

Howrah Sandford Weekly Church Bulletin

6th September 2020

SUNDAY SERVICES at St Thomas' Howrah 8.30 am & 10 am (Holy Communion, Leonie Silk preaching) and St Barnabas' South Arm 10 am (Holy Communion, Andrew Lake preaching)

There is also weekly online worship found on the home page of www.stthomashowrah.com.

READINGS:

Galatians 1: 1-10

Psalm 118: 1-9

John 14: 1-7

SERMON: No Other Gospel (by Leonie Silk) *this is the first of a seven part series on Galatians*

Do you remember these headlines from May 2018: 'Hobart Rivulet breaks its banks', 'Deluge floods the city', 'Chopper plucks stranded boy from floodwaters' or 'Officials fear for public safety unless respect for law can be restored.' Traffic lights went out, places were flooded, people needed rescuing. In all this chaos emergency services personnel followed their training and procedures to keep us safe. The rules we follow, are important. But some people don't like others enforcing rules they have to follow.

Christians are meant to be law-abiding, with respect to state and federal law but also God's law. But when does God's law, his rules for us, become an unhealthy fixation? When does obedience to commandments threaten to be a substitute for a personal relationship with the God who gives the commandments? Paul and Barnabas in our Galatians reading were facing this type of unhealthy fixation after planting new churches in Galatia and the surrounding areas we know of as Turkey. The churches had given in to the pressure from 'agitators' we read in chapter 2. The people began quarrelling among themselves; their understanding of the gospel message differed from what Paul preached to them.

Paul's basic claims were firstly the God of Israel, the true and living God, has from ancient times been at work saving people from their sins so they may worship him and be a redemptive presence in the world. Secondly, the message that salvation lies in Jesus has been entrusted to Jews like Paul as well as to non-Jews who will receive it.

So what then, was upsetting these agitators? They are the key to understanding the false gospel that Paul opposes. Basically they sought to bring about purity and holiness through the keeping of the Old Testament Law. The concept of receiving salvation through faith alone, or to say, by God's Grace, was not supported. Old Testament Law – the Ten Commandments; the sacrificial system – strict adherence to Jewish customs like circumcision and doing good works was the way to receive salvation in their eyes. Perhaps that's why today we hear people say: 'I'm a Christian because I'm a good person; I don't break the law and I help people where I can'. They don't get it. They don't get that their fixation on following rules & procedures & and doing the right thing does not ensure they receive eternal life. What Paul speaks of is this misrepresentation with Old Testament law in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. We'll hear more about this in coming weeks.

Another thorn in Paul's side was that they questioned his authority. His opening words in his letter are abrupt, and for good reason. After all he had spoken to Jesus after his death on the road to Damascus. He says 'Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead' Gal 1:1. As is customary he then offers his best wishes. The Greeks typically began a greeting with "grace", while the Jews would offer "peace" (shalom). Paul offers both "grace and peace." Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace being the undeserved gift of God. Peace being the by-product of this grace. Since we have been justified with faith we have peace with God.

Paul has up until now, always started his letters with something positive to say. This time he comes out swinging: 'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.' Harsh words indeed: Deserting the saviour! Turning to a different gospel! They are confused! Perverting the gospel!

He continues on with some of the harshest words in the entire New Testament: 'Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned.' He calls those who are causing confusion to be eternally condemned. Not once, but twice!

What must have really upset Paul was that he was being portrayed to the churches as someone who was just a people-pleaser. As a God-pleaser Paul paid a high price in suffering. You may recall how he was stoned and left for dead in Lystra. In fact, many years later, near the end of his life, the memory of those tumultuous days was still fresh in Paul's mind. Paul responds with these words in our final verse today: 'Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.' It can be all too easy to become a people pleaser. Many of us have been people pleasers all our lives - trying to please parents, teachers our work colleagues, our friends; even our children.

The agitators sought to bring about purity and holiness through law-keeping alone. Paul taught that the gospel brings about purity through the work of Christ on the cross through the grace of God alone. Jesus taught that he was the only way to the heavenly Father.

CONSIDER:

1. Not only do we learn of a departure from the gospel a long time ago, but is there a similar error being proclaimed today? It is important for us to understand what the Galatian error was so that we can recognize similar false teaching today.
2. The Lord's Supper is observed most weeks at our church. The message of the Book of Galatians helps us to understand one of the practical reasons for doing so. The elements which are placed before us on the communion table are representatives of the essence of the gospel. Not only are we reminded of the salvation we have obtained through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord, but we are also reminded of the essence of the gospel, to which our daily lives must conform.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS:

Give thanks for fathers and father figures in our lives.

For Christian witness in community focuses in our area: schools, bowls, surf and other sports clubs, RSL, service clubs like Probus, Rotary and Lions, hobby groups.

Pray for Australians trying to return here; for friends and family in lockdown Victoria; for frontline workers in hospitals and nursing homes; for police, emergency services and others enforcing quarantining and other precautions; for those planning economic recovery; for those working on a vaccine.

With Spring upon let us thank God for the annual seasons and a blessing from the pandemic, which is many people rediscovering the joys and satisfactions of gardening.

Our missionary Kate in South Asia is grateful for your payers and support following the death in one of the team families. Pray for Kate working at mastering the language and for opportunities to make disciples during the covid crisis.

FROM THE MINISTER:

As far as I know two people in the parish have signed up for the **Online Bishop's Training Event** (10am-1pm, Saturday 19 September.) and one of them is me. Register at www.bishopstrainingevent.com or let me know if you would like to join a group at St Thomas's. There's some good speakers and workshops pertaining to mission and ministry in our parish.

With the love of Jesus
Andrew Lake
0487903363