

AM Galatians 1:1-5

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Date: 16 August 2020

[0 : 00] My name's Thompson Mackenzie and pleased to be joining you this morning. Originally from Lanarkshire, I now stay in Ayrshire and also study at ATS, or somebody who's main look better is the Free Church College around Edinburgh.

I'm a first year student, or I've just finished my first year, and pleased to be going on with you this morning.

We will be worshipping again this evening at 6pm as normal. On Wednesday evening at 7 o'clock, we'll also have your prayer meeting and Bible study, which will be led by the Reverend Robert Dale. Next Sunday at 11 o'clock and at 6 in the evening, the services will be led by David Parker, a Free Church Minister, who works as a hospital chaplain.

Wednesday the 26th of August at 7pm will be the annual congregational meeting, and that will be chaired by the Reverend Ken MacLeod, the interim moderator. The Deacons Court has felt that you should respond to the difficulties that the Reverend Suraj Kasula is experiencing by sending him £100 from the Congregational Benevolent Fund.

[1 : 31] Nepal has been hit not only by the coronavirus, like the rest of us, but by plagues of locusts and torrential rain that have caused extensive damage throughout Nepal, and particularly in the centre of Kathmandu.

Norman was telling me that some of you will have met Suraj in the past, when he gave his testimony here. I've not had that pleasure of meeting him yet, but I'm in regular contact with him by the use of the computer.

Nepal is a place that is very important to me, so I'm glad to hear that he's supporting him in his work in planting churches in Kathmandu and in establishing the seminary in Bhaktipar, just outside of Kathmandu.

We'll start our service this morning with Psalm 100, unfortunately because of the regulations we can't sing ourselves. But let's just take time to reflect, as we listen to the piece of music, about the words of the psalm.

Psalm 100, a psalm of celebration, that the people of God would have sang as they came up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts.

[2 : 56] A psalm that has, from start to finish, is a song of celebration and rejoicing. So let's just take some time to reflect on the words of the psalm.

Psalm 100 from the Scottish Psalter. All people that on earth do well, Sing to the Lord with cheerful lies, In second word, this praise foretell.

Come give me for Him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God in me. Without the rain He did us stay.

We are His God, He God has made. And for His sheep He God has made.

[4 : 25] O enter then His gates with praise. Approach with joy His courts unto.

Praise God and bless His name always. For it is He with soul to prove.

For while the Lord of God is true, His mercy is forever sure.

His truth that all times were least true. And shall promise to His true true.

Let us pray. O God and Heavenly Father, we give praise to Your holy name.

[5 : 57] That Your mercies do endure forever. That what You have given to Abraham, the promises You still fulfill today for us.

Thank You for the opportunity once again to meet in worship. There have been obstacles to overcome. But thankfully we can once again share the reading of Your scriptures and share the preaching of Your word in person.

And we thank You for the weeks where we were unable to meet. That You have given us the gift of technology. That through live stream, through Zoom and other channels, people have been able to share Your word.

To hear Your teaching. And to give praise to Your name. And to give praise to Your name. We give You thanks for the blessings that You have bestowed in us.

The simple blessings from our health to be able to come together this morning. For our family. For the gift of new life. And for the gift of Your Son.

[7 : 10] The greatest gift that You could have gave us. That while we were sinners, while we were far from You. You gave us Your own Son for our sin.

That we could once again come into Your presence. That we did not need the human intercessory. But that Christ would intercede directly for us before You.

And that we can have communion with You once again in person. We pray for Your church. Not yet opened.

That they will overcome the difficulties. And they once again can share Your word in person. Lord, we have no doubt often prayed about Covid for the people that have been affected.

And we still bring before You the situation in the world today. That people will follow appropriate guidance.

[8 : 22] As we start to see spikes spreading across the country once more. And the numbers rise across Europe. That people will not go after their self-will.

But will have consideration and care for their fellow man. We pray for those who have been personally affected.

And for our frontline staff. We pray for those whom it has challenged about the meaning of life.

And start to them in a journey that we pray ends in finding a relationship with You through Christ.

That some who have wondered the real purpose of life and why they are here.

Have started to ask questions about the things that are important to them. That Your grace will lead them into faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 36] As we have heard in intimations of the donation to Suraj and his work in Nepal. We ask for Your continued blessing on him, his co-workers and their efforts.

For the seminary in Bagnapar that it will raise up indigenous church leaders. People who can relate directly to the culture and the people of Nepal.

