

WELCOME 21st April 2024 – 4th SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B

Galatians 3:1-22

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Even though Pastor John isn't here this week you have **Growing Praise** inserts **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. *Zoom Bible Studies will resume when John get home to Wagga.*

As we move into this week... Putting the **cart** before the horse...Counting **your** chickens before they're hatched... We can say it dozens of ways & know exactly what it means. We've gotten life out of order. We've moved to step G before we've done step B. **Ikea** flat-pack furniture...every time.

Paul writes to the church in Galatia but surely to each of us...leading us to keep our lives in Christ in order...not some mechanical legal moral order, but faith alone in the grace alone of Jesus Christ alone that leads us to living out God's mission to rescue & restore all that is to himself. To live each day engaged in God's eternal desire to reclaim his sin-scarred world in a life that flows from our being reclaimed to the Father by Christ's death & resurrection.

It is Christ's victory over sin death & the devil, that by his Spirit calls us to trust in him alone by faith, & equips us for living as instruments of his redeeming love & saving grace...as agents of his Kingdom which lasts forever. Living exclusively by faith means putting all of my life in submission to the promises of God.

If we get that out of order...at best the world sees nice people & tidy orderly lives, but they never hear the good news of the Father who loves the disordered & dirty so much that he came personally in Jesus to die & rise to make us his.

So *it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*

The righteous live by faith

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY (Martin Luther)

Lord Jesus look upon us, empty vessels that needs to be filled. In faith we are weak—strengthen us. In love we are cold—set us alight so that your love may go out through us to our neighbour. We doubt and are unable to trust you fully. Lord, strengthen our trust in you. You are all the treasure we possess. We are poor, you are rich, and you came to have mercy on the poor. We are sinners, you are goodness. From you we receive goodness, justice & righteousness, but we can give you nothing in return. Therefore we shall stay with you & delight in you in the hope that you will use us for your glory. Jesus Christ alone Lord & Saviour we pray in your name --- Amen

Let's hear God's word then sing Only a Holy God

4th SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B – LIVING EXCLUSIVELY...BY FAITH

Have you ever walked into a room & instantly knew you didn't belong? You knew the moment you got there you just didn't fit? *Take 2 minutes...* Turn to your neighbor & tell them what happened. (We won't talk about it as a whole but tell your neighbour) Do you ever think that happens when people walk into a church for the first time? Maybe even here...? It's not funny really...most of us grew up in a place where when you met someone you didn't know & you heard a German-ish surname you just assumed, "**Lutheran.**" Once you knew, you immediately asked, "What **kind?**" Because there were "kinds." At least 2...maybe as many as 4-5 in Australia...& at least twice that many in the US...& you know sometimes dating across church lines was dangerous. Grandma might not abide one of "those" Lutherans in the family.

Pastor I know up on the Central Coast says he had a family from Indiana in the US on a temporary work assignment living in their community for about 2 years. They almost *never* missed Sunday worship, but *never* took communion. He visited in their home early on & asked "Why?" You're gonna love this...They were part of a **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod** congregation back home & they were afraid their pastor would find out they took communion from a church not in altar & pulpit fellowship with the W.E.L.S. I'm not making that up. How their pastor in Indiana would know what happened here, they couldn't say, but for the 2 years they were here... worship every Sunday, various Bible Studies & Small Groups but didn't venture near the communion table. That is precisely what's in play in Galatians...

Non-Jewish Galatians heard the gospel...the incredible good news that God **in** Jesus had come to this earth to rescue & restore all things to himself by Christ's life, death, resurrection & rule in love. They received the assurance of God's pardon & peace in Christ by faith & the hopeful certainty of life now & always in Christ's presence & power. They were drawn to joyous faith by the Holy Spirit & started living a freedom from all the rules & requirements of their previous pagan life. The fear of judgment & punishment from whatever gods they worshipped was gone & their lives gave evidence of a freedom, joy & peace nothing else could match. They were Christians.

Then a bunch of knucklehead Lutherans showed up...Ok...they weren't Lutherans they were formerly Jewish Christians...devout Jews who discovered all their ancestral longings & faith-filled promises made real in Jesus. They too were drawn to faith in the risen Jesus as the fulfillment of every promise they had ever known from Abraham on. But they *insisted* the Galatians (every non-Jew among them) get circumcised & start following the Jewish dietary & worship obligations they knew as only Jews would know them...trying to convince them that the only way Gentiles -

non-Jews could be true followers of Jesus was if they became Jewish first, *OR* if they added Jewish religious practice to their faith in Jesus to prove they were genuine.

The Jewish Christians had fallen into a common trap. They huddled together & formed a rigid boundary around themselves so they could clearly determine who was "in" with God & who was "out." This was consistent to a point with Old Testament Law. It was scrupulous obedience to the Law Moses received on Sinai that set Jews apart from every other nation on earth. But when Christ breathed out "*It is finished,*" rigid adherence to the Law ended. Keeping score of your life against the shalt & shalt nots of the Law died & was buried with Jesus. Only Jesus was raised from the dead...not the Law...

