

The Test

A Series on the Letter to the Galatians

Message 9 – “Sowing and Reaping”

Galatians 6:7-10

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown

September 6, 2020

Rev. Dr. David Woolverton

Well good morning everybody! Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, it’s so good to be here with you, so good to have you in the house lifting up the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we prepare our hearts would you join with me in prayer.

Lord God we thank you for your Word and we pray that you would pour out your Holy Spirit on each and every one of us. Lord open us up to your Word and open your Word up to us. Teach us Lord what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this Lord we pray in Jesus’ name - and all of God’s people said, Amen.

So, there’s a lot of things that are transitioning right now. And one of the things that’s transitioning for us is that we are bringing a close to our summer sermon series that we have been focusing in on. It has been called “The Test”. And one of the things that we have been doing in this Test series is that we have been dissecting and looking very positively at the letter in the New Testament called Galatians. Galatians was a letter written by the apostle Paul 2000 years ago and part of what he has been doing is trying to help those early believer and all of us to learn the basics of what it means so that our witness to the world can reflect the heart of God. The heart of the God who sent Jesus to die on the cross. So, what we have been doing is we’ve been tracking through each of the chapters of this incredible letter and learning and listening together for what those basics mean for us today.

And one of the main principles that we instituted at the very start of this series is this: the teacher is silent during the test. Now what Paul reminds us of is that even in our failures, we have a God who actually wants us to succeed. He wants us to succeed! So when I was preparing for this sermon series I actually thought of this principle but it wasn’t something that was new to me. In fact, I found it a long, long way back from the time of Paul in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. Now for those of you who may not be familiar with Deuteronomy it was a book written by Moses. So, we’re going way back years and years and years ago. Moses was the guy who led the people of Israel out of bondage, out of slavery in Egypt and brought them ultimately to Mt. Sinai where God downloaded on two tablets of stone what we know as the 10 Commandments. That was a way to try and bring the people of Israel underneath His Lordship, underneath His sovereignty. They had been slaves for 400 years. They had forgotten about who they were. So this was a way for God to reestablish that identity. Yet, by the time that Moses got down from the top of the mountain with those 10 Commandments he found that the people had broken all of those commandments even before they had received them.

They really had a journey ahead of them, so they went to this promised land, this land flowing with milk and honey. They sent spies in and the spies came back and 10 of them said, "We can't do this" and only 2 of them said, "We can take it". They were afraid and because of their unfaithfulness to what God had promised them, they were doomed to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. So now fast forward, the 40 years is done and Moses is now escorting those people to the very precipice of the promised land. Only he discovered from God that he was not going to be the one to actually cross that river and go into the promised land. That would fall on Joshua, Moses's apprentice. And because Moses was going to have to say farewell to the people at that point, he reminded them of all of the things that were important that they had learned during those 40 years in the wilderness. That, in a nutshell, is the book of Deuteronomy.

Very early in that book we read the following in chapter 8,

*Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the Lord our God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (**Deuteronomy 8:1-2**).*

Wow, the test. It's a test like many of us have gone through in our own lifetimes. Thinking about our present-day circumstances, I began to wonder, "were we as a society, were we as the Church going through yet again another test in this season of the pandemic?" Let's face it, we have over 7 months had to go face-to-face with what it meant to change our entire lifestyle, this pandemic has wreaked havoc in so many schedules. It has also wreaked havoc and caused conflict between people-- whether you're going to mask or not mask, whether or not you are going to eat inside or outside restaurants or at restaurants at all... We have also had to face into some racial tensions that have challenged us both inside the Church and outside the Church and we've had to navigate through a whole bunch of challenges, a polarization really as we face into the upcoming elections. So, there's a lot of chaos going on in this year 2020 and made me wonder if this is a test, what has this season been teaching us about our hearts? What has it been teaching us about our relationship with God? What have we been learning about ourselves?

