

22nd January 2012 – Faith life

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20

Beloved in the Lord,

Shortly before I wrote this sermon, I was painting the ceiling in our ensuite. Over time, the ceiling paint had yellowed and become mouldy. Before I could paint it, I had to clean off the mould and give the ceiling a thorough wash with sugar soap. Had I just painted over the mould, then after a short while it would appear again. This led me to think about an article that I had read in the Sydney Morning Herald about people attending Church. The article claimed that many people who sit in the pews do not believe in the traditional God. They do not believe in sin or the wages thereof – namely eternal death. They do not believe in hell. Yet they attend Church regularly. Why? Some are seeking fellowship, community, a good feeling.

Religion can deliver on these things.

We are all created in God's image and likeness, It is sin that separates us from God, but I believe that all men have an innate desire for fellowship with God. Up until a heart becomes hardened by sin, it is sensitive to the conscience that tells us what is sin, what is not acceptable.

Many join religions seeking to comfort that inner seeking, to satisfy that inner nagging. The problem is that religion without true fellowship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, is like painting over mould. For a while it seems to work, but then the problem returns.

What is needed is a thorough washing. We need to remove the mould.

Only the blood of Jesus shed on the cross of Calvary can wash away the stain of sin. Nothing else can. That is why I emphasise this truth nearly every time I preach.

As we begin this New Year 2012, may we commit ourselves to stick to the true foundations, to build our Church upon the rock. May we be a Church that does not seek to be modern, or that moves with the times, that seeks to be popular, but may we be a Church founded and built upon the bedrock of God's Word.

Our fore father and founder, Dr. Martin Luther always emphasised Sola Scriptura – God's Word alone.

In our foundation text today, Paul writes about His own experience. Remember that he was a highly educated religious man. A Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had attended the highest religious institution of his day and sat at the learned feet of the greatest professor of Jewish

law. He had reached the pinnacle of his religion. He was so dedicated to the cause of Judaism, that he persecuted Christians, believing that they were corrupting sect.

But one glorious day, on the road to Damascus, everything changed. Paul now writes in his letter to the Philippians: ***“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*** (2:8-11)

Paul considered all that he had before Christ to be rubbish, compared to what he now had. Before he met Jesus, Paul had religion, now he had fellowship. He now lived in faith. From that moment on the Damascus road, Paul no longer lived for himself, but for Christ Jesus the Lord. His sins had been washed away in Jesus Blood and to use his own words he was a new creation.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2. Corinthians 5:17

You see the difference between religion and faith is fellowship, a relationship. Religion serves forms, rituals and rules; whereas faith serves the true and living God in fellowship with Him as a person. It is a love based relationship.

Religion creates slaves, whereas faith sets us free.

Jesus said to the Jews that had begun to believe in Him: ***“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”³³ They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?”***

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. “ (John 8:31-36)

True freedom comes when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and live in fellowship with Him.

What does this mean? That means that we understand that we are sinners and that we deserve eternal death for our sin, because the wages of sin is death. Hell.

Secondly we understand that there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves, to change this situation.

Thirdly we understand that Jesus suffered in our place, took our penalty upon Himself for us because He loves us: ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)***

Fourthly, in order for the Blood of Jesus to cleanse us from sin, we must be born again. We must confess our sins, repent and accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour.

From that moment we are in Him and absolutely nothing can separate us from Him.

As we begin a New Year we do so not knowing what this year will bring. We do not know what changes may occur in our personal lives, our community, Church, country or World.

What we can know for sure is that God will never leave us nor forsake us. If we are in Him, we are in a secure place. Safe in the arms of Jesus! If our lives are surrendered to Him in faith, then to quote Paul in His letter to the Romans: ***“We are more than conquerors.”***

Here is the key, not in our strength, but His power.

Religion operates under the power of man. Faith relies upon God and His strength and mighty power. When we are in Christ, we function under His power through the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

Let us have one more look at our foundation text: ***“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Gal.2:20***

When we are in Christ, He lives through us. That is why Paul could boldly proclaim: ***“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)*** Where does the strength to do all things come from? From Christ who dwells within.

As we begin 2012 I encourage each one of you to come to Jesus and to surrender all to Him. Do not live for yourself, serving your own selfish desires, but live in love and faith serving Him who gave all for you. Serving Him who loves you with an everlasting love. In faith, let go of the control of your life and let Jesus take control. Not my will, but Yours be done!

Let us come to Him and surrender all to Him. Let us place ourselves on His altar anew today and may our confession be:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.