

“HE SET HIS FACE”
by Rom A. Pegram (2/14/16)

Have you ever ‘set your face’ to do something? Jesus did! It really means that we ‘determine’ to do something—no chance involved; whatever we’ve decided to do we do deliberately! And Jesus did that when it came to doing his Father’s will—completing his Father’s will for his life...

Jesus was in Galilee, you see, among many agrarian villages and towns where thousands gladly listened to him. (I’d call that a great appointment!) He performed healings and he reached out to marginalized people, like lepers standing by the wayside. He even blessed and healed some much-hated Samaritans! Oh yes, there were more than a few religious lawyers, Pharisees, and rabbis who criticized him; but in Galilee, things were still fairly safe...

It was Jerusalem that he’d have to be concerned with. Jerusalem, you see, was the center of political and religious power! Jesus knew full well that if he went to Jerusalem, he’d be challenging the muscle of the Roman Empire—offending those who’d sold out to the Romans in order to get their prominent Temple positions. Folks, Jesus not only knew what he faced in terms of conflict, but he also had a good sense he’d be arrested, put on trial, falsely accused of treason, beaten, crucified, and put to death by these authorities. *He was completely aware of the tragic consequences of his choice ... yet, he made a clear decision!* Or, as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) puts it, Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)”...

So, with all of this in mind, let’s get into Jesus’ decision. Because it was this decision that set into motion all of the other events that would soon be upon him.... So, *how did all of the events leading up to and Jesus’ death begin?* First...

JESUS DECIDED TO DO GOD’S WILL. Major decisions in our lives often emerge from unusual circumstances or in unusual places ... just as they did for Jesus. For Jesus, this decision to ‘go up to Jerusalem’ came from the top of a lonely mountain in what we know as the ‘Transfiguration’; *in a nutshell, here’s how it went:* Jesus took Peter, James and John and went up on a mountain to pray. While up that mountain in prayer, Jesus’ appearance changed & his clothes became a white that almost glowed (like Moses coming down from the mountain after receiving the 10 Commandments). Then, Moses & Elijah began talking to Jesus; they too were ‘clothed with heavenly splendor’ and talked about Jesus’ departure from this earth, which he’d achieve in Jerusalem. As Peter was babbling things that were inappropriate, a cloud covered the top of this mountain, and then they heard a voice say, “This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him” (Luke 9:28-35)! Then the next thing the disciples knew, Jesus was tapping them on the shoulder and saying, “Get up ... Don’t be afraid” (Matt. 17:7)! Peter wanted to stay, but Jesus had made his decision; he’d ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem’ ... so they came down the mountain and were met by a large crowd (Luke 9:37)...

Folks, in the midst of conflict, and in spite of impending danger, *Jesus made his life-determining decision to do his Father's will!* He 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51, NRSV); that's where it all had to take place...

For you and I, life-determining decisions might come from any number of places. For some of us, it might have come from a job we worked as a kid, when someone told us we were really good at something. It might have come through an experience at church camp, where we heard a message or spent some time in prayer. It might have come from a coach or a teacher, who simply made a comment of encouragement—not realizing at the time that they may've just altered the course of a life forever! We never know how God's going to break into our lives to direct us or who God might choose to get our attention! But, it happens. And these kind of life-determining decisions happened all throughout scripture: Think of these...

Abram/Abraham – Sometimes it's hard to leave home, to leave the familiar, isn't it? Yet that's what Abram did. Abram & Sarai, his wife, lived in the land of Haran ... and they were doing good! But God said, 'I want you to move' (Gen. 12:1-2, NLT): **“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.’”** So they went. At 75 years old, Abram was obedient and went. They went to Egypt for a while, because of a drought. Then back to Canaan, though not without difficulties. But God kept talking about 'a reward'— (Gen. 15:1-2a, NLT): **“...the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.’ ²But Abram replied, ‘O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don’t even have a son?’”** Then the conversation continues (Gen. 15:5, NLT): **“Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, ‘Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!’”** So Abram & Sarai believed God, became Abraham and Sarah, became parents in their old age, and then Abraham became *the father of a great nation*—today numbering in the millions ... all because he 'set his face' to do God's will...

Moses – Born a Hebrew, raised an Egyptian, killed an Egyptian soldier so had to flee, then worked in Midian for his father-in-law as a shepherd. One day, as he was tending the sheep, he ran into a bush that was strangely on fire. He checked it out, realized it was God, and then *hid his face*. But he and God had a conversation. In spite of his lame excuses, God made a way for Moses to serve him mightily by saving his people from years of slavery in Egypt, and Moses then 'set his face' to do it! And because of his life-determining decision, the nation of Israel exists today! And...

