

Galatians 2

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. ¹⁷ But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Luke 7

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³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸ She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.' ⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' ⁴¹ 'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' ⁴³ Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' ⁴⁴ Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' ⁴⁹ But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Welcome to the church of England
Not just to Harvey this morning
But I dare say to quite a few of our guests
Who may just find this whole encounter
a bit weird (and I hope) wonderful

I know there'll be quite a few of you here this morning
who don't normally read this stuff
so I want to simplify it – in as few words as possible

Paul is writing about Law and justification
and whilst there's some serious unwrapping to do
To make sense of this letter to the Galatians

it really is a great opportunity
to help you begin Harvey's education,
by spelling out what this whole church business
what we call "THE GOSPEL" - is all about

Paul spent much of his time
writing to the churches he had founded
putting them right where there was conflict or confusion

Now it's fair to say that these new churches in Galatia
were largely made up of Jews
whom Paul had converted to Christianity

But we have to be careful when we use the word "converted"

I don't mean one day they were Jews,
next they were Christians
it really wasn't that simple

Every Jew – including Paul himself
was brought up to believe
That they were God's chosen people

That God is Great
The Almighty, all-powerful, all knowing
Ever present God
Who created the heavens and the earth

And their first book, which we call Genesis
says that everything God made was perfect

and that in comparison with this perfect God
We human beings are little more than worms
with no chance of having a one-to-one relationship
With such an awesome God

So God gives Moses Ten Commandments
and the Jewish leaders add a few more
and they call it "The Law"

and they thought that by keeping to "The Law"
they'd have a *right relationship* with God
something Paul describes as being "justified"

The Law required sacrifice for sin
When they thought they'd offended God
They brought their best animals, often lambs
To be ritually killed and offered to God
as a peace offering

that system failed
instead of making people closer to God
The Law made them feel even worse about themselves
(lets' face it
Knowing you are going is against God's wishes
Does tend to have that effect)

then came the prophets
men who truly listened to God
And had the courage to stand up
and tell the people what God was really about

the prophets foretold
that one day, God would come, in person
The Christ – The Messiah – Emmanuel – God with us
to put right – once and for all
the relationship between Himself and mankind

He would do it, by demonstrating His love for us
By self-sacrifice
By becoming the Lamb Himself, and dying for all our sins
Paying the ultimate price for our justification

This is why Jesus is often called "the Lamb of God"

But of course,
when He arrived amongst His chosen people
Many of the Jews refused to recognise Him
as anything more than a blasphemer

And they nailed Him to a cross
In doing so they playing right into God's hands
And set His rescue plan for mankind into action

Now I need to stop here for a moment
Because I know this is a stumbling block
for some people who argue
"If God is so loving, how could He let His own Son
suffer such a shocking and terrible death?"

well - there's a problem with translation here
when we call Jesus "the Son of God"

we obviously think of a human father-son relationship
and of course, no sane father would allow such a thing
to happen to his only son

but this, as I often say, is part of the divine mystery
that which we call the Holy Trinity
"Father, Son and Holy Spirit"

and without going into great theological debate here
let me simplify it

**this is God, giving His own life
giving Himself for us**

When the Son suffered on the cross
The Father felt every lash of the whip

And when He was raised from death
Just as the prophets said He would be
Still, there were many, including Paul himself
Who just didn't believe that Jesus was The Christ

And it wasn't until Jesus stopped him
on the road to Damascus
with a blinding flash of light
that Paul began to put it all together
and it all made sense

The Jewish Law
that he passionately believed in up to then
couldn't put us right with God
because all the Law did was remind us
just how far we've drifted away from him

what made Paul the Jew into the Christian
was when he believed that this truly was the Son of God

the one who'd paid the price for all our wrongdoing
and been raised triumphant from the grave
the one who returned to heaven
and now sits at His Father's right hand - pleading for us

like a brilliant barrister in the highest court of all time
who not only knows what we're going through
but has actually been here, amongst the mud and bullets
the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

been there, done that
and has the tee shirt
and on that tee-shirt are the words
"Keep Calm - I've sorted it!"