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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 30, 2019
3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 17:17-24, Luke 7:11-17
Hymns: 26; 777; 779; 38:4 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Galatians 1:11-24

¹¹ But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. ¹⁴ And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

²¹ Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea

which *were* in Christ. ²³ But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried* to destroy.” ²⁴ And they glorified God in me (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Calling the Dead to Life:

In both our Old Testament lesson and in our Gospel lesson we heard how such a wonder took place. In 1 Kings we read of the Prophet Elijah who was so struck with the grief of the kind widow who was providing for him that Elijah turned to the Lord in fervent prayer and the widow’s son was returned to life by the power of God. The widow recognized that it was God, the God of Israel who had performed this wonder, and she knew that this was the God whose message was true and powerful to save!

In our gospel lesson from Luke chapter 7 we learned of how Jesus also had compassion on a widow who was destitute and grief-stricken at the death of her only son. Jesus commanded the dead man to arise. Dead men don’t respond to commands. They can’t. They are dead! But at Jesus’ command the young man sat up and began to talk to those around him. The power and the authority of Jesus’ Word brings life to the dead.

How does that relate to Paul’s words to the Galatians in our text? This is a continuation of last week’s text which focused on the gospel being God’s message for the world. And yes, already last week we discussed how this was not Paul’s message, but God’s, and so it was to be respected as the only message that saves.

This is where we pick up the message. As we consider how it was that Paul came to possess this message we will be brought to a deeper appreciation of how this is --

THEME: A Gospel that is Powerful to Save.

We will consider

I. Paul as a Case Study for the Grace of God.

In our text Paul reminds the Galatian Christians of where he was spiritually before he was called to faith.

Galatians 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. ¹⁴ And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Paul was better known in those days as Saul of Tarsus. He was a Pharisee extraordinaire! He led the persecution against Christ believers. He arrested them for blasphemy, for they believed and confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. Saul had both men and women imprisoned and even condemned to death by stoning! He was zealous in this pursuit, convinced that he was doing the God of Israel a great service!

He was so strict in his observance not only of Mosaic Law but of the tradition of the fathers, all that claptrap that was added on to the law in the Talmud, that he was secure in his own righteousness. He was an "All Star" Pharisee.

Saul of Tarsus was a **dead** man; he was dead **spiritually**. He was as dead as dead can be. I hope you understand dead. Dead means you can't do anything. All those things that Saul was so proud of were nothing. In fact they were less than nothing. Instead of the righteousness Saul imagined them to be they were trespasses and sins. Indeed they were sins enough to make Saul in his own

estimation the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) rather than the chief among the righteous which Saul had imagined himself to be. He was dead and totally unable to change that. He was unable to respond to anything. And then Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus.

There was nothing **within** Saul, there was nothing **about** Saul that would warrant anything positive from the Lord. This was all about grace. Grace is God's **undeserved** kindness. The point right here is that Saul was clearly undeserving of God's kindness. But is it any different with you? What did Paul write in his epistle to the Ephesians?

Ephesians 2:1-2 "And **you** ... were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which **you** once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."

That wasn't only Saul of Tarsus, and the heathens of Ephesus and Galatia, but that describes all of natural mankind. That describes you and me! Dead as dead can be! Oh, we didn't perceive ourselves as being spiritually dead, but we were as dead as Saul, as dead as any other heathen people in this world. Yes, I know that many of us were brought into the kingdom of God's grace as infants through baptism, but that doesn't change the nature of unregenerate man. Our old adam **still** clings to thoughts of self-righteousness.

There is only one way that one can be brought to life. One must be--

II. Called by God's Gospel.

Again Paul reminds the Galatian Christians of how this came about in his life.

Galatians 1:15-17 "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might

preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”

Remembering that while Paul is here continuing his defense of his apostleship, we are drawing lessons from his words regarding the power of God’s gospel to save, to bring someone dead to life; called to spiritual life.

With Saul as with all of us, it happened in God’s time, “*when it pleased God*” (v.15) but even though that came later in Saul’s life it is a fulfillment of God’s grace determined by God much earlier. Paul writes that he was separated from the time when he was in his mother’s womb. That means that God had chosen Paul to be His own, and that before he was born. God knew him, and called Saul of Tarsus to life from spiritual death. The reality of Jesus’ majesty as Lord and God was made clear to Saul on the road to Damascus. The grace of God came to Saul through a Christ-believer named Ananias in the city of Damascus three days later, who came and announced forgiveness to Saul, and baptized him for the remission of his sins.

And so the grace and power of God’s Gospel in Christ Jesus has come to you and me and made us alive. Paul wrote of this to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus

In the great love of God in Christ, in the great grace of God in Christ, in that power of the Gospel we have been made alive. We were called to faith by the gospel, that we might believe the gospel. Paul wrote to the Romans that

the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, Jew and Gentile, (Romans 1:16) be that Saul of Tarsus, or Ted of Austin.

For Saul it was life changing, which it is of course for us all, for we who were dead are alive in Christ. However, Saul was called to be the Lord's Apostle, a special messenger of God's grace to the Gentiles. Saul was directed away from human instruction out into Arabia, where he was instructed for three years by the Lord. And then he returned again to Damascus. His authority didn't come from Peter, or other elders of the church in Jerusalem. It came directly and solely from Christ Jesus.

We have **not** been called by the Spirit to be apostles. However we have been called to be God's own special people who are eager to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

III. To God All Praise and Glory.

Paul summarizes the remaining portion of his early apostleship with these words:

Galatians 1:21-24 "Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. ²³But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God in me"

Saul did exactly what Jesus had called him to do. He was traveling about the country testifying to the wonder of the gospel of Christ as our Crucified and Risen Savior. He didn't do this where the other apostles were conducting their ministries. In fact the churches of Judea didn't see him during this time. But they heard reports of what was going on. They heard that this man known as Saul of Tarsus who had persecuted the Church was now

preaching the very same gospel he had previously tried to destroy.

And they glorified God! The Christian world glorified God for the miracle of grace He had performed in Saul. They must have marveled, I mean really marveled at this turn of events! Who would have even imagined such a thing could be possible!

Remember our Savior's words. "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) The glory is God's and the power of His gospel to save.

We need to understand this truth **about** ourselves and **for** ourselves. First let us never ever forget that we are what we are because of the grace of God in the gospel. It is by the power of the Gospel that God has instilled life in our cold, **dead** hearts. It is to God's glory **alone** that we know and believe in Jesus and have life. We are alive in Jesus' name.

Finally, we need to grow in our attitude towards the power of the gospel when it comes to calling others from spiritual death to spiritual life. We are inclined to think that this or that person we know is pretty entrenched in their thinking and we are not going to change their minds by talking about Jesus. Is it possible for anyone to be more entrenched in wrong thinking than Saul of Tarsus? And yet the gospel was powerful to save him, and call him to life in Christ Jesus! Give God the glory due Him, and understand that we cannot fathom the greatness of God's grace and power to save in the gospel. Keep on sharing that gospel, and you will glorify God for the salvation He brings to people who were dead in their trespasses and sins. By God's grace we have been entrusted with **A Gospel that is Powerful to Save!**

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.