Jesus went up to the mountain for a night of prayer, where the disciples wanted to celebrate a spiritual encounter, *but Jesus had other ideas*. He had a decision to make. His decision would be a life-determining choice that would lead him to challenge civil & religious authorities in Jerusalem—eventually giving his life as a sacrifice of love for the sins of the whole world. So, a world-changing decision was made! After a night of prayer with three disciples ... and a heavenly vision they all experienced, Jesus is then

prepared for the worst: Luke 9:44 (NRSV) tells us, “**Take these words to heart: The [Son of Man] is about to be delivered into human hands**”... So, here’s something interesting that happened almost as soon as Jesus had made up his mind to follow God’s will for his life...

WHEN JESUS DECIDED, BOTH OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES ROSE UP! Have you ever had that happen to you? The moment you decide to follow God, the moment you decide to do the right thing, the very moment you decide to look beyond yourself and do things God’s way ... *chaos just seems to break out!* This happened to Jesus too! Look at these examples: The very next day, as they came down the mountain from a night of prayer, a father approaches Jesus and tells him about his sick son, who has violent seizures. Even though Jesus wanted to head south, he couldn’t deny this request, so he heals the boy. *Sometimes as we get ready for a journey, an emergency strikes, or we remember some unfinished task before us and have to deal with that.* These things happen, even when we’re following God’s will...

Then they started walking again ... but **opposition** slapped at Jesus from every direction, and Jesus used opposition as an **opportunity** to teach, like this: The disciples started bickering about who would be the greatest (Luke 9:48) ... and Jesus used this as a teachable moment on who was really great in God’s eyes...

But it was time to travel... Again, the NRSV says that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem”. The Common English Bible translates it that he “determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). **Setting one’s face is a powerful visual image of deep determination!** Sometimes though *a life-determining decision may be easier than following through & staying committed to that decision* ... and I’m sure Jesus sensed that too ... like in these circumstances that followed:

- Jesus had an encounter with *the Samaritans* on the way, his disciples got angry at them, but *Jesus used this as a teachable moment and moved on...*
- Then there came *the prospective followers* ... who wanted to give Jesus all kinds of excuses for not following him right now ... but *Jesus again used this as a teachable moment and moved on...*
- And the greatest opposition came from the disciples themselves ... once they realized Jesus was serious about walking into the face of danger in Jerusalem. But Jesus refused to let them distract him from his goal—*he’d ‘set his face to Jerusalem’ and nothing was going to change his mind...*

So, *where do we set our faces?* What are we determined to do for God this year? What is it that God has planted on our hearts to do that we just cannot be distracted from? Now, this may seem like small potatoes compared to Jesus’ decision, but let me share this...

Almost 38 years ago now, while in the midst of a relationship & life that was surely headed toward disaster, *God sent someone into my life that has changed my life forever!* Her name was Jane Ann Douglas. She was a lifeguard the summer I met her,

which is ironic, because I've always believed that God used her to save mine. Folks, I'll never forget how rapidly our relationship progressed that summer—both of us currently in other relationships, but realizing that God was at work in our lives in powerful ways. And within two months' time of meeting Jane, I made a life-determining decision. After a great deal of walking with God and praying that summer, I had a serious decision to make. Would I agree with God about this woman he'd sent into my life ... or not? Long story short, Jane and I were engaged before that summer was out. And, maybe for the first time in my life, *I said 'I love you' to someone ... and actually meant it.* God sent Jane to me, showed me what my future *should* be, but *I* had to make the decision—to decide whether to say 'yes' to God or not. And it's been one of the best decisions I've ever made...

My point is that every decision we make in life—especially those life-determining decisions, it needs to be prayerfully considered. You and I need to make *prayerful* decisions—with God involved. We need to be open to God, and when God speaks, we need to make thoughtful and obedient decisions. We need to learn to sing/pray just like the old song...

Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth Thou has for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee, ready, my God, Thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

As we begin this Season together, maybe you have a sense of God's call to 'set your face' in a particular direction. *Jesus' life-determining decision to 'set his face to Jerusalem' changed the world, giving us life.* That's what happens when we say 'yes' to God. Folks, *where we set our faces may well determine whether we, too, can participate in the life-determining, life-giving work of God...* So, what is God calling you to do right now?