*Such A Deal:*

Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

“A Miss Is As Good As A Mile”

June 1, 1937. “Millie” Earhart, about to turn forty, flies out of Miami for California, the long way: Caribbean, Atlantic, Africa, India, Australia, into New Guinea to refuel. 22,000 miles down. 7,000 to go.

July 2. Amelia’s Lockheed Electra 10E departs New Guinea but ditches in the Pacific maybe 35 miles from land. Experience, guts, good intentions let her down. Oh, for a jigger more of fuel and a tailwind.

*The Letter of the Law*

Paul stoutly contends that performance-based religion may *seem* right but misses its target by a mile. Written circa A.D. 48 to Christ’s early followers in Galatia (Turkey), this letter has a largely unexplained back story which we’ll tip-toe into today. **But first let’s read Galatians 1:1-24 (p. 408, Message).**

**DISCUSS: Why is Paul so hacked at these “Turkeys?” How would you react to this letter if you’d been on the receiving end?**

*One Gospel At A Time, Please*

From Day 1 God’s desire is for you to know and trust Him. First, He speaks our universe into being (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6). Then on a tiny space-rock in the Milky Way, in a Babylonian garden He forms Adam to be Earth’s caretaker. No gospel (“good news”) needed since here God and man walk and talk *together*!

But Adam, having no TV remote, is lonely. So God gives him Eve whose very name implies that tomorrow is playtime. (Ahh, paradise has it all. Except clothes.) But the First Couple disobeys God and does the only no-no. Blessed with a perfect world, ya know, was one bite short of enough (Genesis 2:18-3:7).

**DISCUSS: Why would God let anything spoil heaven-on-Earth?**

What goes on in Eden can’t stay there. So, A&E “leaf” the garden, losing intimacy with their Creator. But God’s compassion would not leave them (and us) hopeless, so He vows to defeat evil and forgive mankind’s sins forever, based on a sinless Sacrifice-to-come (Genesis 3:13-15; Romans 5:12-19).

His Son’s sacrificial death and resurrection now gives us better access to the Ruler of the Universe than Eden v.1 ever did.

Eve’s #2 son Abel obeys God by sacrificing an animal. His *offering* doesn’t “save” him from sin’s penalty; his *faith* in responding to **God’s “progressively revealed gospel”** does (Genesis 4:1-5; Hebrews 10:1-18, 11:1-4).

Then God hands Moses ten laws, not to *save* us all from sin, but to show us that as sinners we need a Savior (Romans 3:19-20,10:1-10). To be right with God, man had to (a) obey *all* His laws, (b) make animal sacrifices, (c) be circumcised, (d) observe the Sabbath and other feasts and (e) be baptized (Acts 15:1-21). The Jews found it impossible to clear all these holy hurdles. Two thousand years after Moses that Law is at last fulfilled by the only One who could. Jesus, all-God and all-man, comes down and gives His sinless life to pay for your sin and mine.

Were the Law and the rituals wrong? No! Jesus even urges people to respect the Pharisees as they would Moses and to do what they *say*, but not what they *do* (Matthew 23:1-39; Romans 9:31-33). This is the same bunch Jesus had blasted as “*hypocrites”* for doing the right things for the wrong reasons.

**DISCUSS: Why can’t we “walk the talk” either?**

Man’s best intentions to be good and do good always slam into the wall of our sinful humanness, inherited from our First Parents. Who, beside God, can do works that meet His sky-high standard for good? “No one” (Romans 3:10-12). Our only hope to authentically walk our talk is tucked away in this letter’s key verse. **Let’s read Galatians 2:15-21 (p. 410, Message).**

Jesus’ warm-up act, “Baptist” John, preaches **“repent and be baptized to be saved.”** *After* Jesus returns to heaven, Peter, James and John stay with **“believe and be baptized”** (Acts 2:38-41). To be OK with God in that day you had to **repent** of your sins**, be baptized and keep all 10 commandments plus the *mitzvoth (*613 more laws plus 39 acts banned on the Sabbath)**.

