

The gospel under threat

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[0 : 00] All over the news, we have seen a politician buying a house just down the road from here, being called out for getting something wrong.

And actually, it's been rather sad to see, particularly when you see images like that on someone's house. No matter what you think of what she's done, really sad to see that.

And this morning, in our passage, we're seeing another, not just a person, but a group of people being called out for something they are doing wrong.

And maybe that also makes you feel uncomfortable. Maybe you were feeling uncomfortable when we read to the children, and then when Shokondi read to his first six, I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting the one who called you to live.

Maybe you felt even more uncomfortable when you heard, let them be under God's curse. Yes. I wonder how you felt about that. It's not the most friendly start to a letter, is it?

[1 : 14] Perhaps you're wondering, Daniel, why couldn't we be looking at something like Philippians, where Paul says very early on, I thank my God every time I remember you. That would be a much nicer thing to read this morning, wouldn't it?

A much nicer thing to read to children. But this is where we find ourselves this morning. We're going to start a series looking at the book of Galatians over these next few months, where we find Paul is speaking very strongly to them about the gospel, and the need to hold on to the true gospel, which saves people, because no other gospel will save people.

And I'm praying that that's going to be good for us. It's good for us to look at this letter at this point. We've recently looked at the book of Acts, and there's some things in Galatians, which will be helped to understand it, because Acts is fresh in our minds.

And it helps us to be reminded about what this church stands for. We stand for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're in a time of year where potentially people will be looking for new churches in this city.

They've just moved in the area, and they'll be looking for new churches, and they'll be thinking, what does this church stand for? Well, as we go through Galatians, they'll be able to see, we stand for the gospel.

[2 : 43] We stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to lift his name high. So it's good that we're in Galatians today and over the next few months. Now, there's two big issues, I think, going on in Galatians.

There's other things as well, but two big things that we see. The gospel is under threat. Hopefully that's clear to us. And also we'll see that Paul defends his authority in this letter.

The gospel's under threat. For Paul, this is life and death issues. Get the gospel wrong. And people are being deceived.

That don't be tolerant of people who are in churches proclaiming another gospel, because it's really no gospel at all. It would be like having a tin of baked beans and opening it up and finding it actually has mushy peas.

And he defends his authority because there's people leading the Galatians away. And the Galatians may be thinking, well, why do I need to listen to Paul?

[3 : 51] Why should I listen to him when so-and-so is telling me something else? And so Paul is at pains to show them, you can trust what I'm saying to you.

And we're going to see these two issues at work in those verses that we've read this morning.

Three points for us. Firstly, the glorious gospel.

We've sung of it, haven't we? And now we see it in these verses. The glorious gospel. Please bear with me.

My notes are out of order. The gospel is summarized for us in verses 3 to 5. We read them at the beginning of our time together.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.

[4 : 51] According to the will of our God and Father. To whom be glory forever and ever. So we find firstly in verse 3 and a little bit into verse 4.

That God our Father ordained Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to give himself for us. To give his life for us.

We need to be very clear about what that means. Because to some, this may actually sound like some horrible form of discipline. A father sending his son to die?

That doesn't sound good. Not just die, but be brutally murdered. That doesn't sound good. Well, what are you saying here? But notice here who the Lord Jesus is.

He's described to us as the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord. He is God. God. God. He's not some weak human being who was manipulated into dying.

[6 : 04] He is Lord God. And notice too, in verse 4, he gave himself. I think that suggests to us he gave himself willingly.

And actually, if you read chapter 2, verse 20, that becomes even clearer. Where Paul says, halfway down the verse, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

The Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ went willingly and lovingly to death for us. So don't mishear this as some terrible form of child abuse.

It's not. It's God in love coming to die for human people who so need a savior, as we're going to see.

So the gospel, firstly, it's Jesus lovingly giving his life for us. It's wonderful, isn't it?

[7 : 09] That Christianity isn't just following some sort of wise guru. It's not a set of burdensome commands. It is trusting in the one who loves human beings so much that he would give his life for us.

It's a wonderful, glorious gospel. And he does that to rescue us from our sins.

Do you see that? Where verse 4 continues. He gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.

He comes to rescue us. It wasn't a death without a purpose. He didn't give his life for us in vain. It wasn't a tragic accident that Jesus died on the cross.

He gave himself for our sins. A problem every human being has, as Paul says in another letter. All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.

