

Communion Preparatory Service

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a few moments this evening to Galatians chapter 2, Paul's letter to the Galatians, and we'll read the verses at the very end of that chapter from verse 17.

Galatians 2 at verse 17 to the end of chapter 2. If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean Christ promotes sin?

Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law, I died to the law, that I might live for God.

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. Especially those words at the end of verse 20.

[1 : 16] I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. The great theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, was once asked, Dr. Barth, what is the single most important truth you have learned as a theologian?

If you've ever seen Barth's Church Dogmatics, you know that he wrote 20 plus volumes and very dense theological works. And Karl Barth replied in this way, he said, The most important thing I have learned is this, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

And tonight, we need to be reminded of this simple truth, which the Bible so clearly states. The Bible says, Jesus loves us, loves you, loves me.

And not only does the Bible say it, that should be sufficient, because we know that the Bible is always true. It's true in whatever culture it's presented. It's true at whatever time it's presented.

It's true whatever the circumstances. So if the Bible says it, we know it's true. But more than just saying that Jesus loves us, the Bible points us to the demonstration of Jesus' love.

[2 : 38] He not only says it, but he shows it. And isn't that where we so often fall down? Words can be very easy to say, but very difficult to show. Whereas Jesus' words and his actions are completely consistent.

He says it, and he shows it. And what Paul, the author, is doing here tonight, is telling us, reminding us, that while clearly the Bible says that Jesus loves us, and clearly the Bible demonstrates that Jesus does love us by his actions, we have the privilege and the responsibility of illustrating that love in our own lives.

So the Apostle Paul could say to this church, to these people, modern-day Turkey, that's where Galatia is, he could say to them, the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Now they couldn't see Jesus, but they could see Paul. They had never met Jesus face to face, but they knew Paul. And that's where we come into the story. We can tell people about Jesus.

We can tell people about what he said. We can point them to the Bible. But very often people will be looking at us. They might not come into this building, but they'll observe what we do.

[3 : 58] They'll observe how we live. They'll observe our attitudes and our actions. They'll listen to our words. And we have this great privilege and responsibility that the lives that we now live as followers of Jesus need to reflect this kind of love.

A love that is spoken and a love that is shown. A love that is powerful and a love that is personal. So you see, we read in John chapter 3, didn't we? We read that great statement in John 3, 16, For God so loved the world.

So there is a general love for this lost world that we are a part of. God doesn't love this world because it is lovable. But God loves this world because of who he is.

That he is love. But the Apostle Paul brings us to a more personal level. Because he's not talking about a general love. He's not talking about a corporate or collective love.

But he's talking about that personal love that the Savior had for him. And remember what Saul of Tarsus was like. Saul of Tarsus, the angry, violent man.

[5 : 06] Saul of Tarsus, the man who wanted to destroy the church. At the end of chapter 1 in Galatians, if your Bible's open, you can just look back to chapter 1. In verse 23, So tonight, if you're not yet a Christian, I can tell you that Jesus loves you.

I can tell you that the Bible says it. I can demonstrate that the Bible shows it. And that you are invited and encouraged to accept and to receive that love into your own hearts. And to live out this new life as every follower of Jesus is called to do.

And if you're already trusting in Jesus, we need to be reminded of these simple but profound truths. That our standing in God's sight does not come down in the final instance to the quality and character of our own commitment.

To the quality and character of our own discipleship. Because when we look at our own characters and we look at our own discipleship and we look at our own Christian lives, we can be disheartened.

We can be discouraged. We can be dismayed. We can give up. But the Apostle Paul has a relationship with Jesus that's based on Jesus. Who Jesus is and what Jesus did.

[6 : 35] And doesn't that give us confidence tonight? That ultimately it's his word. Ultimately it's his work. Ultimately it's his commitment to us that really and truly matters.

So tonight we're going to look at the love that Jesus has for us. And this world tonight is searching for that kind of love and that kind of fulfillment and that kind of satisfaction.

The problem is that they are very much looking in the wrong place. Now you might not know the name Karl Barth, but I think you might recognize the name of this second figure who was famous in a different sphere of the 20th century.

