

MONDAY 12 September 2022 "Galatians" (Galatians 1:1-7)

Good Monday morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

For those of us old enough to remember the world changing events of September 2001, you probably remember the morning of this day, 21 years ago today... September 12.

The eyes of the entire world were focused on the NYC skyline, wondering what it would look like the 'day after' that horrific 9/11 tragedy? Sure enough, as daylight came, we saw the pile of debris was still smoldering and for any who had lived or worked in NYC the absence of those two enormous towers caused one of the most famous skylines in the world to be almost unrecognizable, on this date 21 years ago! *May I urge you to not rush into this day before you give some thought to what was happening in our world 21 years ago this week and how much our world has changed in these two decades?*

Of course, 2000 years ago communication was nothing like it is today. News could only travel as fast as word of mouth and travelers could take the news from one place to another. For the past several days we've been in Jerusalem, watching the apostle James write the first of what we today call the New Testament books, as he wrote the scroll which bears his name.

About 400 miles to the north, in the city of Syrian Antioch, the apostle Paul and his traveling companion and fellow teacher Barnabas, had returned from their first missionary journey and they were very busy teaching the deeper truths of Jesus' Gospel to those Jews and Gentiles in that great city who had believed in Jesus as their Savior. I don't know if Paul knew James had been writing a letter down in Jerusalem, but we do know the Holy Spirit of God began stirring in Paul to pick up some parchments and stylus and begin the first of his several letters.

AD 48 was a very strategic year in the Jesus movement all across the Roman Empire as the Holy Spirit authored the first two letters of the New Testament, one through James and the other through Paul.

*Unlike James, Paul's letter is not known by the **author** but rather by the **audience to whom Paul wrote his letter**. In our Bible it is called "**GALATIANS**". Why? Because Paul was writing primarily to the Gentile Jesus followers in the cities where he and Barnabas had brought the Gospel on their first journey, in the large province of Galatia. Do you remember their experiences in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe? We traveled with them as we followed the log of their journey written by Luke which is today found in Acts 13 & 14.*

Thanks to the experience we've had over the last few days, I think we understand **WHY James** wrote his letter to Jewish Jesus followers, so it's only fair we ask **WHY Paul** wrote his letter to the Gentile Jesus followers?

I think we find the answer in Paul's opening comments, which he wrote after his brief self-introduction: ***"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and trying to pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ."*** (Galatians 1:6,7) Evidently word was coming to Paul and Barnabas, that some people, claiming to be wise teachers of spiritual truth, had come to those very same four cities and were teaching a distortion of the gospel Paul had taught, causing great confusion among these new Gentile Christians in Galatia.

Remember in the first century no one had the New Testament as we do today, nor did they have seminary trained pastors or libraries filled with resources for the people to research the teachings they were hearing which were contrary to what they had heard from Paul and Barnabas.

So, confusion was dividing the fledgling clusters of Gentile Jesus followers in all the places Paul and Barnabas had visited only a few months before. Can you understand the spiritual dilemma and the need for a quick response and clarity? *People's spiritual lives were hanging in the balance. Confusion was leading to arguments and division. Many people were spiritually drifting, and some were believing things which were totally false!*

As Paul heard this heart-breaking news, he went to God in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide him in how to respond. Should he run to the coast and jump on the next available sailing ship and retrace his steps in Pisidia and Galatia? But that would take too long, and still word of mouth can be so easily forgotten or distorted in repetition. *No, evidently Paul came to the conclusion the best answer, both for then and generations to come, would be a written explanation and clarification of God's truth.*

Written words don't change, and a clear explanation could then be passed from town to town and generation to generation. And so, in Syrian Antioch, Paul sat down to write a vital, strategic letter for the purpose of protecting the truth and purity of the Gospel Jesus had given him to take to the Gentiles.

Come, let's do with Paul as we did with James. Let's sit and watch Paul receive God's truth from the Holy Spirit and write his first letter to Gentile Christians. *Letters in those days needed to identify the author immediately and that author needed to identify his authority for writing,* so Paul writes these opening words: ***"Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead - and all the brothers and sisters here with me, to the churches in Galatia."*** (Galatians 1:1,2)

It's clear isn't it my friends? Paul is taking full responsibility for what he is writing AND for what he preached when he first visited those towns. Paul wants everyone to know he was not sent out by men nor representing any group of people, but Paul was selected and sent out by Jesus Christ Himself, and by Almighty God the Father. We remember this from Paul's Damascus Road encounter with the risen Jesus, as recorded in Acts 9, in which Paul was given, by Jesus, a very specific life mission. Jesus had commissioned Paul to be "**...My chosen instrument to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings...**" (Acts 9:15)

Did you notice...Paul makes it clear BOTH Almighty God the Father and Jesus Christ, God the Son, commissioned Paul and he went obediently? Paul also prioritized mentioning in his first opening lines, the essence of the Christian Gospel... that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead by God the Father? Do you see Paul wants the Gentile Christians in Galatia to understand they are brothers and sisters in the family of God with both the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Syrian Antioch, the city from which he is writing his letter? Paul loved the concept of the global, multicultural Church!

Paul wastes no time with pleasantries. He gets right into the purpose of his letter... clarity of the essential truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's look at verse 3: "**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**" I see several very powerful truths that Paul proclaims in all his letters. I can imagine Paul pausing after he writes these words, looking intently into the eyes of the few people sitting in his little house as he writes this letter. He wants to make sure they understand how vitally important these truths are.

First, the atonement death of Jesus Christ, which Jesus accomplished in full obedience to Almighty God the Father, *is what provides rescue for any person ensnared in the evil of our world. There is NO other way out of our sin bondage.*

Only Jesus can rescue us, and only because of who He is... God the Son, and what He accomplished by His sinless life which He lived here on earth, (Hebrews 4:14) and His atonement death on the cross. That death is accepted by Almighty God as payment sufficient for God to forgive us our sin and set us free, by His superior power, from our sin condemnation and our sin bondage.

Second, Jesus is not dead, He is fully alive, resurrected by Almighty God, and more than that, Jesus is ascended back to heaven, in all His glory, where He stands as the only advocate, (1 John 2:1,2) intercessor, (Romans 8:34) mediator, (1 Timothy 2:4,5) for human beings who long for a forgiven, delivered, adopted relationship with Almighty, Holy God. *All of this is for God's great glory for ALL time future, for this work of God in a repentant sinner is irreversible and undeniable! (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25)*

Now that is reason for celebration, do you agree? And I think it's a great place for us to pause with Paul and simply ask two questions:

* *Are you and I in any way confused about the Gospel of Jesus Christ?*

* *Have we allowed social media or popular opinion or our own thinking to skew God's truth?*

Ponder that my friends, and we'll rejoin Paul right here tomorrow.

Today's Scripture is Galatians 1:1-7.