The Jewish Christians thought of discipleship...being the church...like a farmer with his fences. The fences keep in what you want "in" & out what you want "out." The Jewish Christians viewed the church like **this**...a "bounded" set. That's the farmer & his fences. Circumcision, worship obligations, & dietary restrictions proved you were in & if you didn't want those you were out. To which Paul says, "Bunk!" The church is a "centred" set...like a sheep or cattle station on 1000s of kilometres of open land. The station owner makes sure there's food, water & shelter where the livestock can get to it & the cows or sheep come & go regularly to feed, drink & reproduce & then go out to explore the station & enjoy the scenery...whatever livestock do in their spare time

That's Paul's picture of the church...Faith in Christ, worship that feeds by word & sacrament...shelter & refuge from the harsh climate of the world around us & the fellowship of God's flock from which we go back to the local culture as those who know where nourishment for hungry & thirsty souls can be found. We gather, centered on Christ & his finished work for us at the cross, not surrounded by a fence of rules, regulations, requirements, doctrines & demands. We gather grasped heart deep by the overwhelming love of God the Father that in Jesus by the Holy Spirit treasures & transforms us & sends us to the lost all around us with an unmistakable word of hope & an assurance of a promise already fulfilled for all the world by Jesus Christ dead, buried & risen to reign.

Let's look at the questions Paul asks quickly...**1st Who has cast an evil spell on you?** (*Who has bewitched you?*) In chapter 1 Paul says twice in the strongest possible language, if anyone preaches anything other than Jesus Christ crucified, risen & ruling as the way God restores his relationship with you, let that person be "cursed." Literally "damn" them. Here, he carries that thought...To downplay the work of Christ as unfinished without the Law is evil...it's a witches spell. Over the course of this series the Growing Praise asks "How do you think the first readers of this letter felt

hearing Paul's words?" Imagine those Jewish Christians hearing this pillar of the church say that...Like a slap to the face he had their attention. And the Galatians... non-Jews for the most part...what a wake-up call. But what follows 2nd is crucial: "...does God give you the Holy Spirit & work miracles among you because you obey the law?" Of course not...We become Christians when we hear & experience the gospel preached or carried out in baptism & the Holy Spirit draws us to trust...to place our faith in Christ & his finished work on the cross.

Then 3rd... *After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?* Cart...meet horse. Obedience, living the life of Christ in your daily life, **FOLLOWS FROM FAITH**...it doesn't come before or prove faith. What Paul is saying is this: live your life in Christ the way you started: by grace, not performance...by faith not according to some prescribed mandate. Anything else is ridiculous, foolish or it's evil disguised as good. Because God had promised by his prophet: "I will give you a new heart, & I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart & give you a tender, responsive heart. I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees & be careful to obey my regulations." – Ezek 36:26-27 From start to finish Paul points us to the work of Christ: first on the cross & then by the Holy Spirit, his presence & power in each of us.

Faith is not betting on the improbable. Faith is not counting on the implausible. Faith is not wishing for the unattainable. Faith is trusting the One who is trustworthy. Faith is relying on the One who is reliable. Faith is effective & faith is powerful because Christ is Lord. Faith trusts the promise as Abraham did. Paul makes the connection this way. Verse 6-7: "Abraham believed God, & God counted him as righteous because of his faith." *The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.*

Abraham's story with God begins in Genesis 12. God promised that through Abraham God would bless all the families of the earth. On the basis of **that** promise, Abraham & Sarah move from their home to the land God directed. In Genesis 15 again God comes to Abraham & **Abram** believed the LORD, & the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. Twice Abraham is drawn to faith in a promise & his life carries through on that faith. It is only in Genesis 17 that circumcision is given as the sign of the enduring covenant and it's 430 years later that the Law is given on Sinai. God made the promise to Abraham. Abraham trusted God for the promise to be fulfilled & that was enough. Anyone God draws to faith, like Abraham, is in.

4th question...**Why**, then, was the law given? two simple reasons...to reveal our rebellion...show us our distance from what God desires for us **AND** to make us long for a Saviour...someone to free us from our self-imposed prison of sin. The law can't

make us right with God. It can only imprison us. But in prison we begin to long for freedom. We begin to long for a Saviour & recognize our need of Christ.

And it is Christ's victory over sin death & the devil, that by his Spirit calls us to trust in him alone by faith, & equips us for living as instruments of his redeeming love & saving grace...as agents of his Kingdom which lasts forever. Living exclusively by faith means putting all of my life in submission to the promises of God.

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The righteous live by faith

TAKE IT HOME- take a minute or two & share with your neighbour...then we'll pray

How can you help an unbelieving friend or family member understand that being a "good enough" person does not restore their relationship with God?

How would you offer your life of faith in Christ as an example?

Let's pray with that in mind...

O God, you have made us in your image. Forgive us when we try to remake the world in ours. You have made Christ the church's one foundation. Forgive us when we try to build it on another. Transform us, O Lord. Grant us the grace to present only Jesus Christ to the world around us, not ourselves except as servants for Christ's sake, so those we engage in our lives might receive your glorious gospel and worship your holy name. Through Jesus Christ...Amen.