She was one of the most remarkable and memorable icons of film and stage. She was Norma Jean Baker by birth. She was Marilyn Monroe by her more famous name.

And Marilyn Monroe once had this quotation. She said, And she had many who she loved.

[7 : 54] The greatest baseball players. The most powerful politicians. The most famous movie stars. The most learned playwrights. And at the end of her life, her death certificate read, Marilyn Monroe, age 39, suspected suicide.

She was looking, but never found. She was seeking, but never succeeded in that search. So we have a point of contact tonight with the world.

There is that search. There is that desire. There is that longing. And the Bible tells us that we are made by God. And the Bible tells us that we are made for God.

So if God isn't part of your life, or if God isn't part of their life, there is an obvious void. There is an obvious gap. And when there's an obvious gap, we will try to fill that gap and fill that void with something or someone else.

But you know it never quite fits. So tonight I'd like you to notice first, when we think of the good news of the gospel, when we think of the great message of God's love for us and Jesus, we have to first recognize that there is bad news.

[9 : 09] There is a problem here. Paul puts it this way. He says in verse 19 of Galatians 2, he said, For through the law I died to the law.

Through the law I died to the law. This paragraph, as you're reading through, you think this is pretty heavy. What exactly is he saying here? Well, what Paul is saying is that human effort is insufficient.

Your best effort, your best attempts, your most concerted tries to please God, to keep his law and to do what he says and to avoid what he prohibits, that simply is not enough.

Spiritually speaking, according to the law, the bad news is we are dead. We are dead in sins and transgressions. We don't keep the law. We don't satisfy the law.

We don't reach that standard. We don't hit that bullseye. So each one of us, if we're honest, have to put up our hand and say, Yes, guilty as charged. I can say with Paul that I have died to the law.

[10 : 20] I can't do it. I can't keep it. I can't satisfy it. Remember Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night. Here was a good man by any standard of the word.

Here was a man who would be noteworthy for his religious observance. And you would think if anyone was in the kingdom, it would have been him. But Jesus says, Nicodemus, you must be born again.

Now, you don't need to be born again if everything is spiritually well. So the Apostle Paul is describing dead in the law or died to the law. And Jesus says to Nicodemus, There's a problem, Nicodemus.

You must be born again because spiritually speaking, you are dead. Yes, you have good works. Yes, you have a standing in the community. Yes, you may be recognized as a religious or a righteous man.

But in God's sight, we need a new start. We need a new beginning. There's this great leveler called sin that puts us all on the same level.

[11 : 23] I was in prison a couple weeks ago and we had a guest speaker. And he was speaking to us from John 3.16.

And he was saying to the guys and to the women at the prison, saying, Think of it this way. If you are a Christian, you are now forgiven.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been set free. And it can be quite possible that you can enjoy a level of freedom in prison that many thousands of people on the outside who are technically free, if they don't know Jesus, they are more in bondage and more in prison than you are or ever will be.

So this great problem of sin isn't just for the bad people that are in prison, but this great problem of sin affects each one of us. It affects our minds. It affects our hearts.

It affects how we think. It affects how we feel. It affects the words we say. It affects the lives we live. It affects what we do and what we don't do. So we need to recognize the problem.

[12 : 31] We need to realize that we are not able to say, God, I have done all that you have told me to do. I have kept the law fully and completely.

And if you know church history, you'll realize that when we read the letter to the Galatians, the great figure of Martin Luther comes to our attention because Luther was trying.

He was trying his best. He knew that he was a sinner and he wanted to go to heaven and he kept trying harder and harder and harder. And he kept feeling more and more miserable.

And he kept feeling more and more desperate and depressed because he realized the standard and he realized his failure to keep the standard. And then lo and behold, he reads the letter to the Romans and he reads that in the gospel, it's the power of God unto salvation for all who believe because the righteous will live by faith.

It is by faith from first to last. And then he reads this letter to the Galatians, which became his favorite of all the New Testament letters. And he recognized that here was good news for him.

[13 : 45] Luther put it this way. He said, the words, the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me are so many thunderclaps and lightning bolts of protest from heaven against the righteousness of the law.

