

WELCOME 7th April 2024 – 2nd SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B

Galatians 1:1-17

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week...

Gin **AND** tonic. Scones, jam **AND** cream.

Some things are MEANT to be added together.

Some...are not. They are enough in **and** of themselves.

Like...Jesus. To add anything to him is to lose him.

Add requirements or rules...you lose your faith.

Add rituals or law...you squander your security.

Add cultural approval or comfort...you forfeit your identity.

Add status, power, prosperity...you surrender your destiny

Over the next 7 weeks we'll be reminded of that fact by Paul as he speaks pointedly & sternly to the church in Galatia **AND** to us.

Only in Christ do we have full access to the freedom the Father desires us to enjoy as his children. Only in Christ by the Spirit do we receive the fullness of blessing the Father seeks to make flourish in our lives.

*Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live...Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's **servant**.*

In Jesus Christ, God has come personally to this world to rescue & recreate all that is by Christ's death/resurrection. God will have the last word about me/you/the world & that word is the promise that our destiny is life – future love – destination abundant joy that lasts forever only because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

In every circumstance of life, the Risen Jesus is always enough.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus, We dare to believe in the things we can't see: In your love for us - In your love for those around us - In the hope of eternity. We dare to believe that another world is possible & that suffering can end & that we can play a role in the kingdom to come. We dare to believe in heaven on earth & in the light that scatters darkness & in your justice made complete. Jesus through you we believe all things will be made new...in you we pray to believe that all things are possible also in us. Amen

Let's hear God's word from Paul to the church in Galatia & Wagga Wagga

FAITH CHAT:

1. What has been the biggest "shake-up" in your life?
(The "thing" that altered the way you live most of all.)
2. How might the promise of life in Jesus "shake up" the lives of those you know who live distant from him at this moment?

2nd SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B – LIVING EXCLUSIVELY...BY THE GOSPEL

We know the stories only too well...even if we can't name all the **faces**... Athletes, Rock icons, Hollywood heroes...who ruined their lives adding a little something extra to their natural talents/gifts...added something extra to pump up the energy, added something extra to enhance the look, added something extra to extend the attraction... added something extra until the fall/fail was harder than the effort to climb.

You may see similar behaviour this afternoon @ the picnic. I'll be one of the guilty... See if you can relate. I'll eat & think "I'm full. That's enough. I need nothing else." Then I'll see something I haven't tried yet...or something I really enjoyed & have a little extra...& think "Yep. That's just right. That's enough." Then I'll remember I really didn't have dessert...or not enough & have a little extra. Sound familiar?

Throughout the NT & particularly as Paul writes to the churches in Galatia...that temptation to add something extra to the good news of God's rescue & re-creation of all that is through Christ alone...is rife...shows up over/over again...that temptation to add something extra to the good news of forgiveness, life, & salvation in Jesus Christ crucified & risen plagues the early disciple communities. And it is **ONE THING** Paul fights ^{w/} all his strength.

We know the story: After Paul came face-to-face ^{w/} the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, his life was completely transformed...from enemy **OF** Christ to evangelist **FOR** Christ...from antagonist trying to **CRUSH** the church to apostle **PLANTING** churches. On one of his 1st missionary journeys, Paul & Barnabas travelled through Asia Minor (Turkey) planting a string of little churches...small communities of disciples. After planting these churches, Paul & his companions would visit or write letters to teach, encourage, answer questions, & sometimes rebuke. Things would get messed up or someone would cause mischief & his role as apostle/planter was to lead & shape those fellowships into vibrant centers **of** Christlike living & **bold** witness to the resurrected life of Christ in their lives. Discipline of the disobedient or the wayward was part of that role. This letter...initially sent to one church, read there; then passed on to be read in the other congregations...emerges from just such a need.

Since Paul had visited, it seems other teachers had stopped in for a visit...Like Jesus, Paul & the original disciples, they were likely devout Jews ^{b/4} becoming Xn **BUT** they still held to the Jewish Law as either a prerequisite for faith in Christ or as proof of your faith in the lineage of Abraham of whom Jesus was a descendant. The litmus test or line in the sand was circumcision. The premier sign of the **OLD** covenant was being used as a necessity/obligation to the life in the **NEW**.

