

SERMON THEME: THE GOSPEL MATTERS

SERMON TITLE: HOLD FAST TO THE TRUE GOSPEL: SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR BY MS HO-YEE MINYI

SERMON TEXT: GALATIANS 1:1-10 (NIV)

¹Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— ²and all the brothers and sisters with me, ³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

⁶I 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— ⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! ¹⁰Am 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.

PROLOGUE

- Aim of this sermon theme is to discover why the gospel matters.
 - Because it is of and from God
 - So that we will not be led astray
 - Because we are to please God and not man
- Galatians is an (apologetic) epistle written by Paul to the Galatian church:
 - Apologetic = Defence of the faith.
 - To address the issue of false teachings.
 - Reminding the church to hold fast to the true gospel.
- As a nation, Singaporeans are capable of hustling hard for our needs and wants.
 - What would it look like if we fought just as hard for the Gospel, which has both present and eternal implications?
 - Today's sermon will show us how we can hustle hard for the gospel.

A. CONTEXT OF THE GALATIAN CHURCH

- Paul left the Galatian church after laying down its foundation.
- Soon after, false teachers (Judaizers and extreme Jewish factions) and teachings have infiltrated the church.
- They taught a false gospel – mixture of law and grace.
 - Gentile Christians had to submit to Jewish laws and traditions *in addition* to believing in Christ to be fully righteous.
 - **This is a direct contradiction to Christianity as Paul had taught.**
- With the alarming contradiction in mind, why do the Galatians take heed to the false teachings?
 - The first converts and early Christians in Galatia were Jewish Christians struggling with a dual identity.


- Being Jewish:
 - ~ It was a national identity.
 - ~ This constrained them to following the law (teachings of the Torah).
- Believing in Christ:
 - ~ Depart from the law to enjoy a holy freedom of not being legalistic (closely following a moral law instead of having a personal faith).
 - ~ They had never known this freedom in their lives.
- Hence, when a false teaching arose that straddled both Judaism and Christianity, they accepted it readily.
 - The false teaching appealed to them as it addressed the struggles these early Christians faced.
 - It sounded relatable and appealed to their national identity, a familiarity that existed since birth.
- Thus, Paul wrote the epistle (letter) of Galatians to **defend the truth of the Gospel** by:
 - Refuting the Judaizers.
 - Calling believers back to the True Gospel.

B. WHY IS THE GOSPEL WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

1. Hold fast to the True Gospel because it is of and from God (v1-2)
 - Paul skipped the traditional greetings (benediction, thanksgiving and pray) in his letter to the Galatians because this is such an important issue.
 - The Judaizers were discrediting Paul's position and authority as an apostle.
 - This has a direct implication on the Gospel.
 - Hence, Paul defends the Gospel by **defending his apostolic authority** (v1):
 - He has a divine Sender → God (Road to Damascus)
 - Apostle = An envoy/delegate sent to carry a message/enact a mission *on behalf of another*.
 - The term "apostle" calls for direct attention *that there is a "sender"*.
 - This placed emphasis that Paul derived his apostolic authority from God, a divine source.
 - This defense establishes that:
 - I. Paul is answerable to God only.
 - Since Paul is answerable only to God, he would not be concerned with changing up the gospel to please the people, as the Judaizers had accused him of.
 - II. God is the divine source of the Gospel unlike other false gospels.
 - Paul defends the Gospel and his apostolic authority through **the shared testimony of a Christian community** (v2):
 - His message is not his own invention.
 - It is a shared testimony, of a larger Christian community, including the apostles.
 - Paul's teachings were in accordance with the other apostles, who were firsthand witnesses of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection.
 - Divinity of the Gospel is thus verified.
 - In defending and establishing his apostolic authority, Paul is ensuring that the believers realizes and acknowledge his authenticity, and not be led astray by the false teachers.
 - In order to know *what is false*, in order to know what are *the half-truths or twisted truths*, we first need to know *what is TRUE*.

2. Hold fast to the true Gospel because we may not be lead astray (v6-9)

- “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and what almost right.” Charles Spurgeon.
 - Recall example of consuming chicken rice locally vs in other countries.
- There is only *ONE TRUE GOSPEL*.
 - A “**different gospel** which is really **no gospel** at all”
 - A subtle twisting of the truth is more difficult to spot than an outright lie; a masquerading of what is **almost true as true**.
 - Emphasizes on the importance of knowing and understanding the True Gospel well.
- False teachings vs True Gospel:

| Judaizers’ false teachings | True Gospel |
|---|---|
|  | |
| <p><u>BAD NEWS (Perversion):</u> Faith in Christ. Jesus finished work on the cross.</p> <p>Jewish laws and customs. (Dependent on human effort and adherence to law). Salvation becomes a reward and not a gift.</p> | <p><u>GOOD NEWS:</u> Faith in Christ. Jesus’ finished work on the cross. Salvation is a gift of God’s grace. (Not dependent on human effort)</p> |

