

Today we are going to begin a 6 week series on Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. We call this letter Galatians. This letter was written probably in the late 40s or 50s and about 20 or so years after the death of Christ. By this time the early Christian movement was still connected to the Jewish faith but through the work of Paul and others there was an increasing number of Gentile Christians. Gentile meaning non-Jewish.

With the growing number of non-Jewish Christians, there became issues with how these non-Jewish Christians were to relate to the Jewish laws and traditions. This letter that Paul writes to the church in Galatia addresses some of those issues which began to arise. Paul's words in this letter will have far-reaching consequences. Paul's letter will challenge and redefine many of the beliefs held by the early church leaders.

Many of the letters in the Bible that were written by Paul or attributed to Paul are addressed to specific people. This letter that we are about to read is not. It is written to the general audience of churches in Galatia. Also, the other letters of Paul that we have all begin with a word of thanksgiving for the church. Paul does not include words of thanksgiving when he writes to the Galatians. He instead begins this letter very critical of Christians in Galatia.

We will also note that Paul seems to be rather defensive in the beginning of this letter. He will claim that his authority is from God and not from human beings. We need to realize that Paul was being attacked as not being a close follower of Jesus. Paul was not one of the early apostles who was chosen by Jesus. Paul basically came onto the scene after Jesus had already departed the earth. And so there were other people who were saying that since Paul wasn't with Jesus that he was not to be listened to.

With that in mind, let us listen to the beginning of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Read Galatians 1: 1-12

I shared earlier that this is the one letter where Paul does not offer a word of thanksgiving at the beginning. Instead, he begins with strong words denouncing the Galatian Christians for what they are doing. He tells them that they are turning to a different gospel, one that is confusing them. Paul even says that anyone who professes a gospel different than the one that they are sharing should be accursed. Strong words indeed.

So the question for us becomes. How do we judge whether or not what someone teaches us is God's gospel? How do we tell if something goes against the gospel? Those are tough questions to answer.

One way to answer that is to remember what the word "gospel" means. The word "gospel" means "good news." Is what we are doing and saying bearing good news about God? Are we bearing good news to the world? Are we bearing good news for the lives of people around us?

Are we bearing good news to people in faraway places? Is what we are doing with our life bringing good news to the world? Or are we wasting our time on things that don't bring good news to others and to our own lives?

I want to share a story. It is a story which I think challenges the notion in our world that there has to be winners and losers in the world. A story which I think bears witness to what it means to share good news in a simple way.

Jim Wallis tells the story about the little league baseball team that he coached. His team, the Tigers, were the strongest team in their league, he says. Their recent opponent, the Phillies, were one of the weaker teams. But one of the Philly players, Danny, was on the Tiger's team last year, and he played his heart out against his old friends. Danny was the Phillies starting pitcher and he shut down the Tigers for the first three innings with amazing throws.

The Tigers scored three runs in the fourth inning, but that's all they got until the top of the sixth when the Tigers had to hold the Phillies to win the game. The Tigers were missing their two best pitchers that night, so two of their younger ones had to step up. They did, but the Tigers walked two of the Phillies in the top of this last sixth inning.

Then Danny stepped up and powered a line shot into the left-center gap, which scored two runs and landed him on third with a stand-up triple. With Danny on third and no outs, it looked very promising for the Phillies to pull the upset and salvage their season. But the next three batters, like mighty Casey in Mudville, all struck out and poor Danny was sadly stranded at third base — you could see the emotional disappointment on the young boy's face.

The Tigers always have a post-game team meeting to discuss what they learned, since baseball teaches the “lessons of life!” The coach of the Tigers, Jim, was surprised when he didn't hear these kids say things like “We're still undefeated!” or “That's 10-0!” Instead, they were concerned about Danny. “He played so hard and almost beat us by himself,” they said. “And it was so sad to see him stranded at third base at the end of the game.”

The coach always gives out “game balls” for player's performance on game day. The two kids who got the game balls said, “I think we should give Danny our game balls.” So they walked over to Danny and gave him *their game balls*, and told him how much they respected how well he had played.

There are lots of people who will tell you about what is the gospel truth. But we are all invited to remember that gospel means good news. When you are faced with a situation at work or when you are among your friends, I think we are invited to ask ourselves, how can I respond to this situation in such a way that it brings good news to someone. How can I respond to this situation in such a way that it shines the light of Christ?

When we hear stories of opportunities for ministry or opportunities to serve and we think to ourselves, “not another need in the world,” we could instead ask ourselves, “how is this an opportunity to spread some good news in the world?”

Ultimately that is what we are called to do in this world where we live. We are called to share good news with the community around us. The good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ. The good news that God loves us. The good news that God loves the person in our midst. The good news that God loves the world.

In our lives this week, we have an opportunity to live our lives in such a way that it brings good news to those around us.

Now go forth and spread some good news around. AMEN.

-Wallis, Jim, Sojomail, 5/30/13

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Prayers of the People

All creation is grounded in you,
Sovereign God, who spoke the Word
and let it be known that you were coming
 so seas might roar your majesty,
 so fields might exult your glory,
 so trees might sing your joy.
You formed us in your divine image,
letting it be known that we were yours,
the people of your heart and hopes.

We become victims when we follow ways that are not your ways. Give us wisdom and discernment to know your way. Empower us to share good news in a world that is aching to hear and experience your good news.

Lord, you have done great things for us, many of which we have hardly noticed. You are Lord over the past, sovereign in the present, and victorious in the future. Even in our trials, we celebrate you.

We thank you for prophetic voices like Paul. Ordinary people that were willing to follow you. People who believed that sharing your good news was more important than abiding by human rules and limitations.