It's been a real challenge, but I'm also here today to give you a word of encouragement. For each and every one of us this is a powerful word of encouragement. We need to hear this, the Holy Spirit seemed to download this on my heart as I was preparing for this message. Are you ready? This is the word of encouragement: **God would not be silent if He didn't think we were ready for the test.**

Why is that important? Because it reminds us that God actually wants us to succeed! He wants us to succeed, why? Because Jesus died for the Church. He poured a lot of Himself into us and the witness of this Gospel message that would transform the world resides in us. God wants us to succeed, He wants us to pass the test. Just like Paul with the Galatians, it's like him passing back their test paper even though it has an F on it: there's notes, there's comments because Paul wants to equip them. He wants to remind them of some very important life lessons. Number 1, he wants to remind them of

- who they are,
- why they are here and
- where they are going.

The same is true for us, we need to remember that for ourselves, we need to always remember who we are, why we're here and where we are going. Amidst all the chaos that's going on around us, these are the foundations upon which God has built this entire mission, so we need to remember no matter what we face, no matter what chaos we face we need to remember who we are, why we're here and where we're going.

As of last week, as we went into chapter 6 of Galatians and we began to learn a few of the specifics, we've learned that **love is the language of the new community in Christ**. And somehow what he said to the Galatians, he's saying to us. We have to somehow become fluent in that language. In fact, **Love shouldn't be our 2nd language, it should be our primary language**. Love is the language of our new community and our fluency needs to remind us of something, something very challenging that we talked about last week and that was,

**If we don't love one another, especially in the Church,
we're not really following Jesus.**

Wow - this is a challenge, but it's the basics, it's the basics of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus reminds us in **John 13**, after He had just washed the feet of the disciples and told those disciples "I'm giving you a new command" he downloaded it to them and he's sharing it with all of us. "A new command" he said, "I give you, you are to love one another. Even as I have loved you," he said, "you are to love one another." (**John 13:34**). Just a reminder, you've heard me share this before, in this moment Jesus did not say, "let us tolerate one another", right? "Even as I have tolerated you." That would have given us a totally different story, wouldn't it? No, He loved us 'to the end' it says (**John 13:1**). And that point was the cross of Jesus Christ. That crucifixion was the moment when He embodied what love was all about and He has called us to take up our cross and follow Him.

What does it mean for us to be fluent in that kind of love? So, Paul takes us a step further as we pick up where we left off last week in chapter 6 of Galatians, so I invite you to open up your bible or bible app or look up at the screen. We're picking up at verse 7. He writes,

*Do not be deceived, God will not be mocked. People reap what they sow. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction. Whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (**Galatians 6:7-8**).*

Do you know what this is? This is a principle that we see from Genesis all the way through to Revelation. It is one of those Laws that God has instituted as part of God's economy and this Law defines life whether we acknowledge it or not. It's kind of like gravity. You know gravity? Literally, I could take my Bible and I could drop it, what happens? It hits the ground, it's a Law! It applies everywhere on this planet (with the exception of those places where they are training astronauts). They have to figure out

how to navigate and understand gravity, but for all the rest of us, gravity is a Law. This is a law too and we call it, "the Law of Sowing and Reaping."

So, if I were to drop my Bible, it's not going to bounce back, but if I were to drop a rubber ball that rubber ball is going to bounce and come back up to me. Some rubber balls can bounce over me, it's got enough power. This is the Law of Sowing and Reaping. I've learned this law from my parents back when I was a kid, but they expressed it differently, and dare I say it was through Jersey talk, right? So, what I learned was "What goes around, comes around". Did you ever hear that phrase? Did you ever use that phrase? What goes around comes around. That's what I heard, that's the Law of Sowing and Reaping. Jesus teaches it to us in Matthew chapter 7. He says,
Judge not, lest you yourselves be judged. By the same measure you use to judge somebody else, it's going to be used to judge you (Matthew 7:1-2)

That's the Law of Sowing and Reaping. If you sow jealousy, you're going to reap jealousy. If you sow envy, you're going to reap envy. If you sow greed, you're going to reap the ramifications of greed. If you sow unforgiveness, you're going to reap unforgiveness. And it's also on the flip side, if you sow forgiveness you're going to reap forgiveness. It's the principle that whatever you sow you are going to reap. It is a Law within the economy of God.

