

Galatians 1:1-13

May 29, 2016

“No Other Gospel”



- my brother-in-law Richard and I were sitting on the dock at the lake having a discussion on Monday evening
- he has a new co-worker who is a Jehovah's Witness and Richard just knows that the subject of religion will come up sooner or later
 - most likely sooner ... it is ... inevitable
 - what do you know about the end of the world?
 - are you ready for Armageddon?
 - or questions about who is Jesus
 - if Jehovah is God and Jesus is the Son of God, how can you Christians say that Jesus is God the Son?
 - doesn't that give you more than one God?
- Richard knows that sharing his faith with his co-worker will be a challenge because they know all their well-practiced arguments
 - and for every argument you have learned, they have a counter argument all ready for you
 - Jesus is the Son of God, but not God the Son
 - there is no Trinity, God is one, and to make Jesus equal with Jehovah is idolatry
 - there is no hell, just oblivion, just non-existence
 - no, you don't have an immortal soul ... you will just cease to exist
 - now, you could go after any one of those arguments and try and make some headway
 - or you could attack their founder, Charles Taze Russell, for his immoral life

- but neither of those will really get you where you need to go
- as a Christian, you have something they don't have
 - St. Paul gives the best summary in Romans 5:1-2
 - Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand ... we rejoice in hope*
- you have to think about what they don't have ... that's the key
 - what they don't have is the very thing Paul talks about here in Galatians
 - they don't have peace in their hearts
 - they don't have access
 - they don't have hope
 - they don't have the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
- before we talk about the Gospel, there is something else that we need to talk about first
- the first thing they don't have is a sense of the depth of sin
 - we call it total depravity
 - we are dead in trespasses and sins
 - we are all born in the midst of a deep darkness that precludes anyone being saved by their works or being good enough to get to heaven without Jesus
 - we are not merely spiritually wounded, but spiritually dead
- if you don't understand that, you are left with the brilliant idea that you can actually do something to contribute to your salvation and earn your way to heaven
- our natural inclination is to think that we can contribute to our

salvation

-I have the ability to clean up my life

-I can overcome my bad habits, my addictions, and get my house in order

-and if I don't God will make me pay for it

-what does that do for your sense of eternal security and peace with God?

-the world is filled with Pharisees ... people like Paul, or Nicodemus who believe that heaven is the reward for a God-pleasing life

-Paul had excelled beyond everyone of his generation ... head of the class ... 4.0 grade average ... perfect SAT score

-until the day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and

realized that none of it counted for anything before God

-in fact, his life of good works and self-righteousness actually counted against him

-because God hates a pride-filled heart

-such hearts need to hear what God says:

-if salvation could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing

-this is a trustworthy statement that deserves full acceptance, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

-there is no other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved

-Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me"

-when we recognize our own spiritual deadness, only then can we begin to see the one thing needful ... a God who loves sinners

- a Saviour who welcomes sinners and eats with them
- a Redeemer who was willing to die for sinners

-the “other gospel” that Paul talks about in our text today is not confined to the cults

- it is our natural, inbred false religion that continually wants to mix faith and works

- our reason and our pride want to insist that we want to help, we need to help

-there is a fatal flaw in that approach:

- I will never know if I have done enough

- I will never have the certainty of salvation

- I will never have the joy of salvation

- I will be doomed to living my whole life on probation, always looking over my shoulder, always worried that one unintentional slip will land me in hell

-not confined to the JW at your door ... Luther struggled here too

- early on in his theological life he travelled to Rome and witnessed throngs of people climbing the prayer steps on their knees as a way to somehow try to cleanse their soul and grow closer to God

- what he saw was that when they reached the top, they were no closer to God and were afflicted with the same uncertainty that they had when they started

-so how did we get into such a mess of mixed up theology?

- our ego always wants to get in the way, it wants to help, it wants

to contribute to salvation

-I don't want to set aside my pride and pray that simple publican's prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner"

-as you start in on reading Galatians 1, you can't help but notice that Paul is pretty fired up here

-he doesn't waste much time on pleasantries

-instead, he dives right in

-there are, in the church in Galatia, attacks on the very heart of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith

-there are also attacks on his own credibility and apostolic authority

-so in the very first verse, Paul affirms that his authority as an apostle comes from Christ and the Father

-he goes on to emphasize that a false-gospel message is being proclaimed among them that is systematically leading them away from Christ

-it could cost them their salvation

-so this now becomes a very important question: are you able to recognize the various voices and theologies of the world around you?

-are you fooled by them

-are you taken in by them

-or are you able to be firm and unmoveable, standing firm in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

-just because the problem was around 2,000 years ago, doesn't mean it's gone

- our world is filled with candidates for “Gospel of the Year”?
- or I should say, “False Gospel of the Year”

- maybe you’ve read about, or at least heard about the “Purpose Driven Life” or the “Purpose Driven Church”

- the focus is on taking the call of God and the expectations of God’s Law upon your life and your home and family and doing a better job of things

- the church will grow if you are obedient

- what’s at the heart of it?

- the focus is on the law of God commanding you to do something for him instead of the grace of God

- ... you do something for him, and he will do something for you

- maybe you’ve read about or at least heard about a group called “Promise Keepers”

- what’s at the heart of this one?

- ... you do something for him, and he will do something for you

- maybe you’ve bought into the prosperity Gospel of Joel Osteen and others ... give to God, turn things over to God and God will bless you ... do you hear it?

