

## The faithfulness of God

Acts 19: 11-20

Hebrews 9:1-15

Hebrews 9:16- 10:10

Responsive Reading Psalm 116 1-8

This morning we are going to pick back up where we left off, which we find Paul in Ephesus. Turn with me to chapter 19, of Acts. By way of a bit of review let's start in verse 1, and read to verse 20. Last time we were here, we focused on the 12 disciples, who having a form of belief in God through the ministry of John the Baptist had not yet received the Spirit, but as we saw in the first few verses of chapter 19, Paul preached Christ crucified to them, pointing them to him, the one who came after John the Baptist of whom he had spoken of. Then upon hearing of this, it says verse 5, "And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."

Last time we looked at this passage we spoke mostly of these 12 men, and how in them we see an example of a sort of false belief, a belief in God not unto salvation. It would appear that in their understanding they were relying on their baptism by John as to be the catalyst for their faith, and it is as with any reliance on anything other than God himself that it will produce a sort of nominal belief, a mental and verbal assent to God without truly having the new birth and the spirit. God does not want a following of good, moral, law abiding citizens in his kingdom, if he did...he would have chosen the Pharisees and others who claimed to follow the law. But that is not the point, baptism is not the point, not even making a decision to follow Christ is the point....it is an issue of the heart, it goes deeper than mere assent or belief, it becomes an intrinsic part of who we are in the new birth. You do not only believe, but God has made you a new creature, who now has the mind of Christ, and a heart to love and to serve him. Not because it gains you any merit, but purely out of a deep longing and desire to please him.

This is the danger of the gospel not rightly preached, if it is not presented as God being the one who saves, and instead focuses upon the individual's own ability to decide, or if it is based around ritual, such as church attendance, baptism, or even communion, as a form of justification then that ministry is also at risk of creating such false disciples who are relying upon their own decision, or some ritual practice as their justification. The Jews relied upon the law as their justification, Even King David understood this otherwise he would not have wrote in Psalm 40, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire; My ears you have opened, Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, Behold, I come in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, oh my God. And your law is within my heart."

King David, the New Covenant theologian...I say that tongue in cheek, but the reality is that David understood that it was not these things that justified a man before God, but it was deeper than that, there was more to it than a mental assent of God's existence and some ritual practice to cover sin. Last week, Paul was here and he is walking us through the sacrifices, their meanings and purposes. They indeed had a purpose, and were instituted by God, but it was less about the sacrifices themselves as it was to serve as a constant reminder of our sinful nature, God's wrath and judgment upon that sin and to point to the one who would come and give of himself once and for all, to be the perfect sin offering, the lamb without blemish, for as Paul wrote in Hebrews that we read this morning, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin."

So if the offerings that were offered in the old covenant could not take away sin, what point was there in practicing them? Paul answered that in the previous verse, verse 3 of chapter 10, "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year." The point here being, relying upon such things as your justification is putting your trust in the reminders, in the shadows, in the things that were meant to point to Christ, instead of relying on Christ as your justification, and redemption. That is the whole point of the Paul's letter to the Galatians. If you remember when we studied that a few years ago, there was a group of Judiazers who had come into the Galatian churches who were bringing in law, and traditions and teaching that they were necessary for true faith. And Paul's point in his letter to them, is that it isn't Christ plus the law, or Christ plus rituals and traditions...but it is only Christ himself, alone who justifies, who sanctifies. As the quote goes, "Christ plus anything equals nothing."

Yes, that is right...I am challenging you this morning, stripping away everything that mankind trusts in to attempt to be right before God. The reality is that we do not bring anything to this equation, it is not Christ+our faith, for even our faith is not our own but a gift given to us by him. We did not have it to exercise, to believe until it was given to us. It is not Christ+ our good works, for even our good works are given to us, for it says, in Ephesians 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, in other words it is he who has worked upon us, it is he who has created us, who has redeemed us, and who is working in and through us, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Our good works do not bring us merit or justification before God...for it is he who has created us in the new birth to do them, for we are created in the new birth, through Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Yes, so even your good works.....are Gods, they are not your merit, they are God working through you...not you working to gain favor. This was the law, God said, Do these things and I will bless you....and the law proved that mankind is incapable of pleasing God through good works, but justification and salvation is this...believe upon me, and I will make you a new creature created in Christ for good works which will glorify my name, which I have prepared before hand for you to do. The law says, Do this...but in salvation God says, I will do this for you. We bring nothing to God in this equation, these 12 men in Ephesus were relying upon their baptism...but it was not their baptism which saved them, it was God through the Holy Spirit opening their eyes to see Jesus so that they may believe and become new creatures, who no longer serve to gain merit, but serve because of love for their savior.

