

Sunday, November 18, 2018—Galatians 4-6

Paul wanted people to understand the great work God had done in Christ. Too many in the Galatian churches were under the impression that they needed to do something to add to what Christ had done with His death and resurrection. They believed keeping the Law secured salvation.

When the time came to completion . . .” (4:4), God sent His Son. It was as if time had been “pregnant,” waiting on all the conditions to be right for the birth of Christ. Jesus came, born of a woman under the requirements of the Law, in order to do what no one else could do—fulfill the Law and redeem everyone from the penalty the Law imposed. Why would anyone want to enslave themselves to the Law when Jesus had provide freedom from its grip?

What Jesus did in the fullness of time then provided the fullness of life. With the Spirit’s leading and filling, there could now be fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control—which were not possible under the Law. The Law could describe these but could not empower them. The Spirit Himself would produce these things, and there was no Law to prohibit or limit the amount of each in the believer.

This Spirit-led life would ensure no one relied on the Law for righteousness and would prevent someone from wandering into selfish sinfulness, incorrectly considering the freedom in Christ a license for sin rather than a call to sacrifice and abundant life.

Praise God for what He has done in and through Jesus.

Saturday, November 17, 2018—Galatians 1-3

The story of Goldilocks and three bears uses a phrase quite often. “It was just right.” This described the food, the chair, the bed, and more. None of those things were too much or too little. They all had the balance for which she sought. Paul and James wrote to early believers trying to help them find the balance between trusting Jesus and working for Him.

Paul wrote to the Galatians because someone had convinced them they needed to practice Jewish Law in addition to placing their faith in Jesus for salvation. They were placing too much faith in their works. Contrast that with James who found the people lacking in their good works stirred by their faith in the One who called them to be salt and light.

One of the main issues was circumcision, and Paul noted when Titus, a Greek follower of Jesus, came to Jerusalem with him, Titus did not feel compelled to be circumcised though surrounded by many who were (2:3). The gospel is good news precisely because it frees Jew and Gentile alike from obligations for righteousness. Righteousness comes from faith in the work of Christ, not in fulfillment of regulation. To preach something else or believe something else is not good news at all. If righteousness could be gained through law keeping, Christ died for nothing (2:21).

The Law taught righteousness (2:24) but provided no means for it. Praise God for Jesus' fulfilling and providing righteousness His personal fulfillment and through an individual's faith in Him.

Friday, November 16, 2018—James 3-5

James led the church in Jerusalem, which had been the holiest site in all of Judaism. There the Temple stood, and the presence of God dwelled for generations. There the Spirit of God fell on those who believed at Pentecost and made each Christ-follower a temple, with the Spirit of God living inside. There the need arose for people to move beyond labels of heritage and nationality. Proof of belief would come through action.

James saw many who professed belief in God, yet their tongues spewed vile language. Many wanted to be teachers and have influence, yet they weren't prepared for the responsibility of shaping lives. He wanted them to see the beauty of true wisdom and conversion. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense" (3:17).

Without this authentic change and heavenly wisdom, the people gathering in Christ's name were bound for conflict. "You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (4:3). They couldn't be friends with the world and friends with God. They had to submit to God and His ways and seek no one else.

Like farmers, they needed discipline and patience to experience the fullness of what God had for them (5:1-8). Their faith in Christ would move them to serve one another and pray for one another. James was calling them to continual surrender for the glory of Christ.

Pray for an authentic, indisputable walk with Jesus.

Thursday, November 15, 2018—James 1-2

While the church spread beyond Jerusalem, Judea, and even Samaria to Gentiles, Jewish believers in Jerusalem and beyond continued to grow and began to deal with growing pains. As Jews who were now following Christ as the Messiah, they had to learn how to acknowledge the Law as a gift from God but see Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law. They needed to know how to practice the traditions which made them Jewish without relying on those traditions to make them righteous. James, the leader of the church, wrote to scattered Jews to instruct them in their faith.

James begins by telling them trials and hardship are something about which to rejoice. They faced religious and cultural hardships, and God would use those difficulties to make them mature, more like the Jesus they worshiped and confessed as Messiah. God had brought them to life in Christ. He wasn't going to abandon them. He was shaping them.

