

## TUESDAY 13 September 2022 "Unique Gospel" (Gal. 1:8-18)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I imagine you have often heard the phrase "people pleaser"? *This is someone who is perceived to be motivated in their words, attitudes, choices and actions primarily by their deep desire to please everyone touched by their life and thus be affirmed and appreciated by all.* Of course, pleasing everyone is virtually impossible, isn't it?

Yesterday we began a new journey together in our "*Walking with Jesus*" as we visited the house where the apostle Paul is staying in Syrian Antioch in the year 48ad. Paul and Barnabas have returned to Antioch from their two yearlong missionary journey and soon thereafter have begun hearing disturbing reports that some truth distortions are being taught and believed in the four cities where Paul and Barnabas had boldly, and with threat of death, taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Gentiles in the province of Galatia. *The Holy Spirit is leading Paul to write a clarifying letter to those Galatian Christians.*

As we again enter into Paul's writing room, he has spread out the parchment to continue and he resumes his warnings to his friends of floundering in the face of some false teachings. Paul speaks the words as he writes them: ***"Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!"*** (Galatians 1:8)

Wow, that covers all the bases, doesn't it? Paul here is calling himself to account, promising to never change the clear Gospel he first proclaimed to them. But also, Paul is challenging them to not believe any other teaching, *even if the teacher claims to be an angel from heaven!* Now that was quite a statement, for people in those days had very strong beliefs that angels were fairly frequent visitors to earth, and they came with messages directly from God which should be received and obeyed! But do you see Paul's final phrase?

*Anyone who presents ANY distortion or change to that which Paul had preached to them on his first missionary journey should be under God's curse!* Wow, those are strong words! But it shows us how seriously Paul was taking this distortion of the Gospel message God had given to him and directed him to take to the Gentiles.

Paul was a strong believer in the historic tenants of the Old Testament including this one found in multiple Scriptures: ***"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow God's precepts have good understanding..."*** (Ps. 111:10) Paul had a great, reverent fear of God and the thought of being under God's curse was simply more than his mind and heart could imagine. Paul knew Israel's history well and the judgment of God was nothing to be overlooked or underestimated!

Paul picked up his stylus again and continued writing: ***"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people I would not be a servant of Christ."*** (Gal. 1:10) You've noticed by now, I'm sure, that Paul is never afraid to confront a problem or issue head on. People pleasing was no longer in any way part of Paul's thinking or motivation.

In his first missionary trip he'd been run out of Synagogues and towns and even stoned and left for dead in Lystra! But Paul would not be deterred. His life changing encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ had forever driven out of his mind and heart any thought or desire of seeking the approval of people. ***Paul lived his life for an audience of ONE... Jesus Christ Himself.*** Paul lived everyday anticipating he would stand accountable before Jesus for his thoughts, attitudes, words, choices and behavior every day. ***That thought served as a warning and motivation to him to stay clear of pride or people pleasing or anything else that was less than God honoring living.***

Paul knew he could not take credit for the Gospel he had preached, nor was he willing to give credit to any other living person. ***The Gospel, which Paul had received from God, was entirely authored by God Himself. It was God's idea, God's redemption plan developed from the beginning of time and taught to Paul in great detail by the Holy Spirit.*** People who'd known Paul as Saul the zealous Pharisee from Tarsus couldn't believe it for the Saul they had known was prideful and arrogant and passionate to make his own name famous. To deal with this Paul wrote: ***"I want you to know brothers and sisters that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."*** (Galatians 1:11,12) Could Paul say it any clearer or any stronger?

That last line is distinctive! Paul used the word '**revelation**' carefully and intentionally. ***It means God REVEALED to Paul something which Paul and everyone else had not previously known but something God had known from the beginning of time.*** Paul could not have learned it from any Pharisee or prophet or even the disciples who'd been with Jesus. ***When Paul first understood, what God was revealing to Him, the Gospel, it was the first time any human being had heard it with spiritual understanding only attained by the work of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life!!*** Now ponder that radical thought a moment, my friends!

But just in case there yet remained some doubters, Paul continued: ***"You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."*** (Gal. 1:13,14) I've often wondered if it was painful and convicting in Paul's heart whenever he spent time remembering or recounting to others the details of his young life as a passionate student and later a Pharisee? Did he carry the remorse all his life for the persecution described for us in Acts 7 & 8 including the oversight of Stephen's execution and the widespread persecution of Jewish Jesus followers in Jerusalem and the region?

Like many people who've had a dramatic conversion experience Paul was not ashamed of his past. He was not proud of how wrong he had been or the pain he'd caused many people, *but his past life provided the platform for God to demonstrate His total life transforming power. For Paul he was a living example of how dramatic the change can be when Jesus becomes Savior and Lord of a person, and the Holy Spirit does His total regeneration work!* It became Paul's motivation to proclaim the Gospel with passion and confidence knowing the Holy Spirit could change anyone! Do you believe that my friends? Is that your story?

Paul next continued with another powerful, clarifying, autobiographical statement: **"...God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles..."** (Gal. 1:15,16) *Do you see Paul's conviction that God had called him to be God's spokesman from the time of his birth?* As he wrote that powerful statement I suspect Paul, who knew the Old Testament so very well, was smiling remembering what the great Hebrew prophet Jeremiah had written about himself: **"The word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'" (Jeremiah 1:5)**

Jeremiah had been a great prophet of God to the people of Israel at a very strategic time in Israel's history, just before Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and during their captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah had great words of hope that God would miraculously bring God's people back from captivity to rebuild and resettle in Jerusalem! And of course, that's the remarkable miracle of King Cyrus and the exile return story recorded in the Old Testament book of Ezra. *But as glorious as that was, it was small compared to the Gospel which God entrusted to Paul that every person in the world is potentially able to be set free from our captivity to sin, because of the deliverance available to us through Jesus Christ and His atonement death and resurrection!*

That reality, *explained to Paul by God*, and then Paul's personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ was beyond Paul's ability to fully comprehend, appreciate or even communicate, and it set him apart from every other Biblical writer, including Jeremiah! So, let's just ponder that my dear friends as we consider the unique thing God was doing with Paul and we'll return right back here tomorrow as he continues.

**Today's Scripture is Galatians 1:8-18.**