

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our only Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. The title for today's sermon is 'Come again?' and is based on the Epistle readings, Galatians 1. Let us pray.... Amen.

Do you remember the last time something really floored you? What I mean is, do you remember the last time, or any time, you saw or heard someone, or something, so outrageous, so preposterous, so entirely ridiculous you just could not believe it? Do you remember one of those times when you had to ask 'Come Again?' Really? You have got to be kidding me!

Now, we have all see and heard all kind of things strange and unusual things. Some make you laugh, such as when you watch funny TV shows or movie, other may make you cringe like when you watch a huge hit in a Rider's game, and some just infuriate you.

This is what was happening for Paul, and what lead up to his writing the letter to the Galatian church. What Paul heard was happening in Galatia was anything but funny. Paul was livid. He was upset. He was sad and at the same time he was outright angry over what he heard the Christians were doing in Galatia.

What Paul was so concerned about was he brought and spoke the saving Gospel message of Christ to the people in Galatia. Paul proclaimed "Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."(v.4) Paul preached Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of sins of the world, for the redemption of mankind, for our deliverance from sin, death, and the devil, and for our eternal salvation. When the Galatians heard God's Word spoken by Paul the church joyfully received his Words. They were excited and would have given just about anything to remain in God's grace. But something changed; something huge.

Paul later asks them in his letter, "What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me."(Gal 4:15b) They were so thankful for God's strong Word for their salvation that they would have given anything, including their eyesight to keep it.

The Galatians rejoiced over God's Word of salvation, but now they were walking away. Something happened. They were rather quickly and easily abandoning Christ and His salvation for some other false teaching. Paul is frustrated over what he is hearing. To paraphrase Paul's opening question to the church in Galatia:

Come again? What is going on there? O Galatians, Galatians, I am shocked at what I am hearing. How on earth can you possibly be abandoning the One "who called you in the grace of Christ"? In this present evil age, what could possibly have been said to you to cause you to so trash the Gospel proclaimed to you, reject the one you joyfully received, the one you said you would die for rather than lose. How can you so quickly walk away and discard the saving Gospel of Christ and Him crucified and risen for you and your salvation?

And can you blame Paul? He knew what was at stake. It wasn't his popularity. It wasn't his paycheck. Paul knew it wasn't even about Paul! It was all about those in Galatia and their

eternal salvation. They were rejecting sound teaching, solid doctrine, for something else which had the consistency of Jell-O.

Paul’s message was simple: the ‘Gospel of Jesus’. This message was not Paul’s, but the message of the One who called, commissioned and sent Paul, namely Jesus Christ. This Gospel—exclusively of Jesus who gave Himself for the sake of our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God the Father; (Gal 1:4)—came not by man, or teaching of man, but revealed by Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12). Paul therefore preached a gospel of righteousness, not in us or by us, but in Jesus Christ alone, and this is our faith: (Gal 3:11-12,22; Rom 3:21-22). Paul preached the true Gospel—no human input, no supplements, no alteration. Without modification or accommodation, this gospel and the apostle who brought it are through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

Paul is so confident he taught them God’s Word that he tells them in this letter that if anyone, including him, another apostle or teacher, or even an angel of God should teach a different gospel, let them be anathema, cursed, and accursed by God.

Wow, Paul writes some harsh and cutting words. Should anyone preach against God’s Word, even an angel of God, let them be cursed. These words were to be a warning to anyone who would dare teach anything against, or contrary to the clear Word of Scripture. While Paul may sound out of touch with the world today, with our inclusiveness and anything goes, he is not out of touch with God’s Word. The book of Revelation concludes with an even more clear warning; “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book,¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”(Rev 22:18-19)

Yet this isn’t just a 1st century scenario, the same can be said today.

Should you, me, or anyone add or take away anything taught in this book—the inspired Word of God given in the Bible—you truly risk condemning yourself to the eternal fires of hell. Rejecting God Word is to reject the Word made flesh, namely Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. To reject, or to try to modify the Word made flesh, or what He has done, continues to do, or will do, is to reject His work of salvation for you. Without His work of salvation, true and complete, you are still in your sins, fully deserving God’s full wrath.

If anyone rejects Christ’s full and complete work for their salvation, Paul goes so far to say later in this letter, “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”(Gal 5:4)

Can you understand why Paul is so livid at hearing that there are some teaching a false message, and worse, that some people are falling for it? Paul is hearing salvation being lost. Paul is hearing of people who once rejoiced in Christ’s salvation for them turning away and condemning themselves to the eternal torments of hell. Paul has tears in his eyes at the thought of those to whom the free gift was given and received, the gift of faith in Christ for salvation, where soiling that gift and throwing it away.

Paul is not trying to please them with flattering words, nor is he trying to entice them with the feeling of a spiritual experience, he is trying to be faithful to God in his proclamation to them so that through him God would save their eternal lives. God’s Word to create faith, strengthen faith, and lead to eternal life.

This doctrine thing isn’t just another thing the church does, to quote Robert D. Preus: “Doctrine IS life”. Scripture and what it says IS life. God’s Word IS that important. It is that critical because without it there is only eternal condemnation and hell!

But God’s Word—the Word made flesh in Christ Jesus—takes us from that eternally deserved death and gives us His life. In Christ your sins are forgiven. In Christ you are delivered from sin, death, and the devil. In Christ you are at peace with God and He calls you His very own adored child. The Holy Spirit works through God’s Word and Sacrament to give you faith, He restores your soul, He gives you eternal life in Christ, and solely because of Christ’s work for you and in your place.

God’s gospel message is clear: there is nothing you can do, think, choose, or say which will get you into heaven. Nothing! There are many things which you can do, think, choose, or say to get you out, but there is absolutely nothing you can do to get you in. Attaching conditions to the Gospel’s message of salvation perverts the Gospel and destroys the sure comfort we have in Christ’s work for our salvation.

Salvation would not be called a gift if you have to do something to earn or merit it. If you have to do something it would be called a wage. Yet, salvation is a free gift worked and strengthened in us by the Holy Spirit through the regular hearing of God’s Word and receiving of the Sacrament.

No wonder Paul was so troubled and livid at the thought that anyone could change this God’s message of salvation. Here they had the Word of Life, eternal life given to them and they were turning away. Fortunately God continues to call them and us to repentance, to turn from sin and return to God. There He daily and richly forgives us all our sins on account of Christ.

While this message may be difficult for the world to accept, and it does ask ‘come again?’ we are encouraged by Paul to hold fast to the inspired Word of God. We are blessed to have God’s Word available to be heard, read, prayed, sung and preached to strengthen our faith and trust in God, for our comfort, for our forgiveness, for strengthening us for life in this world. You are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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