

Galatians. 1:11-24

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

Dear brothers and sisters who are led by God's love to thank God with your lives and actions. Amen

How would you feel if everything you have ever learned in church... was wrong? What if everything you know about Jesus and the salvation he came to win for you was all just a cruel hoax? What if your faith was just wishful thinking? What if when it comes to religion, you have been duped? Have you ever struggled with doubts like this? I'm sure we all hope that these thoughts would never cross our mind, but, sometimes, they do. I think uncertainty can begin to creep in our minds even more easily when we see tragedies in the world (the recent devastation in Haiti comes to mind), and we start to wonder if God really does care about us. Insecurity can arise when we see the sincerity of those who practice other religions around the world which don't confess Christ. The devil gets us to ask "Who am I to say that my belief is right and theirs is wrong?" Perhaps the doubts occur when we're watching a nature show on TV, and the subject of evolution is brought up.

So what if we are wrong? What if the gospel message we possess is just a bunch of nonsense? What if our hope doesn't come from God, but our religion is just a bunch of man-made ideas? That is the question Paul wrestles with in his letter to the Galatians. The Galatian churches were in danger of losing the Gospel to the deceptions from a group of people called the Judaizers. The Judaizers were a group of Gospel-Minimalists. Their message was, "*Faith in Jesus as your Savior is great, but it isn't enough... you also need to observe Jewish traditions.*" The Judaizers tried to downplay Paul's preaching by questioning his authority as an apostle, saying that his message couldn't be trusted because he wasn't one of Jesus' original companions. Today Paul defends his authority as an apostle and the purity of the Gospel he preached to the Galatians. As we listen to Paul's words, may God help us to:

Sermon Theme: Remember, It's God's Gospel

- 1. It comes from God**
- 2. It is filled with God's power**

During the days of Paul, the Gospel was highly underrated. Paul preached at the churches in Galatia—he taught them that they were sinners, and that Christ had taken their sins away. Once Paul had left, there were some trouble-makers who stirred up the people, saying, "***Don't listen to Paul! His message isn't from God; he's just preaching a bunch of man-made ideas. Jesus died on the cross? He rose from the dead? Paul is making all of that up...or he learned it from people who were making it up. Don't listen to him!***"

There is no other place where Paul defends his apostleship more than in the book of Galatians. Listen how he responds to the nay-sayers: "**I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation**

from Jesus Christ.” Paul goes on to explain to the Galatians that once God turned his life around, Jesus himself gave him his message to preach. Paul was going to be speaking Jesus’ own words. Since these words came directly from God, Paul was confident that they were right, even though many hearers would find his teachings unpopular. Paul remembered that he was speaking GOD’S Gospel.

For us Christians who believe that the Bible is God’s inspired word and that Paul is really an apostle of Jesus, that is really all we need to hear. But not everyone in the world is a Christian, and so others might struggle with this. Someone who isn’t a Christian might point to Joseph Smith (the founder of the Mormon church), who claimed to have received a revelation. Mohammed also claimed to have received a revelation. What makes Paul any different from these other “prophets”?

The difference is that Paul spoke GOD’S Gospel. God’s message is uniquely different when compared to any other religion in the world. Let me try to explain. Many people in the world have noticed that there is something wrong with the world. There is something wrong with the people of the world. They see that something’s broken, and their solution is to try and fix it. This idea of having to fix something is present in literally every religion of the world. What makes other religions different from us is that all the other religions of the world put man himself at the center of the salvation equation. Because the people of many religions in the world are burdened by a heavy conscience, they try to work their way to heaven—and they do this with wonderful sincerity and the best of intentions. They might worship this god or that, but they believe that man is inevitably in the role of saving himself.

If our salvation were up to us, we might as well throw in the towel now and stop trying. God has told us that all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags, and even if we only stumbled once against God’s commandments, we would be guilty in God’s sight. On our own there is no hope for us. But God’s Gospel tells us something that you won’t find anywhere else. We acknowledge that we are sinful, but God reminds us that he is merciful; he forgives; and he saves. Salvation and eternity are gifts that God wants to give to everybody through faith.

The trouble makers in Galatia rejected Paul’s message because they didn’t want to trust in Christ. They wanted to earn their way to heaven through their good works. Have you noticed how things have NOT changed in 2,000 years? Many people reject the Bible and its message about the salvation Christ offers. People today still say, ***“You don’t really believe that stuff, do you? It’s just a bunch of fairy tales and fables. This isn’t from God!”***

One of the greatest privileges I have as a pastor is preaching GOD’S Gospel. The message I preach to you is not something I made up. It’s not something the forefathers of the WELS invented. Every single doctrine we teach in our church is based on the pure Word of God. But don’t take my word for it... I’m just the messenger. Go back to the source and see for yourself. Study the Gospel on your own and see the beauties of God’s Gospel. But don’t just remember where the Gospel comes from, remember what the Gospel says: all of your sins have been forgiven, our lives have been turned around, and in response to that, we joyfully serve God until he takes us to heaven.

2. It is filled with God’s power

Just like us, Paul knew first-hand the power of God’s Gospel. There was a time in Paul’s life when he wanted nothing to do with God’s Gospel. When Paul speaks about being “extremely zealous” in his former way of life, he is saying that his Christian persecution was repeated, persistent, and continual. But then God changed him using his Gospel. Paul boasts, **“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles.”** Do you see how powerful God’s Word is? God knocked Paul off of his high horse and revealed his Son to him. God completely changed Paul from a Christian hater to a Christian preacher. No human could have done that—but God could. Paul went on to say that all the things he treasured in his former way of life were now garbage to him, and God’s churches rejoiced when they heard the report, **“The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”**

Ever since the beginning of time, God had the same plan for you. Sometimes we are tempted to think, “I made the choice to become a Christian. I chose to become a better person.” You might feel that way, but the

truth is, no one can change his own soul. By nature, we are hostile to God, just as Paul was hostile toward Christians before his conversion. By nature, we want nothing to do with God.

But then God steps into your life. It may have been when you were younger, when you were baptized with the water and the word. Maybe God called you when you were older. God's Word changes you. That's the power of God's Gospel. It is the same Gospel message in our day as it was in Paul's. Remember that the Word that you hold in your hand is not just a rule book for you, or a map to show you the right things to do to earn heaven. Rather, it shows you the way to heaven—through Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus died that we might live, and then imparted this message to us.

The hymn we just sang reveals the wonderful truth about God's power in saving us. Let me read the words to verses three and five again:

*It was a false misleading dream, That God his law had given.
That sinners can themselves redeem, And by their works gain heaven.
The Law is but a mirror bright, To bring the inbred sin to light.
That lurks within our nature.*

*Since Christ has full atonement made, And brought to us Salvation.
Each Christian therefore may be glad, And build on this foundation.
Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead; Your death is now my life indeed,
For you have paid my Ransom.*

The next time you have doubts about your faith, take a good look at the powerful tool God has given to each of us—His Gospel. Today we have heard stories of a few of God's messengers of the past, and how God gave his word to them to share. Today YOU and I are God's messengers. We can have the same confidence that God's message is effective; because it's from God himself. It is the most powerful message ever given—free salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen.