

WEDNESDAY 14 September 2022 "Solitude with God" (Galatians 1:13-24)

Hello, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Think back for a moment to your school days. Classrooms, students, books, libraries, homework, teachers, exams, grades. What pictures and memories flooded your mind as you read each of those words which describe your education experience?

This week we are spending time with one of the most educated men of all time. As a boy he was known as Saul Paulus of Tarsus. From his earliest days he pursued with a passion his Jewish studies. All Jewish boys of his era did their schooling at the knee of the local rabbi in their synagogue. *Their core subject was their study of the Jewish Scriptures which we have as the Old Testament of our Bible.* Other subjects like math or geography or history were in addition to their Scripture studies.

Regularly the rabbi would meet with parents of each of his students to discuss what he was seeing in their appetite for learning. Usually by the time they were 9 or 10 years old or so, both parents and rabbi were guiding each student either toward learning a trade, or toward further education, and for a few prize students, toward advanced studies of the Scriptures. *Saul was one of those prized students.*

At a fairly young age Saul moved to Jerusalem to study with the most famous of the Jewish scholars in the first century. He advanced quickly in his studies and his zeal for learning. (Gal. 1:14) His goal was to become a Pharisee and a teaching scholar himself. *Expectations were high for young Saul.*

I believe since Saul was about the same age as Jesus, and Jesus caused quite a stir whenever he was in Jerusalem with his miracles and teaching, so Saul probably listened to Jesus speak on several occasions. It appears each time he did, his anger increased. *It was inconceivable to Saul that Jesus was who many said He was, the Jewish Messiah. It was even more ludicrous to imagine Jesus was actually the Son of God!*

I believe Saul was a boisterous part of the Pharisee leadership calling for Jesus' death and may well have been present when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and brought to stand trial before the High Priest and others. I imagine Saul was gratified when word came confirming Jesus had in fact been pronounced dead on the cross and buried. I also imagine Saul's anger knew no bounds when he began hearing reports that people were seeing Jesus alive again and claiming he was resurrected.

Saul was convinced Jesus was a fake, a false prophet and someone who deserved death because His teachings turned many people away from the historical truth of Judaism which Saul was convinced was God's unchanging truth!

That is what drove Saul to launch a persecution in Jerusalem of any followers of Jesus and even head for Damascus, Syria to arrest any Jesus follower there. On that road, as you know, Saul experienced the most dramatic, life changing encounter he could ever have imagined. *The resurrected Jesus appeared to Saul and spoke to him and blinded him.* We have that record in Acts 9. That encounter and the three days of blindness which followed and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in Saul's mind and heart during those days totally transformed Saul from a violent persecutor of Jesus followers to a passionate apostle, *proclaiming that YES, Jesus IS the Son of God, and YES, Jesus IS the Jewish Messiah, and YES, Jesus is Saul's Savior and Lord!!*

This week we are in the Syrian city of Antioch in the year 48ad. We're with that same Saul, who has changed his name to Paul as a reflection of his total life change. He's beginning to write his first letter, as led by the Holy Spirit, to the Gentile Christians in the four cities in Galatia where he and Barnabas had taken the Gospel of Jesus. Paul, as he often did, acknowledged who he had been before his encounter with Jesus, *but then explained his unique understanding of the remarkable God given news which he has been proclaiming.*

In Galatians 1:13-16 Paul writes: *"You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it... But when God...called me by His grace...revealed His Son in me so that I might preach Jesus among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being."* Following Saul's unexplainable encounter with Jesus, he found himself disowned as a traitor by the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders who had so highly respected him.

Saul was feared by the apostles and all followers of Jesus. So, there was no one for Saul to consult after his life transforming encounter with Jesus. *Instead, he withdrew to a remote place in the Arabian desert for extended time to be alone with God. Only God could help Saul understand the truths about Jesus which had before been unthinkable and unreasonable to Saul's remarkably well-trained mind.*

Now some years later, as Paul is recounting for the Galatian Gentile Christians how it is that he received God's revelation of the Gospel, Paul continues writing: **"I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter..."** (Galatians 1:17) In this single verse Paul gives us insight into something very important which Dr. Luke did not disclose as he wrote the account in Acts 9 of Paul's conversion experience in Damascus.

A three-year period of time in which Paul did as others before him like Moses, Elijah, David and Daniel had done. *Solitude with God is a powerful, life changing experience and we find many people in the story of the Bible who sought a private time with God, away from the noise of people and the pressures of life, to simply listen to God!*

This three-year period for Saul was intense instruction from the Holy Spirit of God helping Saul understand how Jesus, God the Son, is the fulfillment of all his Old Testament studies. We don't know exactly where Saul spent these many months alone with God, but It appears these three years solidified in Saul's mind and heart the deep doctrinal truths of the Gospel, which he then proclaimed all the rest of his life through his travels and his writing.

In reality every Christian in the past 2000 years is indebted to Paul, more than any other human being, and his 13 authored books of theological truths, for our understanding of God's design for the relationship God desires with every person made possible only through Jesus Christ.

Let's pause right here with Paul and he sets down his stylus, looking at the few people watching him as he writes this letter.

Paul rises from his writing stool and paces across his little room remembering those powerful years alone with the Holy Spirit of God, *as his mind and heart were both stretched to comprehend the greatest news of all time, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, making salvation from sin and a glorious relationship with Holy God possible for any and every person in the entire world.*

May I ask, when was the last time you spent an extended time alone with God, asking God to speak His truth powerfully into your life? Perhaps you even fasted while you meditated on God's Word the Bible and listened for fresh instruction from the Holy Spirit of God. How did that solitude with God change your life? Might God be calling you now to another such experience with Him? *Could it be God has some fresh things He wants to tell you as He guides your life into the future only God can see for you?* Pause right now for a moment and ask God if He'd like some extended time alone with you... and here's a song to help you consider this wonderful possibility.

Today's Scripture is Galatians 1:13-24.