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Learning to Live in the Freedom of Christ
An Encounter with Jesus
Galatians 1:11-24
October 19th, Jeff Germo

My first informal training in the construction industry was from my grandfather over thirty years ago. My sister wanted to build a beauty salon in a small town in Alberta and she asked my grandfather if he could build it for her. He wasn't physically strong enough to do all the heavy work so he asked me to be his muscle, and he taught me the basics of building construction. "The first rule", he said is, "Measure twice, cut once." In other words, make sure of your measurement before you cut so you don't waste time and materials. "Both time and materials are costly," he said emphatically.

He asked me to cut several two-by-fours for him, all the same length. I cut one for him and then I used that one to mark my next piece, and I gave him the one that I used as the marker. I used the next piece as a template for the next one and then gave it to him.

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I cut about ten pieces and he asked why the pieces were getting longer each time. And then he noticed what I was doing. He said, "If you are going to use a template you need to mark each piece with the same template because if you don't you will increase the length of the two-by-four by the width of the saw blade each time. That may not seem like much but if you do it ten times you are going to add almost an inch." So, what he told me to do was to measure my first piece, mark it as the template and then always use it as the marker.

This is what was happening in Galatia. They didn't have a building construction problem. Theirs was much more serious. It was a theological problem.

At this point in Christian history Jerusalem was the epicentre of theological and missiological activity. It was where the apostles were headquartered. It was the go-to place if there was ever any problem or misunderstanding in regards to the Christian faith where the experts in Jerusalem would be consulted.

Today, in the world of technology the Silicon Valley in the San Francisco Bay area is on the leading edge for technological advancement. Much of the innovation comes from there. In the first century, in regards to Christian theology, Jerusalem was the place.

If you can remember from the last couple of weeks, we learned that the Judaizers had been trying to get the Gentile Christians to submit to Jewish tradition and Old Testament law, specifically circumcision, dietary laws and special festivals. They had a **Jesus plus law theology**. They were distorting the Gospel of Jesus by diluting it. What they, in essence, told the Galatian Christians was that *they* had the latest theology from Jerusalem, so it overrode Paul's theology.

To try to understand what is happening here we can use a hermeneutical principle called mirroring. What you do, metaphorically, is hold up Paul's argument into a mirror and look at it backwards.

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Paul said in **Galatians 1:11-12 (ESV)**,

¹¹For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

When you read this you have to wonder why he said it. He wasn't just writing things that were on his mind. He was addressing a problem. Somebody, the Judaizers, were accusing him of getting his theology from someone else. It looks like what is happening is that the Judaizers were accusing Paul of getting his theology from Jerusalem, as if it was the theological centre, and that if there were any changes in understanding God, it had to come from there. So, what may have been happening here was that they were telling the Galatian Christians that they had come most recently from Jerusalem and they had a new and improved gospel given the rubber stamp by the apostles. Paul was essentially saying, **"No, I did not get my gospel from Jerusalem.** I got it directly from Jesus, the divine template, the exact representation of God."

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Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Paul is saying that he got his theology directly from Jesus, not from anyone else, not from the other apostles, not from

Jerusalem. He spent time with Jesus. He's not saying that there is anything wrong with learning from other people. We, of course, should. The problem was that if Paul had received his theology from other people it was open to correction, because the "gospel" coming from Jerusalem could be wrong. Over time it could have evolved, and changed little by little.

If, on the other hand, he had received it directly from Jesus it was not open to correction. It was the real deal. Jesus is the true template of the Almighty God.

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Remember the game called telegraph you played when you were a kid. You stood or sat in a line of other kids and the first person whispered something in the ear of the person standing next to them and the next person did the same thing until it got to the last person and they had to say what they heard. And usually, what the last person heard was something totally twisted from what was first whispered.

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That is why **we need to get to know Jesus. That's why we need to read our Bibles for ourselves.** Don't let me spoon-feed you. That is very dangerous. There have been many people who have been led astray because they blindly followed what they were taught. And the leaders discouraged them from reading and interpreting the Bible for themselves. Please read your Bibles.

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One of the reasons that Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the wall of the church in Wittenberg, in the year 1517, almost 500 years ago, was because the church at that time would not allow its members to interpret the Bible for themselves. If I tell you that God has only given authority to me, as your pastor, to interpret the Bible, I can manipulate you in all kinds of ways. That is spiritual abuse.

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One of the tenets in the Baptist doctrine is called **Soul Liberty**. The church is not the authority. The pastor or priest is not the authority. God's Word is, and nobody has the authority to choose for another. And nobody can force another to believe in Jesus.

In the year 313 AD the Emperor Constantine issued a decree called the **Edict of Milan**, which made Christianity the legal religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity was forced on people in the Empire by baptizing their babies and forcing adults to get baptized upon the threat of death. Study church history and you will see what sort of abuse happens when a hierarchy is erected reaching to God and certain people are granted an arbitrary authority to hear from God and interpret Scripture while the average person must blindly obey.