Now let's take that Law one step further into Galatians. Paul continues, he writes,
Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9).

You'll notice I highlighted a couple phrases and words. The first is that couplet "proper time." If you've hung around me for any length of time over the years you've heard me talk about, teach or preach about the two Greek words and concepts about time. One of them is "Chronos" and that is the passing of every second, every minute, hour, day, week and year. It's Chronological time - Chronos. The second word is "Kairos." And, "Kairos" is not chronology, it's not about every second, it's more about the seasons and telling time from God's perspective. God isn't confined by our chronology. And so, when we read this verse here, "*for at the proper time we will reap a harvest*" the Greek word that Paul uses is 'Kairos.' We may not know when it's coming on chronology time, but make no mistake, Paul says, when it's the right time, it's coming and God knows when it's coming. So, we should not give up.

The second phrase I want to raise about this verse is very personal. It's "*let us not become weary in doing good*". You know it's so easy for us to get weary in the face of all of what we have been facing, the pandemic is wreaking havoc as I've shared, as is the racial tensions among us. There's so much going on that we can become weary. The Greek word used by Paul is literally translated "*discouraged*". I've gotta' be honest with you, there were times we've been going through this since March, there were times when all of this was going on and how it's impacted ministry and daily functioning. It's made me pretty weary and dare I confess there have been times of great discouragement. So, this verse I take personally. Let us not grow weary, let us not get discouraged. We have to remember

- who we are,
- why we're here and
- where we're going!

And to remember that at the right time, at the proper "Kairos" time the harvest is coming. It's coming if we just don't give up.

Paul takes that a little bit further in verse 10, he writes,

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

I highlighted that phrase "As we have opportunity" because the word that Paul uses in the original language, guess what? It's based on the word "Kairos". So, in other words what Paul is saying is as we continue on our journey we've got to look for those "Kairos" moments. We have to look for just the right seasons, just the right time, just the right moments that God Himself is providing for us to do good, to embody Love. Because love is the language of the community of faith, the community of followers of Jesus, so that doing of good, that representing the heart of Jesus, that's what we refer to as "The Mission".

Now, I've heard that word "mission" for decades. When I started out in ministry 30 plus years ago that was the thing that you were supposed to do, churches were supposed to get together and figure out your mission statement and businesses did that too, and businesses were challenged to "find your mission statement" and so people and businesses and churches gathered together, researched together and came up with mission statements and we framed them and put them into frames and put them on the walls and many people put them into their files, checked off their box, saying "we have a mission statement" and moved back into the normal processes of life. *Woo-hoo!* Right? And they missed the essence of what was going on. We 'program-itized' this rather than doing what I believe Paul - and what I want to share with you - is asking of us. I think we have forgotten who we are, why we're here and where we're going. So, we have a mission statement here at St. Paul's but our mission statement which is "**as followers of Jesus we will out Love the world.**" Our mission statement is pretty much the DNA of who we are as people of faith. It reminds us that our fundamental principle of life is to learn to be fluent in the language of Love and to take that Love out there. So, I want to challenge us to re-define "mission" for our purposes as we end the summer, launch into the Fall and also capture what Paul is teaching us in Galatians as a whole.

That word "mission" within the context of the church is often best described the way a man named John Stott, who was an Anglican priest and one of the founders of this movement that hit the nations called Evangelicalism, defined mission. He said mission is "Everything the Church is sent into the world to do." That sounds great, right? That sounds like a wonderful definition of mission, but I want to push against it. And to do so I want to tap into John Wesley, one of the founding movers and shakers that formed the Methodist movement. John Wesley, or I like to call him Uncle John, Uncle John says, "The world is my parish" giving a global perspective to why we do what we do. He also said, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion by social; no holiness but social holiness."

