

Did You Hear About...

Galatians 2:15-3:5

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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I was very thankful when the latest “Trial of the Century” was over. Anybody want to guess which one I’m talking about? I’ll give you a hint: It *wasn’t* the Zimmerman trial. It was the trial of this rather messed-up person called Jodi Arias. Headline News Channel went so overboard with covering all the weirdness that they might as well have been called “The Jodi Arias network.” EVERY NIGHT it was all about the latest dish on this thing. It was like, “Did you hear about what she said...” or what the lawyers said, or about the new evidence they’d uncovered. Here’s the thing: if Jody Arias was a normal person, and we didn’t have all the intimate details of the thing out in the open, nobody would have cared. But we were *fascinated* by all of that. How could anybody do those things? How could anybody think like that? The weirdness just drew us in. Or maybe it was the novelty. We haven’t seen anything like that!

You get the feeling that that’s what was going on in Galatia, an attraction to the weirdness, the novelty, of the things Paul’s opponents in Galatia were promoting. You see that in the way this letter begins. Usually, Paul begins his letters with a section recounting his love for the brothers and sisters, and his past history with them, and it’s all very nice. Six verses into this letter, he just *explodes*. Here’s the quote: “I am *astonished* that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” That word “astonished” is the one used when Jesus pulls off one of his ridiculous, supernatural miracles. You know what Paul’s saying? “Whoa! Didn’t you hear about the truth in

Christ? Yes, you did – but now you're deserting it!" Here's the weirdness: The Galatians church was being told by some troublemakers that they needed to obey Jewish laws, including circumcision and kosher food laws, in order to be saved, when *Paul* had made it clear that faith in Jesus Christ was all that was necessary. And remember: the Galatians were almost completely non-Jewish. All these Jewish requirements were new to them. Could it be that this weird "new preaching" was attractive because it was novel? Can you imagine what the coverage would have been if they'd have had a first-century "Headline News?"

In the section before the one we read, Paul has even gone back to recount some of his own history. In effect, he says, "Did you hear about how I used to persecute believers like you? Yes, I used to turn them over for punishment and even execution. I believed in all those laws *that much!* But Jesus himself appeared to me, and he called me to this ministry; and now I have proclaimed it to you. You do remember what you heard when you first believed – don't you?"

Now, Paul begins with a complicated statement that we can easily make clear in this way. Paul is saying: "I'm a born Jew, but that doesn't help me; I'm only put right with God by my faith relationship with Jesus, because doing all that Law won't accomplish a thing." Essentially Paul is saying, "Did you hear about the crucifixion? Yes, you did! Well, WE have been crucified with Christ, and raised into new lives, lives that are Christ living in us, not just us living sinful lives. We can't defeat this grace of God; even if you get weird and attempt and fail to keep the Law, you STILL live under God's grace."

You can sense that Paul's working up some steam here. He finally vents. "You foolish Galatians!" he explodes. And we can carry his argument this way: "Where did you Galatians get this from? Did you hear about the Spirit? Yes, you did – and then you *received* it. You know that's true. You didn't get it from your own doing of the works of the Law." You can almost sense that Paul is going to add a postscript, and he certainly seems to: "Did you hear about the church that ceased to be because it forgot the gospel that it first heard and believed?"

My friends, that's always a danger for every church. It doesn't matter what size it is, or how old it is, or where it's located, it's a danger. It's a danger for every believer; it's a danger to every one of us. Look, let me put it another way. *We are* family; you've heard me say that over and over. And we function, on many levels, like family. *We do* care for each other, and I've seen that in action, and I know you have, too. *We do* the "Did you hear about the time", and we talk about something from the past, something familiar, that meant a lot to us then, and maybe still does. Which is o.k. for a point of reference – but that's the thing that hurt the Galatian troublemakers, they wanted to go back to the Law, in a sense, and damage the work of the Spirit in their very midst, the same Spirit they had received through the hearing of the Good News. Why? Because it was weird, compared to the things Paul had taught 'em, and that's exciting? Maybe because it was new to them – and isn't the new always better? Paul knew that they wouldn't last long if they stopped looking for God working in and among them, and started looking to their own works, just like the Jews were used to doing.

Paul's' question to them, the last verse of our reading this morning, might be a good question to shine light on *our* path. "Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the Law, or by your believing what you heard?" I can tell you that God does indeed give that Spirit to us all. If you think about it, you'll remember times when it showed up in your life. Why does God give the Spirit to us? He gives it to us so he can work miracles among us. I bet some of you are thinking, "When are we going to see those miracles happen, Don?" Open your eyes, people! You've been seeing them. Think back to the winter, when many of you gave up the comfort of your own bed to come and stay here for some homeless people. That's a fairly new thing that's at the same time and old thing: caring for others, giving of yourself. And think of the many ways you've been cared for by brothers and sisters in this congregation. Think of the help we constantly give to people in the community. Were these things done as "good works," able to bring salvation to the doer? No! They were done *in response to* the Spirit of God in each one of us. So if that Spirit is at work here, what does it mean? It means that God is equipping this church for something. What is it? We'll have to find out.

Did you hear about God at work in you? I think this morning you have. Or at least you've been reminded. So go and remind those of your brothers and sisters who aren't here that God's at work in them, too. And then just give thanks.

Let us pray: O Lord, help us to stay un-confused about the work of your Spirit in and among us. Don't let us think it's so weird! We already know it's not new. Let us remember that you don't give it to us as a gift to be displayed like a trophy, or discarded like some plaything, but as a tool to be used. Help us to see how we are to celebrate our relationship with you, and then share it with the world; in Jesus' name we pray, AMEN.