

The Good News is from God

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[0:00] So as I said, we're going to begin the first couple of Sundays in the book of Galatians, thinking about the good news that you and I must never forget, and beginning here that the! good news that we find in God's Word, in the Gospel, it comes from God, it's not man-made.

And that's important. If you were to ask yourself, if you were to ask the question, where do we go for reliable news? That's maybe a question you find yourself asking from time to time.

The Vancouver World newspaper famously got the news wildly wrong in 1912, as the Titanic was sinking. They were the first newspaper to report what was happening, and they said, Titanic sinking, no lives lost. 1,500 lives were lost. Where do we find news that's reliable? In 2025, we discovered that the BBC is being sued by President Trump because the BBC had deliberately doctored his speech about the Capitol Hill riots in order to present him in the worst possible light.

Where do we go to find news that is true, that is reliable, that is vital? And that takes us, perhaps surprisingly, to the church, because as the church, we have a task of broadcasting news that is good and true and vital. Think about the thing that sociologists have been recognizing, and church leaders have been recognizing for the last couple of years now, I think, why is it that so many young men are returning back to churches? And the answer is that those young men and many others are looking for something that is true and solid and reliable, not being offered it in the answers of our secular society. And so they are searching for truth.

And we pray that many would find the truth as it is found in Christ Jesus. So we're going to spend a couple of weeks in the book of Galatians, this early letter of Paul where he explains, but also does a lot of work defending the good news that he proclaims, that the church has been proclaiming since Jesus died, rose again, sent the Spirit. And so Paul writes the letter to a young church that he's planted, perhaps just a few years previously, recognizing that these young Christians, they're being turned away from his message to listen to message brought by a different group of teachers.

[2:47] And he calls it a false gospel because it doesn't offer real hope. And the great need, and what drives this letter is that these Christians would come back to the true gospel, to the good news that is truly good.

And I think it's always valuable for us, and I think it's helpful for us as a church at the start of the year to focus our time on the message of what God has done for us in Jesus, to remind ourselves of this good news that we would never forget it, but rather we would love it, that we would live it, and that we would be sharing it together and with others. And so just to kind of plot where we're going to go this morning, we're thinking about the source of the news, that the good news is from God. This evening we're going to think about the content, that we are justified by Jesus and not good works. Next Sunday morning we'll think about the nature of the message that it's vital, this good news is vital for us, and then we'll finish next Sunday evening with the effect of the gospel, that the good news, as we receive it by faith, it changes our lives. But today we'll think about the truth that our good news is from God, it's not man-made. So we're going to begin thinking about authority, because this really dominates the early chapters that we've just read. The idea that Paul the apostle, he is a messenger that you and I can trust. In our day, we know this, there are lots of voices, lots of opinions, lots of podcasts we can go to, YouTube channels we can check in on, any number of topics, and that includes religion and spirituality. The question becomes, are they always qualified to speak on what they comment on? And so sometimes we maybe find ourselves fact-checking, and maybe if we're doing our homework, we look at credentials, we look at qualifications, is this person a leading authority, should I give sort of credence to what they are saying? Boys and girls, you'll know this, when you go back to school, you're going back to school, sorry to break that to you, if you haven't realized that, in a couple of days, when you want to find out

about a subject and you're in school, you know that you can trust your teachers, what they say on maths or English, those kind of things, and also if they give you some homework, and they say, here's the books to look at, here's the websites to look at, now you know, here's the information that you can trust. When we turn to the book of Galatians, maybe you notice this as we read it, that Paul wants to highlight in so many different ways, I am an apostle, my words have authority, this is a voice, this is a message you can trust. He begins by introducing himself as an apostle, what's an apostle? An apostle was someone who was sent by Jesus, an apostle was an eyewitness of Jesus, and for Paul, now if you know his story, Jesus appeared dramatically to Paul on the Damascus road, totally changed his life around, and sent him with this unique mission that he's been speaking about. And so Paul in this early chapter, early couple of chapters, he wants to highlight his authority, not so they can show off, not so he can lord over others, somehow say I'm more important than you, but to say we can listen, and we should listen to him as he brings the good news from God.

So just to notice how he does it, look at the two introductions, first of all the introduction of himself. Verse 1, Paul an apostle, who's he sent by? Sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. That's his authority to speak and to write this message, it's God given. What about as he introduces his message? Look at verse 11, I want you to know brothers and sisters that the gospel I preached is not of human origin, not man-made. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it. Rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. That's his authority. His message that he's bringing in this letter comes directly from the Lord Jesus. He follows the same pattern when he tells his story.