Now what does he mean by that? This is so incredibly personally important to me. I am a United Methodist pastor today, in fact I am a United Methodist today because of this principle. I'm not a United Methodist because I grew up in the church, I did not. I chose this because I did a lot of research, and my research was not just in the denomination as a whole, it was into the person of John Wesley. And simply put is what John Wesley is saying here is that our vertical relationship with Jesus Christ is essential. That's the personal piety we have, our relationship with Jesus defines who we are, but our relationship with Jesus is worthless unless we take it to the streets, unless we show and demonstrate the love of God shown to us on the cross. So, you have to have the vertical, but you also have to have the horizontal. That's why I became a Methodist. That and also because John Wesley was 5'5", the appropriate height of pastors. ☺ I also think Jesus was 5'5", we just haven't been able to find the archeological evidence yet, but I'm tracking that. ☺ So, from that vantage point, we take mission one step further, we define it by its own word. "Mission" comes from the Latin word "missio" which means "to send". So, here's my definition of mission, are you ready? You might want to take a moment and write this down and I'll go slow just so you can capture it, you ready? It's really complicated,

"Mission" is You.

Do you need me to repeat that? "Mission = You (and me).

Let me explain. One of the passages of scripture that we have that is the 'go to' passage of scripture to define mission is in fact called, "The Great Commission" from Matthew 28. Look at these verses from the vantage point of what I just said, let me read it to you,

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me..."

I've got to pause there for a second, we could spend hours on just that one verse. In simple terms is that what it means is there is nothing, nothing, nothing that is not held under the sovereign umbrella of Jesus Christ's Lordship. If He is Lord, He is Lord over everything and Jesus holds the authority. All authority in Heaven and on Earth and He is now saying,

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely, I am with you always to the very end of the Age (Matthew 28:19-20).

There is, in these verses, an implicit pronoun that we read in simple terms explicitly just a couple of times, but implicitly it's throughout these verses, know what it is? It is the 2nd person plural pronoun, "You". He's talking to the disciples of course, but because the disciples are to now take this to the extent of all throughout the world and over generations upon generations we are part of the "You", it's our job that's why it's referred to as 'The Great Commission'. That word "you" is to draw our attention further in. As many of us have read and studied this passage of scripture, we focus in on the word, "Go" as being a command, but in the original Greek, the word "Go" isn't even the

primary verb. The primary verb of that sentence is “make disciples”. The word, “Go” is actually a participle, for those of you who are English specialists. That means that the action of going is on-going. So literally what Jesus is saying to His disciples and to us is “*as you are going, make disciples of all nations*”. Even that phrase “*all nations*” needs to tie into the first chapters of Acts. From Luke’s perspective, where Jesus just before He ascends into Heaven, He looks at His disciples and says, “Hey guys,” (again this is the Jersey paraphrase)

I want you to go and take this good news that you have heard and I want you to start where you are, Jerusalem, go to the surrounding area, Judea, go to the places of the people that are not like you, in fact they are the people you don’t like, Samaria, in fact while you are going, just keep going to the ends of the Earth
(Acts 1:8)

So, what we have is ever progressing circles of influence where the Church - that’s you and me – and we are taking this message wherever we go. And while we’re doing that, while we’re making disciples, we are to be baptizing and teaching so that all those who we’re equipping will be able to expand the ever-progressive circles and transform the world.

The mission is you! It’s you. It’s me. It’s us. We are the mission. Jesus says in John’s gospel, “*As the Father has sent me, even so I send,*” **(John 17:18)**. Who? “You”.

The mission is you. As a follower of Jesus, you and I are the mission and here’s how it plays out. Your presence in any context is meant to do two things.

- **First, it is meant to influence that context with Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

You know what they are? They are the fruits of the Spirit that we studied just a few weeks ago in Galatians 5. That means that wherever we go, we are the mission and the Holy Spirit in us begins to influence the culture and the context of wherever we are. The Holy Spirit fruit in us begins to influence and change the environment especially when we become fluent in the language of Love.

Let me share this story with you, every time I think about it over the years it brings tears to my eyes. It’s a true story. When I arrived here at this church a little over 4 years ago, I encountered a church that was severely broken. You all told me that, you shared with me the heartache that you felt. There was a lot of conflict, there were people who didn’t talk to each other, there was conflict between styles of worship and a lot of heartache and brokenness. So, we rolled up our sleeves and worked together and God did some amazing things to bring about healing and unity. There was a sense of renewal and rebirth.

