

Sunday Lesson – May 9, 2021

GOSPEL: Galatians 1: 13 – 17; 2: 11 - 21

Living by Faith

Background

“Cephas, Barnabas, and other Christian Jews had begun living as the Gentiles in order to share the good news of the risen Christ with them. But when opposition grew in numbers, they backed off of their convictions and once again started living according to the laws of the Jews. Paul took exception to this behavior. He believed that their actions were sending a strong message to the Gentiles that they were inferior, perhaps even not saved, because they were not living according to the laws of the Jews. Paul reminded them that we are not saved by what we do, but by what Christ did.” *(Excerpts from clergystuff.com/daily-devotions/2017/5/21/galatians-113-17-211-21-living-by-faith)*

Insight

“Paul describes his own early life as a persecutor and destroyer as “advanced ... beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors” (Galatians 1:13-14). He says this not with pride but, as he says elsewhere, as an enduring reminder both of how far grace has brought him and of how wrong he could be and how low he could go (1 Corinthians 15:8-11).

Further, both descriptions of his conversion focus not on his personal salvation but on how the Son of God altered his understanding of his purpose — not punishing those who depart from traditional ways but being open to God’s revelation of Christ, even if it meant a radically new direction and purpose. For Paul, he was not made right with God simply so that he’d be right with God. He was made right with God so that he could proclaim the gospel through word and deed, through the



testimony of his life.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/justification-by-faith/commentary-on-galatians-113-17-211-21-2)*

Gospel Reading

“1: 13-17 I’m sure that you’ve heard the story of my earlier life when I lived in the Jewish way. In those days I went all out in persecuting God’s church. I was systematically destroying it. I was so enthusiastic about the traditions of my ancestors that I advanced head and shoulders above my peers in my career. Even then God had his eye on me. Why, when I was still in my mother’s womb he chose and called me out of sheer generosity! Now he has intervened and revealed his Son to me so that I might joyfully tell non-Jews about him. Immediately after my calling—without consulting anyone around me and without going up to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles long before I was—I got away to Arabia.

2: 11-21 Later, when Peter came to Antioch, I had a face-to-face confrontation with him because he was clearly out of line. Here’s the situation. Earlier, before certain persons had come from James, Peter regularly ate with the non-Jews. But when that conservative group came from Jerusalem, he cautiously pulled back and put as much distance as he could manage between himself and his non-Jewish friends. That’s how fearful he was of the conservative Jewish clique that’s been pushing the old system of circumcision. Unfortunately, the rest of the Jews in the Antioch church joined in that hypocrisy so that even Barnabas was swept along in the charade. But when I saw that they were not maintaining a steady, straight course according to the Message, I spoke up to Peter in front of them all: “If you, a Jew, live like a non-Jew when you’re not being observed by the watchdogs from Jerusalem, what right do you have to require non-Jews to conform to Jewish customs just to make a favorable impression on your old Jerusalem buddies?” We Jews know that we have no advantage of birth over “non-Jewish

sinner.” We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it—and we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen! Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good. Have some of you noticed that we are not yet perfect? (No great surprise, right?) And are you ready to make the accusation that since people like me, who go through Christ in order to get things right with God, aren’t perfectly virtuous, Christ must therefore be an accessory to sin? The accusation is frivolous. If I was “trying to be good,” I would be rebuilding the same old barn that I tore down. I would be acting as a pretender. What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be *God’s* man. Christ’s life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“Christianity exists as the gracious fulfillment of the already gracious Judaism. Christianity is the “climax of the covenant,” as N.T. Wright has said, not its cancellation. Holy Scripture tells the story of how God’s past, present, and future grace goes forth from Israel to the world through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

First-century Jews believed that they were saved by grace which was **demonstrated** by their obedience to the Jewish Law. Jewish believers worked **from** salvation; **not for it**. Our right standing (“righteousness”) with God, Paul argues, is not

demonstrated by badges of ethnic privilege but by the badge of faith for all who believe—whether Jew or Gentile. Thus, Peter’s hypocrisy is an assault upon the very nature of the gospel itself.

If our justification—our state of “being in the right” with God—is built upon the shifting sand of our own fallible faith, there is no blessed assurance but only a perpetual dread of the dark night of the soul produced by our own forthcoming inevitable failure and fully-assured faithlessness. The instances of justification by “faith **in** Jesus Christ” in verse 16 can also be translated as justification by “the faithfulness **of** Jesus Christ.” Our imperfect faith testifies to our right standing with God by reaching out by grace to grab for dear life onto the perfect divine life of Jesus Christ on our behalf. This right standing, this justification, creates a new status and it makes us a new creation (see also 2 Corinthians 5:17)! It is both declarative and transformative. Faith becomes our badge of gospel belonging even as it rests upon something far more foundational—the infallible faithfulness of the crucified and resurrected Christ.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by John Frederick*)

Readings for Further Study

- [1 Corinthians 15: 3-5](#) *When someone believes the gospel of Jesus Christ*
- [Galations 3: 10-14/Romans 4:3/Titus 3:5](#) *Justified by faith in Jesus*

Thought for the Day

“God help me to see the good in the ‘not knowing’...the joy in the ‘in-between’...the meaning in the ‘meantime’” ~ *Mandy Hale*

A Prayer

Lord of justification, with great joy we receive the gift of salvation which is ours not because of our own efforts, but because of the saving work of Christ. Grant us full access to the glory of your salvation, an abundance that is more than enough for all humankind, for the sake of our redeeming Christ. **Amen.**