- ... you do something for him, and he will do something for you

- maybe you’ve heard about this thing called “Church Growth”

- some business minds got together to study and examine successful churches where there has been explosive growth

- they tried to zero in on the principles and organization and structure that make such growth possible

- now they try and sell other churches a magical formula that will make them grow
 - structure, organization, marketing, meeting felt needs ...
that's what will make your church grow
 - it doesn't matter what theology you have, you don't really need any theology at all
 - if we do this ... if we do that ... we can make the church grow

- the names change, the faces change, but something remains the same
 - the focus in on me and us and what I do and what we do and what the church does
 - and by default, we have lost our focus on the true and only Gospel ... Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again
 - we've lost focus on the cross and the empty tomb
 - we've bought into a different Gospel

- do you know what unites most Christians today?
 - what is the one thing, the one core belief, the one basic operating principle?
 - the thing that unites most evangelicals in America is not the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God, but the rejection of it
 - in most Christian circles today, the Bible is not the Word of God,
 - at best it merely contains bits and pieces of the Word of God, mixed with all manner of human opinion

- a friend is part of a church that belongs to the ANiC
 - it's a short form for the "Anglican Network in Canada"

- this group, along with several others in Canada and the United States, have been in theological discussions with Lutheran Church Canada and the LCMS for more than five years
 - they have 25 churches in Ontario, another 25 in BC, and 16 churches elsewhere in Canada
 - it seems that we have more things in common than not
 - these are conservative Christian Congregations who have woken up to a sad reality
 - their former national leaders and national conventions have endorsed same sex marriage and climbed on board the whole rainbow movement
 - the result is that now many of their local pastors and leaders in their congregations have started to ask themselves and each other, “how did we get here?”
 - they have recognized that somewhere in their not too distant past, they made a wrong turn
 - they have followed a different Gospel
 - and now they are trying to find their way back
 - they want to go back to their Christian and Anglican roots, the authority of Scripture and the truth of the Gospel
 - they have walked away from their liberal cousins who have abandoned the Gospel and the Word of God
 - in the process, they have sought out other confessional Anglicans in developing countries
 - they have also sought out confessional Lutherans to help them find their way back to the truth of the Gospel
- their wrong turn wasn't same sex marriage or homosexual pastors,

although by the time that happened, it had become obvious to many people that they had wandered away from the Word of God
-the wrong turn happened somewhere back in their past when they decided that the Bible is not the Word of God
-that it only contains bits and pieces of the Word of God
-now, as modern, 20th or 21st century Christians, their leaders and teachers were saying that we are free to pick and choose which parts apply today and which parts we can simply ignore as someone's outdated opinion

-the change happened little by little ... it was almost imperceptible
-just a little bit off course at first
-but even one degree off course 20 or 50 or a 100 years ago quickly became thousands of miles
-now, miles off course, they are trying to find their way back
Again

-so when you hear about and read about confessional Lutherans and confessional Anglicans in dialogue, now you know what that means ...
-you can pray for that unity ... and you can praise God for his gift of true unity in the Gospel

-I share that with you because I want you to see that Paul's problem in Galatians was not confined to the first century, nor was it confined to that cluster of congregations in Galatia

-the temptation to forsake the truth of the Gospel for what is reasonable or what is popular, is always there ...
-the devil is always there, prowling around like a roaring lion

- always asking the same question, “Did God really say?”
- always trying to plant seeds of doubt
 - because he knows that small seeds of doubt are all it takes to create giant weeds that will choke out the truth of the Gospel

- I think of those churches and individuals who are being led astray as “flakey” because they have been dropping bits and pieces of what God has said here and there along the way
 - it’s like a trail of dandruff or dog hair
 - one day they look in the mirror and wonder when the change started to happen

- sometimes the other “gospel” looks like this:
 - other religions can get you to God ... I know people who are Hindu or Sikh or Muslim, and what they believe will save them
 - we’re all praying to the same God, just with different names
 - and that place where the Bible says, “There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” ... that’s one of those verses that isn’t God’s Word
 - it’s just one person’s opinion ...
 - besides, we’re adults ... we know better than that

- today’s Sunday School lesson and our Bible Class lesson is “Jesus Blesses the Children”
 - why is it that the Bible tries to present the most important truths about man’s sin and God’s grace and heaven and eternal life in such simple ways
 - it uses stories and parables
 - it uses miracles and examples from everyday life

- God wants children to get it ... and they can ... and they do

- they understand the simple message of Scripture
 - we're lost ... God comes to find us
 - we're broken ... God comes to fix us
 - we're hungry ... God comes to feed us
 - we're alone and cut off ... God comes to be our friend
 - we're homeless ... God comes to invite us to live at his house forever

- the consistent picture from the Bible is our need and God's grace
 - and little children get it ... they understand it
 - it's us grownups that have such an impossible time trying to understand it ... it's not about understanding, it's about believing

- foolish Galatians ... don't you know that God has hidden the truth of the kingdom of God from the wise and the learned and revealed it to little children?
 - unless you turn and become like children, you can't see the kingdom of God ... you can't see that which is right under your nose

- the kingdom of God is about coming to the banquet, just the way you are, because when you get there, God has a whole tickle trunk of party clothes for you to dress up in
 - if you don't know what a tickle trunk is, ask your grandmother

- the way into the party is to dress up in Jesus
 - oh, and that heavenly banquet is not pot luck
 - you and I don't have to bring anything
 - it's all supplied
 - and it's all five star
 - in fact, it would be a great insult to bring your own when

someone else has already paid the tab

-foolish Galatians ... don't you know you can come just as you are?

-don't you know, Jesus has prepared a table for us?