Paul would have none of it...not a bar. God restoring us to himself in deep intimate relationship is at no point dependent upon our behaviour. Our restored relationship ^{w/} God is in **no way** built upon what we do. It is uniquely & solely founded on the completed work of Christ in dying/rising & reigning over all the Father has made. Paul would write to the Romans, *Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.* (5:1) *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time & died for us sinners.* (5:6) *For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.* (5:10-11)

Galatians is a strong rebuke of adding anything of our effort, understanding or behaviour to the gospel. What is the gospel Paul preached? **The** gospel is the good news of what God has **done** for us in Christ, not what we **do** for Him. In Jesus Christ, God has come personally to this world to rescue & recreate all that is by Christ's death/resurrection. Salvation **is** by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Anything else is **NOT** the Gospel! This debate ^{w/} those who were insisting on keeping the Law as a prerequisite for salvation/being part of the family of Christ was so severe that it eventually was carried to the apostles in Jerusalem where the final declaration in favour of grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone was made public: "So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the grace of the Lord Jesus." – Acts 15:10-11 Paul writes ^{b/4} that apostolic council in Jerusalem...so he has to be clear...both about his authority to speak as an apostle **AND** more importantly about completed work of Christ for us.

Paul gets it at the depth of his soul & will not back down that the gospel is not just something we believe to be true...It is not just a set of historical events we hold as fact...neither is it one opinion among many opinions about truth in the world...like having a favourite footy team, ice cream flavour, or political party...it's a nuclear blast that completely transforms our spiritual lives as well as our living experience in this world...it's dynamite/power to shake our lives to the core & rearrange everything about us. In this world increasingly driven by distrust & fear, our trust/hope is the fundamental truth that God will have the last word about me/you/the world & that word is the promise that our destiny is life – future love – destination abundant joy that lasts forever **ONLY BECAUSE** God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. As followers of Jesus we hold fast to the promise that God is, was & will be forever God...even if no one else sees it, acknowledges, or submits to his rule...God is still God & will have the final determining say on all of human history.

The NT witness is clear...Jesus says God sent him not to swoop you up out of this broken heap of human history off to some angelic heaven, but to bring you & all human history & all creation back to its fitting & rightful & intended destiny. To bring you back into right relationship w/ the Father who loves you & wants to reveal himself to you & through you...*to live with you & walk with you...* & that time of restoration & renewal & rebuilding is now...by the work of Jesus Christ. *God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them.* – 2 Cor 5:19

Jesus declares that in him God takes hold of you...makes you his own...first a recipient & then an agent of that good news...Through his life/death/resurrection God in Jesus defeats all the forces that would bind you trap you ensnare you & kill you...restores you to your place as his child & begins restoring you into the image & likeness of His Son.

Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. By his death, resurrection & rule, Christ has not only delivered us from the eventual grave each of us will fill but from the living death of a world broken – fundamentally ruined - by sin & evil. Through His death, Christ holds us in his hands to protect & preserve us against the obvious flood of evil that washes over our world. Through His death he daily frees us from the slaveries w/ which this world is enslaved. (acquire/achieve/accumulate, money, sex, power, status, acclaim)

But let's ask Luther's question: "What does this mean?" What does this good news mean **to you** as you live in your house, go to the shops, head off to work, chat to your neighbours, go to the Dr or hang out w/ friends & family members who don't believe it for a minute? Every day, people all around you are being lured away from Christ as supreme treasure toward some lesser false god who cannot save help or provide. So test yourself against Paul **here**: *Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.* The 4th century church leader Augustine said this: Jesus Christ is not valued at all until He is valued above **all**. Until Christ is above all in all of our lives no one else will ever know the all-surpassing joy of life in him...Scholar, former Anglican Bishop NT Wright says: "Our task as image-bearing, God-loving, Christ-shaped, Spirit-filled Christians, following Christ & shaping our world, is to announce redemption to a world that knows only fallenness, to announce healing to a world that knows only brokenness, to proclaim love & trust to a world that knows only exploitation, fear & suspicion..."

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TAKE IT HOME – In what ways would you say your life been changed by the gospel?

Would someone know that just by watching you live your life?

Just in case you don't think it is...

With whom do you want to share that personal experience of the gospel's power?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus, you said you were the only way to the Father. Yet by your death & resurrection you have made that exclusive way available to all. By your Spirit teach us live by the gospel & be transformed by it so we share it gladly & boldly with everyone we know...[silent prayer for those living distant from God's grace] We pray in your name...Amen