

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, Pastor
Sunday, January 21st, 2018

Galatians 1: 1-5

“The Breaking of Bread”

OPENING

The Washington Post tells us that 40 percent of Americans make New Year’s resolutions. A host of news organizations wrote articles in 2017 about ways to keep them. Have you kept your new year’s resolutions? Old Habits die hard, they say, and particularly bad habits.

We started the New year, beginning the first Sunday, with some resolutions of our own. I hope that these are the heartbeat of our church. And though it is clear that no one can make resolutions for someone else, I pray that the habits of the early church become patterns for our own life.

The first church devoted themselves to (Acts 2:42)

1. The apostles teaching;
2. fellowship;
3. the breaking of bread;
4. Prayer

The first Sunday in January, I introduced the four characteristics. Last week, we looked more closely at the apostles teaching. Today, I want to unpack the "breaking of bread, but I want to do it from Paul’s letter to the Galatians: 1: 1-3.

INTRODUCTION

1. The apostle Paul was a church-planting missionary. He would help a church get started, then move to a new location to start another one. But he didn’t leave those churches without support. He would hear of concerns or needs about the church in various ways and encourage/admonish/lead them through letters.
2. One of the letters was written to the churches in the area of Galatia in Asia minor about 15-20 years after the death of Christ.
3. The church was experiencing racial divisions in the churches around Galatia. The first Christians were Jewish, but increasing numbers of Gentiles were being saved. A group of teachers in Galatia were insisting that these Gentile Christians practice all of the traditional ceremonial customs of the law of Moses as the Jewish Christians did. They had to practice the dietary laws and to be circumcised and to receive full acceptance.
4. Paul teaches them that their confusion and strife is coming from their misunderstanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – something at the core. This wasn’t just a peripheral issue. When you add something or anything to what the Lord says you need to be saved, then you have a “different gospel” (1:6) from the one they had been taught (1:8). When you have a different gospel, then you lose Christ himself (1:6). Therefore everything is at stake in this debate.

SOMETHING’S DIFFERENT

As Galatians opens, the tone is strikingly different. He is using strong language, and his normal “thankfulness” for the people is strikingly absent. (See Phil. 1:3-8, Col. 1:3-8, 1 Cor. 1:4-9 for example). In fact, Paul says he is “astonished” (1:6); He seems surprised, perhaps angry.

WHY IS PAUL CONCERNED?

1. They've Turned to a false Gospel – Paul is astonished, because the people are turning to a “different gospel,” which really “isn't a gospel” at all. They are confused.
2. False Teachers have arrived – Paul is directly angry at those misleading the church. These teachers are perverting the gospel and causing confusion. Paul says pretty plainly – let anyone teaching a false gospel be cursed (v. 9).
3. Upset with the people- It seems like Paul is angry with the Galatian Christians themselves, warning them that they are deserting the God who called them (6b) – a very serious charge.
4. Summary – When you read through Galatians, you discover that a group of teachers were communicating to the new Christian converts that they were obliged to keep the Jewish cultural customs of the Mosaic law – the dietary laws, circumcision and the rest of the ceremonial law in order to be fully pleasing to God.

WHO DOES PAUL THINK HE IS?

1. Verse 1 tells us – Paul is an apostle;
2. The word *apostolos* means “one who is sent.”
3. Paul reminds us that his authority didn't come by or through men, but from God.
4. Ministers of the gospel today have the same source of authority – words from God coming in and out of the Bible, but Ministers living today were appointed by men. When I was “called” into the ministry, that call was affirmed by a body of believers who prayed for me and laid hands on me as a symbol of the Holy Spirit's anointing. Yet Paul's call and commission was from Christ himself. So, Paul and the 11 disciples have a unique commission in all of history. (See Acts 9: 1-19).
5. Are there apostles today – No, not in the original sense of Paul and the 11. Barnabas, for example, was called an apostle (2 Cor. 9:3), but only because he was sent out of Antioch to do missionary work. Barnabas never met the risen Christ.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

1. People are lost
 - a. Jesus “gave himself for our sins to rescue us.”
 - b. This doesn't sound very pleasant, does it?
 1. First, it seems to put me in a position of authority, and it appears to make some of us as judges over others. We're fine, but you need rescuing;
 2. Second, it seems to suggest that there might be something wrong with me – as if I am helpless, and dependent – weak, not able to make it.
 3. Rescue me from this evil world, and from my sins? I'm not so bad. My sins are mistakes, etc.
 - b. We are lost and helpless without Christ.
2. Lost people need finding
 - a. The point isn't just that people need rescuing, but also that they can't rescue themselves. They/we need someone to rescue us. That someone is Jesus;
 - b. Have you ever been lost? There isn't any feeling quite like it, is there? When Golda Meir was Prime Minister of Israel, I remember an interview she gave with one of the U.S. networks. She was lamenting

the fact that Moses wandered around for forty years and finally settled in the one place in the Middle East that had no oil. She said, "If only he would have stopped and asked for directions."¹