After a year, my first year here I got into a week where I was just very weary like that verse describes. I was very tired, very exhausted, very discouraged for a particular reason and at the end of that week, one of you came to me and said, “Pastor David, I want you to know that I am just so thankful to God that God brought you here.” And she

looked at me and said, "You brought Love back to our church." Gotta tell you, I went home and I just cried. I cried. Not because it was me. Rather, it's because the Holy Spirit worked through me. And here's the thing, ever since then over the past 3 plus years the same thing has happened through each and every one of you. As we have gotten to be more and more fluent with Love in ever expanding circles of influence, the Holy Spirit was working through every single one of us to influence the culture of this church and today God is doing an amazing thing by using this church now to influence the culture of Elizabethtown and beyond. That's what we're talking about here, that's what Paul is getting at, "YOU are the mission" "WE are the mission" and wherever we go, whether to our workplaces or schools or families or neighborhoods, where ever we go, to the local Giant supermarket or to the Mall or to the park. Wherever we go, God is present because He's in you. He's in me. And our challenge as the mission is to influence that context.

- **Second, hold onto your seats for this one: "As the mission we are also to be agents of Holy Spirit empowered subversion."**

Where God uses us to subvert the forces of Satan by the power of sacrificial love." That is what Paul calls in another letter that he wrote, Ephesians, "Spiritual War or Spiritual Battles." So, let's put our agent 007 sunglasses on and be prepared because God is going to use us, but not in the way that you think. God has called us to be subversive, but it's not the way that word is interpreted in the political realms out there in the world. I'm not saying that it's our job to go stir up trouble for the government. What I'm saying is that the true battle that's going on right now is a supernatural battle. So, the truth that we need to remember, and this is why we need to remember who we are, why we're here and where we're going is that battle, that war has already been won by God. The cross of Jesus Christ has already announced victory over the enemy of Love; Satan has already been defeated. He has no claim on any who give their hearts to Jesus Christ. But until that final day when Christ comes to re-claim this which is rightfully His, Satan wants to deceive not only the world, but each and every one of us in the church. So, Paul in Ephesians says I want you to gird yourself up with the spiritual armor and he spends verse after verse describing what that armor is. Do you remember what he says to do once you have all of that armor on? He says, stand. He doesn't say fight. Why? Because He already fought it. He says stand because the battle is God's, not ours. But God uses us and by virtue of our sacrificial love, our love that is non-defensive, but confident because of who Jesus is, that Love reminds Satan that he's already lost.

And that's our job in mission, you see, we are the mission, the mission is me, the mission is you. *"So, let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up, therefore as we have opportunity let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers"* (**Galatians 6:10**).

Paul then finishes up chapter 6 by going back to the debate with the Judaizers and basically reminds them again, circumcision or not circumcision, it doesn't matter because before us is a task. We're to represent the heart of God. You are the mission. God would not be silent if He didn't think we were ready for the test. God would not be silent if He didn't think you were ready.

So, it's time for us to turn in our test papers. God wants us to succeed, He wants us to get the basics, He wants us to be His witnesses, He wants us to Love. So, let's be the mission. Friends will you pray with me?

Lord God, thank You that You have called us to a very special mission. To be the heart of Jesus Christ in all that we do and wherever we go. Lord, the only way we can do that is for You to empower us with Your Holy Spirit. Fill us Lord, fill us today with more of your Spirit. Remind us daily who we are, why we're here and where we're going so that we can go with confidence and represent with Love, the heart of the God who gave Himself for us. So, Lord I know that there are individuals who are reading this who may be weary. Breathe on them a refreshed Spirit, renew them from the inside out. And I know Lord that there are those who are reading who are wanting so desperately to have that sense of renewal and forgiveness. Point them to the cross. And I know Lord that there are people who are reading who are desperate for healing, Lord minister to them and in the name of Jesus, bring about that healing. Regardless of all the tasks before us, we surrender ourselves. We want to be influencers for Jesus and supernaturally empowered agents for Your grace. It's in Jesus' name that we pray, Amen.