

June 17, 2007  
Pentecost 3

*"Defending the Pure Gospel"*

**GALATIANS 1:11-24**

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*I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup> I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> I saw none of the other apostles-- only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. <sup>21</sup> Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.*

It was the ride of a lifetime for Ben Carpenter, a young man with muscular dystrophy from Paw Paw, Michigan. He was crossing a busy highway with his motorized wheel chair but he did not get across before the light turned green. The driver of a large 18 wheel truck lurched forward from the stop light. He did not see the wheel chair and pushing it forward. The truck gained speed up to 55 miles per hour and the wheel chair became lodged in the front of the truck with its handles stuck in the grill and its 8 inch wheels burning rubber. Other drivers saw the strange site and frantically called 911, "There is a wheel chair being pushed down the highway by an 18 wheel truck." Four miles down the road the highway patrol was able to stop the truck. Ben was unharmed and unfazed by his experience. He told news reporters it was the ride of a lifetime.

The ride of a lifetime. That might describe your life and mine who know Christ and the power of his resurrection. What a thrill it is to know that in Jesus Christ you have complete pardon and cleansing for all sin. You are at peace with God. You know where you are going when you die. You have strength to wake up each day and live your life for Christ. With Paul you joyfully proclaim, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." You are thrilled to live for Christ not to earn a place in heaven, but because God's glory and heaven is already yours.

Nothing will take the joy out of life, the air out of your balloon, the spring out of your step and the song out of your heart than the false teaching that salvation and the hope of glory is not dependent on Christ alone, but also on what you do to make yourself worthy and acceptable. That was the problem in the churches of Galatia as we heard in the sermon last week. Paul left them with the message that they were justified or declared forgiven through faith in Christ, not by observing the law. False teachers immediately

raised doubts by saying, "To be truly mature, truly forgiven and truly a believer, you need to continue to keep certain Old Testament rules and regulations such as circumcision and various festivals." I may take supplements such as this fish oil to provide better nutrition for my body, but any attempt to supplement what Christ has done for me and for you will ultimately supplant and destroy what Christ has done. This morning we want to learn from Paul the importance of **"Defending the Pure Gospel."** It is worth defending because in the words of Ben Carpenter, "It is the ride of a lifetime."

### **The gospel comes by revelation from God**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is so beautiful because it does not have its origin in human opinions and speculation. It comes directly to us from God. Listen again to what Paul writes, "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."

How easy it was for false teachers to discredit Paul by saying, "Oh his message is not true. He dreamed it up in his own head. That's his gospel, his concoction but it is not the true gospel." To defend the gospel Paul tells the story of his life. He did not receive the message of salvation in Christ from other human beings. It came directly from Jesus Christ when Paul heard Jesus say, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" When Paul asked, "Lord who are you?" the voice came back to him, "I am Jesus." That was the message of the gospel in three words, "I am Jesus." Suddenly he saw for the first time in his life the treasures in Christ he once hated were genuine and true and real.

The Lord has done the same for you dear Christian. He has taken you by the hand, led you to a place, where all the treasures you have in Christ have become clear to you. Picture in your mind an archaeologist breaking through the tomb of Tutankhamen in Egypt. The light of the desert sun streams into the opened door and reveals a room full of gold treasures sparkling in the sun. So it is with God's revelation to us about Christ. 1 Corinthians 2 tells us, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him- but God has revealed them to us by his Spirit." The Spirit takes the blessings we have in Christ that would ordinarily be hidden to us and makes them known to us. As it also says in 1 Corinthians 2, "...no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." The Holy Spirit takes what God has in his thoughts about our salvation in Christ alone and makes these thoughts known to us without any input from human hearts and human ideas about what constitutes truth, religion and getting right with God.

C.S. Lewis once said, "You don't need to defend a lion, you simply need to let it out of its cage." To let the lion roar in defense of the gospel Paul talks about his previous way of life lived under the law in Judaism. He was the ultimate religious fanatic, so zealous for the traditions of the fathers that he considered it a privilege and honor to kill people who became Christians. How he loathed and hated the message about Jesus' payment for sin and his resurrection from the dead. But then God changed him. "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 to 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." Paul had everything he needed in Jesus alone. He did not have to consult with religious teachers to get their opinion on what was true. It

came to him directly from the Lord.

My dear Christian, it is time to let the lion out of the cage. The message that we are saved entirely by what Christ has done can stand on its own power and its own strength as Paul wrote to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." Look at all the religions of the world and discover they are basically the same except for the true religion, the one that was revealed to Paul on the road to Damascus, the same true teaching that has come to us. All religions have a common thread because they arise from the fertile human heart that is deceitful above all things. They are all connected together because they originate inside hearts and minds of human beings who do not want to accept the things of the Spirit of God. What do Buddhism, Islam, Mormonism, or Hinduism, or even the person here in Santa Maria who claims to have their own way of worshipping God have in common? They all without exception believe that we are justified or declared right with God on the basis of following a certain formula based on what we do.

The Christian faith has a shocking message that is totally radical and different from anything else that arises in the human heart. It says in the words of Ephesians 1:7, "In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace." Do you see how radical this is? There is no mention of a redemption that based partly on Christ and partly works. It is all Christ, all his redemption, all his work that saves us. It is God's grace and God's plan that reaches way back into eternity. Religious guru's did not gather together and add their two cents worth to formulate this plan. This was Christ and Christ alone.

If God is a little bit bigger than we are, and if he is who he says he is, namely three persons and one God, and if he loves us as he says he does, then we would expect him to talk to us and tell us about a plan to rescue us that comes from him and does not originate in our sin cursed human hearts. That's the pure gospel. That's the message that revolutionizes and changes our lives and gives us the ride of a lifetime. Let it out of the cage. It comes from God.

### **The gospel changes our lives**

Do you want further evidence that this message of salvation alone in Christ is the true message? Then look at how this message changes the lives of people in a strange way unlike anything human. How do I know that this lamp works? I can put a bulb in it and it shines. Paul defends the gospel by pointing to how his life changed through Christ not through other people. He says, "After three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter." Why did Paul wait so long to visit Peter, the great leader of the church? Because the gospel message was so complete and so real to Paul he had no need of consulting with Peter or any of the other apostles. Everything was already complete in Christ. He knew the truth and the truth had made him free. For three years Paul was in Arabia. He received further revelation from the Lord and carried out his assignment as a missionary to the Gentiles.

Once you know that you are saved entirely through what Christ has done and once you know that you cannot add works to what is already complete in Christ, you develop

impatience with anyone who would talk about Jesus as just a great world leader or another great prophet or a moral example to follow. You become impatient and irritated by other Christians who speak so much about walking like Jesus that they forget to talk about the life Jesus lived for us and the death he died for us. You lose patience with Christian songs that speak about feelings for Jesus, but hardly ever tell the story of how Jesus feels about us. You constantly struggle and pray for wisdom and guidance to speak the truth in love and you seek help in defending the pure gospel before those who had corrupted it.

Paul went to the churches in Judea, around Jerusalem totally confident in the pure gospel message. "I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only read 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." Paul did not visit these Christian churches to discover what the true gospel was or to seek human ideas and opinions on how to add something to what Christ has done. He went everywhere preaching a pure gospel, telling everyone without ever growing weary that everything was accomplished in Christ. His zeal for Christ and Christ alone left a deep mark on all the churches he visited. Paul loved every minute of it and it made a profound impact on other people. "For me to live is Christ. To die is gain." That was the theme of Paul's life rooted in the pure gospel. That's the theme of your life and mine. What a privilege it is to defend and proclaim the pure gospel in these last days. It is the ride of a life time. Amen.