

SERMON THEME: THE GOSPEL MATTER

SERMON TITLE: GOSPEL FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY BY PR RUFUS CHAN

SERMON TEXT: GALATIANS 2:1-10 (ESV)

¹Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

³But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

⁴Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.

⁷On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸(for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

¹⁰Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

PROLOGUE

- After hearing about (i) why the Gospel is something worth fighting for, and (ii) the source and legitimacy of Paul's apostolic authority and teachings, Galatians 2 delves deeper into the scripture – (iii) Gospel freedom from slavery.
- The term “slavery” here, refers not to the physical act of being a slave, but of enslavement to:
 - Legalistic expectations on a believer.
 - Confusion over faith and works.
 - Contention to the heart of the Gospel.
- In the book of Galatians, we follow to see that Jesus' work/sacrifice on the cross:
 - Broke down barriers between God and His creation.
 - Unites people of all backgrounds and erases the divisions that separates us (Gal 3:28).
 - Despite what Jesus' sacrifice on the cross sought to accomplish (abolishment of the laws and gospel of faith), the sentiments of division persisted.

A. ATTACKS ON THE GOSPEL AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

- There surfaced **2 major attacks** on the truth of the Gospel:
 - Confusion over the issue of circumcision (Genesis 17:10, 12; Romans 2:28-29).
 - In the Old Testament, God commanded for all males to be circumcised as a mark of the covenant between God and man.
 - Circumcision signifies the physical commitment by the people to be set apart from the rest of the world, for the Lord.
 - Jesus came and abolished the law of circumcision and established a new covenant – a true Christian will experience an inner circumcision of the heart.

- *The fight now is not against flesh, but in spiritual warfare.*
- Contention against Paul's mission to the Gentiles.
 - There exist intense discrimination and prejudice against the Gentiles in those days, evidenced in the book of Acts (Acts 22:21-22, 27-28).
- The **ramifications** as a result of these confusion and contention:
 - There was a great sense of disunity and schism among the early Christian community.
 - V4-5 – Brothers are more like enemies, with action described as *"spy/infiltrate/sneak in under false pretence"*.
 - Today, we face schisms in the form of:
 - Disagreements on doctrinal interpretations.
 - Worship practices.
 - Ethical issues or social matters.
 - There was also a sense of inequality and a false construct of superiority.
 - This could arise due to:
 - The first come first serve basis – that the Jews first worshipped God, therefore God would favour them over the Gentiles, hence the Jews felt a need to impose Jewish customs on the Gentiles to create a distinction between these two groups of believers within the church.
 - The people remembering that Israel was the chosen nation *but* left out the fact that they were the chosen ones *TO BE A LIGHT* to the nations – **they were to be missionaries to the other nations.**
 - In Jesus Christ, there is no such distinction – Paul taught that salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ alone (v6), *we are all sinners in need of salvation.*
 - The extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles also fulfils a promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3; that through him, *all nations on the earth will be blessed* – This promise was fulfilled through Jesus.

B. MAIN UNDERLYING DISPUTE IN THEOLOGY – FAITH VS WORKS

- It is important to know and understand how salvation is obtained, and the role of human efforts in the process.
 - *"Ever since Paul's time, the enemies of grace have been trying to add something to the simple Gospel of the grace of God. They tell us that a man is saved by faith in Christ plus something – good works, the Ten Commandments, baptism, church membership, religious ritual – and Paul makes it clear that these teachers are wrong."* – Warren Wiersbe.
- Paul believes and teaches the theology of *"sola fide"* (Latin) = "faith alone"
 - It emphasizes that justification, or being declared righteous before God, comes solely through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from any works or human effort.
 - Salvation is not achieved through human works or adherence through religious rituals but is received only by grace through faith (Gal 2:16).
 - Example of baptism in showing the order of faith – work.
 - Baptism is an/a:
 - ~ *Event arising from a decision, it is not a point of salvation.*
 - ~ Important sacrament that signifies a believer's union with Christ, with participation in His death and resurrection, and the reception of God's grace into our lives.

- ~ Commandment with Jesus setting the example of baptism.
- It is widely agreed that baptism is *an event of importance and prominence* in the life of a believer – it is a symbolic act of obedience in following Jesus.
- Firstly, having faith in Jesus = point of salvation, then comes the decision of baptism – the celebration and outward expression of the inward faith.
 - ~ If a believer were to receive Jesus as his/her personal Saviour, but dies before baptism can happen, he/she will still be received in heaven, because *the point of salvation has happened*.
 - ~ Because Jesus had set the example of baptism, baptism is important for us too – hence it follows that after the point of salvation, there will come the decision of baptism (similar to a couple first falling in love, then having the event of marriage to celebrate and announce to the world of their union).
- *“Faith precedes baptism and is operative in baptism. So we are justified at the very first act of genuine saving faith in Christ, and then baptism follows, and preferably would follow soon, as an outward expression of that inward reality.”* – John Piper.
- FAITH HAPPENS FIRST, THEN WORKS FOLLOW.

