

SERMON FOR THE 2nd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 6-23-19 Our Redeemer

Galatians 3:23-29 “Do you get it?”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I like to tell puns. I heard one the other day for cat lovers. “Why don’t we use a kitten symbol to make an apostrophe?” “Because then it would be a catastrophe.” Another favorite of mine: “I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger; then it hit me.” Another: A friend of mine tried to annoy me with bird puns, but I soon realized that toucan play at that game. Sometimes puns are a little difficult to figure out. My brother was always a little slow at getting some of my sick jokes, and sometimes it could be several minutes later and we could hear him say, “Oh, I get it!”

And that is what makes a pun or a joke effective: do you get the punch line? Do you get the word play that makes the pun work? Do you get the little twist that makes a joke funny? You just have to get it if you are to appreciate the humor.

The apostle Paul was having a hard time with the Galatian Christians. They did not seem to get it. However, it was not a punch line that they were having trouble with. No, it was something much more serious. They were struggling with how to approach God. What does the Law do? What is so important about Jesus? There was nothing funny about this problem. The Galatians’ salvation was at stake, and they did not seem to get it. When Paul was first there, in person, they did. But now, later, after he had been gone for awhile, they were getting it all mixed up. No laughing matter here. You either get this right, or you suffer an eternity apart from God.

Of course, it is not just the Galatians that need to get this right. We do too. We need to get it. We need to have it sorted out in our minds, in our lives: what work God’s Law does and what Jesus does when it comes to our salvation.

So what does Paul say about the Law? It holds us prisoner. It locks us up. It supervises us. But it does this, not to be nasty, but to lead us to Christ. Whatever the Law is doing, it is doing so to bring us to the point that we realize we need Jesus.

How? By giving us a clear and definite standard to tell us how we are doing. God’s Law is clear. It is definite.

- Speak a word of profanity, and God’s Law says, “It is wrong.”
- Use God’s name improperly – It is wrong. No set of circumstances can change that fact.
- Fail to worship, and you know you have done wrong.

- Dishonor authority; hurt someone; think lustful thoughts; look at pornography; cheat; lie; want something you should not have – God's Law is clear and definite.
- No way to worm out of it; no way to pass the buck; no other interpretation allowed. God's Law is the standard. The commandments let you know what is right and what is wrong. (I love the billboard that says: "There not called the 10 suggestions. God)

Think of the Law as a brick wall. It is immovable. So also God's Law. What God says goes. No changing it. No getting around it; no loose bricks to play with; either you are in the right, or you are not. God's Law plays no favorites. It treats everyone alike. It simply stands there to tell us whether this thought, that word, a particular thing we have done is acceptable in God's sight or not.

And when we are in the wrong—notice which side of the wall that leaves us on. The wrong side. The side of sin and death and hell. On the other side is God and life and heaven. That is the prison the Law puts us in. It locks us up and surrounds us with walls of accusation

William Wimmer, a pastor of a Church of God congregation in Benton, Arkansas, tells of a time he was traveling at night with his wife and three-year-old son, Micah. They had been traveling on a warm summer evening in the darkness of a rural road, away from the city lights. If you have traveled at night, in the country, you know how many bugs and insects your headlights attract. When they pulled into a rest stop, with all the lights on, little Micah looked at the windshield and said, "How dirty!" The lights showed just how many bugs and critters they had actually hit. Pastor Wimmer did not think much of the comment until they pulled away from the lights of the rest stop. In the darkness, the mess on the windshield wasn't as noticeable, and Micah piped up, "Now the glass is clean!"

Perhaps for awhile we can fool ourselves and think things are "OK." We can think that we are pretty 'clean.' We can try to hide ourselves from what we have done wrong. Keep in the dark, so to speak. **But sooner or later, the Law will do its work.** It will turn the lights on, and we will get it. We will see just how much filth we have collected as we've journeyed down the road of life. It will highlight the true situation of our souls. (Illustrated from Preaching Today.com. Purpose of the Law.) It will show us that we are on the wrong side of the wall. The Law accuses us of sin and judges us 'guilty before God.'

Yes, the Law does its work well. It tells us just what we have done wrong. And it does so with no mercy, no excuses allowed, no freedom given. It simply locks us up

behind a wall of accusation, and holds us prisoner. We cannot get to God's side of the wall by trying to go around it or under it or over it. Live by the Law, try to approach God on the basis of what you have done in your life, and you are left on the wrong side, forever locked up with sin, death, and hell.

Do you get it? Paul writes to the Galatians, and he so wants them, and us, to get it. There is no hope, no future in the Law. Only accusation and prison. Do not go that route when you want to be on God's side of the wall. It does not work. The most you can do is bang your head up against an immovable brick wall.

Yet, the Law does not want to leave us with those accusations and in that prison. Instead, it wants to use those accusations and the realization of our sinfulness to lead us to Christ. *To look for help outside of the Law*

Just a few verses after our text, Paul writes: **"God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."** (Galatians 4:4,5). You see, Jesus is the only One the Law cannot accuse. He came into this world, and kept the Law perfectly. He drove down the road of life without even a single bug to dirty his soul.

- Each day He lived under the same standard that we do.
- Each day the Law showed Him what was right and wrong.
- And each day the Law could not lock Him up. It could not hold Him prisoner.
- There was nothing the Law could do to Him. He was free. No need to escape; he was already on the right side of the wall.

But He would not stay there. He was born to redeem us, to bring us freedom from the Law's prison. So He took all the Law's accusations, the punishment the Law handed out to us, the sin and death and hell on our side of the wall. He took it all on Himself to give us a way out of this mess. And when He did, He broke a hole in this wall for us to march through. He made a door for us to enter into the hope and life and heaven on God's side of the wall. And that door is in the shape of the cross. **Do you get it????!!!!**

The Law shows us our sin. It can show us just where we stand in our sin. It can accuse us and sentence us to death. But most of all it wants to show us that it cannot save us. We need help outside of the Law. Then its work is over, and Jesus takes over. He reaches out to give us faith. He reaches into our lives to pull us through to the other side, to the right side of the wall.

Paul tells the Galatians that when they were baptized into Christ, they put on all He had done for them. And again, there are no favorites. Christ did it all for all. Grace

is for all. Mercy is for everyone. The door is wide open for those in faith to walk through.

- The church is a small congregation in Africa. A child is plunged under water in a local river. The Word is spoken. The door is open. The supervision of the Law is over; and a son/daughter is on the right side of the wall.
- Again, here in this place; parents bring their son/daughter forward in a white dress. Water rolls off the child's forehead. The Word is spoken. The prison doors swing open once again.
- Now we are in a hospital. The man is old, death is only hours away. All his life has been lived on the wrong side of the wall. But now he says he wants to be baptized. So many years spent avoiding the threshold, and now the moment comes. Yes, only for a few hours in this life is he free from the Law's accusations. But he is free, oh, so free, as he walks through that cross-shaped door with Jesus.

Do you get it? Paul so wanted the Galatians to get it. He wrote a letter to this congregation. He poured his heart and soul into getting them back to Jesus and the faith given at their baptism. Do you get it? This is no laughing matter. This is life and death. This is your salvation at stake here. This is being on the right side of the wall. The Law will lock you up. It will hold you prisoner. Only Jesus can bring you through to the other side. Only Jesus. Only Jesus. Do you get it? I hope so. I certainly hope so.
Amen.

(May we get it and may we daily revel in what we have in Jesus!)