

Rev. Ben Jones:

[01:00:06:03 - 01:00:37:15]

So I have to say that I'm blown away when someone like Billy says things to lead this service off that I'm going to say in my sermon. And so I want to piggyback on something that he said because the stuff that's going on in the world right now, it challenges your faith, right? It's just so challenging. Lord, how, why? Lord, when are you going to come and fix all this?

[01:00:38:16 - 01:00:53:03]

It's just so challenging. And the thing is, and this is what I want to do when I look at Galatians with you because Paul is talking about faith, but he's talking about it in a very strange way, and I think that he's talking it in a way that we're not used to hearing.

[01:00:54:16 - 01:01:41:04]

So what I want to do is I want to talk about the way we tend to think about faith and describe that as the illusion of my faith, and then talk about what I think that Galatians, Paul is getting at in this passage in Galatians, that has to do with the faith of Jesus, the faithfulness of Jesus, and how it's his faithfulness that saves us, right? It's not dependent on, you know, if I'm going through a dry spell, I'm going to say this later, if I'm going through a dry spell, I'm going through a period where, Lord, how can this stuff happen when it comes right down to it? It is all about God. It's all about Jesus. He has done it all.

[01:01:43:07 - 01:01:48:15]

But we have this tendency when we talk about faith to talk about it in terms of, well, my faith, my belief.

[01:01:50:10 - 01:02:11:09]

And at least in my experience growing up, and I grew up in the renewal movement in the 70s, and the church that I went to, an Episcopal church, had healing ministry and healing prayer, and not very often, but every once in a while, someone in the prayer ministry, when praying for someone who wasn't healed, would say, "Well, they just didn't have enough faith."

[01:02:13:08 - 01:02:19:02]

And as a teenager, I thought, "There's something wrong with that. That just doesn't ring true."

[01:02:21:06 - 01:02:31:19]

But we do. We struggle. And here's the thing. The illusion of my faith is that somewhere deep back in the recesses of my mind, it's I've got to bring something to the table.

[01:02:33:07 - 01:02:44:16]

I've got to bring something to the salvation equation, right? I've got to do something, and if I don't do something, then I don't have any faith.

[01:02:46:20 - 01:03:00:04]

And think of it this way. You might think of the salvation equation as, "Well, Jesus is doing 90%, and I'm doing 10%. That's what I'm bringing to the table." Or let's shrink that to 1%. Let's shrink that to .0000001%.

[01:03:01:13 - 01:03:06:21]

But I'm bringing something to the table of this salvation equation.

[01:03:08:02 - 01:03:21:23]

And there's a problem with that, because that becomes a work in disguise, right? I have to muster enough faith, even if it's just a little bit, I have to muster enough faith to be saved. I have to maintain enough faith to be saved.

[01:03:23:07 - 01:03:40:00]

You know, I'm reminded of what Jesus said about the mustard seed. Remember that? Jesus said, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move this mountain, tell it to get up and go somewhere else." I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life when I think, "If I had faith the size of a mountain, I might be able to move a mustard seed."

[01:03:41:06 - 01:03:41:11]

Right?

[01:03:43:03 - 01:03:44:22]

Amen? Do anyone ever feel that way?

[01:03:45:23 - 01:03:46:22]

Okay? Yeah.

[01:03:49:15 - 01:03:53:04]

Even a little bit of faith seems like impossible.

[01:03:54:05 - 01:03:56:10]

How can I do it? How can I bring it to the table?

[01:03:58:05 - 01:04:21:22]

Here's an image for you. I've sort of played around with this image. There's a classic sort of description of salvation in Christianity, where you've got the two cliffs right and the cross in the middle and Jesus gets us a cross. Well, here's the illusion of my faith version of that. So you're standing on one end of the cliff and on the other side of the cliff is salvation,

[01:04:23:01 - 01:04:26:09]

and down below is, well, sin and death.

[01:04:27:22 - 01:04:29:13]

And I've got a bridge in front of me.

[01:04:31:03 - 01:04:41:21]

And this is the part that I've been playing around with. I first thought, "Maybe the whole bridge is rickety." Maybe 90% of the bridge is solid. Solid wood. Yeah, this looks good. I can walk across that.

[01:04:43:20 - 01:05:02:17]

But then I get to the last 10%, the part that I bring to the table, and suddenly the boards on the... That I'm looking down at are rotted or falling out. And this is the point where I'm like, "I just need to believe more. I just gotta have some more faith. I just need to try struggle."

[01:05:04:06 - 01:05:18:21]

My jaw clenches. And I used to see this when I taught people about healing. People would come up for healing and someone would be praying for someone, and this happened several times, someone could see their jaw clenching. I'm like, "I'm gonna believe."

[01:05:19:21 - 01:05:24:22]

I used to say, "Look, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, man, just relax.

[01:05:26:11 - 01:05:31:08]

Just relax. Don't pray at all. Just receive. We're gonna do the praying for you, man.

[01:05:33:13 - 01:05:35:12]

We're gonna have faith for you. Just receive."

[01:05:36:12 - 01:05:38:02]

And I think that's what it's all about.

[01:05:40:04 - 01:05:44:10]

Because otherwise, I've got to pull my weight.

[01:05:46:13 - 01:05:48:12]

I've got to bring something to the table.

[01:05:50:06 - 01:05:57:14]

Now let me just say that faith, as we've been taught, is a complicated thing.

[01:05:58:19 - 01:06:05:02]

When I start talking this way, some people are worried I'm going down the Cheap Grace Road.

[01:06:06:18 - 01:06:12:19]

Well, maybe, but I'm gonna throw you an olive branch if you're sort of in that camp. Here's my olive branch.

[01:06:14:11 - 01:06:20:12]

I'm talking about the faith that saves, and the faith that saves is the faithfulness of Jesus.

[01:06:21:13 - 01:06:24:15]

But I'm not saying that we don't need to have any faith at all.

[01:06:25:16 - 01:06:28:22]

But here's the caveat. Here's an analogy.

[01:06:30:07 - 01:06:44:00]

I went to seminary in Virginia, Virginia Theological Seminary in the 80s, and parenthetically, my wife went to a different seminary. Back then, we used to call Virginia Seminary the seminary.

[01:06:45:12 - 01:06:49:05]

In Virginia, there's the high school, and the university, and the seminary.

[01:06:50:10 - 01:06:55:18]

And so anyway, the dean of that seminary, Richard Reed, God Rest His Soul, used to say,

[01:06:56:20 - 01:07:00:08]

graduation is by grace, graduation is by works.

[01:07:02:16 - 01:07:03:15]

Right? But here's the thing.

[01:07:04:18 - 01:07:16:00]

All of us went to seminary believing that we were being faithful to a calling, that Jesus had called us to ordain ministry.

[01:07:17:00 - 01:07:32:15]

And speaking for myself, I was trying to be faithful. I'm saying to the Lord, "Lord, you must know something about me that I don't know because I'm an idiot. I don't know how I got... Really, I'm not academically minded. I was mediocre at best in college.

[01:07:33:16 - 01:07:42:13]

Here I am in graduate school. Oh, Lord. Now, I know I got to do the work, Lord. I'm going to put in the work, and I'm going to study. And boy, did I work.

[01:07:43:22 - 01:07:46:10]

I worked, and I worked, and I worked, and I graduated.

[01:07:47:17 - 01:07:51:02]

Here I am. It seems like all the time went by. Now I'm retired.

[01:07:52:12 - 01:07:52:15]

Okay.

[01:07:54:11 - 01:07:55:08]

But here's the thing.

[01:07:56:21 - 01:08:02:07]

That faithfulness on my part has nothing to do with my salvation. Nothing.

[01:08:03:17 - 01:08:16:17]

Absolutely nothing. It has everything to do with discipleship. It has everything to do with responding to what God has done for me in faithfulness. I need to be faithful to God's calling.

[01:08:17:21 - 01:08:28:14]

But if I had chosen not to go to seminary, what if I had said, "Well, Lord, I don't want to do that. I'm going to go down this road, plan B. Does that mean I didn't have faith, and so now what?

[01:08:29:21 - 01:08:30:23]

I'm doomed?" No.

[01:08:32:14 - 01:08:38:14]

Right? So, we need to distinguish between the faith that saves and the faith that we need to walk with the Lord.

[01:08:39:20 - 01:08:47:22]

And all of this is a response to what God has done in Jesus Christ, which brings me to Galatians. Can we put Galatians back up?

[01:08:49:15 - 01:08:54:16]

Now, I think my translation is a little bit different. I'm using the New Revised Standard Version.

[01:08:56:07 - 01:08:59:23]

So, here's what Paul says, and listen to this, because it's kind of strange.

[01:09:01:09 - 01:09:08:02]

Now, before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.

[01:09:09:15 - 01:09:14:20]

Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

[01:09:16:02 - 01:09:23:07]

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

[01:09:24:14 - 01:09:29:22]

As many of you, as were baptized into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ.

[01:09:31:00 - 01:09:43:20]

And for our purposes, I'm just going to stop there. Now, this is kind of odd. Before faith came, until faith would be revealed, now that faith has come, whose faith?

[01:09:45:00 - 01:10:04:18]

What faith are we talking about? Are we talking about the Old Testament before faith came? Well, there were faithful people in the Old Testament. I mean, Abraham, Paul talks about Abraham, who was faithful and was reckoned to him as righteousness. So, it's not the case that there wasn't faith before Jesus came along. So, what is he talking about?

[01:10:06:02 - 01:10:11:18]

Well, here's a way of reading it that helps us understand what Paul is getting at.

[01:10:13:19 - 01:10:20:13]

Before Christ came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until Christ would be revealed.

[01:10:21:19 - 01:10:27:14]

Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by Christ.

[01:10:30:01 - 01:10:38:06]

But now that Christ has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, because we are all children of God through Christ.

[01:10:39:23 - 01:10:43:14]

As many of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

[01:10:44:16 - 01:10:51:23]

Now, I'm using it as a sort of synonym. It's not really Paul's getting at the faithfulness of Jesus.

[01:10:53:21 - 01:11:37:20]

Until the faithfulness of the Messiah came until the faithfulness of the Messiah was revealed, until that faithfulness showed up, we are under the law. And we are justified through the faithfulness of Jesus. We are saved through the faithfulness of Jesus. Let me pull up another piece of scripture to help you see this. So, in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Now, if that was the end of the sentence and nothing else followed it, we could say, "Well, okay, we were saved by grace through my faith, what I bring to the table." Even if it's just this much, I've got to bring something to the table.

[01:11:39:03 - 01:11:48:05]

But that's not where the sentence ends and Paul goes on. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your doing.

[01:11:49:23 - 01:11:55:00]

It is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

[01:11:57:08 - 01:12:14:12]

Well, if I have to bring something to the table, even if it's just a little bit, well, yeah, it is my doing. How can it not be my doing, at least partly my doing, but Paul's like, "No, no, this is not your doing." It is a gift from God.

[01:12:16:09 - 01:12:39:15]

It is a gift. What is the gift? The gift is Jesus' faithfulness, what he has done. Where Israel and the world were unfaithful to God, where Israel and the world sinned and rebelled and fell short, Jesus followed the Father perfectly, trusted the Father completely.

[01:12:41:23 - 01:12:43:20]

And that's what saves.

[01:12:46:10 - 01:13:05:23]

So if we go back to Galatians, this is verse 26, "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, and as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." He's not changing the subject, he's linking baptism to Jesus and faith.

[01:13:07:21 - 01:13:09:13]

What does Paul say about baptism?

[01:13:11:00 - 01:13:19:16]

Paul says this in Romans, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Whoa, let's stop right there.

[01:13:21:02 - 01:13:44:00]

If we are baptized into Jesus, we are baptized into his death, and the death of Christ is his obedience, is his faithfulness. Philippians 2 verse 8, "That Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." The death of Christ is his faithfulness.

[01:13:45:02 - 01:14:03:02]

It is his trust. It is his trust in the Father that we rely on. It is his faithfulness that saves me, not my own. I mean, you're not saved because your faith never wavered. I mean, think about that.

[01:14:04:21 - 01:14:23:17]

If I have to bring something to the table, God forbid, what happens if I die during a spiritual dry spell? How many of us have not gone through that? Even us clergy go through spiritual dry spells when it's like, "I got nothing, Lord. I got nothing to bring to the table."

[01:14:27:02 - 01:14:28:10]

But that's not how it works, you see.

[01:14:29:19 - 01:14:31:17]

It's Jesus' faithfulness, not mine.

[01:14:32:21 - 01:14:40:14]

In another part of Scripture, Paul tells us, reminds us that where we were faithless, he is faithful because he cannot deny himself.

[01:14:41:18 - 01:14:45:13]

Even when we are in those moments of just, "We're lost.

[01:14:46:21 - 01:14:55:00]

We have nothing to bring. I got nothing, Lord." He is faithful even when we can't be.

[01:14:56:12 - 01:15:24:08]

So you picture the waters of baptism not as a sort of test of your sincerity, but rather picture it as a current carrying you into the heart of Jesus' obedience because that's exactly what it's doing. It's in baptism you are dying with Christ and you are bringing his obedience into yourself or he's bringing it into us. We are being clothed with Christ.

[01:15:26:10 - 01:15:31:23]

So when I have these moments, I'm watching the TV and everything is just going to heck in a handbasket.

[01:15:33:05 - 01:15:37:01]

"Lord, how am I supposed to have... Where are you in all of this?"

[01:15:39:11 - 01:15:49:03]

It's at moments like today when we have to remind ourselves, "Lord, it's your faithfulness, not mine.

[01:15:50:12 - 01:15:51:13]

That saves me.

[01:15:53:17 - 01:16:04:01]

Thanks be to God that it is his faithfulness." Faithfulness cannot be about trying harder or getting more of it to have enough.

[01:16:07:03 - 01:16:22:02]

And this is another thing that Billy said that I'm going to hop onto. What did Jesus say? "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light

[01:16:24:10 - 01:16:28:08]

because he has done it all."

[01:16:32:12 - 01:16:35:17]

There is nothing you can bring to the table, nothing.

[01:16:37:12 - 01:16:46:04]

No amount of belief, no amount of good works will sort of bridge the gap between that bridge and salvation. No.

[01:16:47:18 - 01:16:59:09]

The faithfulness of Jesus, to go back to the bridge analogy, Jesus' faithfulness, that's a concrete steel reinforced bridge, my friends, that's locked into the rock on either side. Why wouldn't you go across that?

[01:17:00:16 - 01:17:03:10]

Why would you pick this wooden bridge even if part of it looks good?

[01:17:06:02 - 01:17:07:15]

That's how the faithfulness of Jesus works.

[01:17:09:02 - 01:17:11:22]

And I respond to that in gratitude.

[01:17:13:05 - 01:17:16:20]

"Lord, what are you calling me to do? How can I love you in return?"

[01:17:17:21 - 01:17:23:21]

That's where the rubber meets the road, right? But none of that saves me. I'm already saved.

[01:17:25:09 - 01:17:29:21]

I'm already saved because Jesus has done it all.

[01:17:31:07 - 01:17:32:03]

Pray with me.

[01:17:33:05 - 01:17:50:01]

Father, I ask that you pour out your spirit on us, and as we come to this altar today, Lord, that you help us bring with us and lay at your feet all of the things that we are carrying, all of the burdens that we have, just lay them at your feet.

[01:17:52:02 - 01:18:18:20]

And Lord, help us to just take a deep breath and not struggle, just receive the faithfulness that you have provided and the gift that you give us in your death and resurrection. Help us to just breathe it in, Lord, to receive it, knowing that there is nothing more I can do or need to do to be saved.

[01:18:20:03 - 01:18:22:04]

In Jesus' name, amen.