**‘His Story’ 6 - WOULD YOU LIKE SOME JESUS WITH THAT? - GALATIANS**

Some years ago, McDonald's franchise began a selling strategy we now call ‘upsizing’. You make your order of what you want only to be asked the question...and would you like fries with that? A larger size drink? Dessert? For just a little more you can improve and increase your order. Upsizing is now common in many major retail outlets. But guess what? Upsizing is also popular when it comes to faith and in particular the Gospel message – ‘Would you like some Jesus with that’?

We are moving smartly through the last 27 books of the Bible. We have looked at eight of them so far, and today the ninth is the book of Galatians. Each book has a purpose – an essential core message. We want to discover that and then ask the question what does this mean now.  Paul wrote to the church at Corinth where new believers were compromising their faith with baggage from their loose living past. This is then how you should live as a follower of Jesus…say no to immorality, law courts, loose living, and demonstrate the new community that serves one another.

Last week in 2 Corinthians we saw him giving a rare glimpse into the personal cost of following Jesus – the toll it took on him mentally, emotionally, and physically.  The 5 C's of why not to give up! And he opens his heart and life before those who opposed and accused him, and he shows his scars, his humanity, and his spirit-filled weakness. But with the trials comes God's comfort with which he can have empathy and care for others.  He’s carrying this life of God inside this weak container – let it shine out he says – but I’m a dead man walking in God's processional march to victory! Walk this new path of captivity to Christ. One day this canvas tent will be discarded for a new house made in heaven for me. And meanwhile, I’m being made into a copy of Jesus who the Father God wants to put on display in my life.

The Galatian churches are clusters of believers in an area of Asia Minor where Paul would later go and visit on his missionary journeys. Incidentally, they are also many of the same destinations of the seven churches in Revelation. Since becoming a follower of Jesus, Paul has had a very difficult time. He spent 14 years in Arabia alone, returning to Damascus which was now enemy territory.  A plot to take his life meant he fled from there to Jerusalem. He stayed there only two weeks – because once again his enemies tried to kill him – he escaped to Caesarea where he took a ship to Tarsus and he stayed for many years. He is on the run for his life because he is speaking a radical message which people want to silence…. for God is up to something – he was launching the gospel into the non-Jewish world. If this man can be stopped, taken out, or discredited then the whole movement of the New Testament Church would be threatened.

The problem these Galatian churches were facing was to decide what the rules were for people to believe the Gospel message. At the core – the issue was this. What is the gospel? Some leaders were trying to teach obedience to the Law of Moses as a condition of becoming a follower of Jesus.  Does Jewish Law = the Gospel? Does Jewish Law + Jesus = the Gospel? Does Jesus + Baptism + Church = the Gospel? Does Jesus + Church + Communion + Giving $ + Serving = the Gospel? You Gentiles should live like us they said.  Kind of like Jews with Jesus tacked on.... upsizing the message.... would you like some Jesus with that? The doors of this new Jesus movement were open to people of all backgrounds, and cultures. So, the inevitable question – do I need to live like a Jew to become a follower of Jesus?  “Just as I am” they came into the church believing in Jesus by faith only to be confronted with this teaching that it was not enough just to believe in Jesus you need to follow the Jewish teachings too!  Peter and Barnabas had also been caught up in this argument and failed to see the serious implications for the future.  The letter implies that these teachers followed Paul around teaching this new gospel undoing and undermining his teaching.

Their argument went something like this. If only faith was required for salvation, then surely this would lead to a misuse of freedom and liberty. People would do whatever they wanted and then just have cheap prayer for forgiveness. No – it’s got to be obedience to customs and laws which shows clear obedience and intent to comply plus faith in Christ – because that is measurable obedience. But, it's more definitive than just believing in Jesus, which was a licence for loose living.  Sounds plausible, even reasonable. Paul uses the closest thing to profanity in the New Testament to describe these people who teach this.  The topic centred on circumcision and Paul said – they should just go and “blank” themselves! You cannot be an Old Testament Christian!

Why is this an important message for us to hear today?

1. **Faith alone puts you right with God by Calvary’s cross**

Even Abraham the Father of Judaism was justified by faith. So, there is no room for add-ons to faith.  It’s Jesus alone!   The Law (rules) cannot save you! The cross alone saves you! On the cross alone Jesus took the penalty and curse for your life. You cannot do anything to merit, earn or deserve this by following rules.

Why is this message so important? Because unless this is sorted – no Gentile will ever come into the Church of God. It was this revelation that Paul said God showed him, that opened the way for the non-Jews to receive Christ. This was the truth that got lost during the corrupt period of the Church, which rose to its height in 1500 AD with the abuse of power and wealth. By then it was the confessional plus gratuities for forgiveness.  Jesus plus obedience to Church priests. Jesus plus baptism on behalf of the dead – Jesus plus hail Marys – Jesus plus adherence to the teachings of the Church - and to bring it right up to date:  Jesus plus church attendance and giving!  You know that coming to church doesn’t make you a Christian, don’t you? Nothing, none of these earns you merit or puts you right with God. Faith alone in Christ and his sacrifice on the cross justifies you – just as if you had never sinned! And it’s this message we need to get straight. The only thing you bring to the mix is faith – to believe and receive and then turn to God and repent.