From verse 13, we hear him tell his own story, and he begins by talking about his past life. You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism. What was it like? How intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. So he says, I was a superstar Pharisee. You will have heard about me. I was reckoned to be like so righteous in the eyes of people, but at the same time, he was a supreme hater of Jesus and his church. He thought he was doing God's will by trying to destroy God's church. And so just think about that, isn't it? It's crazy to think that Paul would spread the story of Jesus as none other than God in the flesh, that he would start telling the story of a Messiah who is crucified, that he would speak to us about salvation coming by God's grace and not by our law-keeping unless God has shown up and God has given him this message, because this is not the way he was living ordinarily. And then he talks about his conversion. Where did the change come?

How does a religious terrorist, because in one way that's what Paul was, going around trying to persecute people, harass people, throw people in prison, happy to see people murdered. How does someone go from a religious terrorist to a gospel preacher? And again, he wants to make the point, it's not down to man, it's not down to him, it's all of God. So how does he put it in verse 15?

[8:47] But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me. God chose him, God called him, God revealed his son to him and in him.

There's that wonderful, but God, but when God, God's the great interrupter. His grace has utterly turned Paul's life right side up when Paul certainly was not looking for it.

And this theme continues as he speaks about the journeys that he takes. Look at verses 17 to 24. He emphasizes, first of all, as soon as he gets this call to go and bring good news to the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I didn't go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles, but I went into Arabia and later to Damascus. Why is he telling us that? He's saying, listen, I didn't go to the apostles, they didn't need to teach me because Jesus was teaching me. Instead, he went into the desert. Again, it's emphasizing that his authority comes direct from Jesus. And then he talks about his preaching ministry, and that doesn't happen in Jerusalem and Judea. It happens, verse 21, in Syria and Cilicia. So it's outside the usual realm of influence.

The apostles are not directing his teaching. And then you get that wonderful thing about how his reputation is spreading. Verse 23, the man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. It's a wonderful idea. The hunter is becoming the hunted. The persecuted is now persecuted as a preacher of the gospel. And in all of this, God is getting the glory because God is at work in and through Paul. So Paul the apostle is a messenger that you and I can trust.

[10:43] So to whatever extent we are interested in Christianity, whatever extent we want to know God and his good news, we're being invited to

recognize here is a voice we can trust.

Of all the options available to us, the YouTubers, the podcasters, the writers, the armchair experts, there is something unique about Paul. He is an apostle. He has unique authority from Jesus. His letter is part of God's word, the Bible, and God's word has authority. It is truth from God. Therefore, we can and we should trust it in our lives. This letter that we have here, it was written maybe 30 years after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by somebody who was totally transformed by Jesus who was an eyewitness, commissioned by Jesus. This is a reliable source of authority.

Lots of people are recognizing that in our generation, there has been a loss of what was previously accepted, that idea of we trust the experts. In the days when anyone can have a platform, it's really easy to listen to an influence or a celebrity, you know, somebody from the world of pop or film, on any number of topics. Who do I listen to for my views on politics or climate change or even religion? Everybody is chiming in and we need to be able to know whose voice should I listen to?

And on the most important topic of all, how can I know God? Who is God? How can I be right with God? Who is Jesus? What has he done? We must listen to the voice of authority and that voice is God's word and here it's God's apostle. So that's Paul's authority, but he moves quickly on in the midst of that to speak about his astonishment. Did you notice that in verse 6? He uses that word astonished. I am astonished that you're so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. There is astonishment here because Paul's good news should never be rejected and he's astonished how quickly this church is threatening to throw out.

[13:19] Now many of us I know will remember the day the Berlin Wall came down. I remember as a school kid eating my cereal in front of the breakfast news and watching images like the one on the screen.

I wonder how much we know about the change that it meant for the people in East Berlin when that wall came down. Just to think about some of it just for a moment. No more were they living under constant surveillance of a big brother kind of society. No longer were there severe travel restrictions. No longer was there separation. There could be reunions with family and friends.

There was greater access to jobs and employment and free elections. And no wonder, if we remember those scenes, there were so many tears of joy and songs being sung.

Put yourself there for a moment. If that was you, would you ever want to go back to the old days, the way it was in the East? Picture for a moment Paul's distress. He has brought to these Christians the good news the good news that you have freedom in Christ Jesus.

That by placing your faith in Him, you are reconciled to God. You are at peace with God. By trusting in Jesus alone for salvation, you are a full member of the kingdom of God.

