

CCH Sermon 17NOV24 “Running the Race”. Gal 5:2-12

V7

- ▲ Wonder if any **runners** amongst us?
 - Regular parkrunners
 - Or... (even more impressive) non sporty ppl having go at couch to 5k app to get into running for first time.
- In my parents village on Boxing day amongst a few families there's a run
 - Good way of shaking off turkey and trimmings
- But it goes onto military land on little known footpaths over the army ranges.
 - And if you take the wrong turn (as I found one year) you can get horribly lost, and had I not retraced my steps I might still be out there now!
- Paul likens the readers of this letter to runners. V7a. “Running the Race”
 - They were running a good race.
 - But they were in danger of someone cutting in and actually
 - leading them off course,
 - forcing them off track
 - and hindering them from getting to their destination. 7b
- And we too, if we're not careful can make the same mistake.
- The story of the readers of this letter was a story in three parts...
 - **STAGE 1: SLAVERY**. Most of them would have been from pagan backgrounds in S Turkey, where you had to keep your gods happy by doing the right things. Andrew Sach told us in his overview at the beg of term (recording still available) that if you did a good deed, like offering a sacrifice in the temple, you'd get a token from temple and this token would be hung up in front of the statue of your god as if to say, come on deity, you owe me one. So you were enslaved to doing religious things to appease your god because of course, you can never do enough.
 - **STAGE 2: FREEDOM**. Wonderfully Paul had told them the good news of Jesus. He is the God-man who personally paid the bill for all our wrong doing by his death on the cross. They had discovered the wonder of grace! God's Riches at Christ's Expense- Jesus paid it all! As a massive free gift He died in a swap to pay the debt which our sin owes and to set us free! To use the legal term Paul uses we are “Justified” and the theology (which lies at the heart of the gospel) is called “justification by faith alone.”
 - But stage 3: **SLAVERY**. Foolishly, having understood that they are in God's good books simply by turning to Jesus, they were beginning to listen to voices that said that they now needed to be circumcised. They were being told it would complete what Jesus had started for them. It would mark them out as truly part of God's family. But ironically it was a return to slavery- they were going back to their preXn roots. V4. JbyL.
- So as we've seen Paul is horrified. V1.

- Note the AGAIN. It's possible for a Christian to be set free by Jesus and then to come under the shackles of slavery all over again, by adding rules/performance to our standing with God.
- And it can be very subtle: If I read my Bible every day, if I do a shoebox, if I get in with the key movers and shakers at church, then I'll really feel like I'm in God's good books. Then I'll really belong.
- I have certainly fallen for it time and time again, thinking that if I just measure up, or do something I'm more acceptable to God, and perhaps that you right now.
- But if there's someone thinking, "I've been coming for 11 weeks now, I've got the message, you are **preaching to the choir**, Charlie", then I want to say, "Paul certainly feels the choir needs to hear it again, because the choir may not have seen how dangerous this wrong turn is and how subtle and easy it is to get persuaded down it". Please don't switch off to the main message.
- Yes there will be **reminders of the main point** of the book of which v1 is a great summary. Don't go back to works.
- But there are also fresh **nuggets**, fresh **camera angles** on the gospel that we haven't seen yet, that are really helpful for brand new visitors and old timers alike.
- So 2 paragraphs and 2 points:
 - 1) THE CONSEQUENCE OF GOING ASTRAY (v2-6)
 - 2) THE PROCESS OF GOING ASTRAY (V7-12)

1) THE CONSEQUENCE OF GOING ASTRAY (off track) (v2-6)

- What's the destination Paul if you get bumped into this wrong turn?
 - Answer- separation from Christ.
 - **v2**.
- The logic is v clear.
 - There's a fork in the road. You have to choose...
 - WORKS- In which case you rely on your performance
 - GRACE- in which case you rely on Jesus' performance.
 - If you rely on yourself by keeping the 10C and the Jewish law (first you have to keep the law 100%, **v3**, there's no half measures. Only full marks will do).
 - Every other religion in the world by the way is works. And actually it is no way to God at all.
 - But the logic is if you take this road to it's logical destination, you are stepping off the road of grace.
 - And so **v4**, you've been alienated (ESV severed) from Christ.
 - Do you get how serious this is. **v4**.