The wickedness, error, darkness, and ignorance in my mind and my will were so great that it was quite impossible for me to be saved by any other means than by the inestimable price of Christ's death.

The law brought only despair. The law brought only darkness. The law brought only death. But Luther realized that there was life. There was good news.

And that good news was found in Jesus. So just as the Apostle Paul says in verse 19, through the law, I died. There's bad news. But the good news is, I might live for God.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. There's now a dramatic change. Paul has experienced a change that took him from death and to life.

[14 : 56] The law brought only death. The law brought only condemnation. And now, through Jesus, there is life. And if you are a believer in Jesus tonight, you too have passed over from death to life, from darkness to light, from despair to hope.

And this is not of yourself. It's not by your effort. It's not by your ability. It's not by how much you know. It's not by how long you've come to church. It's not by the things that you haven't done or by the things that you have done.

But you notice here that the logic is impeccable. The law brought only death, but it was through the crucifixion of Jesus and that connection with Christ through faith that brings life.

So tonight, if you are saying that you live by faith in Jesus, then it is true that Jesus now lives in you. He lives in your heart.

He lives in your life. He gives you new power. He gives you new strength. He gives you new hope. He gives you the ability to persevere when you want to give up. He gives you encouragement when you feel desperate.

[16 : 10] He's there when no one else is there. So you see, the Bible says Jesus loves you. And the Bible demonstrates that Jesus loves you by what he did. You haven't kept the law.

He has. You haven't lived a life of perfect obedience. He has. You haven't died for the penalty of your sins. He has. So all that you haven't done, he has done.

All that you haven't kept, he has kept. The satisfaction that which for Jesus was 100% is a satisfaction that he then shares with you, with me.

And these words are so personal that the Apostle Paul is saying, let me tell you what God has done for me. Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me. And let me tell you, therefore, what he can do for you.

Because the argument, the logic is such that if Jesus died for Paul, if Jesus loved Paul so much and gave himself for Paul, then there's no one who is greater than Paul in terms of his sin or guilt, Paul described himself as the chief of sinners, the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low.

[17 : 25] So therefore, if this is what Jesus did for Paul, then there's hope for you. There's hope for the world. There's hope for the folks that we know and love and care for in our families.

There's hope for the people that we live with or work with or study with. Because the love of Christ is a powerful and a personal love that changes you and me from the inside out.

Christ now lives in us. And what a difference between Jesus living in you and you trying to keep the law, you trying to satisfy God.

You see, when Jesus comes to dwell in your heart, he gives you new strength. He gives you new guidance. He enables you to see what you would otherwise miss. He enables you to understand what would otherwise perplex you.

So tonight, the love of Jesus is a powerful and a personal love so that Paul can say, he says, the life I live in the body, yes, I live.

[18 : 27] And we all are living lives. He says, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Personal, powerful commitment on the part of the Lord Jesus. He says it, he shows it, and he means it. And in turn, we believe it.

We accept it. We receive it. And we live it. Jesus says what he means. Jesus tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

As you read through the gospel accounts, notice how many times Jesus says, I tell you the truth. Or, verily, verily, I say unto you, truly, truly, I say.

He wants you to know that he speaks the truth. He never lies. He doesn't want to trick. He doesn't want to confuse. He doesn't want to fool you. He wants you to know the problem, and he wants you to see the solution, and he wants you to know that the problem is ours, and the solution is his.

[19 : 33] We've broken the relationship. Only he can fix it. And he fixes that broken relationship fully and freely. And he offers life to you tonight, if you're not yet a Christian, and he reminds you that your relationship with him depends first and foremost on him.

It's not the strength of your faith. It's not the level of your commitment. It's not the depth of your knowledge or understanding. But it's this reality, that Jesus now lives in you.

He now dwells in your heart. Just as clearly and as powerfully as he came from heaven to earth, he now dwells in the heart of his people. He's there to bless.

He's there to encourage. He's there to strengthen. And the key is this word, faith. We know him. We love him. We trust him.

We follow him. We believe him. We have a personal connection with this personal Savior, Jesus. It's not enough to hear about him. It's not enough to read about him.