- The Judaizers twisted and undermined the true Gospel by:
 - Pointing out that Jesus’ finished work on the cross is insufficient.
 - Moving grace back into law, and abandoning liberty for legalism.
 - In Greek, the term ‘perversion’ = ‘to reverse’, which is what the Judaizers had done in AD48.
- There is false gospel in our current day world as well (AD2023):
 - Rejection of core beliefs like sin and salvation.
 - Low view of Christ – Jesus is a moral teacher and not divine.
 - Moralism – being a good person is enough.
 - Believing in Jesus is not the only way to God; everyone goes to heaven.
 - The Bible is not inerrant (incapable of mistakes) or infallible.
 - Not believing in the virgin birth.
 - Not believing in the Trinity.
- False teachers (heresies) have existed since the start of Jesus’ ministry.
 - Over the years, they may have been through name changes and rebranding.
 - Christians must stay alert to spotting these false teachings.
 - Hence, the church set out the core beliefs of the Christian faith in a creed.
- The Christian creeds:
 - Provide a correct doctrinal statement of faith among Christians.
 - Drawn up at times of conflict about doctrine.
 - The acceptance or rejection of the Christian creeds serves to differentiate the believers from the heretics.

- The Nicene creed is one often used in churches.
 - The only TRUE and RELIABLE ecumenical (universal, united) statement of the Christian faith.
 - It is accepted by the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodoxy, the Church of the East and the Protestants.
 - It was adopted in AD 381 to refute heresies.
 - Passed down for 1642 years, unaltered, except for translations.
 - What we believe in today is the same as what the early Church believed in.
 - This provides authenticity to our beliefs, gives us basis in identifying heresies and how to refute the false teachings.
 - We must recognize the consequences of heresies.
 - False teachings are consequential.
 - False teachers are destructive, and they can lead us astray.
 - ~ They can be difficult to identify (v8).
 - 2 Cor 11: 13-15 Satan masquerades as an angel of light.
 - ~ Be on guard and be discerning.
 - Severe judgement of false teachers ("Under God's curse").
 - Paul invoked divine judgement on false teachers twice v8-9.
 - In Greek, the phrase 'be under God's curse' = 'to be devoted to destruction'.
 - It refers to the most severe kind of divine judgement and damnation.
 - *"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves."* - 2 Peter 2:1.
 - This echoes the judgement mentioned in Galatians.
 - Keeping in mind the consequences of heresies, we must then know that:
 - *Entertaining* false teachers and false teachings exposes ourselves to great harm.
 - It is not errant to listen to and understand what the false teachings are about, but *we must stand firm and never to believe in them.*
 - Paul is warning the people of God to have nothing to do with it.
 - Have a discerning mind.
 - Untruths can be mixed into the truths that we read/hear from Christian articles and podcasts.
 - Compare what you are hearing with the truth of the Bible.
 - We must have a personal experience of reading the Bible, to explore and understand the true Gospel for ourselves.
 - Only then can we have the knowledge to discern and stay guard.
3. **Hold fast to the True Gospel because we are to please God and not man (V10)**
- Paul's example showed clearly of his integrity as an apostle of Christ.
 - A faithful messenger who did not compromise the integrity of the Gospel.
 - He was not an unreliable speaker who spoke for the sake of winning them over.
 - However, he was mindful too of the need to preserve interpersonal relationships.
 - Sometimes, a decision has to be made when it comes to the preservation of the Gospel.

- Not timid about causing offence for the sake of preserving the truth of the Gospel.
 - He spoke the truth in the context where it was needed.
- Disciplined the Galatians out of love.
- Paul understood that being a people-pleaser is incompatible with being a reliable servant of Christ.
- His heart's desire was to honor God.
- What does this mean for us?
 - Paul's own example challenges us to remember that,
 - In every encounter,
In every decision,
In every intervention,
There is *One whom we must please*,
There is *One to whom we, as Christ's servants, are answerable*.
- The Gospel is worth fighting for.
 - We are not only saved for an eternal life – “The Gospel and us; We are saved for a *relationship* with God.”
 - As we would hustle for the things of our daily living on this earth, we should hustle hard to preserve, study, and pass on the True Gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have the Scriptures spoken to you personally before? If so, how?
2. What are some false doctrines you've come across and how do they differ from the true Gospel?
3. How can you "fight for the Gospel" in your daily life?