

Prayer of Preparation: Worship and Song #3165

1. *Take me to the water, take me to the water, take me to the water to be baptized.*

2. *None but the righteous, none but the righteous, none but the righteous shall see God.*

This portion of Paul’s letter to the Galatians is all about faith...and where we find it. Many people have faith in their jobs, in their families and relationships, and in their best friends. Some people have faith in their bank accounts, that they will win the lottery, and in all the things they own. But Paul says our faith is in Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus Christ is a bold statement. Up to this point, the Jews and the Galatians relied on a bunch of rules, Paul calls them laws, for their faith. If you think about it, we do too. We believe that if everyone follows the rules, or laws, things will work out just right. But here’s the point Paul is making...rules, or laws, aren’t faith. The rules Paul refers to aren’t going to get us to heaven... only our faith will do that.

That’s the difference. Following rules is good...if the rule is to drive 55 miles an hour, drive 55 miles an hour. If the medicine you take says “take with food,” please take it with food because if you don’t you’re going to get sick. So Paul isn’t telling us to leave the rules behind, I can’t tell you enough to follow them. No, Paul is telling us that the source of our salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. It is our faith which prompts us to follow those rules so that we can live lives worthy of our calling.

Our life of faith begins with our baptism. Our baptism ushers us into new life, one which calls us to new laws: *love God and love neighbor as we love ourselves.*

We take our baptism vows very seriously. That’s because our baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace...or, our baptism is our sign to the world that we have faith in God and our salvation, and we place our lives in Jesus hands. This same Jesus who told us to *love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves.* It sounds simple, right?

The song says, *take me to the water to be baptized.* But what the song is really saying is: take me to the water so that the world can see that I have placed my faith, my trust, my hope in Jesus. And, *take me to the water to be baptized*, so that I can show the world that I have decided to follow Jesus who commands me to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

I’d like to tell you that Paul’s message is more complex, but it’s not. But it is difficult. Paul’s message is difficult because if we look at the commandments as a bunch of rules and laws to follow, salvation would be simple. We could make a checklist and every time we followed the law, we could put a check next to it and when we get to heaven Jesus would give us in A+ in life.

Don’t curse...check.

Take care of our parents...check.

Don’t lie...check.

Keep the list and show it to our neighbors to show them how saintly we are...check.

But Jesus says that our law is love. You know what I’ve never had? I’ve never had anyone come to me and say that they’ve out loved their neighbor. Not once in all of my ministry have I heard it. I’ve had people testify that they’ve been saved from having a foul mouth, they’ve seen the light and taken care of their parents, they don’t lie anymore, and they’ve stopped the pride which we use to compare themselves to their neighbors. But, I’ve never once had someone come to me to say that they’ve out loved God and neighbor.

Why? It's because love is hard. It's very, very, very hard. We love God with no problem. We pray, attend worship, take communion, go to Sunday School. Yes, we do those things. But our neighbors...well, we've got some work to do on that because our neighbors don't worship like we worship, they don't eat what we eat, they don't look like we look, and they certainly don't love like we love. And so, we fail at the second part of Jesus' command...love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

But there's good news: God is not through with us yet. God is ever working on our hearts and minds to turn them towards love, Christ's love which knows no boundaries, respects no race or gender, and is showered upon every inch of the world. That's the power of love, the same love we receive in our baptism, the same love we are clothed in, and the same love we are charged with spreading throughout the world. That's the love which saves.

Response to the Word

3. *In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, We shall be saved.*

4. *Glory, hallelujah, Glory, hallelujah, Glory, hallelujah, to be baptized.*