3. Of course, it is true, that sometimes we recognize a landmark, and find our way, but Paul communicates here that spiritual lostness demands/calls for a rescue.
4. Even if we could wake up from our sin-induced stupor and see the way home, we wouldn't be strong enough to fight our way out of the chains.
5. Jesus Saves
 - a. Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost (Lk. 19:10). People are lost. They can't rescue themselves. Jesus saves.
 - b. Notice, For example, it is interesting in this short summary that Paul doesn't mention Jesus role as a great teacher. That's because people need a savior, not just a teacher.
 1. Conventional wisdom today is that Jesus was a great teacher, but good teaching can't rescue us from our sin.
 2. Sometimes people believe that a Christian is just someone who follows Christ's teaching and example.
 3. But that's impossible. Imagine that someone has been in a car wreck, and they've been hurt so bad that they are in danger of death.
 4. It doesn't help at that point to throw the person a manual on first aid, or emergency surgery.
 5. Let's say that you knew exactly what surgery they needed, and you had instructions which showed someone a "step-by-step" instruction to stop the bleeding and to repair the wound through self-surgery. Well, the person is sick. They couldn't even get up to read the manual.
 6. It isn't good teaching we need, but a great savior.
 7. Colossians 1:14 says "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves.
6. By dying in our place
 - a. The question naturally arises – "How does Jesus save us?"
 - b. Verse 4a – "He gave himself for our sins."
 - c. The word "for" means "in place of," or "on behalf of."
 - d. *He died in our place*. His life was substituted for ours.
 - e. *He died willingly for us* - Throughout the South, there are memorials in most towns to the bloodiest war fought on American soil – the Civil War. Over 600,000 died in that conflict. What is often not known is that both the North and the South allowed "substitute soldiers." A man drafted for military service could literally buy another man to go to war in his place. This lasted until 1863 in the South, when there were no more available men, and began about that same time in the North where immigrants were often paid to fight in someone's place. The term "rich man's war, poor man's fight" became popular in the

¹ Illustration from the sermon "Lost and Confused" preached by Scott Carmer on June 12, 2006 based on Psalm 55: 1-44.
<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/lost-and-confused-scott-carmer-sermon-on-emotions-92096?ref=SermonSerps>

South. Imagine paying someone to fight in your place – most to die in your place. How humbling that must have been.

7. He is our redeemer – It is important to understand, when Paul says that Jesus willingly gave himself for us.
 - a. Yes, Christ died in our place. He took the punishment for our sin that we deserved.
 - b. But he also purchased us back from the grips of sin. You see, sin has a rightful hold on people, an ownership. We are slaves to sin, because we willingly entered into a contract with sin.
 - c. It isn't that Jesus just came and stole us back. He purchased us back with his own blood:
 1. Acts 20:28 - Be shepherds of the church of God which he has bought with his own blood;
 2. Colossians 1: 20 – he made peace through his blood, reconciling us to God.
8. The end result is grace and peace in our lives. Romans 5:2 – since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.
9. Then we live out this grace to the Glory of God. Galatians 1:5 – to whom be glory for ever and ever amen.

CONCLUSION

1. This is why the New Testament church anchored itself to the cross of Jesus Christ. They had been died for.
2. It is why we must look to it too, for it provides us the central metaphor for our lives. We have been loved extraordinarily.
3. We look to it, so that we will never add anything else to it. You are saved by grace through faith. It is not of works, lest anyone might boast. It is the measuring spoon, the guide on a gun, the standard by which we evaluate everything we are and do.
4. This gospel isn't just the entrance to heaven, but a way of living – powerfully humble; Loved to overflowing; Given much, so that we too can give., and on and on it goes.

INVITATION

The late David Matthews, who last pastored Royal Lane Baptist Church here in Dallas, once told the story of a man who needed to make a phone call. This is going to take you back now, because he was in a subway station in New York before the era of cell phones. He was standing outside a phone booth, paging through a phone book, trying to see by the light of the single yellow bulb on the ceiling of the platform. A woman walked by and asked what he was doing. He told her he was trying to read a number, but he couldn't see it because it was so dark. She looked at him in that way women do and said, "Well, if you just get all the way into the booth and close the door behind you, the light comes on and you will see everything you need to."²

Won't you come in?

² Illustration in a sermon preached by George Mason, Wilshire BC, Dallas.