Jesus had come to the Jews as their Messiah to fulfill the Law and to set up His reign on earth (Matthew 10:5-7). But despite knowing the Old Testament and seeing Him make wine from water, walk on it, heal, feed crowds from a lad’s lunchbox, and raise the dead, they blow Him off (John 5:39-40; Acts 7:54-8:3).

**DISCUSS: Why didn’t those 1st century religious czars embrace Jesus? How would we act today if He walked among us?**

When the Jews reject Jesus as Messiah, God sets that nation aside for a season and rolls the **next version of His Deal** (John 1:11; Romans 9:30-10:4). To launch it, God radically saves a Pharisee-on-steroids (Acts 9; 1 Timothy 2:6-7).

This Christ-hater has been terrorizing Jesus’ people on a vicious manhunt. God changes his name from Saul to Paul and reveals *only* to him what Paul calls **“my gospel,”** **“the gospel of the grace of God,” “the secret,”** **“the Mystery** kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25-26; 11:32-33; Ephesians 3:1-11).

No longer is total obedience to Moses’ laws a barrier between God and us since Jesus had met the Law’s demands on our behalf. The good news, which Jesus gave to Paul, is that salvation is now *free* to any who accepts it by faith, fully paid for by Christ’s death! No *works* for us to do to earn this indescribable gift (Romans 3:19-31, 4:4-17; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 2:8-23; Titus 3:5-11).

Under **God’s program “for *today*”** His Holy Spirit actually comes to live *in* the believer, and that believer’s life is hidden in Christ. No longer separated from God by fear, distance or darkness, it’s “Christ *in* you” (Colossians 1:21-28; 2:8-17)! And He unequivocally guarantees our permanent position in His care (Romans 8:31-39; Jude 24-25).

**DISCUSS: Anyone ever tell you, “When you said that, you sounded just like your mother then?” It’s like she is living through you. How would your life look if the Savior is expressing His life through yours?**

**This gospel** frees us from rules-keeping and from sin’s power. Our good works are now Holy Spirit-produced, not self-induced (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). In this ***age of grace*** God gives us equal standing as a “co-heir” with His Son “who did no sin” (Romans 8:16-18). As Sarah Young writes in *Dear Jesus*, it’s “not about earning and deserving. It’s about believing and receiving” (Romans 4:18-25).

This ***new* gospel** had never been heard ‘til it comes from Jesus’ lips to Paul’s ears **A*FTER*** Jesus returns to heaven (Ephesians 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:9). Salvation has always come through grace and faith. But in **today’s gospel** God replaces *our* work with *Christ’s* work, leaving us with just **believing.** How could He make it any simpler for you and me to surrender and give Him our trust?

**DISCUSS: With this new peace-giving freedom that God gives us, why do we still insist on working to justify our worth to Him?**

**DISCUSS: If you could ask God, “What do you want from me?’ what do you think He’s say?**

**The Gospel Jesus gave Paul** demands no religious act as a condition to be “accepted by God.” We close the Big Deal with God by **believing** what His Word says to *us* today, not to Adam and Eve, Abel, Moses or to 1st first century Jews. The Bible is consistent, never self-contradicting (2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16-17). We’re now **saved by faith** plus nothing (Ephesians 2:8-9). S=F+N.

Here’s the telling breathalyzer test: false gospels give wrong answers to Jesus’ pivotal question, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:13-17) The cross does not stand between a plus (+) and a minus (-) sign. Nothing is to be added to or taken from what Christ accomplished hanging on that tree for you and me.

**“What must I do to be saved?”** Paul replies, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-13; Hebrew 11:6). Do you believe that? Do you believe God loves you, that Jesus died in your place to pardon your sin? If God’s squeezed enough out of the Faith tube for you to believe that, He’s waiting to hear “God, I do believe. Thank You for saving me.”

He is all the fuel and tailwind we need to land safely in His arms. S=F+N.

Faith + anything else is the miss that’s as good as a mile.

His Deal

September 15 & 22, 2009

www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

Copyright © 2019. George Toles. All Rights Reserved.