

Galatians 2:15-16 Final Sunday Morning

11.12.17

Open your Bibles please to Galatians 2.

Intro

Last Spring we took our kids to Jump Street and they have this area where you climb up increasing tall pillars that you can barely stand on and you're hooked up to a harness that is attached to rope coming from the ceiling that when you jump (or if you fall) will catch you.

So I get harness in (25-30 feet up) and she says, "**Just step off.**"

"**Can I grab on to the rope.**" She'd tell me that you can't, all you need to do is trust the rope to do its job and step off.

It was then that I realized that there **was a mental roadblock** in my mind to me just jumping off and it was this: **my faith wasn't** so secure in the rope. I had some questions about it. I liked having **some control over** what was about to happen: **holding** onto something, **bracing myself** somehow etc...

But in the end, I had to **remove that roadblock** because unless I wanted to give up, the **only way down** was to **completely trust that the rope** could do what it said **it could do**.

So, in an act of total **trust** and **dependence** (ie **Faith in that rope alone**),...I **stepped off** but as I let go and **felt the rope catch** me, my apprehensions and **desires to hold myself** up were replaced with **gladness** and **joy** as I realized **that I was fine** and in fact I **enjoyed this feeling** hanging suspended, **fully trusting in faith** that the rope held me secure knowing that **sure enough**, it was **able to do** what it said **it could do**.

Listen, to **fully put your faith in something** (to **completely trust it**) is difficult unless you **decide to believe** that what you are **putting your faith** in is capable of doing what it is **promising to do**.

And this is Paul's concern with the **Gentile Christians in Galatia**. He wants to be sure that there **are no roadblocks laid** before them in their understanding of how they are brought into a right relationship with God (ie **justification**)... as we'll see, he is concerned **that roadblocks** have been placed before them that will derail their understanding that all they need for **justification** is faith alone in Jesus Christ.

And **here at Sovereign Grace church**, this is the message that we love to proclaim more than anything. The **realities of the finished work** of Jesus Christ: his perfect **life, death, resurrection** so that **we who are sinners** can be saved from our sins.

We are passionate about it. And if **you're a guest** I trust that this will be your experience as you **listen to us preach** and **talk with church members**.

And if you've been at this church for any length of time you're going to find out that nothing I'm going to say this morning is new to us at Sovereign Grace...but may we hear as if it's the first time.

Our passage is Galatian 2:15-16 but I'll be referring to verses 1-16. And the point that I want you to grasp this morning is that the reality of **Faith Alone in Christ Alone is Cause for Rejoicing** in us. It should be something we ponder and consider often and rejoice in because when we place all our faith in Him, we experience the joy of what it means to live a fully Christian life without anything else smuggled in.

So, let me **PRAY** and ask God to bless not only the reading of his Word but the preaching of it as well and then we'll read Galatians 2:15-16 and see why we ought to rejoice in this reality:

PRAY

[15] We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; [16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

First, Paul realizes that there is a roadblock to Faith in Christ alone that he wants to remove.

I. REALIZING THE ROADBLOCK TO FAITH ALONE

This letter was written to a number of churches in the Roman territory of Galatia which was in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). It was an area Paul and Barnabas had reached with churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.

And Paul is writing to this group of churches because certain men had come to their region and had stirred up trouble claiming:

1. That Paul **wasn't an actual Apostle** like Peter, James, and John, trying to discount what he was teaching.
2. That the Gentile Christians in Galatia had to be circumcised and obey the **whole** Law of Moses in order to be justified.

Now, I'm going to use the word justified/justification throughout this message because it's what the Bible uses. Let me give a definition: It is courtroom language where a judge would declare a verdict of righteous or innocent to a person on trial. So justification is the moment when God declares the sinner to be righteous or innocent before Him.

And some men were trying to tell the Gentile Christians that you needed to place your faith in Jesus AND keep the law if you wanted to be justified before God which is, as we'll see, is horrific to Paul's theology.

So Paul spends the first chapter and a half **defending his own Apostleship** and then in chapter 2 begins his defense of why circumcision and a demand for Gentiles to adhere to the Law of Moses for their justification was unchristian, unbiblical, and anyone preaching this should be damned in the last judgment.

