

## 517 Christ-Indwelt and God-Filled

Last time we came as it were to Nazareth with the Lord Jesus in the early days of His ministry. In the synagogue, after He carefully read that famous Messianic passage in Isaiah Chapter 61, “he began to say unto them, ‘This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears’” (Luke 4.21). After the initial shock over this clear Messianic claim by Jesus, followed by His speaking of Gentiles being blessed by the Lord God in past times, His hearers “were filled with wrath”. They led Him out to throw Him over the cliff (from vv.28b-29), “but he passing through the midst of them went his way” (v.30, KJV).

In these extraordinary events we see, first, the sheer stature of the Lord Jesus among those people. He knew what was going to happen in that synagogue, and it did happen, but He calmly spoke the truth anyway, come what may. We can then just imagine Him among that mob, as they pushed and shoved Him along towards that clifftop – utterly calm, utterly in charge, and utterly able to “pass through them” when He chose to do so. (We briefly remember at this point that on that later occasion when He was led out in a crowd to His death, Jesus chose not to “pass through them”, in loving acceptance of His Father’s will, as in Luke 22.42).

Second, we see how those Jews in the synagogue on that sabbath day, the relatives, neighbours, friends and fellow worshippers with Jesus, were quickly turned into a frenzied mob intent on murder – and never mind those Ten Commandments! The devil in the wilderness had recently failed to trap Jesus into betraying His Father-given mission (Luke 4.1-13 and parallels), but here in that synagogue he – as Satan, meaning “adversary”, “the accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12.10) - was clearly “pulling the strings” behind the scenes. He wasn’t going to give up easily on his efforts to thwart the Christ, and he still hasn’t given up, even after his defeat at Calvary and the empty tomb (egs., Ephesians 6.11-12 / I Peter 5.8-9a / Romans 8.37). But thanks be to God, the devil’s fate is assured – Genesis 3.15 / Revelation 12.3-9; 20.7-10.

With the long-foreknown rejection of His Son, God the Father then brought into being the “ekklesia”, the “called-out ones”, consisting of Jesus-believing Jews and - hold tight! - Jesus-believing Gentiles. In Ephesians 3.1-6 the Holy Spirit through Paul has described this new body of Christ-believers as a “mystery”, meaning not that its nature is hard to understand, but rather that its future existence is wholly unknown

in the Old Testament. The “ekklesia” came as a total surprise to the Jews, (whose long-lasting contempt for the Gentiles burst so suddenly into frenzied wrath towards Jesus in Nazareth that day). The Gospel torch of this New Covenant, involving salvation by faith in Christ rather than by obedience to the Law, was then entrusted to the “ekklesia”, which soon became overwhelmingly Gentile in its membership. That remains the situation across the world today, for the time being (see those familiar texts, Luke 21.24 and Romans 11.25).

Saul of Tarsus, without knowing it, had been set aside by the Lord for a key ministry in establishing and sustaining these many new local ‘ekklesias’ (Acts 9.1-22)). In subsequent years Saul, later known as Paul, was the human agent under the Holy Spirit in bringing “ekklesias” into being: he loved them, taught them, prayed for them and wrote to them – many of his epistles, filled as they are with Christian doctrine and practice, being accepted since the earliest days as having the status of Scripture and placed within the New Testament of God’s Word.

By God’s grace we thus have preserved for us several of Paul’s prayers for these “ekklesias”, each one of which is worthy of our careful study. One short but rich example can suffice for us here for now, from Ephesians 3.14-19. Paul kneels and prays to God “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, that He would grant the Ephesian “called-out ones”: to be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (3.16b, just as Jesus was so strengthened in the midst of that mob in Nazareth); that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith (v.17a); that they should be “rooted and grounded in love” (v.17b); so that they might “be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (of God’s love in Christ, v.18); and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (v.19a); and that they might be “filled with all the fulness of God” (v.19b).

Strong, Christ-indwelt, loving, comprehending, knowing, and God-filled – what a glorious list of blessings, goals and tasks for each Christ-member of each “ekklesia”!

As at Nazareth and ever after, Jesus did not flinch in setting forth God’s truths. As His “called-out ones”, fully-equipped and entrusted in these days with God’s same truths, may we, by God’s grace, not flinch either.