[8 : 17] Each of us has sinned. Each of us have not obeyed God as we should. We have gone our own way. That's what's going on.

As Paul says, the present evil age. This present evil age is like that because human beings are rebellious towards God. We don't live for him. Human beings live under the power and influence of sin.

That's what this age is about. In some of my misspent youth, I would play computer games.

And some of them involved killing zombies. Zombies being like the walking dead. Horrible things.

Thankfully, just for computer games and TV shows and movies.

But the walking dead, zombies, that's what human beings are like. That's what all of us are naturally like. We're like the walking dead before God.

[9 : 27] Because we have no way of getting life with God on our own. We are spiritually dead. No matter how obedient we might be to God's law, we cannot live up to it.

We cannot live up to God's standards. We are sinful before him. We'll see that Paul says in chapter 2 that no person is justified through the works of the law.

No one can make themselves right with God. And so, to raise the dead back to life, it takes a complete miracle, doesn't it?

And thankfully, the Lord Jesus has worked a complete miracle for us. See, he, the sinless one, has died for our sin. To rescue us from our sin.

And he didn't just stay dead. We don't worship a dead saviour this morning. Notice, verse 1, Paul says that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

[10 : 41] Jesus, our great saviour who comes to rescue us from our sins, has been raised from the dead. And so, he is qualified to drag us up from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive in

him.

And so, this is the gospel. It's glorious. It's good, life-giving news. If it wasn't for this, none of us would have any real hope.

We'd be awaiting a day of judgment. But we do have this news. And it's glorious. And it's all because of the grace of God.

Nothing we could do could save ourselves. We were dead. We'll sing at the end of the service. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross I cling.

No work we do can rescue us from our sin. Only the work of Jesus. And we're going to have another reminder of this glorious gospel of grace in our service as well.

[12:04] Later when we take the Lord's Supper. As we're reminded of his death in that really visible and tangible way as we eat the bread.

Which Jesus says, take, eat. This is my body and it's given for you. Extraordinary. Extraordinary that Jesus would say that and then do it.

For sinners. Dead people. Who don't deserve it. So it's extraordinary grace. And so the glory must go not to us.

We can't save ourselves. The glory for this gospel must go to God. And that's what Paul says in verse 5. To him be the glory forever and ever.

That's why we began our service singing. Glory be to God the Father. Glory be to God the Son. Glory be to God the Spirit. Because he deserves all the praise and all the glory for this incredible glorious gospel.

[13:14] This incredible gospel which is about grace. Which is about rescue. But the issue is we're going to see more clearly in a moment.

It's going on with these Galatians. Is that the people are in their churches preaching another way to be saved. And these churches are really working hard about who they can trust.

And as they read these opening words about the glorious gospel. They must be thinking can we believe Paul? This sounds different from what others are telling us.

And actually it almost sounds too good to be true. It's so glorious. It almost sounds too good to be true. And we're told aren't we?

To avoid scams. If it sounds too good to be true. Then it must be. So keep away. The Galatians are told.

[14:19] You can do things. To save yourselves. It's not all about Jesus. So Paul is at pains to say.

You can trust what I am telling you. You can give the glory to God. Because it's come not from me. It's come from him. Verse 1. Paul is so clear on this.

Paul. An apostle sent not from men. Nor by a man. But by Jesus Christ. And God the Father. Who raised him from the dead.

Paul the apostle is telling them. About this glorious gospel. And you can trust him. Because he's not made it up.

It's not from him. It's from God. He's the author of it. And so he must get the glory for it.

[15:17] This would be too good to be true. If we just invented it ourselves. But this is God we're talking about. And God can do what is impossible for us. So glory alone to God for this glorious gospel.

But if the gospel is so glorious. Why mess with it? Why suggest to people that there is some other gospel? Why? And yet that's what's going on.

People are going away from the gospel in these churches. Jesus. Verse 6. I'm astonished. That you are 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. Paul's so astonished. He's so fired up here about this.

Because they're abandoning the glorious gospel. The glorious gospel of grace. Which causes them to live. Rather than be the walking dead. They're turning away.

[16:24] They're deserting it. And going to a different gospel. Which Paul says in verse 7. It's really no gospel at all. So what does gospel mean?

It means good news. But it's not good news. If it can't save you. So they're thrown into confusion.

Verse 7. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion. Are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. This is a church in a confused state.

