

FRIDAY 30 September 2022 "Derailed!" (Gal. 5:7-15)

Hello, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Have you ever seen pictures of a derailed train? Rail cars off the tracks and strewn all over the area? Depending on the cargo, a train derailment can be quite a disaster with a prolonged process of clean up. Can we use that analogy to ask what it looks like when a human life gets 'derailed' from the good track they were on?

Welcome back to our experience with the apostle Paul, in about the year 48ad, as he is writing the first of his many letters, this one to the Gentile Christians back in the province of Galatia where he and Barnabas had taken their first missionary trip a few months before. Paul is greatly disturbed to hear that false teachers had come into those places where Paul had been, and they have spread false teachings which have confused those who had courageously taken great steps of faith and trusted Paul's Gospel and Jesus Christ to be their Savior.

Paul is picking up his stylus and rolling out the parchment, so let's watch and listen:

"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be..." (Gal. 5:7-10)

We have no evidence that Paul was ever an athlete, but he was obviously fascinated by athletic games and the training needed to succeed. In several of Paul's letters he makes reference to athletic competition and here did you notice his mention of a race and that these Gentiles in Galatia had been running their race well? Paul is talking about their spiritual growth and the challenges we all face along the way. *But as you see Paul suspects an intruder, someone had come into their midst and spread false information which has turned them off their spiritual growth path.* Paul is frustrated that what had begun as such a wonderful new journey for these brand-new Christians was now confusing and causing conflicts among them.

As I think of it, I imagine an off road, cross-country foot race. Rather than following a nice, clear, well-marked course, sometimes cross-country runners are more like pioneers, running through the woods or across wide open fields, sometimes even jumping across streams. As they run, they need to be on the watch for markers along the way which keep them on the track. Can you make the application my friends to your spiritual race?

Now for Paul, he suspects someone has intentionally come into their race and by spreading false information has directed them off their course and they are now lost, not knowing how to get back on the track.

That would be very frustrating in a real foot race, but when we're talking about people's spiritual journey's it is much, much more serious, do you agree?

May I ask you my friends, is it possible there is someone who has done this in your spiritual journey in life? Has someone given you wrong information or intentionally turned you away from the Bible, God's Word, so that you have found yourself confused and doubting some of the fundamental truths about which you once were convinced? When Paul writes **"That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you."** He means that God's truth is unchanging and the Holy Spirit, who calls us to relationship with Jesus, and then teaches us God's truth, that Holy Spirit never persuades us toward error or wrong thinking nor contradictions. *Do you understand my friends, that when you read or hear a spiritual teaching that contradicts the Bible, you may be confident it is not coming from God!*

Did you notice that Paul next uses a cooking example as a warning? **"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."** Yeast is several times used in the Bible as an example of evil or untruth or deception or rebellion against God. (Matt. 16:6-12) Just as yeast works its way through the entire batch of dough so untruth or deception or rebellion is contagious and will spread among people. *In a person, one idea of doubt about God's truth can quickly move to doubts about all of God's truth. Or in a group, one doubtful person can quickly infect the entire group so that everyone has doubts.*

Perhaps you've experienced this my friends, so you know how dangerous it can be. May I ask, do you have the ability to discern when truth undermining doubt is beginning to worm its way into your heart and mind or the spiritual group you are part of? *If you sense it, are you strong enough to stand against it and defeat it as Paul was trying to do with this letter he is writing?*

Paul then issues a clear warning: **"The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be."** Do you remember a few weeks ago we were with James as he was writing his letter to the Jewish Christians across the Roman Empire and the Holy Spirit led James to write a similar warning: **"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."** (James 3:1) And who do you think will be the judge of all who had teaching influence on others? Hebrews 4:13 says: **"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."** Well, that's clear, isn't it? And some years later when Paul was writing his very last letter, he concluded by writing: **"The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not to me only but to all who have longed for His appearance."** (2 Tim. 4:7,8)

Finally, I see in Hebrews 9:27 another verification of Paul's confidence of judgment awaiting all of us when we stand before God Himself, the righteous judge, to give account for everything in our lives.

"Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgement." That assurance of accountability before a holy, righteous Judge, gave Paul confidence that whomever it was who had been spreading false teachings among the people of the towns where Paul and Barnabas had brought the Gospel... that scoundrel would one day face the harsh judgement of God. The matter of bringing spiritual confusion to people is a very dangerous crime in the sight of Almighty, Holy God!

Paul summarized this powerful section of his letter with this encouragement: **"You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."** (Gal. 5:13-15) Evidently Paul had heard that spiritual confusion among these dear people had led to disagreement and division in these small groups of new Christians. Sadly, because Paul was not there to bring clarity into their confusion, disagreement had built to conflict and backbiting, and even slander as accusations and rumors ran wild. *Oh, isn't it a tragedy when that happens among spiritual people who really want to honor God, but find themselves in growing disagreement?*

But have you also found that two great ways to defeat division and disagreement are worship of Almighty, Holy God and serving one another in Jesus' name? There's a key principle of healing here friends. *With our focus on Jesus, the closer we come to Him, the closer we'll come to each other! And the more our hearts come into alignment with the heart of God, the more we'll want to serve each other in His love and that will bring healing to the fractures!*

Now let's ponder these great truths friends, for they are very powerful, and my guess is there is probably some disagreement, confusion and maybe outright conflict in the part of the world where you are living today! How does God want you to be part of the solution rather than adding to the problem? And here's a song to help us consider these things!

Today's Scripture is Galatians 5:7-15.