For the school that they have opened. That will provide a Christian education where children will no longer be indoctrinated by Hindu teachings and worship.

For the church planted in Kathmandu. That people will have the opportunity to witness and to speak for You. In a country that still penalises apostasy.

In a country that still penalises apostasy. Pray that You protect them from the continued persecution by Hindu nationalists. Who would wish once more that Nepal return to a Hindu kingdom.

[10 : 46] And Lord we pray for Your persecuted church across the world. That You will not let their light be snuffed out in the darkness.

But rather You will strengthen and uplift them. That their light will be a beacon to You and to Your Son, our Saviour. We pray for our own country.

A country that was once the country of the book. A country that is now turning its back in Your ways and Your teachings. In Your road to salvation.

That Your Spirit will fill our people and raise up new servants and workers for the gospel. That we may see a revival in the people and as a nation we may once again praise Your name.

Lord as we go forward this morning we ask that You just be with us as we study Your word. And that it speaks to each of our hearts and minds.

[11 : 55] These things we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour forever. Amen. Good morning boys and girls.

My name is Thompson. It seems a bit strange being up here wearing a visor. Normally I would be expecting to be down the front and moving about a wee bit. But these are the regulations that we have to adhere to these days.

The talk that I had planned was maybe just for a wee bit older group. So hopefully it's still relevant to you. Because I don't think that you've quite started school yet.

Have any of you started nursery? No? Yeah? No? Okay. Do any of you like colouring in? Mmhmm. That's good. Okay. So, we like colouring in. And this, can folks see it? Not too good. Okay. Okay.

[12 : 59] This is my wife's colouring in. It's not mine. Okay. And the reason it's not mine is that mine isn't that good. Okay. So, is anybody good at colouring in?

Mmhmm. Not sure? No. Do you colour in within the lines? Yeah? That's good. I don't. I'm impatient and messy.

I'm impatient and messy. So, I colour in quickly and it goes outside the lines. Mmhmm. You like drawing?

Good. So, when I was watching my wife, my wife colours in to sort of relax and sort of chill out. Eh. So, when I was watching her colour in the other day, it made me start to think of a Bible story.

[13:57] And that would probably sound strange. Where does that Bible story link into drawing? Or where does drawing link into a Bible story? Well, it made me think that even something like colouring in, there's rules.

Right? So, the rules are that you draw within the lines. And you pick appropriate colours. So, I was going to say you have green wellies. But in my day, when I was a child, we only had green wellies or black.

Whereas now you get them in all sorts of colours. And the leaves in the tree, in the plants are green. And the flowers are sort of purple or yellow.

So, there are rules. And it reminded me of, God gave us rules to live by. And he gave us what we call the Ten Commandments.

Now imagine, you'll be just a wee bit young to know the Ten Commandments. Okay? You may have heard of them, but you might be a wee bit young to actually remember them.

[14:59] So, the Ten Commandments were given to a man called Moses by God on two big stone tablets. And these commandments were ten rules about how we were to live and how we were to please God.

And if we followed the Ten Commandments, we would be living how God wanted us to lead our lives. So, that was like following God's law.

And if you follow God's law, we do what is right. And our lives take on a better path. So, by following the Ten Commandments, we can live as God wants us to live.

But sometimes we make wrong choices. Do any of you ever do anything wrong? No? It's all good boys? I am glad to hear it. Okay.

But sometimes, particularly adults, we make bad choices. And we don't follow the rules. So, just like I would colour in outside the lines, sometimes in life I make wrong decisions.

[16:15] So, one of the important rules was to love God with all their hearts and to follow Him.

So, as you get older, you'll find that it's sometimes tricky to know what is right and wrong. What are we supposed to do? And sometimes, people will ask us to do things that aren't what God wants us to do.

Okay? So, how do we know what we have to do? Well, one of the things that God has gave us to help us was the Ten Commandments and also the Bible.

Now, some of you, being younger, you might have nice fancy Bibles with pictures and stories. It's the same stories, just slightly different words from this one.

And this one's dull. It's not got any pictures. So, we've got the Bible. And it's important to keep the Bible at the centre of our lives as we grow up.

[17:24] And as we grow up, we'll go to Sunday school, hopefully, and learn about the Bible at home and at church on a Sunday. And that we keep that central to our lives.

Because if we follow the Ten Commandments and the other rules that are in the Bible, that will help us to lead a life that is close to God.

