

Galatians 1:11-24 – Undeniable

Good morning RCM. So very good to be with you as we continue our time of worship through the Word of God this morning. As I shared with you the last few weeks, I really hope that each week as we work through the book of Galatians, I really hope that each of us will read through the entire book at least 1 time each week. 6 chapters – rich in its teaching – productive for us to spend time personally in the Word. Allow the Holy Spirit and the Word of God together to convict and challenge and encourage us together.

If you remember from the last few weeks, these 4 churches that this letter was written to – had let some false teachers creep in. False teachers were trying to gain control over the people – as false teachers today still do – trying to control people. And the two big ways they were apparently trying to gain control over the people were to (1) try and discredit the apostle Paul who had planted the churches and (2) distort the message that Paul had been shared. Discredit the messenger, distort the message. Same methods are alive today.

That's one of the reasons Paul starts his letter by establishing his unique calling to the work – that Paul was an apostle called by Jesus – and then from last week if you remember – Paul tells them basically “don't let anyone change the Gospel – regardless of who they think they are”.

And after establishing the priority of the message – Paul defends his calling and ministry.

Turn with me if you have a Bible, to Galatians 1:11-24

READ

¹¹ For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. ¹² For I did not receive it from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵ But when God, who from my mother's womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.^[d] ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas,^[e] and I stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I didn't see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I declare in the sight of God: I am not lying in what I write to you.

²¹ Afterward, I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² I remained personally unknown to the Judean churches that are in Christ. ²³ They simply kept hearing, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.^[f]

PRAY

Paul starts his defense of his apostleship by establishing the source of his message.

I. The Source

- Not of human origin
 - They must have thought he had colluded with the guys back in Jerusalem

- And if these false teachers could convince them it was a human message, then they'd be free to change it
- But it wasn't
- To think the Gospel is of human origin...
 - We are comfortable with merit based systems. Work hard, get rewarded. Slack off get punished. We want to boil down things to a list of do's and don't's.
 - But the Gospel of God's grace is nothing that people could have imagined. So incredible. So freeing. That we turn from our sin, trust in Jesus, find life in Jesus' name, not a set of checkboxes that make us ok – but a relationship with the God of the universe through His Son Jesus.
- The origin matters – because everything, for the Christian at least, is viewed through the lens of the Gospel – John Stott

And Paul reminds them – not just of the source of his message but this incredible transformation that took place. Something so incredible that reoriented everything about him. Everything.

II. Paul's Incredible Transformation

We almost have the “how it started; how it's going” kind of thing here in Paul's life. The classic before and after.

BEFORE:

Re-Read V13-14 → We see kind of 3 words that I'd describe Paul with in his pre-conversion state

- Enthusiastic – I have this picture of Paul being REALLY hyped up
 - Like he was the original Blues Brother – he thought he was on a mission from God in persecuting the church and trying to destroy it
- Excited – The CSB uses the word zealous. Zealous for the tradition of his elders. And uninformed zeal, and excitement for the things of God, all the while missing the true promise of God in Jesus Christ.
 -
- Wrong
 - We can't evaluate a church's message based solely on its leaders' enthusiasm and excitement.
 - Don't mishear me – we should be enthusiastic, and excited. Christians have the greatest news in the history of the world, and we should be enthusiastic and excited about it. But that's not going to be the sole basis for how our message is evaluated. There must be truth and depth and substance behind our excitement and enthusiasm.
 - For Paul – he had this passionate enthusiasm and excitement, but he was flat out wrong. He missed it. All of the Scriptures that he grew up studying, all of the OT scriptures and scrolls, the books of the prophets, the psalms, the law – all of it points to Jesus – and in Paul's “before” picture he had flat out missed it.

We know that how it started for Paul, wasn't how it ended.

V15-16

- **But when God** – Some of the most powerful words in the Scriptures follow But (when) God...
 - Set apart
 - Called me by his grace
 - I have to think Paul never really “got over” the grace that he experienced. So moved by the grace of God found only in the Gospel – Paul never got over it. He was amazed by it. You can almost feel the emotion behind these words if you let yourself.

- See Paul never forgot how it started.
 - BUT WHEN GOD
- And it's no coincidence that in the BEFORE verses we see I, I, I and now we see God, God, God. The emphasis here is clearly in the work of God in the life of the apostle Paul. It's not until we see the picture of God's saving work in Paul's life that he goes on to I, but even then it's for the purpose of pointing others to God.
- So that I...
 - There was a purpose for God's saving work in Paul. There's a purpose for God's saving work in you.
 - Paul was given this special role – as an apostle – a role no longer active, limited to the 12 + Paul – but the special role to take the Gospel to the nations.
 - Each of us, if we are a Christian, has a “SO THAT I...”
 - So that I can share the gospel of Jesus in my work, at my school, on my sports team, in my home. So that I can show the compassionate love of Jesus...
 - Don't miss this – if you are a Christian, if you have turned from your sin and are trusting in Jesus – you have a SO THAT I...

Paul goes on to defend the nature of his message – seeing that it was from God, it radically transformed him – but also they needed to know that it wasn't the product of a collusion with the brothers from Jerusalem. He spent 3 years (perhaps in isolation) and he talks here about his delays in going to the brothers in Jerusalem.

And he was unknown to the churches in the area – but, they had heard of him.

Re-Read V22-24

III. The Result

I love the way this part of the letter ends. We talk a lot in our home and in our church about the glory of God. Or the fame, praise and honor of God. And the goal for Paul's ministry – the goal of every true church – and the goal for every Christian should be that God is glorified.

What an incredible testimony – the churches in the Judean region had heard about this radical transformation that happened. This guy that was breathing threats against the churches and dragging Christians off to be martyred – now preaches the faith. And rather than say how awesome Paul was, the praised and glorified God.

Illustration: On a zoom call with college buddies...asking “what happened to you, now we see you at the beach baptizing people...”

That should be the goal for all of us. And to be sure, God will not share the glory due his name. We can try and steal the glory that he alone deserves, or we can (rightly) point others to Him.

CLOSING...

- (1) Have you experienced the greatest how it started/how it's going of the Gospel?**
- (2) What about your “so that I”**
- (3) To bring glory and honor to God alone**