- Does this now explain the strong language in the book
 - “I’m astonished”.
 - “You foolish Galatians”.
 - “You are turning back to weak and miserable forces”
 - “I’m perplexed about you”
 - (we’ll see some really fruity language at the final v of our section v12!)
- Don’t do it.
- V2-4 NEGATIVELY This is where you’ll end up.
- V5-6- POSITIVELY this is what you'll miss out on.
 - **V5.**
 - **The path/track of grace**
 - (which is the track of the **Holy Spirit**,
 - More on the wonderful HS in the next 2 weeks)
 - And which is the track of **faith**, simple trust in Christ)
 - Brings the righteousness of God.
 - That means the gift of a right standing with God
 - ▲ At a rock concert you need a ticket to get in.
 - V expensive. Often £100s of pounds.
 - Security will rightly say you have no right without ticket.
 - But if you are bankrupt no hope going in.
 - You can’t walk in and hear Britney or Coldplay
 - But imagine a rich friend says, I’ve already bought a ticket for you in advance. Wait for me at the door.
 - Wait here and I’ll give you one!
 - You trust the person and their promise
 - So you wait for them.
 - Jesus loves you- all of you.
 - Trust me, I have a ticket for you.
 - 1st little nugget in this verse and 2 in the next:
 - True Christianity is **future focused**.
 - Yes *past*- have been saved from *penalty* of sin.
 - Already justified
 - But *future*- I will be saved from the *presence* of sin.
 - That ticket will be seen visibly by all the world.
 - This life will often feel flat. Waiting. Not much fun.
 - But Oh keep waiting, what a glorious future
 - Christ is coming back with his salvation for you.
 - (1 Pe 1:5- who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time)
 - v6 It’s not about our performance. Another great nugget.
 - V6 Neither circ nor **uncirc. Easy to miss this.**
 - You are not more holy if you get circumcised

- You are not LESS holy if you do!
 - Being uncircumcised doesn't buy your way into heaven.
 - Having the right theology and separating yourself from
 - (at one point Paul got Timothy circumcised to make it easier to share the gospel with Jews). But circumcision for justification and Paul says v2
 - So neither circ nor uncirc is what counts.
 - Coming to prayer meeting not coming doesn't count for your standing with God.
 - But can be perverse sense of righteousness in saying I'm more right for NOT coming to the prayer meeting.
 - But What would be the most loving thing for you at the moment?
 - Young kids prob not. Distressed spouse. Deadline at work.
 - Sitting watching TV. Why not come to PM. Not more justified if you don't.
 - And that's the third nugget/vista- faith is expressed through love! V6b.
 - Filling in a shoebox might be a perfect way of demonstrating your faith. It doesn't save you, it doesn't make you more righteous but you love Jesus and by his Spirit you can't help but love others.
- ➡ **So friends which shall it be?**
 - **WORKING for your salvation**
 - **Or WAITING for your salvation.**
- Strong warning here (1). Over the years I've known Christians who have given up on their faith, sometimes through wandering off the track to immorality, and it's been tragic. They are on their way to destination separation.
- But just as sad (and probably more common) are the stories of friends who have gone religious or moral.
 - They've said, I don't need Church to be a good person.
 - I've turned my back on all that.
 - And they've walked away from Christ. Destination Separation.
Or they've joined a church that has so emphasized ritual that effectively they are in slavery to the ritual at their church
- So it is so important that we are question our motives. Why am I doing this act?
 - Is it because I love Jesus and others, or is it to bolster my chances with God.
 - The destination of taking this misturn is a return to slavery, and ultimately it's logical destination is separation from Christ.
- Don't do it.