And help us to follow Christ. So, thanks very much. Is it all boys? I was going to say boys and girls, but is it all boys? Oh, one wee girl.

Who's rather asleep at the moment. That's good. So, let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Lord, we bring our young people before you this morning.

Here and in your wider church. For the young ones here, we pray that they will be brought up within Christian households. Where they will learn from their mother's knee the importance of your word.

[18:32] And the message of salvation through your son. For the wider church, we think of the young people this week who will have returned to nursery, to school.

And the ones preparing to go on to college, uni or into the workplace. We pray that you will keep them safe. And that you will help them to continually continue to grow in their education and their knowledge and love of you.

To keep the Bible central to their lives. To keep the Bible central to their lives. That they may walk in your ways. Always. And come to know your son, our Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour. These things we ask through Jesus, your son. Forever. Amen. So, thanks very much boys and girls. And I hope that that didn't bore you too much. Our readings today are taken from Isaiah chapter 53 verses 1 to 2.

[19 : 41] In Galatians chapter 1. So, Isaiah chapter 53 verses 1 to 12. Isaiah chapter 53 verses 1 to 12.

So, Isaiah verse 53. It's chapter 53, sorry. Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the eighth, the arm of the Lord, been revealed?

For he grew up before him. Sorry, the visor's just making a sort of glare of you. But I'll start again.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant. And like a root out of a dry ground.

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him. And no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men.

[20 : 55] A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne out our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted.

Yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. And like a sheep that is before its shearers is silent. So he opened not his mouth.

[22 : 08] By oppression and judgement he was taken away. And as for his generation who considered that he was cut out of the land of the living. Shicken for the transgression of my people.

And they made his grave with the wicked. And with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence. And there was no dissent in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt. He shall see offspring. He shall prolong his days.

The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous.

By his knowledge shall the righteous. Sorry. By his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant.

Make many to be accounted righteous. And he shall bear their iniquities.

[23 : 19] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many. And he shall divide the spoils with the strong. Because he poured out his soul to death.

And was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many. And makes intercession for the transgressors. A reading from New Testament Galatians 1.

Starting at the beginning of the chapter. From verse 1 to the end of the chapter. So Galatians.

Chapter 1. Paul an apostle. Paul an apostle. Not from man nor through man. But through Jesus Christ and God the Father. Who raised him from the dead.

And all the brothers who are with me. To the churches of Galatia. Grace to you and peace from God our Father. And the Lord Jesus Christ. Who gave himself for our sins.

[24 : 37] To deliver us from the present evil age. According to the will of our God and Father. To whom the glory forever and ever. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him.

Who called you in the grace of Christ. And are turning to a different gospel. Not that there is another one. But there are some people.

There are some who trouble you. And want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven. Should preach to you. A gospel contrary to the one we preached to you.

Let him be accursed. As we have said before. So now I say again. If anyone. Is preaching to you. A gospel contrary to the one you received.

Let him be accursed. For I am. Now seeking the approval. Of man. Or of God. Or am I trying to please man.

[25 : 40] If I was still trying to please man. I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have. For I would have.

And that he put to good use in Corinthians 18 after his conversion when he goes to Corinth. So in Acts 18, he goes to Corinth and meets Akula and his wife Priscilla and works along with them while preaching in Corinth. As a young Jew, Saul was made swift and committed an ambitious progress in Judaism. He was seen as a shining star. And Saul went on to Jerusalem to study under Rabbi Gamaliel and became a Pharisee. He had Roman citizenship, which gave him particular rights across the Roman Empire. Though we're unsure, and it's not really that important whether the Roman rights were by birth or because his family did service for the Roman government.

[36 : 11] growing up in Tarsus, he did strong Greek influences in his culture. Tarsus owed much of its development to Alexander the Great. And obviously that Greek was the standard language across the Mediterranean.

So growing up in that culture stood Paul in good stead when it came to writing his letters. So Saul was also a zealous persecutor of these new followers of Christ.

In Acts chapter 9 verse 1 and 2 we read, But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogue at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, man or woman, he may bring them bound to Jerusalem.

But on that road to Damascus, he has a life-changing experience of the Lord Jesus Christ. Saul, a fully-fledged Pharisee, a young man in the up in rabbinic Judaism, had a meeting with Christ that changed his whole life and his whole direction.

Saul, who had been present at the stoning of Stephen, was on the road to Damascus armed with letters from the high priest to carry on further persecution of Jesus' followers.

