

February 4, 2007

“Is This Really Such a Big Deal?” Galatians 1:11-24

FCF: Downplaying the need to get the gospel straight

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because the gospel is a big deal,
(anchor) we must remind ourselves and one another of it repeatedly.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

The Super Bowl. A time for crazy ads, many snacks, media hype – sometimes even a game. And a bit of nostalgia, revisiting great moments of games gone by. One of my favorites – Super Bowl XXVI. Not only because the Washington Redskins won, but because Thurman Thomas, the spoiled running back for the Buffalo Bills, managed to lose his helmet and had to sit out the opening series. “Lose his helmet? What was he thinking?” How do you lose sight of something so basic, so fundamental, to all you are?

The same could be said of us, could it not? I’m thinking of followers of Christ, unclear in their understanding, inconsistent in their practice of the gospel of Christ. How could we do that? How could we lose sight of something so fundamental, so basic?

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 1:11-24

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

I love Martin Luther. His writings are so earthy, so honest ([READ Luther, p.31](#)):
The matter of justification is brittle: not of itself, for of itself it is most sure and certain, but in respect of us. Whereof I myself have good experience. For I know in what hours of darkness I sometimes wrestle. I know how often I suddenly lose the beams of the gospel, and grace, as being shadowed from me with thick and dark clouds. Briefly, I know in what a slippery place even such also do stand, as are well exercised, and seem to have a sure footing in matters of faith.

And Luther’s wise counsel after this candid admission? ([READ Luther, pp.31-32](#)):

We have against us one-half of ourselves: that is to say, the flesh, and all the powers thereof. The flesh resisteth the spirit which cannot believe that all the promises of God are assuredly true...Wherefore, we teach continually, that the knowledge of Christ, and of faith, is no work of man, but simply the gift of God, who as He createth faith, so doth He keep us in it...Therefore the greatest service that a man can do unto God, and the very Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to exercise himself in true godliness, diligently to hear and to read the word. Contrariwise, there is nothing more dangerous than to be weary of the word.

Do you hear? There is a battle raging and our grasp on this message is so tenuous we need to keep coming back to it again and again. It is so easily lost. And too vital to lose.

That’s something of what we see in Paul’s words here in Galatians 1. Remember what we’ve seen thus far. The letter starts abruptly. Paul wastes no words, cutting to the chase. His opponents, in wanting to denigrate the gospel of Christ, have begun to denigrate this apostle of Christ. And Paul, in defense of the gospel, will not have it.

So he stands firm, making clear that justification, being made right with God, comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He’s laying it all on the line here. It would seem, both from what Paul says and how he says it that this is pretty important, a big deal. A big deal of which we must be reminded repeatedly. Think with me. Where does it come from? What does it do? And who is it for? Let’s look at this.

I. WHERE IT COMES FROM

This message is a big deal first because of where it comes from.

A) Not from Man

Look at what Paul says, the major emphasis here ([READ Galatians 1:11-12](#)). Where did Paul get his message? Not by invention. Not by tradition. But by revelation.

1. Paul’s pre-conversion days

Paul takes us to his pre-conversion days (**READ Galatians 1:13-14**). He was a zealous man. Fanatically devoted to the persecution of the church and to Judaism. The point? No such man would change his mind or have it changed. Only God could reach him.

2. Paul's post-conversion days

He then goes on to take us to his post-conversion days. As we take this account and mesh it with Acts 9, a picture begins to form. After Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, Paul headed to Arabia, and to Damascus. It was three years later that he went up to Jerusalem and met with Peter and James for a mere two weeks. From there, he went off to Syria and Cilicia. The point? His message was not from man but from God.

B) *But from God*

Not from man but from God. It's worth noting the change in the subject of the sentences (**READ Galatians 1:14-16b**). Again, we see so clearly who is behind this.

1. Sovereign election

Paul speaks of God's sovereign election. With language reminiscent of some of the Old Testament prophets, he recognizes God had set him apart before the beginning of time.

2. Effectual calling

Then, in just the right time, as only God could do, He drew Paul to Himself. Convincing him of his sin and misery, enlightening his mind in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing his will, the Lord persuaded and enabled him to embrace the gospel.

