

St Mary's 10am Thursday 9th June 2016

Galatians 1 v1-10

GALATIANS SS1

Today we begin a new Thursday Sermon Series on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians. And we do so because the Lectionary follows Galatians at this time. And why not, because Galatians can rightly be called the MAGNA CHARTA of Christian liberty. It resists all attempts to shackle the gospel.

Galatia is simply 'central Turkey' right bang in the middle. Its big towns were Persidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe and Derbe is not that far from Paul's home town of Tarsus. Galatia's neighbouring regions are those famous names read out on the day of Pentecost: Pontius, Asia, Pamphylia and Cappodocia.

And where IS the Letter to the Galatians in our Bibles? Answer: It's the FIRST of a string of Paul's Letters after Corinthians and they follow in order of the vowels: G**A**ltians, E**P**hesians, Ph**I**lippians. C**O**lossians. Never forget!

Because 'forgetting' is what the Galatians did and why Paul had to write to them. **They forgot the pure gospel Paul had preached to them** on his first Missionary Journey and had added to it so it was no longer the gospel but a man-made alternative which lacked truth and power, which Paul described as "no" gospel, v7, but a perversion, v7.

Anyone reading Galatians Chapter 1 can see something drastic has gone wrong. How many of you, writing a letter to friends, would say in only the second paragraph "you are cursed!" and then repeat the phrase in the same paragraph just to make sure they had got the message?

Paul was, clearly, hopping mad. This was normally the point where Paul, in his Letters, would give a thanksgiving for the faith and hope and love of the recipients and a prayer for them. But not so in Galatians!

Let us look.

After Paul's first Missionary Journey, others came to Galatia, conservative Jewish Christians, sometimes called "Judaizers". They did two things in Galatia. **They belittled his person and they belittled his message.**

(2)

FIRST, they said that Paul was not a 'true' Apostle, like the original Twelve; and SECOND they insisted that Gentile Christians must also be circumcised and submit to Jewish rules about food.

Their great sin was to turn Christianity from simply 'Faith in Christ' to faith in Christ 'AND'.... Faith in Christ AND circumcision. Faith in Christ AND keep the Law of Moses. And many false teachers over the centuries have done the same and added their own little rules, their "AND'S".

Be aware if anyone says to you that you must do something else for salvation alongside trusting in Christ. The JW's say its faith AND no blood transfusions, the Amish say its faith in Christ AND withdrawal, AND special clothes. The TV Evangelists says its faith AND a big donation.

But the real gospel is that there is NO supplement to the gospel. No "and's" needed to be added on.

THIS is why Galatians is rightly called the MAGNA CHARTA of Christian liberty. No supplements only v4 "*Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.*"

In Galatia, these Judaizers seems to have some success for Paul writes in v6 "***I am ASTONISHED that you are so quickly DESERTING the One who called you.***" The word "desert" is the word used of a soldier who deserts from the Army and changes sides. One word for it is "turncoat". It means a "change of allegiance".

The Judaizers were successful, partly, because they were good looking and good speakers. They were impressive to look at, and impressive to listen to.

Infiltrators often have success because they *minimise* salvation in Christ, because they water-down the gospel. In contrast, Paul spent his life *magnifying* the gospel.

SO, what does Paul do?

Answer: He established his credentials as a true Apostle.

VERSE 1: "**Paul, an APOSTLE, sent NOT from men nor by a man, BUT by Jesus Christ and God the Father...**"

It cannot be clearer. **It isn't an argument. It's a STATEMENT.**

"Paul, AN APOSTLE." An Apostle is "one who is SENT". "A Messenger". One sent to preach the gospel message.

(3)

And who has sent him? Not the churches, “not men”, but Jesus Christ and God the Father. Paul is saying I was commissioned by GOD. My apostleship is genuine. I am NOT an Imposter.

He received his office from the historical Jesus. Jesus, in person, invested him with this distinctive and special ministry. He met him on the Damascus Road as recorded in Acts 9 and also 1 Corinthians 9.

The implication is clear: **As Paul and his message have divine authority, those who oppose Paul are opposing GOD!**

Paul considers the gospel itself to be FAR MORE IMPORTANT than the messenger who brings it.

Verse 8 says that if he, Paul, himself, brought a different message they should ignore him; And if an angel flew down from heaven with a different gospel they should ignore it.

ANYONE who proclaims ANYTHING BUT THE GOSPEL OF GRACE is “anathema”, is cursed.

TRUTH COUNTS and status and credentials mean nothing at all.

Don't be dazzled by outward appearances but always weigh the truth of the message.

Finally, don't think Paul is just on his own high-horse.

In verse 2 he says, *“and all the brothers and sisters with me.”*

Paul knew he had to write a harsh message to the Galatians but he didn't do it on his own. He obviously discussed the matter with his fellow believers, his “brothers and sisters in Christ”, who were with him from wherever he was writing from.

He practised the principle of *“when two or three agree in my name”*. He sought the spiritual wisdom of others at a time of controversy. And I'm sure these “brothers and sisters” were praying and supporting Paul on an on-going basis. Paul was not a lone Apostle.

Please read Galatians Chapter 1.

More next week!