Now, to be really clear, Paul isn't talking about **holiness** or a **Christian growing to be more like Jesus**. He's talking about justification. This instantaneous legal courtroom act where the sinner is declared righteous or in right standing with God.

And as Paul begins his defense on why adherence to the whole Law for justification is nonsense, he relay a story about Peter in Antioch. You may be familiar with it:

- Peter had come to Antioch and was eating with the Gentiles (non-Jews), though they weren't following the food practices commanded in the Law.
- Some men from James had come and Peter changes course. Perhaps Peter felt odd with these men did follow the Law OR because these men said something to him OR maybe Peter felt that if he ate with Gentiles (going against the Law, then his ministry would be devalued)

For whatever reason...he stopped eating with the Gentiles in an attempt to distance himself from those Christians not following the whole Law.

- And Paul arrives and goes ballistic because in his mind Peter's reluctance to join in table fellowship with these Gentile Christians was an indictment on them. in that they were viewed now differently and at least in this way viewed as lesser and unacceptable because they used the God-given freedom to abstain from practicing the whole Law.

Now, it's important that when it comes to these Jewish people, Paul isn't necessarily trying to correct **legalism** in them. In fact, Paul was fine if the Jews who had grown up with the Law wanted to continue keeping it so long as they realized it wasn't essential for justification (right standing before God).

But to put that demand on the Gentiles as a means to say, "We'll eat with you if you improve yourselves by keeping the Law like we do" was unthinkable to Paul and he publically corrected Peter for it.

And he equates that with what was happening in Galatia. Only, perhaps, Paul views the men who had come in and demanded that the Gentile Christians be circumcised

as being accursed and preaching a different gospel. In the case of these men in Galatia, Paul wishes that they'd be emasculated (5:12) and accursed (1:9). And the difference seems to be that these men preaching this circumcision message were trying to get the Gentiles in Galatia to adhere to the Law as a means for salvation, unsettling them, and they were beginning to think that faith in Christ alone wasn't enough. These men had placed a roadblock in front of these Gentile believers that would cause them to stumble and divert their attention on Christ.

Paul sees it and begins to unravel it specifically for them in verse 15, removing this roadblock to faith alone one verse at a time. Paul realized that there was a roadblock in their way and now he removes it.

II. REMOVING THE ROADBLOCK TO FAITH ALONE

Look at verse 15:

We ourselves (Peter and Paul) are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; [16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law

Meaning that Peter and Paul weren't Pagans in the past, worshipping other Gods like the Gentiles. They worshipped the true God and tried their hardest to walk in obedience to the Whole Law of Moses, the written rules given to them by God. And both Peter and Paul realized that living in obedience to the whole Law of Moses would never justify them because of sin, one misstep in obedience to the Law made them guilty of breaking all of it.

And Paul really wants to hammer home that because of this understanding, even Paul and Peter had to concede defeat in keeping the Law as a means for justification so they believed (**middle of verse 16**):

So we also believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ

Now, Paul doesn't simply want this to be a small thing and we know this because verse 16 function like a chiasm. This is a literary term used to make a point clear. It's on the screen behind me so you can understand what Paul wants to make clear:

[15] We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

[16]

*A. yet we know that **a person is not justified by works of the law***

*B. but **through faith in Jesus Christ,***

C. SO WE ALSO HAVE BELIEVED IN CHRIST JESUS.

*B. in order to be **justified by faith in Christ** and not by works of the law,*

*A. because **by works of the law no one will be justified.***

In other words: Galatian Christians, Peter, and I were Jews and even we believed in Christ alone for our justification, knowing that the Law could never justify us.

So don't you go and begin trying to justify yourselves by the Law because some men placed this roadblock in your way to faith alone in Christ alone. A person is not justified by works they do, it is impossible and don't place that on yourselves. The work of Jesus is sufficient for you... as Theologian Doug Moo says of Christ's work:

Nothing should be added, nothing can be added, nothing must be added.

This past summer I had the privilege of visiting the Cistine Chapel in Rome and as you know Michelangelo the master sculptor painted the ceiling. It's a masterpiece. What I didn't know was that he also painted the wall behind the altar and over time people thought that his wall mural needed a few alterations so they added their own artwork to it in an attempt to make it more acceptable. You know you see, not an improvement, but a devaluing and cheapening of the work of Michelangelo.

