

Good morning.

The message today, is a dual-purpose message. For St George, it's going to be our Good Friday message, and for Bongeem, it's going to be the Easter Sunday message.

But whichever way we look at it, we can't have Easter Sunday, without Good Friday. And a Good Friday message leaves us feeling pretty hopeless, without looking forwards to Easter Sunday... So, in normal times, a Good Friday message focuses on the crucifixion, and looks forward to the resurrection; And an Easter Sunday message begins at the grave, but fills us with joy that Christ is risen...

Righto:

Today's reading talked a lot about Law; Faith; Righteousness; the Spirit; Abraham; Gentiles... There's: Blessings; Curses; a Promise; and Redemption

There's a lot happening in this passage...

And for those who haven't been with us over the last few weeks, I'd better just give a quick run-down on what this letter to the Galatians, is about...

Galatia is a region in Modern day Turkey. And the church in Galatia, were mostly Gentiles (non-Jews). And Paul had taken the Gospel to them – the simple Gospel message of Grace and forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ Jesus...

But since that time, Paul had moved on (as missionaries do), preaching the Gospel in other lands,, and what the Bible

refers to as “Judaisers”, came into town, and they told the Galatians, “Hey, if you want to be a Christian, first you have to become a Jew, because Jesus is the Saviour of the Jews, and for a start, you blokes had better get yourselves circumcised, because that’s the mark of being the people of God.”....

Now, something that I’ve noticed, is when a group of people really, truly desire to honour God (with every part of their being), if somebody (seemingly in authority) tells them a few simple practical things they need to do, or practices they need to keep (to make God happy), well, they’ll just do it – there’s not any harm in it (is there?)... Or is there???

Well actually, “Yes, there is.”

And so this letter that Paul wrote to the Galatians – it’s a very important letter... The teaching of the Judaisers – he had to nip that in the bud. God was doing a new thing. The death and resurrection of Jesus was His means of salvation for the **nations** (not just the Jews)... And yet the Judaisers were putting a whole heap of hurdles in front of them (& burdens on their backs), trying to make them carry the burden of the religious law...

And Paul says in this letter, “The Law can’t save us, because we’re not able to keep the law”(2:16). And in fact, the Law becomes a curse (we’ll get to that shortly).

And this letter to the Galatians, roundly destroys the twisted teaching of the Judaisers – that to become a Christian means

we also have to become a Jew (and embrace Old Covenant ceremonial customs, laws and practices).

And Paul's point is, we're not saved by the law – we're saved by faith.

And today's Bible reading, homes in on what that faith is – It's by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – the one who died for us – the one who rose again... And for Paul, the cross – the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, is **central** to the Gospel – in fact, it **is** the Gospel – Jesus died, to set us free from our sins,,,, and yet He lives, and in Him, **we** have life...

O foolish Galatians! he says **Who has bewitched you?**
It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

You know, there's people today (who claim to be Christians), and yet they do not see the cross as being central to what Christianity is about; and some don't even believe that Jesus is raised from the dead... That's foolishness, and when that sort of teaching finds its way into the church, it's Satanic... That's why Paul used the word "bewitched" – Who's bewitched you (cast a spell)(put the evil-eye on you) – who, by the power of Satan, is distracting you from pure Gospel?....

If the death and resurrection of Jesus isn't central to the Gospel message, then that message isn't the good news of Christ at all – it's satanic...

Now, the Old Covenant sign that someone belonged to the people of God, was (on a personal level), circumcision, and (on a national level), the keeping of the sabbath... Those 2 things seemed to have particular emphasis, but of course then, on a personal level, it extended to only eating cosher foods etc... ..

But when Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He sent His **Holy Spirit** to the church... And so ‘not working on a Saturday’ – that’s not evidence that I’m saved, and ‘having a trimmed foreskin’ isn’t evidence that I’m saved; and ‘not eating bacon’ isn’t evidence that I’m saved...

The evidence – the sign that we are saved and belong to God, is the presence of the Holy Spirit...

God, the Holy Spirit living inside of us, developing the fruit of the Spirit – that’s the evidence that we belong to God....

And the church in Galatia had already experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in a mighty and powerful way, and the miracles of God had been done in their presence. And so Paul asks them straight out – “Did you receive the Spirit by keeping the Law? No. You received the Holy Spirit by faith...”

So now that you’ve started out with the Gospel, and God has put His stamp-of-approval on you by the presence of His Holy Spirit, are you going to try and improve on that with the religious Law????

Now, at this point, he brings up the example of Abraham: Abraham was the great Jewish hero – he was like the father of the Jews...

- Abraham had
- Isaac, who had
- Jacob (name change to Israel),
- Who had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel

But it began with Abraham (the Patriarch)... There were generations before Abraham, but Abraham was the one who heard God, and he believed God. He had faith!!!

And it's not the ones who follow the Covenantal religious law, who are the children of Abraham – it's the ones who receive and act in faith, who are the children of Abraham... It was centuries after Abraham lived, that the Mosaic Law (Law of Moses) was given to Israel...

Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"

And Paul says, "Hey, this is a prophecy that's now been fulfilled" Right back in Genesis 18:18, God had said that in Abraham, all nations would be blessed... And to be a people of faith, that's to be a people like Abraham...

OK, so are you with me??? Saved by faith – the righteousness of God comes to us by faith, just as Abraham was credited with righteousness by his faith...

And this is where the purpose of the Law, and the purpose of the cross, is revealed....

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¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse;

When Moses gave the law to the people of Israel, in Deut 27&28, he lays down all these blessings and curses... If you keep all of God's commands and all of God's Laws, you'll be blessed (land blessed; crops blessed; safe & secure as a nation; military victories; etc; etc;)... But if you **don't** keep the law, then you will be cursed (crops fail; nation overthrown; military defeats; become slaves; and live in misery)...

And the thing is, Israel weren't able to keep the covenant, and so they lived under the curse...

And when Jesus taught about the law, basically He made us realise that **nobody** is capable of keeping the Law... He didn't make it easier – He made it harder. He took it from being merely a thing of 'outward actions', to being a thing of the heart.:

- If you look at a woman in lust, you've already committed adultery;
- If you're angry with your brother, you've already murdered him....

Now, the key word here, is “rely”... ¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse;

He’s **not** saying,

- “If you do the right thing”, you’re under a curse
- “If you aim to please God”, you’re under a curse.
- He’s not even saying, “If you work hard, and always strive to do the right thing, you’re under a curse”.

It’s if “that’s what we **rely** on”... You see, people of faith do what the law requires, because Christ is living in our heart....

all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Wow!... It’s pretty obvious (isn’t it?) – No one can be justified by the Law, but only cursed... And that’s the whole point - “The righteous shall live by faith.” (The Prophet, Habakkuk had said that)...

You see, when it comes to “The Law”, it’s not about “Faith” – it’s about “**doing**”...

But ¹³ Christ redeemed us (He bought us back – bought us out) from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us

And **this**, is why I chose this reading for Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

You see, Jesus is the only one who ever perfectly kept the Law... But He was crucified – he was nailed to a cross – nailed to a tree – He hung on that tree... And the law said, that it's a **curse** to hang in a tree... Jesus didn't break any laws, and yet He bore the curse...

He bore the curse of the Law, to redeem us – to buy us out from under the curse of the Law...

So that by faith, people of **all** nations – people like you and I, don't have to live under the curse of an unkeepable Law – we are saved through faith in the one who is raised from the dead...

Are you a person of faith? Or are you a person of Law???

Are you a person who relies on jumping through the right religious hoops to be saved???

Are you someone who has to:

- be in the right denomination to be saved;
- take communion from the right person, to be saved;
- read a particular translation of the Bible, to be saved;
- have an 'anointing' and has to speak in other languages, to be saved;
- always have a smile painted on your face, to be saved;
- eat the right food, to be saved;
- not watch the television, to be saved;

- not work on a Saturday or a Sunday, to be saved
- recognise your church leader or your pastor as ‘infallible’, to be saved

If so, you are putting yourself under the curse of the Law...

Are you a person who relies on doing as many good things as you can, in the hope that you’ll be saved??? If so, you are putting yourself under the curse of the Law...

Jesus became cursed, to set us free from the curse... Why would we go back to it???

The righteous are saved by faith – what does that look like???

It’s **believing** in faith, **and** acting in faith.

The message of Good Friday, is Jesus died to pay the penalty that our sins deserve – to break the curse that is over us... The message of Easter Sunday, is Jesus lives!!! He has conquered sin and death – He rose from the grave... And by faith in Him, we also have life...

Do you believe these things? Believe in faith.

And now, act in faith.

- Surrender your life to Jesus;
- Repent of sin;
- ask for forgiveness; and
- receive the grace and mercy of God...

But as we’re going to discover, as we get toward the end of Galatians, the action of living by faith, doesn’t mean we

continue to live rebellious lives and that's OK... Righteous living – faithful living, is living by the Spirit...

And this is the wonder/joy, of living as a disciple of Jesus – we don't **rely** on our keeping of the Law to be saved – by faith we rely on Jesus.... But do you know what happens then??? The beauty of the Law becomes real and evident in our lives... It's not a curse of being unattainable – the righteousness of Christ in us, makes us better. And as we live with Christ (by faith), His character becomes our character, and what a glorious thing that is...

Let's pray:

Oh Heavenly Father, it is with sorrow,
that we realise that we are the ones responsible,
for the crucifixion of Your beautiful Son.
He who is Holy, became cursed, as He hung on the tree,
to save us from the curse of the Law –
that curse we could never break ourselves.

Oh Lord,
please forgive us,
for the times when we have tried to **rely** on works of the
Law to save us.
...and all the while, we are cursing ourselves more...

Praise be to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

You have broken the curse that held us captive.
You were nailed to the cross;
hung up on the tree to die;
to save us...

Oh Lord, what a love;
what a gift;
what a sacrifice...

We praise You, Lord Jesus Christ,
that You make us righteous by Your shed blood.

And we rejoice that You live again.
You overcame the curse, with Your wondrous blessing;
You overcame death with Your eternal life;
You conquered sin with Your holy righteousness.

Ah Lord,
We praise You.
Thank You Jesus,
Amen.