

English Communion Sermon - Faith And Love

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Date: 25 August 2019

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[0 : 00] We can turn back to the passage we read, Galatians chapter 5, and we can read again at verse 6.

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

We can read about the commencement of the churches in Galatia in the book of Acts, where Luke describes Paul's first missionary journey.

And as you read Luke's account, we would imagine that there are great days ahead.

Churches were commenced in the main cities of Galatia, and things seemed to be going well.

[1 : 41] Paul and Barnabas, they went back to Antioch and gave a report of how marvelous had been the commencement of the gospel in that previously pagan community.

Yet, despite the good start, within a short time, Paul had to write this letter to them.

This is the first of his letters, and it is a very hard-hitting one. Indeed, it could be described as the hardest-hitting of his letters.

And the fact that he is so strong in his rebukes of the Galatians indicates that their particular error was very serious.

And what was their error? Well, basically, it can be summarized as they added something to Jesus.

[3 : 05] After Paul and Barnabas had been in the area of Galatia, several other Jewish teachers came from the church in Jerusalem.

And they basically said to the Galatians, what Paul and Barnabas have told you is a good start, but it's not enough to continue.

In order to continue as good followers of Christ, they said you have to adopt Jewish practices.

Many of the new converts in Galatia, of course, were Gentiles. And it would be hard for them to resist a group of people with some kind of authority who were speaking to them with the Old Testament in their hands.

And they were saying to these new converts, you have to adopt circumcision and all the other external Jewish rights.

[4 : 37] We might think about that. Well, what's wrong with that? After all, doing this might have kept the Jewish converts happy.

And in a certain sense, life would just go on. A continuation from what had been done in the synagogues before Paul and Barnabas came to Galatia.

But this seemingly innocuous addition, Paul said, was a denial of the faith.

It wasn't a harmless practice because it meant that the Galatians were now sharing salvation with Jesus and their own activities.

The sign that they were Christians, according to them, was no longer faith. But it was faith plus these different extras.

[5 : 59] I suppose we're not liable to add the Jewish rights to our outlook.

But it is very easy to add something to Jesus. And that can be anything. It can just be our personal preferences.

What I, as an individual, think is good. But if I start insisting that others adopt it, I am getting close to a Jesus plus something.

And as Paul indicates here, that's not the Christian life. He tells us what the Christian life is.

It's faith working through love. The Christian life comes from the inside, not from the outside.

[7 : 08] The Jewish rituals were just sticking things on to the outside. But that is not the Christian life.

The Christian life flows from the inside. Now, no doubt when Paul says here, faith working through love, he's thinking of life in general.

And indeed, in the rest of the chapter, he goes on to speak about, for example, down in verse 14, that the whole law is fulfilled in one word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But we would make a mistake if we limit faith working through love to how we behave in our daily lives.

It's very important that we realize that whatever is not of faith is sin. And we interact with people as believers.

[8 : 15] And as believers, everything must flow from love. But it's not just our interactions with other people that are defined as by faith working through love.

So also are our church activities. Whatever we do, it has to be an expression of faith working through love.

And as we sit here together at the Lord's table, we can only do it. do it properly if it's faith working by love.

I mean, obviously, by faith, Paul has in mind faith in Jesus. And also, I think, when he talks about love, it's love for Jesus primarily.

And after that, it extends to others. So as we sit here together at the Lord's table, this is an activity that's to be full of faith as well as one of love.

[9 : 31] There is a danger that we just focus on the outward. And obviously, it is important for us to look at what's going on.

But we also have to do it properly from our hearts. So I just want us to think briefly, what does it mean to be sitting here having faith, working through love?

Why do we love Jesus? Well, the Apostle John gives us the answer to that question, doesn't he? He says that we love him because he first loved us. What does John mean by first?

Does he mean that he only loved them just before they start to love him? Well, we know the answer to that question.

[10 : 46] The astonishing thing about the love of Jesus is that it had no beginning. However far back we want to go, and all we can say is that before creation, he loved us.

Before creation, there's no time. Time begins with creation. And all we can say is that before the universe appeared, Jesus always loved us.

And of course, that's extraordinary, isn't it? Because it means that throughout his entire beginningless existence, existence, because he had no beginning.