[14:59] That was His good news. That was His good news. And they believed it. But now, now they're turning to a different message. And Paul calls it a false gospel. Why does he call it a false gospel? Because there are those who are saying, yes, believe in Jesus, but you can't really be a member of God's church unless you add law keeping. You can't really consider yourself to be a true Christian unless you are able to say, my keeping of the law earns my place in the kingdom.

Jesus plus, make sure your diet is right, make sure your circumcision is right to be part of God's church. And so he is full of apostolic astonishment at their reversal.

The message they had, look at verse 3 and 4, the message they had was God is a God who by His grace has made peace with sinners. Because it was God's will to send His son Jesus to give Himself as a sacrifice to die for sins, to bring a rescue about, to transfer people into a new kingdom. And we don't do anything to earn that. We receive it as a free gift of God's grace. And it's no wonder he concludes that section saying, to whom be glory, to God be the glory forever and ever. Amen. In the true gospel, God's gospel, God chooses. And God acts. And God sends His son. And God's son saves. The cross is God demonstrating God's love.

[16:48] The effect is that God produces a rescue. And by the Spirit, God blesses us with salvation as we choose, as we place our faith in Jesus as Lord. The good news is from God.

And that's a good news that brings true freedom and true joy as Father, Son, and Spirit work together to accomplish our salvation. That's a gift to receive, not something we can earn. Boys and girls, we're still close enough to Christmas Day that I can use this illustration. Imagine yourself under the Christmas tree and the presents are being handed out and you get a present from your mom or dad or brother and sister. And even before you have unwrapped the gift, you turn to them and you ask, how much do I owe you? That'd be a terrible thing to happen on Christmas Day, wouldn't it? Gifts are supposed to be received with joy. But somewhere along the line, these false teachers have come and they've persuaded these Christians that salvation is something that needs to be earned and paid for. They're falling under the spell of legalism. That we must somehow merit God's mercy. Then we must try to earn God's love. And that is slavery and that is doomed to failure. And that's why Paul is so astonished and why he speaks so strongly. Look at what he says to them. You are deserting. This is an abandoning. You're deserting them when he called you to live in the grace of Christ. So they're deserting God's message of grace. But more than that, they're deserting

God himself. When you leave behind God's message, you're leaving behind God. This matters. Think about it in the Old Testament. Book of Exodus. Here is Moses and he's led the people with God's help, God's direction, out of slavery, into the freedom of knowing him.

And then there is that awful moment where the people of God decide that they're going to build a golden calf. And they give their worship to an image instead of the one true God. This is like another golden calf moment. They've been saved and set free to enjoy life with God through the Lord Jesus. But now they're going back to choose what is not a gospel. How's it happened? Look at verse 7. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. People are distorting the message. They're twisting the gospel. They're destroying it by adding to it. The false teachers are in effect saying, trusting Jesus is not enough for your salvation. You need to add your own law keeping on top of that to be sure of a positive verdict from God. Paul doesn't hold back. This is deadly.

[19:49] This is dangerous. Notice he includes himself in this. Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let them be under God's curse. Why? Because this is a direct attack on God and his goodness and his free grace. If we try to add anything to God's grace, we destroy it. And it's all through this letter. For example, chapter 3, verse 10, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. As it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. Or look at what he says in chapter 5, verse 4.

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from grace. This matters. He is astonished. They are trying to rebuild the wall. They're trying to go back to the old way. But the old way was one of slavery and curse and separation from God. And so he delivers a really solemn warning to grab his hearer's attention. And it's still a warning that you and I need to hear today. We need to beware a Jesus plus mentality. Then when it comes to our right standing with God, we don't add anything to Jesus' perfect finished work. There will always be the temptation in our hearts to think that God will accept me or God will love me more if I or because I. Ask yourself, what is it that makes you feel good about yourself? What is it that makes you feel more comfortable and confident that you've earned a place at God's table? It's not going to be food laws and circumcision, but it might be. God is pleased with me. I am saved because of my morality or my likability or my spiritual disciplines or my hard work or my good theology. We must beware thinking that we are accepted by God because we go to church or read the Bible or serve on a rote or any of that.

Faith in Christ alone, that's what justifies us. That's the gospel we must always hold on to. I love the way Spurgeon put it. We must cling tightly with both hands to the gospel. And when they fail, hold on by your teeth. And if they give in, hang on by your eyelashes. The gospel matters. This good news should never be rejected or abandoned. One last thing to say, and it's about Paul's acceptance.