The law mindset is slavery, and to put yourself under it for sanctification, is to see God as a task master, a harsh ruler who punishes those who do not measure up. But the faith of God is freedom, we are not slaves who work and strive because we are afraid of the lash and punishment, but rather we are children who work because we love the father and desire to please him. The Christian service, the good works that flow out of the heart of one who has become a new creature serves as a sort of proof of the faith, and works to build up and edify one another in the church having the mind of Christ, preferring one another over oneself. As the book of James says, "What does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" I think that this is a very relevant question for our Christian society today, there seem to be many who claim faith...but do not have the works, or the fruits of the Holy Spirit. James continues and answers that question.

"If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled but you do not have them the things which are needed for the body what does it profit? Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead. A mere claim of a belief in God is meaningless if there are not works of faith which stand as a proof of the spirit working.

In scripture there is no such thing as the term carnal Christian that likes to get passed around in describing believers who look no different than the world around them. No, according to the word of God..a carnal christian, is no christian at all..but rather at worst, and impostor, and at best self deceived. Which is why Paul in his closing to his letter to the Corinthians writes, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” The Spirit witness to you in comfort and peace that you are indeed the fathers. Is there conviction of sin? Do you run to God in prayer desperately asking forgiveness when sin has been revealed to you? And the beauty of it, is that though we may sin, though we may at times stray from the fold of God....the good shepherd will always gather his sheep back to himself.

For as God has promised his people, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” Those who are in the hands of the father will not be lost, and how could they be? For those that are his, are those he has chosen, and are those he works through to love, and to do his good works, for his good pleasure. Laws, lists, and regulations are not needed for those who are lead by the Spirit of God, for God has implanted the perfect law of liberty, the law of love, his own Son Jesus Christ upon the heart of the believer who can do no other but praise and worship him through witness, and good works. God does not save his children to set them free to their own devices without guidance, he is intrinsically involved in the lives of each and everyone of them, working in them, and through them. The holy spirit ministers to us, love, and compassion, peace, and joy, but also conviction, so that we may flee from our sin and be forgiven. And it is through this conviction of the Holy Spirit that God chastens us, scolds us, corrects us as his children.

For as Paul wrote to the Hebrews, quoting Proverbs, “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him; for whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives. IF you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without this chastening, this correction from God, of which all have become partakers...meaning, for God's children, a time of correction is a part of this Christian walk...all who are children of God, will have experienced it...but if you are without it, if it is something that you have not experienced then Paul says in verse 8 of chapter 12. “You are illegitimate and not sons.” But that correction from God isn't a mere punishment, Paul here is getting at something greater, for it is a chastening with purpose verse 11, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.”

This is another sign of the spirits work within the life of the believer, God's chastening, conviction, and the suffering through the feeling of guilt and separation that the sin we have harbored brings. But it isn't a mere punishment for failure, like a task master but it is like the punishment of a father to his own child, a father who loves his child with the intent to teach, and to cause the child to grow and learn. This is how we know that we are his, the chastisement of the father, and the works that he has per-ordained that we do in him. But the wonderful thing is, if we are faithful to confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive...and he does not merely forgive as we forgive, but he the holy, mighty, and gracious God forgives perfectly, fully, and completely and he says, he will remember our sin's no more.

That is why Paul can write in Roman's 8, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” In other words, the law stands to condemn, as Paul cause it...it is the law of death, and it is God's perfect law which is perfect in its design, to point to Christ and our need of a savior...that mankind can not work their way into God's favor through law keeping, but instead it is by the spirit that brings life.

All stand condemned before God, except those who are the called according to his purpose and Glory, All stand condemned before God except those who have been given the Spirit of life. In the last portion that we are looking at today in acts 19, we see a record of unusual miracles that God had worked through Paul. Verse 12 says, that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from Paul to the sick and the diseases left and the evil spirits went out of them. It is amazing what God was doing through Paul, but the miracles are not the point, it was the spirit, and God's ministry through Paul that is the point. The true and greatest miracle is the new birth, for the new birth is bringing life to a soul that is dead. We must remember the words of Paul in chapter 8 of Roman's when we think on the miraculous, those who walk according to the flesh, who focus upon the physical realm, are condemned, but life is in the Spirit. There is more to these healings, and casting out of demon's then the mere physicality of it...there is a spiritual element which is the point. We get a sense of that in the following verses, there is a spiritual warfare that is being waged over the souls of mankind.