Throughout it all, he loved us. There's never been a moment when he didn't love us. there didn't come a time when he decided to love us.

He always did. And of course, that is an amazing stimulation for loving him, that he loved us knowing who we would be.

[12 : 13] and that's extraordinary. We also love him because of what's said about him in his word.

That's where we find out information about him. And faith always believes facts. I mean, faith is never a leap into the dark.

If anything, it's a jump into the light. But, in his word, Jesus reveals himself.

What's the Bible about? Well, that's the wrong question. Who's the Bible about? And that's the question. And the Bible is about Jesus.

I mean, he went to, I was going to say great pains, but that's not the right word. But he went to some effort to remind his disciples that was the case.

[13 : 31] We can think of the two on the way to Emmaus who, in Luke chapter 24, who were very downcast.

They were downcast because Jesus had died. But if they had listened to the scriptures, that would not have been a reason for being downcast.

And Jesus himself took them through the law and the prophets, pointing out to them that what happened to him on the previous couple of days, it was all in the Bible.

And, of course, we're told about them that their hearts burned within them as they listened to what the scriptures had to say about Jesus. And, later on that resurrection day, when he met the disciples in the upper room, where they were gathered in fear, his remedy for their dilemma was to tell them that the law and the prophets and the Psalms spoke about him.

So, the Old Testament, that's what he was speaking about, it describes who Jesus is and what he did.

[15 : 06] And, surely that becomes a stimulant to our love. love. We take down the Bible and we discover it's a love letter.

Often, we regard the Bible, don't we, as a manual. It's a manual for identifying what's right or wrong. A bit like the way we treat a car engine when it breaks down. And, of course, the Bible is that. But, it's not primarily that.

The Bible is about Jesus, who he is and what he did. And, as we feed ourselves on that, we discover, don't we, that our faith increases because our love increases.

Faith works by love. And, the deeper our love for Jesus, the more energetic will our faith be.

[16 : 29] So, I would just like us to think briefly about the different ways that Jesus has revealed in the Bible in order to help us love him and, therefore, have faith in him.

What kind of Savior do we need? well, we need a divine Savior, don't we?

The mess that we are in, the mess brought about by our own sins, our failure to do what we were made to do, to live for God.

We can't rescue ourselves. I can have as many resolutions as I want. None of them will help me rescue myself.

And, that goes for all of us. And, even if all of us combine together to try to rescue one of us, we'll fail as far as spiritual recovery is concerned.

[17 : 51] We need help from outside us. We need help from someone who's far bigger than us. We need help from someone who can do what is impossible for anyone else to do.

And, only a divine Savior could deliver us from our sins. And, it's wonderful to read about how the eternal Son of God became a man.

We go to Bethlehem and we see the entrance of the Divine Son into our lives, into our world. And, what other response can we have but love?

He's doing this for us. He's made this incredible journey, not a journey measured in miles, but a journey in which He, the Divine Son, also becomes a man without ceasing to be God.

And, as Paul says elsewhere, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh. and as we look at Him and we realize He's coming for us, we are so delighted that we have a divine Savior, one who is fully God, as well as being a real man.

[19 : 31] So, He's come, and He's in our world, and as He comes into our world, we see that He's a very diligent Savior.

He didn't just become the Savior when He went to the cross. I mean, the angels told the shepherds, unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.

And, His whole life was part of His saving work. life. And, why did He have to have perfect life?

And, when we think of His perfect life, we can only say it was exceptionally diligent, because His perfect life included every thought, every word, every action.

And, that requires great diligence. I mean, part of my problem, and I'm sure part of your problem, is often we don't watch what we say.

[20 : 47] That was never said about Jesus. He always said what was right. And, when we extend that to His thoughts, well, our thoughts, they're all over the place, that was never the case with Jesus.

And, His actions, He always did what was right. so, He was exceptionally diligent. But, why was He so diligent?

Well, one reason was He had to offer a perfect sacrifice. We're familiar with, we heard last night, of the Passover, and the importance of the Lamb being perfect.

What would disqualify Jesus from being the sacrifice? one wrong thought. That would be enough to disqualify.

