

September 4, 2022 Origins Galatians 1:11-24

A very close friend said to me, “You cannot possibly go into the ministry. You have too good a mind.” He was convinced that I had been brainwashed by the church. A family member said to me, “It is claimed that Jesus rose from the dead. You know that things like that just do not happen.” It was obvious to me that both of them did not simply understand the Gospel, they believed that people had invented the accounts, the way writers invent novels or movie scripts. I was very new to the faith at the time and had little experience of the church. But it was obvious to me as a teenager, that the one reality neither of them took into account is this: God is real. And I was convinced then as I am today, that with God, anything is possible.

So it does not surprise me that Paul would write, “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something man made up.” And that statement is even stronger in the word for word KJ translation of the Scriptures. “I certify to you,, brethren, that the gospel preached of me is not after man.” It is a crucial insight, and a critically important statement. The Good News Bible translates this statement with exceptional clarity, in basic English. “Let me tell you my brothers, that the gospel I preach is not of human origin.”

And that is precisely why, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are so willing to tell us that the disciples, and they as part of that group, that followed Jesus for the balance of HIS

three year ministry, portray themselves and their brothers as having difficulty with the idea that Jesus is genuinely and clearly the Lord. It is true there are points at which Peter for example declares "You are the Christ." However, their behaviour, including the behaviour of the big fisherman betrays the truth that there was always doubt as to what that declaration meant.

The truth is that the crisis in the church, if there is a crisis, rests in this. I pose it as a question. Do we really believe that Jesus is the Son of God? And before you respond with something like, "well that's rather judgemental!" consider this. Jesus said to the disciples in Mark 4:40, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" And if you do not remember when that happened, it was immediately after Jesus had calmed the wind and the waves when they were caught in the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

They had just witnessed one of the premier demonstrations of Jesus divinity. In their amazement they said, "Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?" We are tempted to say, boy, how I would like to have been there and seen that. The truth is what the disciples teach us in their testimony of their conduct and their words, amazement is not the same as faith in God. it did not produce the answer of faith for them. It produced the question, who is this man? They struggle with Jesus obvious humanity. And they find it hard to get beyond that no matter what Jesus does, no matter what Jesus says.

What changed them? HE was right there in front of them every day for the balance of three years. What changed them? It was not that they saw more or heard more or learned more. When Jesus was arrested they ran away. When Peter was identified as one of Jesus' followers he cursed and denied that he had ever known the man. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" The answer to the question, what changed them is profoundly simple. Easter changed them. The resurrection changed them. And no, not immediately. And the disciples tell us in plain language, the women believed it because they had been sent to the disciples with the news declared by angels of God. The men reacted with unbelief and thought it was nonsense! (Luke 24:11) And the best we can say of Peter is that he wondered what had happened? (Luke 24:12) He struggles to be logical. I was told I had too good a mind to enter into an adventure based on faith.

Paul declares, "The gospel I preached is not something that man made up." He goes on to say, "I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:12) There is a hymn in the praise book near you, number 414 "God reveal your presence, gladly we adore you, and with awe appear before you." That is a request that God do something. It is a modernization of the lyric that appeared in the former Book of Praise. The original lyric is a statement. "God reveals his presence, Let us now adore Him, And with awe appear before Him." The change is subtle. From what God does...HE reveals HIMSELF, to a request that HE do so.

In the resurrection the disciples were confronted with what God did in Jesus. And as they met the risen Christ, they were changed. They went out across the world of their day, telling the good news that God saves sinners: that God gives new life, eternal life: that Jesus loves me, and that I can trust the content of the gospel for that reason. And they died proclaiming that word.

The change in Paul's life was similar to the change in Peter's. They shared the news, and it is good news, in fact it is the best news, that Jesus died for us and HE is alive. The best experience we have in the church, is not just the result of hearing things read or preached, or singing the songs, or being with people we like. It is all of that and so much more in the context of the reality that Jesus is alive and among us. His Spirit is with us and in us. That in fact we stand with one foot in time...here...and with the other foot in eternity by the grace of God, who has given us HIS Son.

We have nothing, if we do not rejoice in this, God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and has redeemed us from our sin, and therefore we can live for God and with one another.

Three of the Gospels begin with the Christmas story. What is that about? The birth of Jesus obviously. But that history of Jesus birth is couched in the words of revelation. It is revealed to Mary that she is going to have a son, having not been with a man. Joseph who is engaged to her says, "I am

going to break off the engagement.” He knows how babies are made. But it is revealed to him that God is doing something very special. Revelation changes his mind and changes his life too.

The shepherds out in the field caring for their sheep, are unclean, because of their work. They cannot attend synagogue or go to the Temple because they are unclean. They are sinners and they cannot get clean unless they cease being shepherds. But it is revealed by God, through the angels that the redeemer of Israel has been born in Bethlehem for them. This is just such marvelous news! They agree they must go and see that it is true. All of the angels are about God’s revealing who Jesus is and that HE has been born into our fallen and often awful world. It is revealed to pagan wisemen that the King of Kings has been born. They spend a fortune in a two trek to Bethlehem to present gifts to the baby who is the hope of mankind. A saviour who is the Christ the Lord. The revelation of God, the revelation of God, the revelation of God. John tells us the meaning of the birth of Jesus at the beginning of his account. “He is the light of the world.” (John 1:4) And Mark begins by telling us that according to the prophesy of Isaiah, John the Baptist’s ministry erupted at the Jordan river, where he baptized Jesus. And it was revealed to John the Baptist that Jesus was so worthy, John did not feel he was worthy enough to do up his shoe laces. Revelation.

Paul had a divine commission. So have I. So have we. We have seen marvelous things and served in marvelous times.

Our challenge is to be faithful to what has clearly been revealed to us....in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray;

Lord, you have revealed so much to us and in the midst of the world around us. We give thanks for the heavenly treasure you have seen fit to call us to serve and to share. Continue we pray to be with us, that we might do your will and touch the lives of others with the blessing of Almighty God in Jesus Christ, as YOUR Spirit leads us. Thank you for this revelation. Amen