C. OVERCOMING SLAVERY AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

- After exploring and understanding all these, we must recognize that we can be enslaved by many things of our times as well.
 - Rituals and traditions that we hold on to, because it has been a long-standing practice.
 - Conforming to legalistic and excessive moral expectations.
 - All these can weigh us down, causing disunity, confusion, and contention.
 - We can overcome these with 3 actions.
1. Constantly Seek Unity in first recognizing the Marks of Unity.
 - Recognize diverse callings (v7).
 - God calls people to different ministries and to different places.
 - We are preaching the same Gospel, building the Church.
 - There is no competition within the community of believers (just like how Peter lets Paul continue his ministry, as the Lord leads him).
 - Realize that it is the same God at work (v8).
 - God’s work is not limited to a specific places or group of people, it is a unified work through various places and groups of people (like how Peter and Paul ministers to distinctively different audiences – Peter to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles).
 - Unity and equality is important to all believers of Christ.
 - There may be many diverse roles and assignments within the church, but the ultimate source of authority and empowerment comes from the same God (just like the case for Peter and Paul).
 - Reach out “the right hand of fellowship” (v9).
 - We need to focus on collaboration – encouraging and supporting each other.
 - Just as the apostles “gave the right hand of fellowship”, meaning that they were:
 - Expressing their solidarity with Paul.
 - Affirming their shared mission of spreading the message of salvation through Jesus.
 - Demonstrating their willingness to work together.

- Embracing each other as fellow labourers in the ministry.
 - “The right hand of fellowship” is a:
 - Powerful symbol of unity and acceptance among the early Christian leaders.
 - Highlights the importance of mutual support and encouragement in advancing the Gospel message.
2. Find Liberty from the Cross.
- The Gospel message is that we can do nothing to ensure our salvation, and *it is only from the cross that we find liberty* from sins and other requirements from our lives.
 - “Without preaching the cross to ourselves all day and every day, we will very quickly revert to faith plus works as the ground of our salvation.” – Alistair Begg.
 - If you believe truly in Jesus and the salvation He brings, then by this simple faith in Him, you are saved and have eternal life.
3. Find Freedom for the Poor.
- This is the impact and outflow of true Gospel freedom.
 - “Think of freedom coming in two flavors, two kinds of freedom. There is freedom from external constraints, somebody telling me what to do. This is freedom from. But there is another kind of freedom that might be called freedom for. There’s the freedom for living the kind of life I was made to live, freedom for becoming that man I most want to be – freedom for.” – John Ortberg.
 - God loves you the way you are, and God also loves you so much to leave you the way you are.
 - He wants to give you a grander purpose in life, as a result of the freedom that you have found in Christ (Gal 5:13).
 - While the Pillars of the Church had nothing to add to the Gospel that Paul was preaching, they did ask one thing of him – *to remember the poor* – something that Paul was eager to do.
 - In the context of Galatians, “the poor” refers to those who are materially or physically poor, due to the ongoing famine.
 - With the impact of the Gospel in mind, it can also refer to those who are “spiritually poor”.
 - We are called to love God and others, hence while we find *our personal freedom from* the cross, we *also find freedom for* those who are poor physically and spiritually (Gal 5:6).

D. CONCLUSION

- When Paul emphasizes on the primacy of love as “*sola fide*”, he also teaches that genuine faith will result in a transformed life and good works (Ephesians 2:8).
 - The works are seen as a result of salvation and a response to God’s grace, not as a means to salvation.
 - Good works *does not lead* to salvation, good works *follows* salvation.
- We see a crucial aspect of the Gospel from today’s passage:
 - The True Gospel sets us free from the chains of religious obligations and human efforts.
 - We are no longer bound by the works of laws but are solely justified by faith in Christ.
 - **This Gospel Freedom extends to all who believes.**
 - We possess a simple Gospel, and our lives serves as a testimony for all in this simple Gospel.
 - True Gospel Freedom from slavery is a freedom from all these complications, requirements, expectations, and conditions that we add on to ourselves.

- Let us:
 - Find freedom from the slavery of playing religion, competitions, comparisons, conflicts.
 - Rejoice in this Simple Gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How have you experienced the freedom of the Gospel in your life? What do you think are some things that hinder (or enslave) us from experiencing it fully?

2. Have you ever unintentionally placed unessential expectations (e.g. legalism, traditions, performance-drive faith etc) on yourself or others? Share how one should or can refocus on the simplicity and freedom of the Gospel.

3. In light of the freedom you have in Christ, how can you extend grace and love to those around you in practical ways?