If I went to study theology at seminary but was not allowed to read the Bible for myself that would be spiritual abuse. And if I then took what I learned and taught you, but told you that you had to believe everything I said without argument that too would be spiritual abuse. And I can almost guarantee you that what I learned at seminary and what I taught you would have evolved somewhat.

It is so important that each of us takes the Word of God seriously. I have to learn for myself from God's Word. You must study it for yourself. Do not take my word for it. I am not the authority. Get to know Jesus for yourself.

So, Paul, in our passage tells the Galatian Christians that he did not get his theology from others. **He got it directly from Christ.** And then he goes on to tell his story and how upon meeting Christ on the road to Damascus he had a reorientation of his life. Let's read the rest of the passage together.

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Galatians 1:11-24 (ESV)

¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

You can read about Paul's (Saul at that time) conversion in Acts 9 how he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians when he met the risen Christ. After that meeting everything changed for him, even his name from Saul to Paul.

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¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

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¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in

Christ. ²³They only were hearing it said, “He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

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I want to just point out a couple things here. Firstly, this whole argument is because Paul is trying to establish that his theology is from Jesus and Jesus alone. He spends a lot of energy on this. **“I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem...but, I went to Arabia, and then to Damascus.”** After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus he needed to do some thinking. That’s an understatement. Try to put yourself in his sandals. His whole life had been focused on one thing, rising in the ranks of Judaism. He says that in verse 14.

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¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

That is what his whole life was about. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, he called himself in **Philippians 3:5-6**.

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⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Just think about what kind of paradigm shift this would take. I was talking with someone in the coffee shop the other day about the Gospel and he said, “You know, I have lived all my life believing certain things about God and it’s hard for me to change.”

For Paul it would have been extreme. His whole life, up until his Damascus Road encounter with Jesus, had been about being the best religious Jew possible and even to the point of persecuting Christians and having them killed because he saw them as an enemy of his religion. **And then he met Jesus.** He would need to take some time to rethink his life. So he went to Arabia, where, he apparently spent some more time with Jesus. I would imagine that he restudied the Old Testament Scriptures in light of his Damascus Road encounter. And he likely asked the Spirit of Jesus to teach him. Paul needed quiet time with Jesus to reorient his life.

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What can we learn from that? **In order to change our thinking we need to get quiet with Jesus and let him work on our hearts and minds.** We need to spend time in his word. We need to ask the Spirit of Jesus to teach us.

The second thing that I want to focus on is Paul’s reorientation. Paul was going to Damascus as an enemy of Jesus and the Church. Then he met Jesus and everything changed. It was no longer business as usual. He had a one hundred and eighty degree about face. His life would never be the same again.

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Here’s my next point. **Everyone who has an authentic encounter with Jesus has a reorientation of his or her life.** Everything changes. The things that they once thought important are all of a sudden no longer that significant. They see life and the whole world differently.

I can remember my “Damascus Road” experience. I was raised in a Christian home, but I certainly was not living for the Lord. I really had no idea about the Gospel. I thought it was about rules and do’s and don’ts. I totally rejected that way of religion and went my own way. I was going to live my life and nobody was going to tell me how to do it.

In 1981 I joined a custom harvesting crew and hauled combines all the way from Saskatchewan to southern Texas, near the Gulf of Mexico, and we followed the wheat harvest back up to Canada for the next several months. I was living it up far from God. And then the last town that we ended up in was the town where my family was at that time. We got snowed in and couldn’t finish the harvest so we had to stay there for the winter. I started going to church with my parents and I saw something different in the people in that church. I met Jesus.

I have had many encounters with him since then and each time my life has been reoriented. I could not go on with business as usual. The things that seemed significant to me all of a sudden faded in comparison to knowing Jesus. There was a reorientation, an about face. Jesus became the constant to which I referenced my life. That is what happens when people meet Jesus. There is a reorientation. Things cannot go on as they always have.

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All stories of encounters with Jesus have three main elements.

- 1. My life before Jesus.**
- 2. How I met Jesus?**
- 3. How has Jesus changed my life?**

Everyone who has an authentic encounter with Jesus cannot help but be changed, not because he demands it, but because he exchanges his life for ours and something supernatural happens. In that meeting the direction of your life changes. Your

life was about you until you met Jesus. Then when you met him things changed. You found new purpose and a reason for living.

We have been telling you for the last three Sundays that God is not about religion, and the Christian faith is not about doing certain things and not doing certain other things. It would be easy to come to the conclusion that “if that’s the case I can just do whatever I want. I can live like the devil and then just ask for forgiveness. God is a God of grace. No worries.”