Do they listen to the gospel Paul preaches? Or the gospel that these others are preaching? Because people are preaching something other than Jesus alone. Can rescue you from your sin. The gospel they were preaching to involved this. [17:21] Turn to Galatians chapter 5 verse 2 to 4. Paul. Let's just see a little bit for ourselves. Where we're going in this book.

Paul says. To the mark my words. I Paul tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised. Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Again I declare to every man. Who lets himself be circumcised. That he is required to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law. Have been alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from grace. And then chapter 6. And verse 12 to 13. Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh.

Are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this. Is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not those who are circumcised.

[18:19] Keep the law. Yet they want you to be circumcised. So that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. People are leading them backwards. Leading them back to the law.

And particularly. Trying to get them to do outward things. Like circumcision. To make themselves look right. Caring about what it looks like to other people.

What it says on the tin. Rather than thinking about the inside. And people's hearts. They're preaching something.

Which really you could hear. From any other religion. Which really you could hear. If you went into a mosque. Or into a Hindu temple.

Or into. Or into. Or into. Even a Catholic church. Preaching gospel that says.

[19:20] Jesus is not the only way to salvation. You do things to make yourselves right with God. Jesus' work is not enough.

Difference between. Christianity. And other religions.

I think is this. I've shared this with you before. But I think it's helpful here. Imagine. God is at the top of a mountain. And we're at the bottom. All other religions.

In one way or another. Say you have to climb up that mountain. Yourself. To get yourself to God. And you do that through your good deeds. But.

Slip up. And you'll fall down the mountain. And I don't know about you. But. But I. Often slip up. I wouldn't be very far up that mountain at all.

[20:19] But the gospel of Christ says. We're not good enough to climb up that mountain. And so God has come down to be. Here with us. And to rescue us.

So that he can himself drag us up the mountain. Because we can't do it on our own. That's the difference between. Christianity. Sharing the glorious gospel.

And other religions. Gospels. But other gospels. Which aren't gospels. Do appeal to us.

In all sorts of ways. I remember one Christmas. When I was studying up in London. I was about to return back home for Christmas. And then. Open. My bedroom door in the morning.

And saw that. I'd had a gift. All nicely wrapped up. And then I saw who it was from. And I was like. I haven't got a gift for him. So I opened it up very quickly.

[21:18] I don't remember what it was. Because all I remember is the panic I had. When I thought. I must go and buy him a gift. So off I was. Down to Asda. Buying some chocolates or something.

And wrapping it up frantically. Before I went away for Christmas. And you see. That's why this other message.

That the Galatians are hearing. Is appealing. Because if someone offers you a gift. You feel like you have to. Give something back to them. But Jesus offers us a free gift of salvation.

And says that there's no more work for you to do to save yourself. There's good works that you must and can do for me. But nothing else can save you.

Apart from the work I've done. So just trust me. But this appeals because. You have to also do something to earn it. And perhaps for some of us.

[22:20] It also appeals to our egos. Our pride. I can do something to save myself. I can boast in my own salvation. Whereas this leaves us.

Boasting only in Christ. So when this sort of gospel. This sort of false gospel. False hope is preached. It is really no gospel at all.

And the consequences of going away from it. Are leaving people to do something impossible. And Paul knows that.

Remember who is writing these words. Paul. The apostle. Who describes himself elsewhere. As a Jew of Jews. Someone who obeyed the law to the letter. And found that the only way for him to be saved.

Was God breaking into his life. In a dramatic scene. On the road to Damascus. And if he didn't do that.

[23 : 27] And Paul was left to just obey the law. As much as he obeyed it. He would have never been saved. Never would have been right with God. Jesus alone.

Saves us. By grace alone. For God's glory. Alone. Alone. For Paul.

If it wasn't for. Jesus breaking into his life in that way. He would have no hope. And God has worked. In many of our lives in that way.

Without that we would have no hope. And if it was all about what we do. Then why on earth would Jesus go to those lengths.

Of giving his life up for us. Why? If we could just save ourselves. If we could just do it. And Paul knows God's grace so well.

[24 : 39] It has transformed his life so much. That he is so passionate about it. And so zealous for it. That he writes to these Christians in this way.

I am astonished that you're deserting. The gospel. So don't go preaching something else.

He says. Don't. Don't meet as churches in the name of Jesus. And declare a false message. It's destructive lives.