[37 : 47] Saul, who had been present at the high priest, meets the risen Christ and immediately accepts him as Lord. Continuing in Acts 9 verses 3 and 6 we read, Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

But rise and enter the city, and you'll be told what you are to do. So in an instant, all the ideas and plans of the brilliant young Pharisee, gone.

And Christ moulds him into a new creation. So Paul becomes God's messenger to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations and the non-Jewish nations.

In Acts, the book of Acts, we see a range of conversions to people following Christ. God meets and changes people in a variety of ways, as much today as in 1st century AD.

[39 : 07] Some come into Christ in a quiet and gentle way, in the example of Lydia, in Acts 18. And others in a dramatic experience, a dramatic conversion like Paul.

So we have the background to the churches in Galatia, and to the writer of the letter. But what was its purpose?

As we touched on earlier, the churches were still young, and people were growing in their faith and knowledge of Christ. And so they were open to being led astray by false teaching. Those of us who are older and remember, and perhaps still do write letters, will remember the formats and structures they were taught at school for writing letters.

How were addressed was to be set in the top right-hand corner. How people were to be addressed. The titles to be given. And when you use certain phrases at the end of a letter.

For example, if we started with Sir or Madam, we would finish with yours faithfully. If we named the person, Dear John, Dear Matthew, we would finish with yours sincerely.

[40 : 22] So on Paul's day, there was normally a greeting. There was normally a set format. There was normally a greeting, followed by a possible prayer, or for wishes of good health for the receivers.

Then there would be the special content of the letter. Finally, there would be special regards and personal greetings. But if we look at Paul's letter, or we look at Paul's other letters, rather, they tended to follow that example.

The letter to Galatians doesn't. In this letter, he is straight to the point. He is straight to the juggler. A bit like my old rugby coach used to always tell us to get our retaliation in first. Well, there has been those who have launched. So why would Paul need to get your retaliation in first?

What was he responding to? Well, there had been those who had launched a two-pronged attack on the churches to ensnare them back into their old ways of existence.

[41 : 35] They attacked Paul and his authority. And then, very subtly, they don't rubbish the message that he had preached, but imply that it falls short.

That it's good as far as it goes, but it's just not enough. As it falls short, they suggest that we have a role to play in our own salvation.

The gospel message is simple. We are saved by faith alone, through God's grace, with nothing less and, importantly, nothing more needing added.

The false teachers were saying this was a good starting point, but not enough. That we need to adhere to the teachings of Mosaic law. That the Galatians needed to be circumcised, needed to perform certain rites and be bound by tradition.

Similarly to experiences of today, we hear that people say, it's great that you have come to Christ, but you also need to do this, this and this. You must follow in our ways, and man adds on his own regulations.

[42 : 55] Just as the Pharisees had done, and the priests had done, in the Old Testament. We add on requirements that God had never stated.

God calls us as we are. He saves us by his grace, and nothing more is required. So right from the first verse, Paul is countering the doubts raised by these troublemakers.

He wastes no time in setting out his credentials, as there is in Christ's apostle with divine authority from God. Normally Paul is content to describe himself simply as an apostle, and go on with his letter.

For example, in Romans, 2 Corinthians, 2 and 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. But here he stresses his divine appointment as an apostle. Verse 1 he says, Paul, an apostle, not from man, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

The apostle is a special title that sets people apart in their role in taking forward Christ's message. In Luke 6, 13 we read, And when day came, he called his disciples and chose for them 12 whom he named apostles.

[44 : 21] Christ had had many disciples whom he had sent out and who followed him. But he chose 12, clearly setting them apart and divinely commissioning them. To this group, Paul had been added.

But you can imagine how people would try and undermine them. You can imagine the mutterings that would be going on as he moved on to another journey and another church.

The false teachers may be asking, Who is this Paul anyway? What authority has he? He wasn't one of the 12 apostles, was he?

Who gave him authority to establish churches? And wasn't he not a persecutor of Christ's followers? So, how could he possibly know the true gospel?

Because you see, we don't always need to viciously attack a person to discredit them. We need to only raise doubts to lead people astray, to start them thinking in the wrong path.

[45 : 26] And this has been a tactic of Satan since man first chose to sin. In Genesis 3, Satan starts the seduction of Eve with a simple question.

In verse 1, it says, he said, speaking of the servant, he said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

He doesn't say that the message is wrong. What he does do is he creates doubt and builds in that doubt to introduce mistruths.

