

Preparing for Harvest: Never Give Up

Galatians 6:7-10 (9) Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up

Background

The churches of Galatia were special to Paul for a number of reasons. First, they were started because of him, so he had a fatherly affinity for the people. Second, they were especially accommodating to Paul. Through the writings it is clear that through Paul's illness, the Galatians were willing to do anything for him, were very sacrificial in their outlook, and were more caring for Paul than judgmental of his situation.

Galatia also became a place of controversy and heartache for Paul, for those that had been his closest allies had turned away from him and from the gospel because of others who had gained influence in the church. Paul's letter to the Galatians is an attempt to get them back on track to their path toward spiritual and relational maturity.

Rabbit Trails and Rest Stops

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing? – Galatians 3:3-4

Paul saw firsthand not only how the Galatians had started out, but everything they went through as they made the decision to follow Christ. The Galatian churches welcomed Paul and the gospel with fervor and enthusiasm, but in between the time Paul left and the writing of the letter, something had caused the Galatians to view the gospel, and Paul differently. They chose another path, and by that, stopped short of reaping all that had been birthed in them by God.

A Different Gospel

Paul describes the chief problem as “a different gospel” :

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all – Galatians 1:6-7a

After Paul left, someone had either come in or made themselves out to be an authority, perverting the gospel and had the Galatians chasing things that sounded good, but produced nothing inside of them. Rabbit trails are nothing new and we all have to deal with them. They come in many forms and often, like with the Galatian churches, sound either important, caring, or fair and right:

...Then he said to [Peter], "Follow Me". Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them... When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me." – John 21:21-22

Peter had just had an incredible encounter with Jesus. Some say that it was the point of Peter's restoration from the 3 denials he had just done days earlier. What is clear is that in that encounter, Peter had gotten frustrated because of Jesus' statements and requests of him. In his frustration, while Peter heard Jesus declare that there was a path and goal for Peter, he saw John as his "rabbit trail".

If we are not careful, we can also get caught up focusing on the wrong thing for a number of reasons:

- **Harsh Life Situations:** the Galatian churches faced some hard times according to Paul. When those times happen, we often ask the age old question, "where is God?" or "why me?" Harsh situations put us squarely in the center of the mirror, and all we want to do is divert our attention to something that doesn't remind us of the pain we are experiencing
- **Frustrations / Hurt:** Frustrations or hurt may come through life situations, but don't have to. In Peter's example, it was a conversation that was not going the way he expected, probably coupled with his own guilt of failure. For some it could be the negative words of a friend, or repeated patterns of behavior.
- **Fear:** Fear can be a powerful influence, especially when it comes to focusing on the wrong thing. Paul speaks of having to confront Peter to his face, because he was fine conversing with the Gentiles until "the circumcision" arrived. Then Peter withdrew and would not speak to the Gentiles.
- **Confusion:** This is what the people had sown into the Galatian churches. Adding things to the gospel, supposedly having better revelation than Paul, introducing a different "gospel" all caused the Galatian churches to look away from their original path and take up the rabbit trails of different belief

The biggest problem with the rabbit trails is that they stop the efforts needed to cultivate what was rightly and originally planted in us, and make us forget that **there is a harvest that awaits us**. We turn off not seeing the turn as a rest stop, but as a place to take up residence, never getting back on the path God has for us. This is one reason Paul is so adamant about getting back on the path. The subtlety of the rabbit trail is like the frog in the slow boiling water: because it remains comfortable, it stays comfortable way past the point of danger. Likewise, the longer we stay on the rabbit trail we not only don't know how to get back, we are ok with never coming back.

My Harvest, My Self

Those that influenced the Galatian churches caused them to turn against the very people that were responsible for good works in them.

What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. – Galatians 4:15-18

Paul is pointing out the true purpose of those that have raised themselves up: they wanted an audience. They didn't care about the Galatians at all, except to know that the Galatians were lauding them when they were there. Paul, however, only wanted to see Christ formed in the Galatians, and that they would be constantly zealous for the truth and life of God. Because the influencers were so consumed with themselves, the Galatians who followed them became less and less concerned with Paul, and of having a life of love, and developed an attitude of judgment.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love – Galatians 5:6

The Galatian churches who had started out cultivating a life and culture of love and giving, of accepting and appreciating, had now turned to alienation, judgment and self focus. What they failed to realize, however was that there was something that would come from all of their efforts, from their unselfish attitudes, from their full adoption of the gospel, and the relationships they forged because of it. Paul calls it **a harvest**.



Harvests in and of themselves are wonderful, or at least can be, *if we can get there*. The hard part of getting to the harvest is that the only way to know that you can get there is to focus, not on

self, but on the “crop” the entire time. The greater the focus on the “crop”, or the end result, the less ability there is to focus on self. Those of you familiar with the story of the Tortoise and the Hare, know that the hare had all of the ability to beat the tortoise. The hare, however, was focused on himself, on how superior and different he was from the tortoise. The Tortoise on the other hand was focused on one thing: getting to the finish line. He didn’t concern himself with the efforts of the hare who tried to get him off course or frustrate him. He just kept doing what he knew he needed to do, and as such, reaped the benefits of the win. Listening to many of the Olympic athletes in interviews, they say the difference between 2012 and 2008 was that they stayed away from distractions and focused on cultivating what was necessary to their goal. The result: gold instead of silver.

Paul urged the Galatian churches to do the same: **get back to the original right path, and don’t allow themselves to get diverted from the end result.** It would be sacrificial, for sure, but it would also pay off in the end.

What is the Harvest?

Like in nature, there is not just one harvest. In God, the harvest is there for whatever it is He is growing inside of you: love, peace, maturity, greater flow of His Spirit, ministry... The important thing is to know what it is that God desires to do, both in a general sense, and in particular, and cultivate that

Questions to Consider:

- What has God started in you that you are on your way to harvesting? What has He started in your small group or in your church?
- What rabbit trails have you gone down? Can you make the decision to get back on the right track?
- What are you doing to demonstrate “faith expressing itself in love”?
- Are there harvests you know you have missed because you have stopped short?

Read for Next Message:

Luke 14:15-35