



## **Around Pentecost – Part 2**

I have spent many Sabbaths with the people of this land. It is good to be able to take one day in the week when I may not travel or work. I enjoy the hospitality, and the chance to talk and learn about these fascinating people and their religion. But this was a very different Sabbath. I knew of the legend of the Christ, who would come and save his people. I knew that many in Israel had believed that Jesus was this Christ, who would release them from their Roman oppressors. He himself in his teaching had seemed to say that he was the Christ, but he had never started to challenge the Romans, only share with them stories of the kingdom of God. Now he was dead, and the manner of his death was the most horrific and humiliating death that the Romans could devise. Everything the people had hoped for was gone, all they could see was a future where there would be nothing but Rome in their promised land.

We decided to stay put for a few days, as we were in a place that we could defend if necessary. It was there that we heard that Jesus was not dead. Somehow he had come to life again, and had been seen by some of his followers. I did not know what to make of the news, and there was a great deal of speculation as to what it all might mean. Nobody had ever heard anything like it before.

We decided that with all the unrest we would pass by Jerusalem and head straight to Jericho to find the fruits some of our group were looking to trade for. If all seemed calm we could return to the Jerusalem on our way back. In the days that followed, no matter where I went, or who I spoke to, everyone was filled with stories of the appearances of Jesus.

I spoke to a couple of men who claimed to have met him on a road back to their village of Emmaus, and the friend, of a friend, of one of his close followers who said that Jesus had been seen fishing in Galilee. I did not know what to make of the stories. Eventually when we had finished in Jericho we decided that it was safe to go to Jerusalem. The Romans appeared to be looking with a benign eye on what was happening, I suppose in the hope that it would all die down of its own accord.

So it was that I was there, sitting at a cafe in the market place sealing a deal over a drink, when a group of men burst out of a nearby house and began to talk and shout and laugh and cry and praise God, all at the same time. When one of my companions exclaimed in disgust that they must be drunk, one of the men rounded on him and exclaimed that it was too early in the day. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, he said, not drink. Then I came to notice, as he began to talk to us, I heard him speak in several of the languages that I speak, almost as if he were doing it at the same time. I could see my companions looking slightly puzzled, and they began to ask each other how they could all be hearing these men's message, each in their own language. Their enthusiasm and energy seemed to flow into each of us as they spoke, and we in turn, left our places and went to speak to others on the periphery of the market, and then in the nearby streets. I did not seem to have to think about what I was saying, the words just seemed to come. By the end of the day I was exhausted, and not a little confused. I am normally so cool and level headed that I have no idea what came over me. Whatever it was, it made me feel really good.

We left Jerusalem the next day. Many of our group had been in the market place when this 'enthusiasm' had happened. During the weeks that it has taken us to travel back to our homes we have talked and discussed endlessly about what happened to us. None of us had ever met Jesus, yet here we were, longing to tell anyone we met, all about him, or at least those things that we knew from the stories we had been told.

Still, I feel somewhat uneasy about what I am doing, as do we all. I am used to summing people up, I have to when I am buying or selling if I am to make a good profit. I have never met Jesus, so how can I look into his face and get the measure of him, judge whether what he is saying is true? All I have is a feeling that this is right. I have heard a lot of stories about him, but I know people will exaggerate. What is the core truth, the exact truth of what he has done? I have been to places where he has been, and I can describe them. I have heard his most favoured friends talk, no fizz, with excitement when they talk about him.

I know something of the faith of the people of Israel, the faith of Jesus himself, but it has not enthused me in the way that he has. Yet if I am to genuinely follow Jesus, to preach the good news about him, I need to be able to answer the questions about the God whom I am following. I am going to need to take a step in faith, to hold on to belief without presence, and to preach with only promises of words. It will be a hard thing that we are all setting out to do, but if the people of Alexandria are ever to be shown the way to Jesus the Christ and the God of Israelites then they need to hear from us, witnesses to that first outpouring of God's spirit, the story of the pain and the tears, the power and the glory and the promises of eternal life with God.