[20 : 41] It's not enough to be told about him. It's not enough to be part of a family where Jesus is trusted or believed in. There is a personal responsibility on the part of the individual to say, yes, he died for me.

Yes, he paid my price. Yes, he satisfied my debt. He's not just the Savior of sinners, but he's the Savior of me. He's not just the Lord of creation or the Lord of Lord and the King of Kings.

He's my Lord. And he's my God. And he's my Savior. So the Apostle Paul makes it quite clear that this is a matter that is personal. It's interesting sometimes how we use language.

We often will say to people, if you preface a comment and say, don't take this personally, generally speaking, if somebody says that to you, what will follow is a personal insult.

Don't take this personally, but I'm going to say something that is personal and it's probably insulting. The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, is saying that he wants you and I to take this personally, but it's not insulting.

[21 : 50] It's not harmful. It's not bad, but it's good. Don't accept a relationship with Jesus that's at arm's length. Don't accept a knowledge of Jesus that isn't personal.

Don't accept an understanding of the cross where you are looking on as a bystander, as a passerby. But can you say with Paul, or with Luther, or with any Christian, that when you see Jesus, you see your friend, you see your Lord, you see your Savior, you see the one who took your place on the cross and paid your price in order that you might be set free.

It's personal. And the pronouns matter so much. So when we read in Psalm 23, which we'll sing to conclude our service tonight, David said, the Lord is my shepherd.

And therefore, I don't need anything. I don't lack anything. My life is a life of abundance here on earth, and my life has an eternal destiny in God's house forevermore.

So David isn't saying that the Lord is the shepherd. He is the shepherd. He's the shepherd of Israel. He's the shepherd of his people. But David is saying, the Lord is my shepherd. And the Apostle Paul is saying, I live by faith in the Son of God.

[23 : 12] Now, that would be sufficient. That's a statement of faith. That's a testimony, a personal testimony of believing in Jesus. But he goes on to say, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

So if you read John 3, 16, and you say, that seems to be too big. God loves this whole world. How do I know he loves me? God loves this whole earth and the seven billion people that are on this planet.

How do I know that he's interested in me? Well, when you read Galatians 2, 20, you can put yourself in that verse, and if you read that verse personally and honestly, then it doesn't matter who you are or what your background is.

Then this is a statement of personal faith and personal trust and personal commitment because of the personal commitment that Jesus has for you. He loves this world, yes, but he loves people individually, personally, powerfully.

Martin Luther commented on this as well. He said, read the words me and for me with great emphasis. Print this me with capital letters in your heart and do not ever doubt that you belong to the number of those who are meant by this me.

[24 : 37] Christ did not only love Peter and Paul. The same love he felt for them, he feels for us. If we cannot deny we are sinners, we cannot deny that Christ died for our sins.

We recognize the problem. We realize our inability, but we realize that the solution is in the person of Jesus, who he is.

The solution is in Jesus, the Son of God, and in what he has done, that he gave himself. That means that he gave his life. There was this great exchange, this great transfer, where the righteous, holy, perfect Son of God gave himself in the place of the unrighteous, of the impure, of the unholy me.

And therefore, all that falls to him now comes to me, because all that falls to me now went to him. All the penalty, all the punishment, all the debt that I accumulated and I deserve now is dealt with by Jesus at the cross so that I can say that my debt is paid for, I am set free, and Jesus gets all the credit.

Jesus gets all the glory because if I could do anything to add to this, if I could do anything to contribute to this, at the end of the day, I would have to be, I would be able then to say, look Jesus, look what we have accomplished, look what we have achieved.

[26 : 08] But there is no boasting. There is no bragging. We can't claim credit. We can't take any of this praise. We can't take any of this glory.

The problem was wholly ours and the solution is wholly his. So when we come to live by faith, we live by faith in him, who he is and what he has done.

So the love is stated and the love is demonstrated, but what about you? Are you illustrating this kind of love in your life? Because Paul, from the moment he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was a new man.

Saul of Tarsus, gone. The apostle Paul arrived. New song to sing, new life to live, new priorities, new focus. The gospel, the message that he once despised, he was now proclaiming.