But, the amazing thing is, He never had any wrong thoughts. He always did what was right, thought what was right, in each situation. And, even when He was brought to the cross, and the soldiers were nailing the nails into His hands, feet, He had to have the right thought at that moment.

[22 : 19] And, what was the right thought at that moment? It was to say, Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing. He had to be perfect continually in order to offer up Himself without spot to God.

And, He did. And, therefore, we love Him for being so careful as He made His way through this world full of traps.

grace. And, every inch, He watched it in order to offer up Himself without spot to God.

And, at the same time, He had to live a perfect life in order to give us righteousness. We're familiar with His life being described as a robe, a robe of righteousness.

Well, every thread in it had to be perfect. And, that perfect life, when we believe in Him, it becomes ours, as much ours as His.

[23 : 41] Isn't that extraordinary? It's our standing in the sight of God, when we believe in Jesus. His perfect life, His righteousness is reckoned to our account, and it's flawless.

And, we love Him for that, don't we? The reason you and I can sit at this table today is because we are wearing that robe. And, our behavior in the past week, whatever it is, or was, hasn't affected that robe.

And, here we are, clothed in His righteousness, and we love Him for that. And, therefore, our faith should be more energetic.

He took. We also love Him because He's a dead Savior.

Savior. And, that's an extraordinary statement. We love going to Calvary and seeing a dead Savior.

[25 : 02] His death is the most incredible thing in the world because He's the author of life. We are the victims of death.

He wasn't. Death had no claim on Him. And, in the Bible, we are invited repeatedly to look at that dead Savior.

There was a movement in Scotland a long time ago where the spiritual movement were those who were supporting it insisted on saying, Christ is dead for you.

And, we have to look at the dead Christ. And, we go to Isaiah 53, and we go to Psalm 22, and we go to the Gospels, and all the other places where His death is detailed.

world, and we love to gaze at it because the reason why He is dead, or one reason why He is dead, is because He loved us.

[26 : 22] We don't just admire Him as He breathes. we admire Him when He has no breath, and we just look at Him hanging on the cross, and to everybody else it looked as if the whole thing was finished.

And, there was no hope, and even the disciples thought that. But, we should know better because the Bible tells us that when He died, He became dead for us.

That was our sins, of course. The wages of sin is death. But, He paid them, and we look at Him on the cross, and we see Him, the one who paid our debts, and we love Him.

And then, after that, His resurrection, what an amazing event. It's not the first resurrection.

Others have been raised before Him, but His is the best resurrection. Because when He rose from the dead, He defeated death.

[27 : 48] death. When death tried to take a hold of Jesus, it discovered a power that it couldn't master.

Death has defeated every other power, but with Jesus, all it showed was His weakness. because in contrast to Him, He's invincible.

And not even the awesome, awful power of death could keep Him. When we go to the garden of Joseph of Adimathea, Admitia, and we love what happened there.

Because there on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. And our faith in a conquering Savior, it is energized.

eyes. And since then, well, what dignity He has.

[29 : 10] We sang about it in the two Psalms that we sang already. There in Psalm 24, but the one who can ascend the hill of the Lord, the perfect Savior.

And we sang about it in Psalm 21. who's given this crown that He'll wear forever. And although we can't see it with our physical eyes, in the Bible we can see His ascension and His exaltation.

And we can join with the hosts of heaven and watch Him entering in to the world of glory.

And we hear Him going there and we hear the Father saying to Him, sit at my right hand until I make all your enemies your footstool.

And we just look at that surely and we say, what dignity? Who has ever risen to such heights? God's throne.

[30 : 23] In fact, He can get no higher because the place He's invited to sit on is God's throne, His own throne.

But He's now there differently because He's gone there as one who's not just God but also man. God's power.

And as I'm sure we've all heard about Rabbi Duncan saying that the dust of the earth is on the throne of the universe. And it gives us great delight to know that He's there because He deserves it. When He was here on earth, He did the impossible. He carried our sins away. And because He did that incredible performance there, Calvary and what a disturbing experience it was for Him as He made His way through the cross step by step.

And we looking at Calvary and we look at the throne and we say that because of what He did on the cross, He deserves to be on the throne.

[31 : 52] and we admire His dignity. And I'm sure there was great joy in heaven when the heavenly Father said to Him, sit at my right hand and there wouldn't be anyone there expressing any reservation about that at all.