James urged them to hear the word and do it. Their maturity in Christ would help them control their tongue and not fall under the pressure of anger and temptation. In this new state of meekness, they would be willing to care for the weak, poor, and oppressed and look on everyone equally, not showing favoritism but expressing unconditional love.

James called them to active faith. They could not simply express belief in Christ. Their lives had to show the fruit of transformation. If the Spirit truly lived in them, He would show Himself by their Christlike action.

Pray for faith which expresses itself in outward obedience.

Wednesday, November 14, 2018--Acts 13-14

God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Cultures change, and preferences come and go, but at the core man does not change. What was tempting in the Garden remains tempting today. How God reaches the soul in one generation or one culture is the way He'll reach the soul in every one.

When God inaugurated the church at Pentecost in Acts 2, there were great signs that stirred the people to ask, "What does this mean? What do we do?" Peter stepped into the moment and shared the message of Jesus and the call to repentance. That was a Jewish audience. When God began to expand the church to Gentiles, He used the same methods. Paul began his first missionary journey, one of the first converts, "when he saw what happened, believed, because he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (13:12). Visually powerful events cause any person—whether Jew or Gentile—to want to know the truth. The gospel then transforms.

When God is on the move, Satan will keep pace. The early church continually saw this. As Paul gained converts and crowds, the jealous Jews stirred up controversy. Paul faced these challenges with faith and discipline, even after being stoned and left for dead. The mission and the truth were more important to him than his comfort and safety.

Praise God for missionaries. Pray for those you know on the field. Pray for personal determination to share the gospel in all places.

Tuesday, November 13, 2018—Acts 10-12

What does it take for a person to go to heaven? The answers are limitless when depending upon personal opinions. Some say there is no heaven. Others believe being a good person is the pathway. If good works are the standard, how good is "good

enough?” Cornelius was devout, did charitable deeds, and always prayed to God (10:2). He wasn’t a Jew, so surely he couldn’t be saved, but he did religious things, so maybe that would count for something. Was he good enough?

Peter was some distance away and saw a vision which troubled him greatly. God showed him many unclean animals—those the Jews couldn’t eat—and told him to kill and eat. Peter protested, but God said not to call unclean something He had approved. Peter realized God was opening the door for non-Jews, the “unclean” Gentiles to come to salvation. At God’s command, he went to Cornelius and proclaimed the gospel. Cornelius wasn’t good enough on his own, but faith in Jesus made him righteous.

Cornelius feared the Lord. His life demonstrated that, but not until he heard about Jesus and the forgiveness of sin available in him did he understand how to find true life—repentance (11:18). Soon, countless Gentiles were trusting in Jesus, and a Gentile city, Antioch, became the place where believers were first called Christians and became the sending center for the church’s mission.

No one is good, yet faith in Christ can make any righteous. Thank God for salvation and purpose which come from believing in Jesus.

Monday, November 12, 2018—Acts 6-9

When God moves, Satan will try to keep pace. As the word of God spread in Jerusalem, the enemy sought to discourage the church with attacks from the outside, like oppression from the Jewish leadership, and assaults from the inside, like the complaints from the Greek-speaking widows in the church. There seemed to be a cultural prejudice against them, so the apostles proposed deacons to serve them, and all agreed.

Why did the apostles not do the work themselves? That was part of the strategy the enemy had against them. If the apostles were distracted from preaching, praying, and ministering, the church would struggle because they would not be doing what God called them to do. The seven deacons served, the church was at peace, and many more came to know Jesus and walk with Him. The church was the victor once again.

Satan then turned his sights on one deacon, Stephen. Facing false charges, Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin and testified to the mighty works of God and the heinous sin of man. They became enraged at his words and stoned him to death. The church suddenly had its first martyr.

The church only became stronger, however, because many scattered under persecution and began sharing the gospel with non-Jews. One of the greatest opponents, Saul, met Jesus on the road to Damascus and began one of its greatest proponents. “So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened” (9:31a).

Praise for the unstoppable power of the gospel.