Because this matters, because it tells us that Paul proclaims the only good news that saves. Up on the screen, familiar site, among world leaders. So imagine any kind of standard summit meeting, trade talks, you know, peace delegations between two countries or more than two countries.

There will inevitably be at the conclusion of these talks, a press opportunity. There'll be photos taken. And usually behind some big desk or maybe in front of a desk, after the signing of a piece of paper, there will be the handshake that shows that a deal has been struck.

[23:23] I think we could make the case that we have in chapter two, verse nine of Galatians, one of the most significant handshakes in all of history. It'd be a good essay to write.

Significant handshakes in history. Here is one. James, Peter, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. There has been a gospel summit meeting in Jerusalem between those who are the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, the leaders of the Jewish church, and there are Paul and Barnabas and Titus who represent the Gentile church, the Gentile mission. And the significance of this moment is that they all agree that there is only one gospel.

that Jesus is the only way to be saved. That faith in Jesus alone is how anybody, Jewish, Gentile, can be declared in right standing with God. Whoever we are, whatever our background, there is only one message of good news that you and I need to hear. So this is a massive handshake. So again, notice the beginning of chapter 2. Paul is again picking up on his personal testimony that some 14 years have passed and he comes up to Jerusalem. There's been a revelation. If you're interested, that revelation is likely the one from Acts chapter 11 where the prophet Agabus says there's a great famine that's coming worldwide. And so the church in Antioch decides to send Paul and others with a collection of money to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. And so that brings them here. But also what happens when he's here, verse 2, I presented to the leaders of the church the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. And he says he wants to make sure that he's not been running in vain.

[25:38] Paul knows he has the true gospel. He wants to make sure that the apostles will be ready and willing and glad to accept Gentile converts on the basis of grace alone. He wants to make sure that everybody's running the same race together. And at the same time as that is happening, there's these false teachers, false believers. False believers, he calls them in verse 4. Some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. So they're attacking this idea you have freedom in Christ Jesus. You can be a child of God simply by placing your faith in Jesus. And so the question is, which view wins the day? Does a person have to become Jewish and keep a whole bunch of laws? Or is it enough simply to place our faith in the Lord Jesus? What wins the day is the gospel that Paul preaches. And we know this, first of all, from verse 3, not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised even though he was Greek. So this guy Titus comes along and they recognize he's a true believer and they don't try and add the Mosaic law. They say he is accepted in Christ. And so the gospel that Paul defends wins the day. And significantly as Paul continues to describe what's going on,

God's grace is recognized in all of this. That people are looking at Paul and Barnabas and Titus and what's going on in the world and they recognize this is a God thing. This is something that's coming from God and His grace. It's a reminder, it's really hard to argue with personal story. There is a particular power in a transformed life that bears witness to the truth of Jesus and how He changes us.

But look at what the apostles recognize. In verse 7, they recognize that I've been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Why do they recognize it? Well, surely because of the advance of the mission in the wider world, surely it's as they listen to what Paul says and as they see the effects, as the Spirit works it into people's hearts, they know this is the real gospel.

They recognize He's been called by Jesus to preach it. And then in verse 9, they're given the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to Paul. Who's getting a handshake? Barnabas and Titus.

These two disciples of Paul. They work with Paul. They watch and learn from Paul. And their lives too are clear evidence that the message that Paul brings, the message that we've got in Galatians,

is a message that changes lives for good and forever. Titus, Barnabas and Paul are living proof of that.

[28:48] They can see the reality of God's work. So we've got Paul as he concludes this first part of his letter.

What's he been saying to us? He's been saying that he is the apostle who brings good news from God. And that's a message that must never in any age, generation, or place be twisted or turned from.

Because it is the only way to be right with God, whoever we are. The message is, believe in the Lord Jesus and you'll be saved. Or the message here in verse 16 of chapter 2, know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So as we sit here, first Sunday of a new year, will you, will I, will we trust God's messenger?

And will we trust God's message? This message that says to us, no matter who we are, no matter where we've come from, no matter what our religious background is, no matter what success or what chaos our life is in right now, you and I can be put right with God through faith in Christ Jesus. This Jesus who gave himself to die on the cross for our sins, by putting our faith in him, you can live knowing God's grace and God's peace. You can live in relationship with the living God through faith in Jesus. This Jesus who came on God's great rescue mission. That rescue mission that means today you can be set free from the slavery of trying to be good enough for God by recognizing that Jesus, the Son of God, was perfectly good for you. And he invites you today to trust in him for your salvation. Let's pray together briefly.