But instead, the heavenly host with great enthusiasm would have celebrated the event. And so should we.

We love Him because He's number one. and His exaltation is great.

And we rejoice and have faith that that's the case. But He hasn't gone up there just to sit. If He was diligent when He was on earth, He is still exceptionally diligent.

And in the 2,000 years that have passed since He went there, He has never had an idle moment. Throughout it all, He's been the prophet and the priest and the king of His people.

[33 : 18] And how many has He looked after at every second of these 2,000 years? All we have to do is think of ourselves and what is required in looking after us as individuals.

His constant attention, even when we're not aware of it. The most active person on our behalf today has been Jesus.

And that will be the case throughout our lives. He's still the servant of the Lord. And as Isaiah said, God speaking to Isaiah said, Behold my servant.

He shall be exalted and made very high. And what a servant He is. And in all these 2,000 years, helping all these millions and millions of His people, He has never made one mistake.

They've made plenty, but He's never made one. And we love Him for that. All our mistakes don't decrease His love.

[34 : 48] And therefore, all our mistakes shouldn't decrease our love. Because He deals with them. And mercy flows from heaven.

And the day is coming, of course, when this marvelous Savior is going to decorate all of us.

What's our future? life. And if we turn to Matthew 25, we discover it. And there in this parable of the sheep and the goats, we're standing there before Jesus and His throne.

And what kind of things is He going to bring up as we are standing there? well, no doubt He'll bring up everything.

But He Himself, in that chapter, chooses to highlight, I suppose, what He wants to bring up. And what He brings up on that occasion will be little things.

[36 : 12] Extraordinary little things. things. You visited me. You did this, you did that. And He took note of it.

And because of His great desire to reward us, and not because we have done anything that deserves a reward, reward, but because of His great desire to reward us, we're going to be decorated with glory.

We're going to be like Him. And we love Him for that. What is our future?

Well, the day is coming when we shall be like Him. for we shall see Him as He is. And the sight of the glorified Christ is going to transform us.

I suppose it's a little bit like being out in the sun and we get a suntan. We're changed. Except the suntans we get in this life disappear.

[37 : 36] But in the world of glory, when the sun of righteousness shines, we will be changed and glorified. And what a sight that will be, won't it?

Everyone sitting around us at the table today is going to be glorified. God's will be going to look at the world. And whether they look at the world today, the day is coming when they will.

And they will all be like Jesus and like Him forever. What an amazing prospect. And we love Him for that, don't we?

And our faith, faith, it increases. Faith is basically trust based on knowledge. And what knowledge we have of Jesus and His loving intentions.

And therefore our faith should work by love. And the last thing I want to say at this stage is this. we've got a delightful Savior.

[38 : 54] There are many heroes of history, but the one thing that seems to mark all of them is their unapproachability.

All their heroic acts, although they put them above us, they put us, them at a distance from us. And the people at the times in which they lived could never say about their heroes, we know them. All they could say about them was, we know about them. But when it comes to Jesus, we know Him.

we have a personal relationship with Him. And although He's been highly exalted, He's still our friend.

In fact, our names are on His heart, the breastplate of the high priest of old, and our names are on His shoulders, the hearts, a place of affection, and the shoulders is a place of strength.

[40 : 15] And all His affections, and all His power, are constantly being used on our behalf. And the day is coming, I suppose, when we'll be told just how much He did.

love Him. But anyway, as we're sitting here at the Lord's table, we love Him, and our faith should be an exercise, trusting Him that He who has taken us this far will take us not just to the end of this journey, but will take us through eternity.

And what a prospect that is. shall we engage in prayer? Lord, we give thanks that we can trust in Jesus.

What an amazing privilege that is. We had no right for that, no claim to have it. We deserve the opposite.

yet in your amazing grace, you provided your Son to be the one that we could lean on, depend on, follow, trust.

[41 : 42] The one who can be our master, our example, the one who is our deliverer. And we thank you that these and many more aspects of them are described in your word.

Lord, and we pray that we would find Jesus walking through its pages into our hearts. So do that, Lord, we pray, for your own name's sake.