1. **Barriers are broken by Calvary’s cross**

We live in a rules-based world. Rules are everywhere! And we are daily reminded of the consequences if the rules are not obeyed. Rules we are told keep us safe, reduce road fatalities and crime, rules are there to help our society function better. Rules are needed for our health and education system to function and our airlines to fly without crashing. But it’s not surprising really because God was the first to put rules in place. In Genesis, he put rules in place for Adam and Eve and they were told in no uncertain terms what they could do and what they were to avoid. We know the outcome of that story. So, God put in place more rules surrounding how people could approach and live in relationship with Him. The sacrificial and temple system was based on rules. So, rules were the basis of relationship and the Jewish faith practised this.

Now, these new believers were being told the rules don’t apply anymore and what’s more, even non-Jews could join in the party and receive all the benefits that until now had belonged exclusively to them. And it seemed to them that the newbies should comply with their rules as a precondition of becoming God's favourites!

Paul’s message:  **Galatians 3:26-28** *There are no favourites anymore…. Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female ...all are one in Christ!* Wow, what a bombshell! Cultural barriers are broken down, Jew and gentile – not special anymore. Sociological barriers are broken down, Slave and free – authority structures are dismantled. Gender barriers are broken down, Male and female – hierarchical order has been discarded.  Do you see how provocative this liberating message of freedom is? God’s community is to be barrier-less. Why? Because that’s what God is. The only barrier that exists he dealt with at Calvary’s cross. Just as quickly as these barriers were dismantled by God – people started erecting them again to become exclusive.

1. **‘freedom principle’ is now internalised by Calvary’s cross**

Will this newfound freedom lead to loose living? The heart of Christianity is grace plus nothing!  There are no add-ons...there is no upsizing.  It’s Jesus alone with nothing else. In Paul's concluding chapters he answers the question…. *Does this mean we can live with this newfound freedom without rules and engage in loose living followed by prayer in the confessional?* No! Paul teaches equally as strongly; our newfound freedom and liberty is to be choosing the way of the Spirit not the way of the flesh.

There is a not-so-subtle irony about the language used in this book. Much of the issue around obeying the rules and laws centres on the issue of circumcision. And Paul is essentially saying it’s not your bodies that need bits cut off them it’s your hearts – a spiritual circumcision and all of you, not just the men! Paul says if you mix even a small number of rules to the mix it negates the whole principle of salvation by faith alone and not works. Like yeast, it infects the whole batch of dough. Though works cannot save you – they do become evidence that you have passed from death to life by the choices you make every day.  So, the measurement of my faith is not - Did I go to worship God at his church today, Did I give money today? Did I share my faith today? But am I living out the new life of the Spirit?

1. **The law of love releases people because of Calvary’s cross**

You should be like us!  Join us, but you need to think and act as we do.

The Bible does not ask that. It says simply – join us and the entry point is faith in Christ alone. Then choose to bring your life under the control of the Holy Spirit.  Begin to sow crops of Godliness that demonstrate that the new life lives within. Friends – Do not impose on others what you think they should be doing. That’s God's job! Do not add onto other people your experience of God and make it theirs. Do not project onto others your rules and expectations!

Simply encourage them to sow into the Holy Spirit in their lives. O Foolish Galatians – who has bewitched you and fooled you into thinking that you can add anything to what Jesus has done for you?  Who has fooled you into thinking that keeping the rules puts you right with God?

**Galatians is a kind of surgery of what the Gospel is not**.  Appendages we try to make, conditions of entry, and acceptance are lopped off. Cultural, economic, and gender boundaries are disarmed from their power to divide and discriminate….and we are left with the simple powerful message of the cross of Jesus – alone. Would you like some Jesus with that? – We have become expert at upsizing the Gospel to make it more appealing. We add it to our life as an appendage. When it comes to rules – Jesus himself said, “A new rule gives you - just one rule". Love God and love your fellow human beings! That’s it!  But we want to tick the box with its lists of do's and don’ts to make sure we are in the kingdom. The true Gospel is very simple, radical, and life-changing!

Christ died and rose again for you – end of story.

**Faith alone secures this salvation for you** – by the cross of Calvary - end of story.

**All barriers are broken down** by the cross of Calvary – end of story.

**The principle of freedom is yours to experience** – because of Calvary’s cross – end of story.

**The Law of love is yours to practice** – because of Calvary’s cross – end of story.

If you take the message of 2 Corinthians and Galatians – together they tell you the hard truth about what it’s going to cost you to follow Jesus and what you need to do and believe. It’s putting your life on a solid foundation that will stand the test of time. Anything else is a human construction.