It had nothing to do with him. It was all of God – both his mission and message.

Application:

The point? This is the source of Paul's message and how he came to hear it. It is not from man but from God. Which makes it a big deal, worth reminding ourselves and one another repeatedly. And it tells us something of how we ourselves come to hear, if we have heard, and how we possibly may yet hear – by God's work in our hearts.

II. WHAT IT DOES

But there's more here than just where it comes from. What does it do?

A) *Not a Whitewash*

This is no whitewash treatment Paul receives, some surface-only clean up.

1. Not made more moral

It's not that he's made to straighten up and fly right, made a more upstanding citizen. Remember, Paul was a Pharisee – as moral as they come. There's more going on here.

2. Not made nicer

Nor is he just made nicer. He is just as zealous and intense as he ever was – if not more – but now redirected with a new purpose, set free to serve a new Master and King.

Whitewash, while it might be what we want, is not what God has in mind.

B) *But a Transformation*

God had in mind a transformation for Paul – a “revelation of Jesus Christ” (v.12) and Christ literally revealed “in him” (v.16). And Paul was changed in profound ways.

1. No longer trying to destroy the faith

No longer trying to destroy the faith – crushing the movement and its adherents.

2. Now preaching the faith

Now he was preaching the faith. And people took notice (**READ Galatians 1:22-24**). The people took notice. How could they not? This was too astounding not to notice!

The point being God has in mind a transformation – renewing and remaking us.

Application:

God is not content to clean us up and send us on our way. He loves us too much. His intent is to address symptoms and causes. To accept us as we are but not leave us as we were. I am not the same man I was when He laid hold of me in the summer of 1984. Nor am I the same man I was in 1994 or 2004. He has made me aware of my sin and more so. Aware of my need of His grace and the strength of His love and more so. He's changing me. That's another reason this is a big deal – because of what the gospel does.

III. WHO IT IS FOR

But there's one last thing that makes this so vital, so important, such a big deal we must continually remind ourselves and one another – who it's for. Think with me here.

A) *Not for a Few*

This message, this radical grace of which Paul speaks, is not for a few.

1. The demand of other gospels

Now, I say that because that is exactly what every other gospel is – for a few. You must live this way. You must live according to this standard. You must be good enough.

2. The despair of other gospels

That's the demand of all other gospels, all other messages. And the despair as well. Because in answer to those demands, we have to then ask, "*But what if you can't? What if you can't measure up? And how do you know when you have?*" You see, seen in that light, seen rightly, these other ways are not as tolerant, as inclusive, as you might think.

B) *But for All*

But the one true gospel is a message not for a few but for all.

1. Definite limitation

Yes, there is what we could call a definite limitation in that you must come to trust in the finished work of Christ as your only hope. You must live within that circle. Absolutely.

2. Totally universal

But that circle is huge in its scope. It includes men and women of all colors and cultures, all ages and backgrounds, all talents and temperaments. So we might say that on the one hand, it has a definite limitation. But on the other, it is totally universal in its scope.

Application:

The point? This is not a narrow message, intolerantly accepting only a few. This is a message of hope. Freeing from the tyranny of conscience burdened by guilt. This is a message true to what is. Not a flight of fancy or some manmade ideal but something received from God Himself. And so, again, we have to say this then is a big deal.

CONCLUSION:

Yet we lose sight of this so easily. Let me end with this. We had some snow this past week. Our kids were out sledding and one of them had a bit of a spill. It reminded me of an incident years ago when I was that age. My brother and I were sledding with some friends on the streets of our neighborhood one dark night. It was my turn to make my run. As I was tearing down this hill, I saw a light out of the corner of my eye through the trees. I turned for just a second. I looked back only to see two legs directly in front of me. I hit my brother so hard it knocked his legs straight up into the air and he landed headfirst on the ice. A slight concussion but he recovered. But I was scared to death.

I tell you that to make a point. We are so prone to be distracted – even from this. Despite where it's from, what it does, and who it's for, we are "*prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.*" This is too good to let go or leave. Let's stay in it.

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