

Sermon by Chris Moroney at the healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney,

Wednesday 19th July 2006

Reading Galatians 3. Topic: Faith & Blessings

FAITH AND BLESSINGS – Chris Moroney 19th July 2006

Talking about faith

The central meaning of faith is "belief", "trust" or "confidence. Faith can mean believing unconditionally. It can also be accepting as true something that one has been told by someone who is believed to be trustworthy. Faith and blessing go together. If you want to receive the blessing of God, you have to trust God, believe in Him and put your faith in Him. But in order to do that you have to have some basis of faith, some understanding of the God in whom you are putting your faith. Faith is not in itself an end, it is a process, an expression of a relationship. Each person needs to get to know God and be willing to decide that they know enough to trust God with the rest of their lives, to be willing to learn and grow in our understanding of God and love for God and then our faith will be placed in the right person. Our knowledge of God will determine the shape of our faith. Everyone has faith, in something or someone. Christians put their faith and trust in God, through Jesus Christ. The great danger that Paul addresses here in Galatians is that people put their faith in the things that they had done, the rules that they had kept and the ceremonies that they had performed. A similar confidence in the idea of our innate goodness and our basically good character is also rife in our modern society.

Model faith

When Paul is addressing the false teaching in the churches in Galatia, he is very conscious that they have a Jewish mindset. Their Jewish heritage gives them confidence in their ancestry dating back to the person of Abraham. They have received lots of rituals and regulations, which made the people of Israel quite distinctive. It was true that up till the time of Jesus, these rules did apply and should have been followed. But it was also true that for all those who tried to keep them, they would have known that they had failed, time and time again. Because Jesus has come and fulfilled the law by his perfect life, no-one should be trying to get right with God through law keeping anymore. Paul's great point is that even Abraham was not made right with God by keeping all the laws. There were no rituals, regulations or ceremonies for Abraham to perform. All Abraham had was the promises of God. Genesis 12 the promise of great blessing to Abraham, his family and all the nations of the earth, through Abraham. It is this very important part of Israel's history that Paul is referring to when he writes in Galatians 3:1-9. Paul is reminding them of all that has already taken place since they became Christians. They had put their faith in Jesus. They had received the Holy Spirit. God had done miracles in their midst. All that had taken place on the basis of their faith being just the same as Abraham's faith. So, why are they going back on their faith in the word of God about the work of Christ? Why are they trying to impress God with law keeping and ritual? Abraham did not need it. They did not need it.

Under the curse

The false teachers had pressured the Galatian Christians to go through various ceremonies and rituals and put their trust in the things that they had done. To do that says Paul is to be under a curse, condemned by God, facing his wrath and certain judgement. There are many people who feel that they are cursed. Things in their lives are very hard for them. This is indeed part of the curse of sin in the world. Since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden of Eden, this world has been place of hardship and pain and relationship difficulties. We call it a fallen world, characterized by sickness and struggles and sin. Left to our devices, we face the final curse of God, his judgement. So it is no good for us to try harder. Good works salvation is a dead end. If you have been attempting to rescue yourself from your problems by your own devices, then it is time to stop and look to Jesus.

Breaking the sin barrier

When we are under the curse of the law we are estranged from God. But when Christ Jesus came into our world, his purpose was to remove the sin barrier, to bring us back into

relationship with God. In Galatians 3:13 Paul says that *he redeemed us from the curse of the law*. We cannot help ourselves. We all make mistakes and do the wrong thing. We are under the curse of sin, enslaved to the service of the Devil. Only Jesus can break down the barrier and pay the price and set us free from sin, release us from slavery and remove the curse. Jesus became a curse for us. In the very process of being crucified on the cross, Jesus was cursed by God for us. He took the very punishment, the very curse that we deserve. Since he was the innocent and perfect Son of God, he did not deserve to be punished in that way. He was not living under the curse in the same way that we might. But on the cross he took our place and suffered the curse for us. As a result when we put out faith or trust in Jesus we can be set free from the curse of sin and death and judgement. Yes we will still be living in a fallen world. We may still be afflicted by problems, struggles and illnesses. But we will know God's gracious gift of forgiveness and the joy of his friendship. No matter what we have done, no matter what we have failed to do, all can be forgiven by our heavenly Father. Complete forgiveness, acceptance and assurance of his love. Complete confidence of his presence with us.

New Covenant Blessing

Paul draws this theme of promise together by looking back and looking forward. God keeps his promises. We can trust him with our lives, now and into the eternal future. Looking back he refers to Abraham. God would bless the world through Abraham and his family. Even the Gentiles, can put their faith in Jesus, incorporated into the people of God. The blessing of God is his favour, kindness, gift of health, wellbeing and prosperity. It does not mean that we will have a life of luxury when we become Christians, but it does mean that we are going to be so much better off, because looking forward to the New Covenant, with the coming of Jesus, there is the promise of the Holy Spirit. Under the Old Covenant the people of God had the word of God, and they struggled to put it into practice. From time to time the Spirit of God would inspire and equip one of the leaders or prophets to speak the word of God to the people. To Ezekiel and Jeremiah God gave the promise of a better time when he would put his Spirit into people's hearts, in order that they would find it easier to live his way. Ezekiel 36:26-27

That is the great joy of the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is in everyone of us who puts their faith in Jesus. *"that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."* When they came to put their faith in Jesus as the one who died for them and rose again from the dead, they receive the Holy Spirit. How can they now go backwards and put their confidence in the law keeping, their rituals and their good works? Faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. It is that common faith in Jesus, that common experience of the Holy Spirit in us, that unites all Christians together. You cannot have some who put their faith in Jesus alone, others who add on the works of the law and others who add on the Holy Spirit. We are all one in Christ, or we have no part in him at all. It is a great joy to know that you have taken God at his word and put your faith in the most reliable person in the universe. On that basis we can look forward to his blessing in our lives, most of all the blessing of his presence with us day by day, through his most precious Holy Spirit. We can be people of prayerful dependence on God, people of the greatest expectations, because our God is so loving, so powerful and so wonderful. We look forward to what God will do in our lives and through us in the lives of others. We need not fear curses that people may try to put on us. Jesus has set us free. We know that we are his children. We have an eternal inheritance to look forward to and much to live for and to do for God, as he empowers and equips us by his Holy Spirit.