And if you dare continue to do this. Well you must be under God's curse. Verse 8. But 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. And he feels so strongly about this. That he says the same thing.

[25 : 33] In verse 9. As we already have said. So now I say again. If anybody is preaching to you a gospel. Other than what you have accepted. Let them be under God's curse.

Even if I come preaching to you. Another gospel. Paul says. Let me be under God's curse. So strongly he feels about it.

And what does it mean? What does it mean to be under God's curse? Well the word for curse there is anathema. Apparently it means devoted to God's judgment.

Not merely God's judgment now. But God's eternal judgment. Let them be condemned to death. He feels so strongly about this. Because they are leading people away from eternal life with God's.

It has eternal consequences. And so it must have eternal consequences for anybody who's leading people astray in this way. It's rather sobering.

[26 : 37] But it's the glory of God is at stake here. People's eternal destinies are at stake. For Paul it's a bit like if you saw a group of people heading out with a lifeboat to rescue people drowning.

And you see that the lifeboat is damaged in some way. And you think that's not going to rescue anybody. That's going to bring the rescuers in danger.

And if we stood idly by without warning them. And actually we had a lifeboat that was perfectly good that we could offer to them.

That would be far kinder, wouldn't it? Than just letting other people go out and more people drowning and dying. And that's sort of what's going on here.

Paul knows the gospel that saves. And he sees these churches being led away from the gospel that saves. And so he doesn't stand idly by because he knows the truth.

[27 : 52] And so it's loving that Paul is speaking in this really serious way. It's this serious stuff. And it's serious for us at Calvary Church to be thinking about it this morning.

We stand and we say we're a gospel church. We believe Jesus has come to rescue us from our sins. That's good.

And by God's grace I think that's true of us. We are a gospel church. But we need to remain one. We need to remain preaching it and living by it.

Because there are churches which do turn away from the gospel. The church I've heard of over this last year. Who has dramatically turned away from the gospel. A church which was once like us.

What would Paul write to them? It's scary. It's serious. If I or one of the other elders or preachers stand here and start preaching a false gospel.

[29 : 03] You need to deal with that seriously. It's good that we're an independent congregational church. So if I go astray you have powers to deal with me.

And please do. Because it's serious. It's life and death issues. And also we need to check our own hearts as well.

Are we really living by this true gospel? Do we really believe that Jesus alone saves? And nothing we can add to his work of salvation for us.

Perhaps we add all sorts of things. Good things. But they become things that we think are going to save us. Perhaps we believe we have to be at church every week.

Otherwise we're not going to be accepted by God. And yet it is good to be at church every week.

[30 : 08] Because we need to be reminded of the gospel. We need to be encouraged by other believers. But if we're doing it because we think we have to be saved. Then there's something wrong.

Or perhaps we believe we have to be baptized in water to be saved. And yet it's good that we do in following Jesus' command to be baptized in water.

Perhaps we are here this morning because we know it's communion. And we think we must take communion in order for God to save me. It's good to take communion.

We need to. Because it's going to remind us of this gospel that we don't want to depart from. But it's not going to save you. It's going to help you.

But it's not going to save you. We need to check our own hearts over this too. Because it's serious. Because the glory of the gospel is not found in us doing outward things to save ourselves.

[31 : 14] The glory of the gospel is found in Jesus alone. Who comes to rescue us because we were utterly dead. And powerless to make ourselves right with God. It's not fun to be called out for wrong things.

We have seen that in the news this week. But here it really is totally right. That Paul strongly, as he does, writes to them.

The stakes are high. People's eternal destiny and the glorious gospel of our great God are at stake. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the glorious gospel in which we who were once dead in our sins can know life with you because of the Lord Jesus.

Father, we thank you so much for that work of salvation. We thank you so much for the privilege we have to declare it to others. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that you would help us to faithfully keep proclaiming it and living by it.

[32 : 30] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing. We come empty-handed and we take the bread and know that it is not in us that we're saved.

It's in Jesus who gave up his body, who shed his blood so that we could be forgiven. So it's a glorious thing that we're doing, being reminded of a glorious gospel.

And with that in mind, let's go through the communion service. Let me just pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for this glorious gospel which saves us.

And we come this morning to this communion table, remembering nothing in my hand I bring, simply to your cross I cling.

Amen. We thank you for that wonderful, gracious work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we remember it this morning, would we be filled with praise and thanks for what he alone could do for us.

[33 : 45] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.