

Explore the Bible: True Life

August 28, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 16 focuses on Galatians 3:1-14.*

Just in case anyone missed last Sunday, consider starting the conversation this week with a discussion about grace. Ask: *What is a good definition of grace? Why is grace so important?* This will allow us a sweeter taste in our mouths before delving into the confrontation of Galatians 3.

As we talk about “True Life” together, we need a healthy understanding of grace as receiving what we did not deserve. No human is guaranteed a good life; each person literally is born into his or her situation. So, to be born into a good quality of life is a real example of grace. However, we need to apply this physical reality to a spiritual truth.

Grace is God’s avenue to true life for humanity. Once we simply receive God’s grace, in particular salvation, the gateway is opened to us to experience something much better than a good life by human standards—a true life, which leaves us in a better place than our sinful lives.

The Spirit Confirms It (Galatians 3:1-5)

Ask your group: *If Paul were your friend, and he walked up to you and said these things directly to you, how would you respond?* Unless we are prepared for such a confrontation, we usually are ready to “go to fists” because these might be “fightin’ words.” But we must not misunderstand Paul’s frustration. He is confronting out of urgent love.

Being foolish here was seen as the Galatians formerly receiving true grace (what they did not deserve), but now trying to live by works (the Law). It makes no sense to accept one thing and then move to another. This is the opposite direction of wisdom. *Why would these people become foolish after formerly being wise?*

One could picture this scenario as being offered a present, opening it, loving it and living with it, only to give it back to the giver to go make your own gift. It just does not make sense. Even more significant is the gift of the Spirit of God. Rejecting grace to follow the Law is the same offense as rejecting the Spirit, which is both a high risk and utter folly.

Abraham Believed It (Galatians 3:6-9)

The Galatians most likely were being influenced by “Judaizers” who were trying to draw these grace-received Christ-followers to become Law-focused Jewish-Christians. So, it makes sense for Paul to draw on Abraham, the first real Jew, who received God’s promise through belief, not Law. Paul was smart to use such an example.

Consider reading Genesis 15:1-6 and/or Hebrews 11:8-12 to your class for context. Abraham did not earn or deserve the great promise of God, yet he did receive grace through believing, which is how we receive the promise of salvation today.

Focus on verse 9 and its meaning. If you *believe* you will *receive*; working your way to receiving will not happen. It is a dead end. *Even after we receive grace, why might we be tempted to “work our way” to God? If belief is so significant, how do we strengthen faith?*

The Curse Demands (Galatians 3:10-14)

Curses are serious things. Even if one does not believe in curses, he or she will be both offended and nervous when someone comes up and begins proclaiming curses in his or her direction. We are skittish in this way.

Much more than a typical curse, Paul points to the eternal curse of the Law: you can never work or do enough to make it. *How did this truth sound in their ears? How does this truth sound in our ears?* If you submit yourself to works, you have destined yourself to be cursed. The opposite is also true: if you submit to grace, you will live a true, grace-filled life.

One more thing that cannot be passed up: Jesus himself took on the curse of the cross (its shame and pain) to free humanity of its curse. *How amazing is this? Who else has ever taken on a curse to free others from a curse?* Most important, Jesus defeated all curses—all things that keep us from living a true life.

Ask: How do you respond to this? If Jesus cursed himself to take away your curse, does this make you want to believe him or ignore him?

Conclusion

True life cannot be a reality without true faith. Both are real, and both have to be real for the person. Even half faith cannot result in half life. This is not a “straddle the fence” opportunity. It is a full-fledged “jump in the pool or stay dry” scenario.

One more thing to consider: in Christianity, we might be tempted to call “true life” as only life in heaven or beyond the grave. But, that is not the reality of true life. As Dare 2 Share’s GOSPEL acronym points out, “L”

stands for “Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.”

As your group concludes, perhaps it may be a good time to pray, asking God to forgive us for how we have been foolish, trying to focus on works more than faith and grace. For this text and lesson to form us, we need to humble ourselves as “guilty Galatians” who needed this confrontation.

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