The Jesus who he wanted to destroy, he was now telling people about Jesus and instead of destroying churches, he was planting churches. So he could say, not only do I know Jesus, not only do I love Jesus, but the life that I live is now based upon Jesus and the life of Jesus is evidenced in his life.

[27 : 27] Now that's the encouragement and the challenge that we face tonight. We say it, but do we show it? I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus. I say it, but does my life reflect Jesus?

Does my character reflect his character? Do my priorities reflect his priorities? Do my attitudes, do my emotions, do my reactions reflect him?

Or do I often say I'm a Christian with one voice and then live as if I wasn't in the next moment? So the life that we live is this visual illustration, or should be, of the grace and the power of the gospel.

people may come to church if you invite them. About 21 years ago I was invited to church and I came and I heard the gospel for the first time.

But I would suggest that many people will not come to church, at least straight away. But people are always looking. People are always listening. People are always measuring.

[28 : 31] And if they know that you're a Christian, they want to see, does this work? I was at a conference the other week and maybe 50 years ago people were asking the question, is this true?

Is the Bible true? Is the message true? Did this really happen? Today people are asking a different question. What does this do for you?

And what does this do for me? They want to see a change of heart. They want to see a change of life. They want to see some demonstration of the reality of Jesus in your life.

And then they will see the power of the gospel. They might not come to church, they might not read the Bible, but if they can see Jesus in us, then they can't easily explain away the change.

They can't easily reject out of hand the gospel because they see that there is a transforming power of Jesus. Jesus. There's a church in a community in Edinburgh.

[29 : 36] The community is called Nidri. Nidri is one of the poorer districts. They've rebuilt large parts of it. I'm sure areas of Aberdeen have similar experiences where some of the old tenements have been destroyed and nice new buildings are put up.

But the problem is is that many of the old people are still there. They might be living in nicer flats, they might have nicer properties, but they're the same people with the same problems. But there's a church that's working in this community called Nidri, and there's a man whose name is Mez.

It's an unusual name. He tells me it's Scottish. He tells me that with an English accent, and he told me that as an Irishman. He was born in Ireland. But here's a man who's ministering in the center of this community, and he is seeing lives changed.

He is seeing people. I met this fellow, a guy also called Paul, and I met him and he said, I'm up from London. He's a very strong London accent. He said, 20 years, I was a crack cocaine addict.

And he said, I tried the 12-step program for 20 years. And he said, you know what? It doesn't work. I tried it. I tried it for 20 years. It didn't work. He said, I've been a Christian for four weeks, and I can tell you that that works, that Jesus works, that Jesus has changed his life.

[30 : 59] And through his life, other people are seeing. Well, if Paul can come off cocaine after 20 years by trusting in Jesus, there must be something in this message.

There must be something to this Jesus. I might not understand it. I might not be able to explain it, but I can see it. There was an obvious change in Paul's life. There was an obvious change in Martin Luther's life.

And there needs to be an obvious change in our lives. We love Jesus. Jesus loves us. How do we express that love practically? How do we express that love visibly?

How do we put into practice in our lives this new and vital and living relationship? If you're a Christian tonight, Jesus lives in you. You have been crucified with Christ, and now the life that you live, you live by faith in him.

The one who loved you so much that he gave himself for you. You say it, but what about showing it? What about living it? What about demonstrating it? What about illustrating the gospel day to day, at work, at home, with your friends, among your family?

[32 : 10] That's the challenge. We need his strength. We need his grace. We need his guidance. We can't do this ourselves. But when Jesus is dwelling in our hearts, it's inevitable that change occurs.

It's inevitable that we think differently. It's inevitable that we speak differently. And it's inevitable that we live differently because we live now by faith.

We live by faith in Jesus. We love him because he first loved us. And he loved us to such an extent that he gave himself for me and for you.

Trust him and live this new life. Trust him by faith and demonstrate the reality of the gospel, the power of the gospel that changed your heart, that changed your life.

And look to see others listening, others wanting to know more about this Jesus. If this has worked for you, tell me how I can find this help for myself.

[33 : 12] Let's pray. Let's pray.