

Galatians 1:11-24
Pentecost 3
June 13, 2010

Galatians 1:11-24 (New International Version)

Paul Called by God

¹¹I want you to know, brothers that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹²I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when God, who set me apart from birth^[a] and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷nor 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.

¹⁸Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter^[b] and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²²I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they praised God because of me.

Praise God because You Have the Truth!

You know what folk tales, urban myths, and legends are. They are stories or tales, which have come to be regarded as truth even without a lot of evidence to prove their validity. I want to share a couple with you.

#1. My Grandmother had the sure-cure for hiccups. Place a butter knife in a glass of water. While bending over, drink from the far side of the glass with the knife pressed against your temple. The hiccups are sure to go away.

#2. There is in New Jersey the legend of the "Jersey Devil." It is a two-legged, devil-like creature with wings. Its origins is said to be the satanic offspring of a New Jersey woman who gave birth to her 13th

child in the mid-1700's who transformed into the creature. The myth has become such a big part of pop culture, that the Jersey Devil lent its name to the National Hockey League team of the same name.

#3. Salvation by Christ alone is not enough. There is your part too. Christ lived and died to save you from the big stuff. Your part is to make up for all the rest...the "little" stuff. Be good. Follow the rules. Do even extra good to make the good-bad scales balance. If in the end the scales are balanced, then you are good with God. If not...well, it is tough to think about the "if not," so just be good enough.

The first tale from my grandmother was cute. Whether or not it cured hiccups was debated, but it sure was funny to watch around her kitchen table as we kids practically drowned ourselves trying to be cured of the hiccups. The second is one of those tales that are so common in American folklore. There really is no basis to them, but in the end they are relatively harmless stories that make for good reading.

The third is a little different. Its content is truly thought of as being "truth," but its basis is a satanic lie whose origins are in the bowels of hell and those who believe it are eternally bound for the same place.

That 3rd myth was one, which the Galatian Christians were facing and, unfortunately many believed. Paul's letter to the Galatian congregations was a loving yet stern rebuke that they had forsaken the truth which Paul himself had brought them years before. The letter served as warning to weak-minded people who were willing to forsake the pure gospel for man-made myth. Lives were at stake! Belief in such a myth was no longer good news gospel; it was bad news "un-gospel" which would only bring eternal death.

Paul's authority to make such stern statements came not from himself. He was ready to defend what he preached and taught. He wrote, ***11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*** He didn't make this up. This was from Christ himself.

Paul knew full well how easily it was to fall into such a trap of false doctrine and un-gospel belief. In his previous way of life he had been the Jew of Jews...a Pharisee's Pharisee. It was he who had formerly persecuted the Church of Christ. His zeal was to wipe out Christianity, single-handedly if necessary, and to destroy all who confessed faith in Christ Jesus.

God had other plans for Paul. Like the other apostles, Paul himself was handpicked and personally trained by Christ. It is widely thought that for three years in Arabia and Damascus he studied for public gospel ministry. He studied and sorted through the Old Testament, which he knew so well. By grace, he was convinced that

Christ was its fulfillment! Then, also by God's grace, Saul, whose hatred of Christ and the gospel was legendary in their time, became Paul, whose commitment to the proclamation of the pure gospel even to the point of his own death is legendary even still today. Christians who once has fled in fear at the news "Saul is coming!" now praised God who had done such wonders in Paul's new life.

Move forward nineteen hundred years. God in his grace saw fit to bring the gospel to Lake Mills, WI. For one hundred seventeen years, the Word of God has been faithfully proclaimed among us! Babies have been baptized and Holy Communion has been offered to you without fail. Your pastors have faithfully preached to you from various pulpits in various buildings, but it has always been the same gospel. For well over one hundred years, little ones have heard the precious truth of Jesus from their teachers in Sunday school and in the Lutheran Elementary School. For all this, you too have reason to praise God!

I want you to know, brothers and sisters that this gospel is something which no one among you made up. It is given to you by revelation from Christ. It is revealed to you in his Word, the Bible, and confirmed among you in the sacraments. You have the awesome privilege of being a family of believers called to gather around Word and sacrament and given the privilege of sharing it however you can. It must be all our prayer that God keep his Word among us, in ALL its truth and purity!

But why? Do we really need to be so seemingly stubborn about holding on to the Word in ALL it says? We come off so rigid and strict. Why can't we be like other denominations? They don't worry so much about sticking to the truth. Is it really THAT important?

Absolutely! Anything but the pure gospel is no gospel at all. Anything but the gospel brings only death forever. Remember your previous way of life? By grace, God handpicked you. From eternity, he saw the sin in which you were conceived. He saw the curse of everlasting punishment which was yours. By grace, you were brought from unbelief to faith, the same faith as Paul's. Like Paul, you were raised from death to life.

Where God's Word is proclaimed, there is always life. The raising of the widow's boy by Elijah brought that truth to bear in her mind. She was absolutely convinced that the prophet spoke the very Words of the Lord. He spoke the truth! Jesus raised a widow's son at Nain. That miracle brought praises to the lips of the eyewitnesses. The miracle of life confirmed that God had come to help his people.

What I am saying to you is no lie. The miracles around you are just as evident. The Word is preached and the sacraments are administered. The dead have been brought to life even among us! We are counted among the living. We now walk in the light.

Brothers and sisters, this is my prayer for you. Praise God because you DO have the truth! Hold on to that truth. Treasure it with all your might. Listen to the Word preached among you. Get into a Bible class. Teach the truth to your children and grandchildren. Live the Word in your life! Rejoice in your salvation! You are alive. So live that life in Christ.

Amen.