So, Paul sets out his divine appointment as apostle straight at the beginning. Not because of what man has done or because of the patronage of a man, but because God has sent him.

And like the earlier apostles, he had seen the risen Christ in person. If we again look at Act 9, God instructs Ananias to go to Paul and when he reminds, when Ananias reminds God about what this man had done to his followers and the power that he had with letters to take people back to Jerusalem, God still instructs Ananias to go and see him.

[46 : 53] In verse 15, he says, Go, for he is chosen, he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

He was to be God's messenger. Today, many may claim to be God's messenger, but as an apostle, Paul had a special appointment. But how can he be an apostle when he had never met Christ like the others?

He wasn't with Matthew, Mark, or John. Sorry, the obvious mistake there.

Mark wasn't an apostle. So he wasn't with the apostle, he wasn't with Matthew and John. Again, if we look at Acts 9, he did see Christ.

He appeared to him in person. And Paul reinforces this in 1 Corinthians 9 when he writes, Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

[48 : 00] And in chapter 15, he again mentions how Christ has appeared to him. So apostles are unique in two ways. In their link with the risen Christ, and their link to the formation of the New Testament.

Paul is therefore claiming membership of a select group distinct from all others, for all other workers, for Christ that are with him. So he points himself as an apostle, the reasons he is an apostle, and then in verse 2, he mentions his brothers who are with him.

We must be careful today of those who use the title of apostle. As a unique group, there is no apostolic succession, no line of people through history who can claim authority from the apostles. It ceased with the apostles. There is no authority ongoing, not even the sea of Rome. this defence of himself and his calling wasn't about Paul's pride or concern for his personal standing, but in defence of the gospel, the good news that he preached as to undermine him would be to undermine his teachings.

So just as we don't need to viciously attack someone, if we start to raise doubt about someone's integrity, we start to raise doubt about their teachings and their methods.

[49 : 36] The second prong of attack by the false teachers was more subtle. It did not deny what the Galatians had been taught, but the message was only as good and as far as it went.

They taught that as well as believing in Christ, males needed to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant with God and follow all to follow Mosaic law. Today there are those who will teach that faith is but the starting point and requires acts of good work and adherence to the sacramental rights for salvation.

If we look at verses 3 and 4, those first words in verse 3, the first word in verse 3 is grace. Grace, the central point to our salvation.

It is in the origins of our salvation. In the words of Alistair Begg, it is a free bestowal of the unmerited favour of God on me as a guilty sinner when all I deserve is his judgment but God in his mercy bestows his grace on me.

We are saved by faith through God's gift of grace. There is nothing else to it. It is not by our actions or by our decisions.

[51 : 01] It is by faith through the grace of God. In Romans 5 verses 8 to 10 we read God's God's love God's love God's love God's love died for us.

Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.

While we still deserve death as a penalty for our sin and we're distant from God, he gave up his son to die in our place for our sin that we may be saved.

That is the gospel. there is no additions. As John 3, 16 that famous verse says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Oh, what a promise, what love that Christ died for our eternal life. He did. But Christ did not just simply die for us.

[52 : 24] verse 4 is clear. Christ gave himself for our sin. He was not taken. He volunteered as a ransom for our sin.

He went willingly for our sin. Paul writes, who gave himself for our sin to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.

God's love. Are you still enslaved to sin in the attempts to obtain salvation by earthly means? Or are you free to enjoy eternal life with God by faith alone through acceptance of Christ as our Redeemer?

Father? Father, finally this morning, if we are saved in Christ, it is not the end or a happy ever after. it's not a case of accepting Christ and everything in our lives will be rosy no we have a task in this world we are not called out of this earth we are not removed from it and we are not promised an end to all trials rather we have died to our old self and instead of pursuing worldly success and self gain we are now in this world to live distinctly for God a guide in the world to Christ and his sacrifice for

us is in Matthew 5, 14, 16 you are the light of the world a city set on a hill cannot be hidden nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven we are to go out and bear light that shines in the darkness for Christ we are to be a guide to the world to Christ and his sacrifice for us now let's listen to a final hymn this morning of praise and reflect on its words and the amazing grace that God has shown to us in bringing us to salvation through his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour final piece of music amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me

[55 : 20] I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed through many dangers toils and snares

I have already come t'was grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home father we thank you for your time of worship this morning we pray that you go with us and your spirit protect us over the coming week and all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ says Amen thank you for your hope