If you think that then you have totally missed the point. The point is that when you meet Jesus he gives you his mind. He begins to strip away those things that used to weigh you down. You begin to lose the attraction you once had to things that weigh you down to the earth. Your goals change. The focus of your life changes. God begins a work in your heart and your mind so that you slowly give way to him, little by little, step by step as you surrender your life to him.

And then as we continue on in our lives as Christ-followers we have more encounters with Jesus along the way. He will lead us to a deeper understanding of him. He will lead us to trust him more fully in every area of our lives. There are still ways that I do not trust God. There are ways that you do not trust God. What the Spirit of Jesus wants to do in our hearts and lives is to lead us to have encounter after encounter with Jesus so that we trust him more completely at each turn of our lives. He does not want us to be settled because we think we know enough theology, or doctrine, or biblical knowledge. He does not want us to be comfortable that we have a head full of knowledge *about* God. What he wants for us is that we would get to know, not just about God, but that we would get to know God through daily, minute by minute encounters with Jesus.

Maybe you are here this morning and you have never had encounter with Jesus like that. Why don’t you call out to him and ask him to meet you where you are at? He never tells us to shape up before he calls us, or before we answer that call. He calls and then asks us to invite him into our dirty dark heart so that he can make it clean.

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Revelation 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

He is knocking. He is the initiator. He wants an encounter. Why not answer?

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Jesus said, in **Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV)**

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

You may look at your life and think that it’s too late for you, that you’ve wasted it and you are beyond hope. Nothing could be further from the truth. Look at Paul. He spent the first part of his life as a religious zealot, trapped by slavery to the law and religiosity. He was so passionate for his religion that he was driven to persecute the followers of Jesus. Then he had his encounter with the risen Christ and everything changed.

My temptation is to look at all the ways that I’ve failed and be filled with shame for the many ways in which I wasted my life focused on the wrong things. Let me tell you something. Legalism, religiosity, and self-righteous attempts to gain favour with God cause shame because we will never measure up to the standards that we or others impose on us. Satan loves to keep us in shame. Shame paralyzes. Jesus frees us to live the life we were created for. God never uses shame. He does not want us to live in the shame of our past. He wants us to have an encounter with Jesus minute by minute, day by day and learn from him what it means to live in the freedom, peace and rest that he won for us on the cross two thousand years ago. Every day Jesus calls us to an encounter with him. Let’s take the time this week to open our eyes, our hearts, and our lives to him.



Galatians: Learning to Live in the Freedom of Christ
An Encounter with Jesus
Galatians 1:11-24
Week of October 19th, 2014

Objective of this study: To see the vast difference between human reason and God's wisdom and the impact that encountering Jesus had on Paul; and to let Jesus change us as well.

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 34:1-8** meditatively to the group. (After each phrase, or paragraph if it's a long passage, pause and let the Lord speak to you before reading the next.)
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

Who is the most famous person you have met? What was it like?

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. This week we want to understand Paul and how encountering Jesus changed his life. As you read these passages think about the following questions: Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-31; Philippians 3:1-11; Galatians 1:11-24.
 1. Describe Paul pre-Jesus. What was he like? What shaped his life? What was he passionate about?
 2. What happened to Paul when he met Jesus? How was he changed? Think of his heart, his passion, his mind, his thinking, his relationships, his actions, his choices, and the results of his life.
 3. Take note of what came from God, God's wisdom and actions, verses that of human origin.
3. Check Galatians 1:11 in the NLT. How are both legalism and antinomianism results of human reasoning?

Work (30 - 40 minutes)

1. Why and how does legalism lead to shame and Jesus lead to freedom?
2. What reason could Paul have had for living in shame? Why didn't he?

"Paul was very religious. His training under Gamaliel was the finest available. His intentions and efforts were sincere. He was a good Pharisee who knew the Bible and sincerely believed that this Christian movement was dangerous to Judaism. Thus, Paul hated the Christian faith and persecuted Christians without mercy." (from the NLT Study Bible)

3. Sermon Quote: **"Just think what kind of paradigm shift this would take... Everyone who has an authentic encounter with Jesus has a reorientation of [their] life...In order to change our thinking we need to get quiet with Jesus and let him work on our hearts and minds. We need to spend time in his Word. We need to ask the Spirit of Jesus to teach us."**
4. What are some things that kept Paul from seeing Jesus before his Damascus Road encounter? What are some things that keep us from daily encountering Jesus?
5. Have you had an encounter with Jesus? If so, take some time to briefly share how Jesus changed your life.
6. What are some things we can do to encounter and walk with Jesus every day?
7. Read Matthew 11:28-30 and Psalm 34:1-8. What is God saying to you through these passages?

PRAYER TIME/HOMEWORK

1. Spend time worship God for his amazing grace through Jesus.
2. Read Galatians again this week at least once more in one sitting.
3. Meditate on verses that God uses to speak powerfully to you, perhaps Matthew 11:28-30, passages from Galatians, or others verses used in the sermon.
4. Journal about what God is showing you.