Starting in verse 13, we get the account of Jewish exorcists, who seeing the power of Jesus through Paul trying to themselves harness the power of God, without themselves being of God. Verse 15 says, the evil spirit answered them saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them and prevailed against them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded." These men, not having the Holy Spirit, had no power over the demon....and that is the point. The only way to overcome Satan and his minions is through Jesus Christ. And even such an event caused the word of God to spread even more...and brought conviction and fear of the power of Jesus as we see in the following verses, "This event became known to all the Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus, and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

That is the purpose, that is the point of the miraculous, it is not a sign of faith as some may preach today, the ability to perform so called miracles has nothing to do with your quote unquote, level of faith, signs and miracles are not a measuring stick by which we measure our faith ....they were given so that Jesus maybe magnified...period, That was their purpose, they were given so that his name may be glorified among the people, so that his word, the gospel may be heard by all peoples. Again this focus upon the miraculous and the ability to perform them is a focus upon the flesh, it is the appearance of a thing, rather than the thing itself. It is the same error as those who appeal to the law for sanctification, a focus upon fleshly reform, an outward showing and signs and miracles, a mere focus on either brings nothing more then condemnation and death.

The reality, is there is nothing more miraculous then the new birth, and the forgiveness of sin. That God, who is Just and Holy....2 attributes that we do not focus enough on I think...God's justice, meaning that sin must be paid for, it is a rebellion and an affront to God in the highest order. The true darkness of sin, is not the act, it is not the thing that is said or done, but it is the heart that turns from the things of God, that is the core of sin, its is a desire for the fleshly things as opposed to the spiritual things. Sin is first committed in the heart before any action is given, and that sin must be paid for, for it is a direct rebellion against the one who created us.

But that is the good news of the gospel is it not? That our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ, and those who are his...those who walk according to the spirit of God, there is no condemnation..there is no judgment, for God's righteous judgment has been satisfied by the death of his own Son on the cross. Yes, while we are still in this body we wrestle with sin, yes, even succumb to it for the flesh is weak....yet God is faithful to forgive, and not only does he forgive...it is not like we forgive and yet still retain the memory of wrongs, For as far as the east is from the west....something that never touches and will never come together, that distance that is infinite and untouchable... 4

That is how far God has removed our sin. And he remembers it no more, its as if it has never existed. Wow, what a glorious promise, is there any such better gift then God telling you that he will not remember your sins. This is why those who are his, who are in the spirit there is no condemnation...for God has forgiven, and forgotten, put it aside as if it had never happened.

Are you struggling with sin and conviction today? Give it to God, who wipes it away, who takes it from us and removes it utterly and completely. He does not hold it against us, to those who are his children he is gracious, merciful, and kind...AS Jim has said, God knew what he bought when he bought us...he knew who he was getting, and he chose you, he loves you, and he has adopted you as his sons and daughters. There is nothing sweeter then to be loved by this God, who is infinitely more powerful, and just and holy, who by his own infinite grace as allowed us to become a part of him. That is the true treasure, it is Christ who is for us. We have all these preachers telling us to believe and have faith and God will give us our every desire, the car, the house, the job....but what are those things? Have we not been given infinitely more? Is not the forgiveness of sin, and being reconciled to our father greater then all of these? In giving us the new birth, God has given us all, for we are now inheritors of a greater kingdom, one that never fades.

Honestly what more could we ask for? We have been given the greatest gift but even then, though God has given his children the forgiveness of sin, having reconciled us to himself, and given us the spirit so that we may know, we may believe, and we may walk with him...he still yet lavishes upon us blessings, he still provides for our needs, he still grants us our wants, not only is God infinitely more gracious and merciful and loving, he is also infinitely more giving in his provision for us. There is no other like God, Think this morning of the blessings he has given you, praise him for the mercy he has given you this week as you have fallen short of where you should be, though you may not have loved as you ought, or you got caught up in sinful thoughts and desires, he yet loves you, forgives you, and calls you to him. Is there anything more blessed? Is there anyone more worthy of praise and worship!

I want to close out this morning, with this thought, How God has loved us, given us all things through his Son, though we were sinners, and despisers, and an enemy of God. While we were in such a state he yet loved us, though we hated him, he yet called us, though we despised him, he saved us to be with him, giving us a heart able to love, and eyes able to see, and a mind able to understand the things of God. In closing, I just want to read Psalm 8, let us worship our God along with David as we read his words this morning. "Oh Lord, our Lord, How excellent is your name in all the earth, who have set your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have ordained strength, because of your enemies, that you may silence the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained. What is man that you are mindful of him....God has done, and created all of these great things...we are seemingly insignificant, a minuscule blip in time and space...yet God is mindful, yet God knows you, and yet God loves you. "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower then the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands, you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen even the beast of the field and the birds of the air and the fish that pass through the paths of the sea. Oh Lord, our Lord, How excellent is your name in all the earth!