In the next paragraph Paul gives us a bit more insight about how taking this wrong turn happens... (1 The consequences)

2) THE PROCESS OF GOING OFF TRACK (v7-12). Persuasion

And there are three factors/3 steps. **First there's the ringleaders.**

- **V7 WHO?**
- Behind error there's normally a person.
- There's a person or people that are cutting in on them in the race.
- In today's language they are influencers.
- Tripping them up, or even worse flipping the signposts so that they take a wrong turn.
- "Come this way" they say,
 - "come down this track, it's the track of freedom, it will take you to the finish line".
 - "You don't really think that calling on Jesus for forgiveness is enough do you?"
 - "Surely you need to prove your seriousness for Christ with your repentance"
- Ringleaders. They are described in this passage as
 - v10 people throwing you into confusion
 - v12 agitators, or in other translations those who are unsettling you.
 - We'll meet them again in ch6.

➡ We have to be so careful. People can be so persuasive. And they wrap false teaching in Christian language, and we end up with

Jesus PLUS- Jesus plus religious activity

Jesus MINUS- Jesus without, without miracles, without

First there's ringleaders, Next there's the ripple effect.

- **V8**
- False teaching spreads like sin does (in fact Paul uses the same proverb in 1 Cor)
- It works through the whole batch.
- It's why we have to beware of Christian peer pressure.
- Just because someone else is doing something or believing something, it doesn't mean it's right.
- Churches can have a culture where inadvertently wrong thinking and wrong practice spreads.
- ➡ Without being heresy hunters, and while always loving one another as brothers and sisters, we need to speak up when we think something is wrong.

And third there's the reason behind it why legalism spreads in the first place- wanting an easy life

- The false teachers were spreading something that was hugely popular.
 - Search for the hero inside yourself.
 - You do you.

- A million dreams in the world we're going to make.
 - All the emphasis is on self. It's all about HUMAN EFFORT!
 - So appealing, but so disappointing.
- It panders to human pride, I can be the saviour, I can be the hero.
 - Just do this small act of religious observance.
 - It will be painful, but it will prove you are serious.
 - Turning over a **new leaf** with this new technique, mindfulness, meditation, that all sells books.
- But if you preach the message of the cross you won't be popular.
 - And Paul says that he isn't.
 - If you teach the gospel you have to say unpopular things.
 - The gospel says you can't save yourself. You aren't the hero.
 - No small effort on your behalf will improve your cause.
 - You need help from the outside.
 - You are heading to hell.
 - The scandal of the cross.
 - No new disciplines, no turning over a new leaf will do.
 - You need a **new life!**
- And that's what Jesus provides the moment you come to him.
- Paul is horrified with this false teaching, and so should we be. Look at [v12](#).
- I wish they wouldn't just cut off a small piece of skin, I wish they'd go the whole hog. Very shocking. Could be a reference to castration which rendered the priests unclean in the Temple and disqualified them from doing their job.
- We must wrap up. What's the message to take away. For the unbeliever

1) I was going to say "Get on track".

- Perhaps never come to Christ.
- But you can't. **ASK TO GET ON TRACK.**
- Ask Jesus to get you on track.
- You've been relying on the wrong liquid. Sweat.
- Now rely on the blood of Christ.
- And rely on the Holy Spirit to work in you.
- And for the believer who has gone astray.

2) ASK TO Get back on track

- You've wandered. (slavery, freedom, slavery).
- Maybe very subtly.

- Milton Vincent was a pastor, but he was struggling with a sense of inadequacy.
 - “I guess I treated my justification as some sort of legal fiction that had little direct bearing on the mechanics of how God related to me and how I related to Him. I suppose I would have imagined God saying, ‘Yeah, technically you’re justified, but I’m angry with you anyway for what you did today!’”
 - He said “I figured that if I beat myself up sufficiently in his presence, or pled with him long enough or just waited a few hours to put a little distance between me and my sin, then God might warm to me again”.
- But he wrote gospel truths down on little index cards and started rehearsing the gospel of grace to himself every day.
- And it was a means of grace that the Lord used to encourage him and
- I’ve got a couple of the book that those truths (and his personal testimony) became.

- Communion is a wonderful time for saying to Jesus, I’m relying on you. I’m not trusting myself. I need you.
 - Empty hands.
 - Something placed into it.
 - That’s Christianity.

- I’m asking for that.
 - Let’s pray.