And, Christian: when we attempt to add the work of Jesus to "improve" upon what he's done on our behalf...it devalues it. It makes it lesser in our eyes.

The work of Jesus for you is not only sufficient, it is the only way that you will find true acceptance and right standing before God.

Where are you cheapening the work of Christ by adding to it? What roadblocks to faith alone in Christ alone are in your lives? Find them and remove them because when you do you'll find that faith in Christ alone isn't only freeing but it is a cause of daily rejoicing.

III. REJOICING IN THE REALITY OF FAITH ALONE

Like trusting in a rope to hold you up when you fall, we need **decide to believe** that Jesus can do **what he's promised to do**. Nothing we bring will help him. If we are going to fully rejoice in this reality of faith alone in Christ, we need to often remember and remind ourselves who we are placing our faith in.

Look again and what Paul says, he says it 3 times:

*[16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith **in Jesus Christ**, so we also have believed **in Christ Jesus**, in order to be justified **by faith in Christ** and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

The object of our faith isn't small. We aren't placing our faith in a Jesus who is like Bono (the lead singer of U2):

- Says some good things,
- People like him
- He's culturally relevant
- But in the end totally powerless to accomplish what he wants to accomplish.

And I like Bono and U2...it's just that Bono makes a **terrible Savior**.

If that's who we think we are placing our faith in, then no wonder we struggle with placing our hopes and faith on Him alone and letting his work stand for us.

If Bono is our Savior than by all means we should create other opportunities to try to save ourselves.

But that's not who Jesus is. Faith alone in Christ alone means that we are trusting in the real live professional perfect Savior Jesus Christ; who **HAS DONE** what He said he **WOULD** do, **CAN do** what he says He **CAN do** and **WILL do** what he says he **WILL do**.

And what has he promised? To save us from our sin and guilt before God.

Remember, when we think about Jesus in the Bible we can be lured into forgetting that underneath the skin he was wrapped in, is the God of the burning bush, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God who with words spoke into existence everything that exists. Who uphold everything by the word of His power.

Jesus is the one who revealed a glimpse of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter, James, and John they saw him for who He was for a moment bright and burning with glory and it says that they, who had walked with him in friendship for years were **terrified**, not because he was scary but because he was majestic and glorious and mighty in their eyes. We need more glimpses of Jesus like that.

If we are to rejoice in Him and place our faith in Him alone we must often remember who he is:

- Our faith is in Jesus who has **always been** in existence and who **made everything** with his speech.
- He was **born into this world** by virgin birth, the God Man who came to bring peace among men.
- His life was lived perfectly, **keeping the whole Law of Moses** without sin.

- He died on a cross as a **perfect man**, bearing the punishment for sin/wrongdoing that we deserved.
- He was in the grave 3 days but the grave could not hold him down and he rose again from the dead conquering sin and death.
- And now he is risen and reigning as King over all and we await his return when he will judge the living and the dead.

At any one of these points, if we fail to truly understand or grasp these realities then we don't fully grasp who it is that we are placing our faith in for salvation.

PAUSE BUTTON: this is why we **MUST** spend time in **prayer** and **reading** the Word of God. How else will we bolster our grasp on where our faith is placed and who it is that secures our justification?

We place our faith in Christ alone because in Christ alone and his working for us we find **genuine hope and salvation and justification** before God.

For, we know, that the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What a joy to be able to say that our hope and faith is not in us or anything we must do! But in Christ alone who is not dead but is alive and his victory over death and sin he applies to those who have believed in him.

Non-Christians...

Christian: We celebrate the reality of faith alone this morning not because we love to say it with the reformers, but because our faith is in Jesus Christ whose work will never fail.

I will close, however, with a quote from a reformer... John Calvin in his Institutes of Christian Religion says:

For faith totters if it pays attention to works, since no one, even of the most holy, will find there anything on which to rely. (*Institutes*, 3.11.11) Calvin

May our faith be not in our works, but in Jesus Christ alone for our justification and righteousness before God.

Pray

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

