

FRIDAY 23 September 2022 "Inclusion" (Gal. 3:26-29)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I wonder what the most powerful expression of "INCLUSION" is that you've ever experienced? Perhaps it was your grandparents explaining to you that you are 'included' in a wonderful family with a proud heritage. If you are adopted, that was an especially powerful moment of 'inclusion', wasn't it?

Or maybe it was the strong sense of being included on an athletic team that worked very hard and the synergy of your shared efforts and skill won the competitions. Or maybe it was being part of a wonderful business organization or a great church or being an alumnus of a school, you loved, or even being part of a wonderful neighborhood of people who cared deeply for each other. "Inclusion" has in recent times become a powerful political word, but long, long before that word had political clout, *God used that word as He referred to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as "My chosen people"*. Do you remember?

When God delivered the Hebrew slaves out of centuries of Egyptian bondage, and led them through the Red Sea and several weeks of desert travel, bringing them to Mount Sinai, the very first message God gave to Moses to tell the more than 1 million Hebrew slaves was this: ***"Moses went up the mountain to meet with God, and the LORD said: 'This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you will obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations YOU will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..."*** (Exodus 19:3-6) Can you imagine, at your age, no matter your age, if you were part of that fleeing 1 million slaves?

Imagine all you've ever known is the hopelessness of slavery and now suddenly through indescribable power, God has broken the power of Egypt and you've been permitted to leave your bondage. You've come to this mountain, following a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, and Moses has just come down from meeting with God at the top of the mountain and Moses proclaims these words to you and nearly 1 million former slaves, standing with you. How would you feel hearing that God now considers you: ***"...out of all the nations YOU will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*** *That my friends, was a powerful message of INCLUSION from God!*

Come with me, let's go back into that little house in Syrian Antioch, about the year 48ad, and watch as the apostle Paul is writing his first letter to Gentile Christians in the four towns you and I have never seen... Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

These are the four towns Paul and Barnabas had visited and shared the Gospel of Jesus with the Gentiles there and many had responded placing their faith in the truth of Jesus and they were the first Christians in their towns! Paul picks up his stylus, leans back, closes his eyes as though he is listening to something or someone, and then rolls out the parchments and begins writing what the Holy Spirit is speaking into his heart... ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus!"*** (Gal. 3:26-28) **Do you hear the power of INCLUSION?**

Wow what a profound statement!! I have two questions for us: What did God want those Gentiles in the first century to understand through these powerful words Paul? And what does it have to do with you and me, 2000 years later? I see several powerful, inclusive, God statements here:

First... ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*** That is another of the unique, core, tenants of the Christian faith. **It's called ADOPTION!**

When a person trusts Jesus Christ to save them from their sin bondage and sin condemnation, Almighty God the Father actually ADOPTS that newly saved person into a loving, secure Father-son; Father-daughter relationship with God! Not only did Almighty God create you, but now God accepts Jesus' atonement death as payment in full for your sin, and God draws you close to Himself in unconditional love, and draws you into an intimate, family relationship. *Is that perhaps the ultimate expression of INCLUSION? I am a member of the family of God, and God is my heavenly Father who loves me deeply!* Also, did you notice, I do not pay one penny for this privilege, it is accomplished by God as I place my faith in Christ Jesus! Paul explains this miracle in more detail in Romans 8:14-17.

Second... Paul describes another type of very powerful 'INCLUSION' that God makes possible for us. Paul wrote: ***"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ."***

That little phrase 'baptized into Christ' is another unique miracle found only in the Christian faith. It is one of the many miraculous works of the Holy Spirit of God. The word 'baptized' is actually an extreme form of 'inclusion' for it means 'immersed into'. It's like a swimmer jumping into the lake, immersing themselves in the water. Or one vocalist among hundreds in a large choir. That musician is 'immersed' in the crowd of other singers. *But in this case Paul is explaining that the Holy Spirit of God 'baptizes' or "immerses" the repentant, forgiven, born again person INTO the 'body of Christ' or the family of God.*

This is such a radical concept Paul wrote about in several of his letters. To the Christians in Corinth, some years later, Paul wrote: ***"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts: and though all its parts are many they form one body."***

So, it is with Jesus Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit... So, there should not be division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it... (1 Cor. 12:12,13, 25-27)

To the Christians in Ephesus Paul wrote: ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*** (Eph. 4:3-5) Do we understand this miraculous work of the Holy Spirit baptizing us, 'immersing' us, including us INTO the Body of Christ, the people of God?

Third, did you notice Paul's very clear, very powerful statement of **ETHNIC inclusion** when he wrote ***"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek..."***?

By the way, that includes every living human being. And did you hear Paul's statement of **GENDER inclusion**: ***"in Christ there is neither male nor female..."***? That includes every human being, and it does NOT mean God re-orient's our gender identity to make a new category 'binary'! ***No, it means we are EQUALLY valuable and equally loved as redeemed sons and daughters of Almighty God and we retain our individual uniqueness as we are baptized into the body of Christ.***

And finally, did you hear Paul's **socio-economic statement of inclusion** when he wrote: ***"In Christ there is neither slave nor free..."***?

We must be careful to understand that God is not suggesting in this statement that we lose our unique, individual identity when we trust Jesus Christ to be our Savior, and God does His salvation work in us! ***Oh no, we retain every bit of our uniqueness, but now we are joined together as equal in value with one another IN Christ!***

Finally, did you see Paul's summary statement: in Galatians 3:29? ***"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to God's promise."***

It means every person, of any ethnicity, any socio-economic status, any gender, any age, becomes a beloved son or daughter of God, and they join the global body of Christ, as they become an authentic Christian! ***And in that miracle, all the precious promises of blessing that God had made to Abraham and his descendants, are equally applicable to all Christians everywhere in every generation... because we are united in Jesus Christ!***

Some years later, as the apostle Peter was writing to Christians all across the Roman Empire, during times of great persecution, he echoed Paul's message with these words: ***"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God..."*** (1 Peter 2:9,10)

Paul put down his stylus and walked over to the door again and opened it. The sounds, smells, noise, laughter of Syrian Antioch come rushing in from the busy street outside. As we look out, we see such diversity. People of all ages and several different skin colors, indicating many different ethnic groups. If we listen closely, we can hear several different languages being spoken in this very diverse city. And the picture we see through that doorway is a beautiful picture of the miracle Paul has been writing about. . *the world-wide people of God, the body of Christ!* There's nothing else quite like us, and may I ask, are you sure you are part of this miracle? Are you celebrating the work God has done in your life to include you and do you feel the power of **'God INCLUSION'?**

Here's a song to help us celebrate this great, great miracle, my friends:

Today's Scripture is Galatians 3:26-29.