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Third Sunday after Pentecost

St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL

3:23

Whose Gospel Is It?

Galatians 1:11-24

- A. *It is God's gospel.*
- B. *It is your gospel.*
- C. *It is the world's gospel.*

Imagine being twenty-eight years old and working in your dream career. Even better, imagine being in your dream career and accomplishing something for which you will be remembered for by your peers and others forever. Now imagine this great achievement being stolen from you. This is exactly what happened a little over a week ago when a young man pitching for the Detroit Tigers by the name of Armando Galarraga technically pitched, not only a no hitter but a perfect game! I say technically because though the last play of the game was in reality an out the umpire called the runner safe thus negating both the perfect game and the no hitter.

True the umpire after the game saw the play on video and realized he made the wrong call but it was too late: nothing could fix the mistake. Sometimes in life you have but a single opportunity to get it right. If you make the wrong decision you can do untold harm, and in the baseball illustration there are times when you cannot go back to fix your mistake.

Saint Paul was exactly in this position when an error arose in the territory of Galatia. He had but a single chance to address the problem and get it right. What was at stake was not just an honor or something special to remember but what was at stake was the very salvation of individual souls and the integrity of the gospel itself. In short the very existence of the church was at stake in a very real and powerful way.

What did Paul do? Not only did Paul correctly address and correct the problem but he did so so clearly and powerfully that he actually condemned to hell itself those who disagreed with him. Furthermore, his defense of the truth was so clear and bold that fifteen centuries later a little German monk by the name of Martin Luther used Paul's own words to once again defend the truth of the gospel and the existence of the church.

How did Paul do this? Why was Paul so incredibly confident about his theology? How could he be so bold so as to say that anyone who disagreed with him would forever be an enemy of God, Himself and excluded from heaven for all eternity?

Paul could act so bold not because he was arrogant or closed minded or confrontational but rather Paul was so bold because the message he preached was not his own, it was given to him from God Himself. Paul knew what he was preaching and teaching was right, knowable and clear because God revealed it to him as so. **"I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."** (verses 11-12).

Paul was preaching a message of his own in the sense that he believed it through and through but it was a message that he did not make up or create on his own. Paul knew that when he was preaching about Jesus he was preaching the very heart and words of God. As such there was no room for doubt of any kind and certainly there was no room for compromise.

How do you feel when the time comes when someone asks you a question about God or heaven and hell? Do you relish the opportunity to speak the truth because you know God's word or do you dread these situations because you do not want to say the wrong thing or have a debate begin?

We are rarely given a chance are we? Sometimes people in our presence will say something like all religions in the end really teach the same old thing: a bunch of rules and regulations one needs to perform to get right with God and live forever. We know such a belief is not only false but deadly. What do we do? God would have us speak the truth and point out that Jesus said He was the only way to heaven--all others fail. Sometimes people will act in such a way that is completely contrary to how God would have us live. Sometimes people get in the wrong relationships or they do the wrong things and more than anything else what they need to hear is the truth.

Paul faced such issues every day in his ministry. To the people of Galatia, there was a misunderstanding and a false teaching about how one gets right with God and into heaven. Paul defended the truth of the Gospel. In Corinth people were living in gross, manifest sin, Paul did not shrink from or overlook such sin but dealt with it head on

even having some members of the church at Corinth excommunicated. Do we need to relearn this lesson and truth ourselves today? After all there are times in our lives when someone will say something or do something and it calls for a response, a witness to the gospel. A call has to be made and many times we get but a single opportunity or chance. If we get it right much good can come about; if we blow it or get it wrong the greatest dangers can result.

What we are reminded of today is that the gospel of Christ is no mere knowledge or facts but rather it is a truth that radically changes one's heart, mind, and life. This was certainly the case with Saint Paul. **"For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."** (verses 13-14). Paul speaks of all this in the past, his past because the gospel of Jesus changed this Paul into the opposite. Paul was now no longer a man self confident in his own supposed righteousness and purity but he was now transformed into a person who viewed himself as the greatest of sinners but one fully redeemed and chosen by Christ to have eternal life. Yes, the gospel was Paul's very own: it was in every fiber, every breath, every thought every action. Paul was a man of God.

Listen to how Paul spoke. Twice in the book of Romans alone Paul even calls the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, as "my gospel." (see Romans 2:16 and 16:25.) In the last letter Paul wrote, 2 Timothy, Paul has this to say: **"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."** (2 Timothy 2:8-10).

The result of this in Paul's life was that living in the gospel wasn't a hardship or a burden or something that had to be forced but rather it was something natural and even easy. This is exactly what Jesus promised when He said: **"My yoke is easy and my burden is light."** (Matthew 11:30). Paul's life was radically changed by Christ and it affected absolutely everything Paul did. Because Paul was a radically different person he changed the world around him. This is exactly what God planned for Paul and it is what God plans for us too. Indeed the Gospel is for the whole world.

Paul makes this so plain in today's text. Why did God call Paul? Why did God take this man and so radically transform him? In his own words Paul says: **"when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus."**

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me." (Galatians 1:15-24).

The Gospel of Jesus which gives life and comfort is first and foremost God's gospel. Because of this it is something greater than ourselves and something we can be completely confident in and bold to proclaim to others. This gospel is ours by faith and it changes us radically. But this gospel is not just for us alone but for the whole world.

In each major league baseball game there are four umpires: one at each of the bases. They are where they are purposely and specifically. They are there to make the right call. By God's grace you are where you are in your life because that is exactly where God wants you to be. You have the gospel, God's gospel and when it is yours you can and will do tremendous things. You will confront sin and you will witness to the truth.