

July 28, 2019 Faith Is Like The Canadian Shield Pt. 5
Galatians 2:15-21

This series is based on a very simple premise: there are fundamental items of doctrine that are like the bedrock of any Christian system of understanding. The first of these statements was 'That we are lost in sin...no buts...no ands...no exceptions. That statement is foundational because it casts us all on the saving beach sand of the grace of God. The second statement was this: We are chosen by God for salvation. I mentioned Shakespeare's putting into the mouth of the Prince Hamlet, newly returned from Wittenburg, that hotbed of Lutheran Reformation thinking, the line "There is a Divinity that shapes our ends."

The 3rd, 4th and today's 5th part in this series focus and expand on the 3rd statement: We are saved through faith in Jesus Christ who died in our place on Calvary's cross. I have chosen to have this (what I call) the series within the series because without Jesus and some considerable investment in faith in Jesus, there is no Christian faith to which we may cling. And I will share a story with you from my teen age years, not about me, but about the love of my life, my wife of 51 years Barbara.

You have heard me say many times that she and I met as a result of my coming to faith in Jesus Christ, and making the choice to worship at a little Presbyterian church in Port Arthur... before it became Thunder Bay. Oliver Road

Presbyterian Church closed its doors shortly after I graduated from Knox College way back in 1972. When Barbara and I were dating, I was trying very hard to become a professional singer as part of the Folk Revival that became part of the pop music scene in the early 1960's. We decided, she and I and our youth group to host a coffee house in the Church Hall on Saturday evenings. Our minister chaperoned the activity, as a result of Session's approving the activity. I was always on the bill when it came to entertainment. One Saturday night our minister arranged a night off for himself by inviting a colleague from the local ministerial to sit in with us.

I do not remember the man's name, and I will not name his denominational ties. Barbara assessed him and was not pleased. She asked the blunt question. "So what exactly do you believe?" To his credit he was frank and honest in his answer. He said, "I believe there is a God, but it is only sensible to take the position that Jesus was just a man, a great teacher, the miracles did not happen and I have no idea what to make of this 'holy spirit'." To which Barbara replied, "Oh! So you are a heretic?" I cannot remember if the man made any kind of response. But there you have it. Jesus is central to the existence of Christian faith. And that is a point made by all of the Historic Creeds. It is the reason that churches which use those creeds share a common bond, and is the main reason we talk about a universal Christian Church.

Which brings us to Galatians chapter 2 verse 20. It begins with the words “I have been crucified with Christ.” What Paul wrote in the marketplace Greek of his time, which was the international language of trade and commerce, translates word for word as “Christ, I have been crucified with.” And of course it is the source of that statement that made Billy Graham so famous “Christ died for your sins and mine.” How did Jesus do that? It is about the crucifixion. And as Walter Cronkite made another phrase famous, You Are There. Even before we were born we were mysteriously present in a moment that changed the world. And therefore, it could not be otherwise, also changed us. The believer, followers of Jesus, are identified in what happened at Calvary. Not only was Jesus crucified at Calvary, but so were we...in HIM. And this means the end of me, and you as a sinner in God’s sight. It means the end of me and you, as a person seeking to earn salvation, or merit it by our own efforts. It means the end of you and I, as children of Adam condemned under the law of the Old Testament. Our old and sinful selves have been put to death, and it has no more claims on our daily life.

By the way, this also explains why the modern secularist mind has become obsessed in the last half century with the attempt to claim that Jesus by some fluke did not die on the cross but a week later after the loss of more than half of his body’s blood by volume, was able to be with the disciples, as a brother alive and well. This is a modern invention trying to explain away the wounds inflicted on the cross and leading up

to it. It is a blatant attempt to take God out of the picture, so that those who feel guilty about rejecting Jesus need not feel the way they do. And there is a cruel joy that runs through the secularist cause of attempting to rob believers of hope and joy...based on a very old hoax, that Jesus did not really die. It is as foolish as suggesting someone could survive the electric chair, or the gas chamber. It denies that capital punishment was capital punishment.

And here is the explanation of the transformation that takes place when people come to faith in Jesus. "I no longer live but Christ lives in me." This does not mean that your personality has been blotted out or bled away. Barbara is Barbara, and yet not the selfish or self centered person she was. I still love folk music and country, along with a drive to share the faith and to live it. Here is the secret of Saul becoming Paul, developing the treatise of love in 1 Corinthians 13, and building up believers in a time when the Empire wanted to wipe them all out. And the explanation of the selflessness that produced a culture that cared for widows and orphans and which continues to give care to the terminally ill, is that the love of Jesus Christ is alive in us, HE is in us.

You know even someone who claims to believe as I do, is mesmerized by the life and death of the martyrs. When I read the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer 54 years ago, and especially the way he died at the hand of the Nazis, I shuddered and wondered how anyone could bare such pain. The martyrs of

our own era. The martyrs in the days of the Roman Empire, I could hardly believe their courage, strength, under terrible fire, and awful deaths. And yet, there is a sensibility in what is written here. “The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God. Is it possible that that same strength which Jesus had to bear the cross, is HIS strength in the lives, the bodies, the minds let alone the spirits of those who find themselves having to die rather than deny our Lord and Redeemer? Of course, of course. And there will be more about that next week.

With his marvelous, God blessed mind, Paul comes back to the point with which he began these statements. “The Son of God,” he says of Jesus, “HE loved me and gave HIMSELF for me. I do know this: when I first believed in Jesus, a life time ago, it was because I found myself taking very seriously the reality that Jesus loved me when HE suffered Calvary. And I found myself believing HE loves me in the present moment as HE called me away from an ambition to entertain, to make money. And I found myself believing HE would love me in sickness and in health, to the end of my earthly days. And then as Bonhoeffer told his cell mate, the real beginning, eternity. Jesus Christ is Lord.

Let us Pray;

Lord thank you for the teaching of your servant Paul. Thank you for his coming to faith in YOU in that dramatic moment on the road to Damascus. Thank you for the way he lived that last portion of his life. He served YOU as he served

those to whom he was a minister, a preacher, a prayer warrior, an instrument of healing, committed first of all to the truth of the Gospel. Thank you for his testimony. His awareness of your saving grace in every circumstance including the death of his earthly body. Thank you for his legacy of hope and joy through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen