

It Is Written – 4. Law & Gospel - Galatians 3:10–14 3-31-19

Remember when people wrote letters to each other?

If you do, then you're definitely showing your age.

But... it wasn't that long ago!!!

Remember any of these songs?

- I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter,
- Please, Mr. Postman
- Take a Letter Maria
- Joe Cocker growling My Baby Just Wrote Me a Letter
- The Beatles wrote... P.S. I Love You and
- I'll write home every day and I'll send all my loving to you.
- Hello muddah, hello faddah, here I am in Camp Granada.
- Lulu – to sir with love.
- Country music still does letters! 2009 song of the year was **Please Read the Letter**, by Robert Plant and Alison Krause.
- Of course, there's Stevie Wonder's ***Signed, Sealed, Delivered!***

There's a wonderful Show on the Hallmark Channel produced by Martha Williamson called, ***"Signed, Sealed, Delivered"*** that features interesting characters and very well written stories. It's all about how important letters can be. The stories show how lives are changed by writing and or receiving a letter.

Journalist Catherine Field says, *A good handwritten letter is a creative act, and not just because it is a visual and tactile pleasure. It is a deliberate act of exposure, a form of vulnerability, because handwriting opens a window on the soul in a way*

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that cyber communication can never do. You savor their arrival and later take care to place them in a box for safe keeping.

Brett and Kate McKay, "The Art of Letter Writing,"

Sending a letter is the next best thing to showing up personally at someone's door. Ink from your pen touches the stationary, your fingers touch the paper, your saliva seals the envelope. Something tangible from your world travels through machines and hands, and deposits itself in another's mailbox. Your letter is then carried inside as an invited guest. The paper that was sitting on your desk, now sits on another's. The recipient handles the paper that you handled. Letters create a connection that modern, impersonal forms of communication will never approach.

In his article in The Huffington Post called "*The Lost Art of Letter Writing*," Andrew Lam refers to a recent experience. He writes:

Thanks to the Internet, I have over the years managed to get back in touch with many long-lost friends. But one of them recently sent me an e-mail complaining that, now that we are communicating on a regular basis, she actually misses me more, not less.

Astounded by the seemingly paradoxical statement, I immediately hit reply: "L. what on earth do you mean?"

Within half-an-hour or so, her e-mail came back with a strangely familiar passage in quotation marks. "*Late last night the rain fell. It dripped and dropped against my windowsills announcing the departure of a lethargic winter. Yet I didn't mind the winter nights. What I fear is the warmth of summer. When my skin turns*

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bronze and when that afternoon sun lingers a bit too long on my shoulders, oh L. I get in trouble."

Only when I got to the end did it dawn on me that it was my own writing. I wrote this passage to L. two decades ago in a handwritten letter, something I regret to report that I rarely do these days. L. concluded:

See what I mean? Where is the writer of this letter now? We e-mail, but are we really in touch?"

Today we are in the 4th week of a Lenten Series titled, **It Is Written** and are considering **a letter that changed the world.**

The apostle Paul traveled the Roman world proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Savior and establishing churches in cities throughout the empire.

He entrusted these faith communities, these churches, to pastors and elders he appointed. But the enemies of Paul and Christ and his Church were many. Men would come to these churches after Paul moved on and say,

Did Paul say? That's not the truth!

In the case of the churches in Galatia these men suggested that faith in Jesus wasn't enough to be right with God; first you had to become a Jew and then you could receive Christ.

What did Paul do when he heard of this?

He sat right down and wrote himself a letter;

a letter that changed the world.

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His words thundered from the page.

Galatians 3:1–3

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this:

Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Are you so foolish?

Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Throughout the world, throughout history people have imagined and worshipped gods made in their own image.

Do this and that and then god will reward you or at least not punish you.

They looked at the wonder of creation and had no trouble imagining the great power of the Creator God but, in the weakness of their flesh, they never considered that this Great God would desire:

- to be in a relationship with them,
- to love them,
- to forgive them,
- to enable them to love others,
- to give them peace and joy,
- to guide their lives to blessing instead of the curses brought on by sin and selfishness.

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When Paul preached throughout Galatia, the people heard and, moved by the Holy Spirit they believed and by believing they were saved!

But then, at the insinuation of faithless men, they lost their way.

Until the letter arrived. In it, Paul reminded them...

Galatians 3:26–28

... in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Before Christ, the law was like a nanny, protecting and instructing us. Now that Christ came, made the perfect sacrifice for sin and destroyed the power of death and the devil by rising again, we don't need a nanny any longer.

Paul says **in Galatians 3:26–28**

I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The words from his letter change everything.

- We no longer try to justify ourselves.
- We no longer consider ourselves better than anyone else.
- We no longer think that we deserve God's favor because of what we do or don't do.

We are children of God because of what Christ has done for us.

Consider the power of these written words!

Galatians 1:3–4

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Galatians 2:19–20

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but 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.

Galatians 4:4–7

But when the fullness of time had come,

God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 5:1

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:25–26

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Do you see how this changes everything?

- No more prejudice.
- No more hatred.
- No more self-righteousness.
- No more barriers.

We are children of God because of what Christ has done for us.

The law shows us our sins so that we come to Christ!

When we receive him by faith, the law guides us to shine with the light of God's goodness and mercy.

Lead character Oliver O' Toole from the Signed, Sealed, Delivered series says,

The thoughtfully composed, well considered addressed stamped, professionally postmarked and personally delivered letter is still the gold standard of human intercourse. God is in his universe and all is right in the world.

That is certainly true of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Martin Luther said this about the letter:

- While we live here on earth, we will be accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and bruised by the law with its demands of active righteousness.

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- Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter of Galatians to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness.
- **For if the truth of being justified by Christ alone (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost.**
- For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness.
- There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ, you must build your confidence on your own work.
- **On this truth and only on this truth the church is built and has its being.**

God wrote a letter and sent all his loving to you!