

WEEKEND Edition 17/18 September 2022 "Life Purpose" (Acts 15:19 & Galatians 2:2-10)

Good weekend to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends.

We've probably all had the experience of watching a very volatile situation diffuse and then actually come to a place of compromise and agreement. That is what was happening when I left you yesterday in Jerusalem in about the year 48ad, as what has been called "The Jerusalem Council" was reaching a conclusion. The apostles of Jesus, many elders of the Jewish Jesus movement in Jerusalem, the apostle Paul and Barnabas, and some Gentile Jesus followers who had come from Syrian Antioch for what they hoped would be a resolution meeting, had reached an impasse of disagreement. *Yet Peter had just spoken some powerful words which the Holy Spirit was using to soften hearts, and then Paul and Barnabas had recounted what God had done among the Gentiles.* Silence had come into the room as the apostle James, the younger brother of Jesus, rose to his feet to speak.

James had become a significant leader in the Jesus movement, trusted by all in Jerusalem. Luke records: **James spoke up: 'Brothers, listen to me. Simon Peter has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking, from the Gentiles, a people for Himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this...' (Acts 15:13-15)** And James then quoted from the prophet Amos. Everyone listened with rapt attention. God's sacred Word had just been invoked in collaboration with Peter's miraculous experience and the undeniable, miraculous accounts of Paul and Barnabas, of what God has done in the life transforming, Holy Spirit anointed work among the Gentiles. James paused, looked everyone in the eye, closed his eyes for a moment to pray, then was ready to pronounce a final verdict: **"It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."** (Acts 15:19)

In this 'defining moment' my friends, the future of global Christianity was determined. Jesus had many times said He had come to earth for all people, whosoever, to have the opportunity for a relationship with Almighty, Holy God. *His death was equally applicable to Jew or Gentile, every gender, every generation, every race or ethnicity, every language or socio-economic strata, every person.* Over the months, after the resurrected Jesus had ascended back into heaven, His message, the Gospel, had spread across Jerusalem and much of the Roman Empire, among thousands of Jews who declared Jesus to be their Messiah and Savior. But then amazingly, as we saw a few weeks ago, even Samaritans responded to the Gospel and experienced what the Jews were experiencing.

But then, first up in Syrian Antioch, and then through the two-year missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, this glorious Gospel of Jesus was being embraced by Gentiles in many different places far away from Jerusalem, and Gentiles also were experiencing the very same work of the Holy Spirit in their lives that the Jews and Samaritans had

experienced. *Jesus' final promise to His disciples was becoming reality!* Do you remember Jesus had said: **"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."** (Acts 1:8) Jesus had also promised: **"I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."** (Matt. 16:18) This was happening, all across the eastern end of the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century, and it is happening today, all around the globe! This historic meeting recorded in Acts 15, is sometimes called the *"Jerusalem Council"* and it has profoundly shaped the past 2000 years of Christianity all around the world. You might be interested to know there is a modern-day movement called *"Toward Jerusalem Council II"* which is a modern-day call for the unity of that historic day to happen again with both Jewish and Gentile Christians around the world. Here's a link if you're interested.
<https://www.tjci.org/mission/>

Let's return to Syrian Antioch as Paul is writing his letter to the Gentile Christians in those four towns, he and Barnabas had visited on their first missionary journey. Paul is reflecting on how significant that "Jerusalem Council" was. Paul rolled out the parchment again, picked up his stylus and began to write, as led by the Holy Spirit, his recollection: ***"I went to Jerusalem in response to a revelation and set before them the Gospel that I preach among the Gentiles... Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though He was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them so that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you... They saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles."*** (Galatians 2:2-8)

What a monumental and profound statement! Titus, a Greek, Gentile follower of Jesus and friend of Paul's, was received as an equal with Jerusalem, Jewish followers of Jesus! Everyone was in agreement that what could have become a great chasm between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, which might have resulted in two entirely different Christian Churches, was averted as the Holy Spirit drew them together as brothers and sisters in Christ, one Church, Jews and Gentiles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, with Jesus Christ Himself as the Head!

While all the apostles of Jesus had been commissioned by Jesus to take His Gospel to the world, the natural leadership abilities and charismatic personality of Peter propelled him to a prominent role among those apostles based in Jerusalem with primary focus on the Jews. Peter became famous quickly and was viewed as the premier spokesman for the apostles among the Jewish Jesus followers throughout Palestine. Paul, on the other hand, understood his calling and commission from Jesus was NOT to his people the Jews, but rather to those people he had disliked, even considered little more than animals... Gentiles! My friends, *I'm not sure any of us can fully grasp the significance of this moment for the Christian movement from that day to this day around the world.*

Paul had paused as he remembered the power of that experience in Jerusalem. But now he picked up his stylus to write one final summary paragraph: ***"James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agree that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."*** (Galatians 2:9,10)

With that Paul set down his stylus and walked over to the door, opening it which allowed in a waft of air filled with the smells and sounds of Syrian Antioch, a bustling, multicultural city. Oh, how Paul loved busy cities with lots of people... people who need Jesus. Paul looked out his doorway with a smile. *He had a deeply rooted confidence of his God given life purpose:* Everyday, anywhere, draw people to Jesus! Paul smiled as he thought about how radical that idea was. He, Saul Paulus of Tarsus, a Pharisee, passionately pursuing his God given life purpose of drawing Gentiles to Jesus, as their Savior!!

Let's pause here friends. *Do you have a strong sense of your God given life purpose? Are you at peace with what God is trying to accomplish IN you and THROUGH you for His glory?* Let's ponder that this weekend, and here's a song to help us celebrate this great truth!

Today's Scripture is Acts 15:19 & Galatians 2:2-10.