

St Mary's 10am Thursday 23rd June 2016

Galatians 1 v1-10; Galatians 1 v11-24 **Galatians 2 v15-21**

GALATIANS SS3

Today we continue our Sermon Series on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians and we do so **by looking at just ONE WORD.**

One word that appears for the first time in Galatians in v16, a word that is central to this Epistle, central to the gospel, central indeed to Christianity itself.

Nobody can truly say they understand the Christian faith until they have some understanding of this word. **And this word is "JUSTIFIED".**

In 2 v16 the word appears three times:

*"We know that a person is not JUSTIFIED by works of the law **but by faith in Jesus Christ**, so we have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we might be JUSTIFIED by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by the works of the law, no one will be JUSTIFIED."*

A triple statement to leave us in no doubt.

The good news of the gospel is summed up in this one word, justification. **The EXACT OPPOSITE is condemnation.**

Justification is a legal word borrowed from the Courts of Law.

'To condemn' is to declare a person guilty;

'To justify' is to declare a person innocent, not guilty, righteous, or to use the very word itself, is to declare a person 'just'.

Another word for the Courts of Law is the Courts of Justice. The purpose of a Court is to examine the facts and reach the truth and declare the guilty, guilty and declare the just, just.

We talk about the sentence 'being just'. It is BAD news when the guilty are let off and the innocent are condemned. That is NOT just or justice.

And because each one of us has NOT loved God with our whole heart and NOT loved our neighbour as ourselves God, on Judgement Day, **OUGHT to declare very single one of us here "GUILTY".**

(2)

But the Good News of the Gospel is that God declares a Believer in Christ "JUSTIFIED" or not guilty.

This is truly AMAZING. And it is totally UNMERITED on our behalf.

WHY should a righteous God declare the un-righteous 'righteous'?

It's a question as old as the hills. Job asked it in Job 25v4, "*How can a person be righteous before God?*" and St Paul asked it too in 2 Corinthians 6 v14 "*What partnership has righteousness and sin?*"

There can be no *partnership* between the two in the sense of *collaboration* because the two are so directly opposed, they are 'oil and water', but there IS a partnership in the sense that God *responds* to this incompatibility, and always responds, in another single word, **and that response is called GRACE.**

And grace is God's unmerited favour towards the un-just, towards the un-righteous, towards the sinner, towards the guilty, DECLARING them JUSTIFIED, pardoning, acquitting, accepting AND TREATING THAT PERSON as righteous.

Note the two words DECLARING and TREATING.

God doesn't just 'declare' a person just HE ALSO TREATS THEM SO. This isn't just a 'paper exercise', a bit of theory.

It is because God TREATS us as justified that we enter into a new and living relationship with him. NEW LIFE is ours.

And HOW is it ours? There are TWO possibilities.

ONE is "by works of the law".

Meaning anything WE DO that we think will make God look upon us favourably. People think that God will be kind and let them into heaven because they have come to church from time to time, because they have been kind and helpful, because they have lived by the Ten Commandments and not committed murder or adultery or robbed a Bank, because they have lived a good life. Well, one can get to heaven by works of the law. Can '*in theory*' that is. One would have to be perfect and not live a good life **but live a perfect life** without a single flaw or slip-up. Anyone managed that? OF COURSE NOT.

The OTHER possibility is that it is all done for us. Which is what Jesus did for us on the Cross. He offered his life as a sacrifice for sin so that ALL OUR SINS are forgiven, so that we CAN be declared JUSTIFIED because there is NOTHING bad against our name to condemn us.

(3)

THIS is a much better possibility. It is do-able.

And the way it is done is by faith in Jesus Christ

v16 *'We have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we might
BE JUSTIFIED BY faith in Christ AND NOT BY works of the law'*

The word is that we don't just 'believe' but that we believe INTO Christ. Belief is not mere mental assent, mere head knowledge but a commitment of our life, the whole of us, *'heart and mind and soul and strength'*.

God's amazing grace requires a response from each one of us. We can refuse and walk away and, ultimately, if we do be declared 'guilty' or we can accept and be declared and treated as justified and right with God through faith in Christ.

**The choice is ours. But it is a very serious choice.
In fact, none in the whole of life is more so.**

Martin Luther in his *'Epistle to the Galatians'* wrote,

"Justification is the truth of the gospel, it is the principle and chiefest article of Christian doctrine, it is most necessary and, therefore, all should know this article well, teach it to others and BEAT IT INTO THEIR HEADS continually!"

Have I 'beaten' it into your heads, yet?
Or shall I repeat my sermon?