

## WEDNESDAY 21 September 2022

### “Penetrating Questions” (Gal. 3:1-5)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*Do you know anyone who loves to ask questions?*

Most people like to talk, sharing their opinion, whether they are well informed or not about the topic. But there are then those rare people who have the unusual ability to ask questions in conversation and thus learn the opinions of other people. Those who are really good at this ask the questions in such a kind and normal way, people share very openly, sometimes not even realizing how transparent they have become! *And then there are some other people who also love to ask questions, but the manner in which they ask seems more like an attorney probing deeply and it feels more like an interrogation than a conversation.*

We've been spending some time with the apostle Paul about the year 48ad in the city of Syrian Antioch where he has been living for some time teaching the wonderful truths of Jesus to Gentiles in that city. Recently we've been meeting with Paul every day, watching and listening as he is writing the first of what will eventually be 13 letters which we have today in our Bible. He's writing this first letter to Gentiles living in the four cities which he had recently visited in what today would be the country of Turkey. *Some people, in all four of those cities, had believed Paul's presentation of the person and the message of Jesus Christ, and had believed in the truth of Jesus and formed little congregations of new Christians.*

Not long after Paul and Barnabas had concluded their trip to those towns and returned here to Syrian Antioch, some other men, claiming to be wise teachers of the Gospel of Jesus, had come to those towns but their teaching distorted and in some cases contradicted what Paul had taught and they had believed. *This letter, that Paul is writing, is therefore intended by the Holy Spirit to set the record straight by clarifying their confusion.*

As we settle again into Paul's little house, Paul spreads out his parchments, picks up his stylus, closes his eyes in prayer and then begins again writing now his 3rd chapter in the scroll called Galatians. ***"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law or by believing the Gospel you heard from me?"*** (Gal. 3:1,2)

Paul loved to ask penetrating questions that could not be ignored. While not a lawyer, he was trained as a Pharisee scholar and therefore his style of questioning was often penetrating, almost feeling like an interrogation.

*Two reasons for that with Paul, first: the significance, the importance of the questions. Sometimes they were literally life and death questions! Secondly, Paul's disdain for those people who breed spiritual confusion.*

Now when Paul writes "**...before your very eyes Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified**", let's remember neither Paul, nor ANY of those Gentiles in these four cities, had been eyewitnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus! But the essential significance of the truth, the horrible reality of Jesus' crucifixion was so vital, that Paul had presented his description and the importance of Jesus' crucifixion to them in such a graphic and dramatic way, it was as though they had actually been there watching it happen. *There could be NO DOUBT about the horrific crucifixion of Jesus and its centrality to the Gospel.* Yet there were some people asking that old skeptical question: "If you weren't there, if you didn't actually see the crucifixion with your own eyes, how can you be so sure it actually happened?" Have you ever been asked that question, my friends? And what is your answer?

Of course, we know Jesus' death was witnessed by many people, some of whom are named, like Mary Jesus' mother, John the beloved disciple, and Mary Magdalene, and the written Gospel accounts name them as eyewitnesses. Also, the Roman soldiers actually executing that day gave a factual report to Governor Pilate of Jesus' certain death. And Jesus was buried by two named Pharisees who were confident his body was dead, as recorded in Matt. 27. Finally, Matthew 28 tells us both the Romans and the Jewish leaders were so convinced that Jesus was dead, guards were actually posted at His tomb. **So, the death of Jesus should be a non-disputable historical fact.** *Paul wanted to start right there, as he then started asking the penetrating questions.* And after each one he set down his stylus and paced a bit, pondering how his readers will wrestle with the questions. First question: "**I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law or by believing the Gospel you heard from me?**" (Gal. 3:2)

*Like an arrow this question penetrated the bullseye of two non-negotiable core values of the Christian faith.* First, the Holy Spirit of God actually comes to reside INSIDE the life of a person who trusts Jesus Christ to be their Savior! No other religion or spiritual system in the world makes such an outrageous truth claim! Jesus had explained this to His disciples during their upper room evening discussion and meal the night before He went to the cross. John records what Jesus had said about the Holy Spirit in John 14,15,16.

The second cornerstone of Christianity which Paul targets here is that everything about the saving work of God in our lives is accomplished by God in us, in response to our Belief, our FAITH in Jesus Christ! **We do NOTHING, absolutely NOTHING to save ourselves.** *God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit, do it all in us in response to our FAITH in Jesus!* So, any attempt, by any person, to add anything to what God has done makes a mockery of the Gospel and is an attempt to dilute the Gospel of its divine power!

Look at the smile on Paul's face. The Holy Spirit has given him another penetrating question to write. Paul scurries over to his table, takes up his stylus and dips it in the ink and says as he writes: ***"Does God give you His Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law or because you believe the Gospel you have heard?"*** (Gal. 3: 5) Now we all understand the fundamental human principle of hard work being compensated. *But it's dangerous, friends, when we bring that economic principle into spirituality, and we expect God to compensate us for our efforts at being good people!*

While God calls His people to live God honoring lives and He empowers us to do that by His Holy Spirit living within us, it is a distortion, a fallacy, for us to conclude that our legalistic efforts to keep every command, every principle, every statute, every decree, every law in Scripture will somehow earn us God's favor. *That concept rejects one of God's great attributes... GRACE!* God delights in pouring out His grace, His kindness, His favor on His people as an overflow of His great love for us. Do you understand that my friends? Or do you find yourself trying to bargain with God, promising to do certain things or contribute financially to certain endeavors IF God will in turn bless you in the ways you want God to bless you, and to do His miraculous work in your life? Oh my, this is a very practical and very contemporary situation isn't it my friends?

Paul had set down his stylus, and gone over to the door, opened the door a little to let a fresh draft of street air into his little home. With it, of course, comes the smells and the sounds of Antioch, and all the people working so hard in life. Life wasn't easy in those days! God's grace is such a foreign concept, so hard to grasp. *Have you embraced God's love and grace to you, or are you working hard to earn it my friends?* Let's just sit with Paul and watch busy Antioch, and think deeply about Paul's penetrating questions, as we listen to this powerful worship song, and we'll come right back here tomorrow...

**Today's Scripture is Galatians 3:1-5.**