Amen. Amen. Well, as we come to the fencing of the table, I just want to say a couple of things. it's important to remember that the Lord's table is for sinners.

There's no Lord's Supper in heaven. The Lord's Supper just lasts for life on earth. In heaven, there's a marriage supper.

[43 : 00] It's not the Lord's Supper. So it's important to remember that we are sinners. It's also important to remember that there's never been a perfect Lord's Supper.

And every one that's ever been held, since it's sinners who are at it, it is inevitable that somewhere sin will show itself.

But the real test, I suppose, is what do we do when sin comes along? Or I should say, when the consciousness of sin comes along.

sin will sin will sin will sin will sin will sin will sin will sin will sin will be. Maybe you've got a response like this. How could I have done that?

Or how could I have said that? Well, the answer is obvious. we do it or say it because we're sinners.

[44 : 20] But when we say such a thing, it's really an expression of pride. How could I do that?

Well, that's what I'm liable to do. Instead, when we sin, we should say to the Lord, surely, forgive me.

When somebody else sins, and of course, we have to point out people's mistakes in a loving manner, but we should never do so without reminding them of divine forgiveness.

sin, to think of sin without forgiveness is not the Christian way of life.

We should always ask God that whenever we sin, that he reminds us of his pardon. God multiplies to pardon.

[45 : 44] That's what he desires. So, whenever we sin, God wants us to confess it. Not to demean ourselves, although it is demeaning.

we do it to obtain pardon. So, a mark of those who should come to the table is that they confess their sins, not reluctantly, but gladly.

Obviously with a sense of shame, sin, but glad that the blood of Jesus always cleanses from sin. As far as the blood is concerned, we can never commit one sin too many. His people are covered. Who else should take part in the Lord's Supper? Well, those who know their weakness.

[47 : 14] We are weak. There's no doubt about that as far as the spiritual life is concerned. and it's not something to be embarrassed about.

Indeed, we're told that it is when we are weak that's when we're strong. We can't do anything without grace.

We never take a step forward in a Christian life without it. We can't do anything without grace. I can have as many intentions to do something on any given day, but if I try and do them without grace, I won't do them.

I need a strength always. And it's good that the Psalms tell us, for example, that God is our present tense, our refuge, and our strength.

God is our strength. And we're told to be strong in the Lord, not in anything else. So those who recognize their weakness and go to God for ongoing strength, they should come to the table because the Lord's Supper is a means of grace for strengthening.

[48 : 53] What else marks those who come to the table? They love God's promises. Our faith is connected to God's promises.

What he has said that he will do. And as Peter says, all his promises are yes and amen in Christ. Nowhere does it say in the Bible that God only gives us 90% of the promises. If I fail to use the promises, it's my fault.

These promises are there for lots of reasons. They're arguments to use in prayer, for example. But they're also there to comfort us and to cheer us on our journey through this world.

Lord. So if we love the promises of God and feed our souls on them, then the Lord's table is a good place for us.

[50 : 14] The last thing I would mention is that those who should come to the Lord's table are people who are Jesus only. I wonder what the Lord's supper was like in Galatia, where all of them were trying to be something.

Which one of them had added the most Jewish rituals to their lifestyle? And it all became a mere external exhibition.

But was Jesus there? I don't think he was. We have to be Jesus only.

And if that's who we are, we should be at the Lord's table. And if we're the opposite of the things I've just mentioned, then the Lord's table is not for us.

If we leave our sins unforgiven, and if we don't go to God for strength, and if we don't value the promises, and if we don't think Jesus is enough, then why would we want to come to the table?

[51 : 46] So, may we do so as we sing the following verses from Psalm 22. Psalm 22 verses 25 to 27.

Come sing Psalms. You are the theme of all my praise within the great assembly, Lord.

Before all those who fear your name, I will fulfill my solemn word. We'll sing verses 25 to 27.

verse 25. You are the theme of all my praise, within the great assembly, Lord.

Before all those who fear your name, I will fulfill my solemn word.

[53 : 08] The poor will eat and will be filled, and those who seek the Lord will give.

A shout of joyful praise to him, O he of hearts forever live.

The whole earth will remember him, and turn towards the Lord their God.

All peoples will bow down to him, and will remember him, will remember him, will