

No Other Gospel

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[0:00] Well, I heard a joke about three men, a scientist, a pastor and a backpacker. They're all traveling in a plane when there was engine failure.

The pilot turned to the men and said, men, we're going to crash. The good news is we have some parachutes. The bad news is I have one and there's only two left for you three.

And with that, he jumped out the plane. The scientist grabbed a parachute and said, I'm one of the greatest minds this world has ever known. I must be saved. And with that, he grabbed one and jumped out of the plane.

The pastor said to the backpacker, son, I've lived a long life and I know where I'm going. You take the last one. And the backpacker replied, no, it's OK. That bright spark scientist actually took my backpack instead.

The point of the story is when it comes to being saved, it matters. We have the real deal, doesn't it? And this is especially true when it comes to the gospel.

[1:07] For there is no other gospel that saves apart from the one that is given in the Bible. And this is what Paul wants us to know today as we start a new series in the book of Galatians, which is all about sticking with the real gospel and living in light of it.

Just some background to the letter. In Acts chapter 13 and 14, Paul had gone through the region of Galatia. It's quite a large region. It includes cities like Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and Pisidian, Antioch.

They're all in modern day Turkey. And people had become Christians. That church has had started. Paul then traveled back to Syria to another city called Antioch. And he stayed there for some time.

And it's while he was there that it appears some Jewish Christians went to Galatia to those churches and started teaching them that Paul's gospel about Jesus was not enough to save them.

And in particular, they had to also obey the law of Moses, especially circumcision. We read about this on the next slide in chapter 6, verse 12, where we see that some people are trying to get them to be circumcised.

[2:29] And we know this happened elsewhere because a bit later, some Jews also, whether they were from the same group or not, we don't know. But some Jews also came to Antioch where Paul was and said a similar thing.

So on the next slide, we read in Acts 15, verse 1, that certain men came from Judea to Antioch, where Paul was staying. And we're teaching believers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.

And so this is what's happening in Galatia. And so Paul writes this letter, reminding them that there is no other gospel that saves than the one they first believed.

And he begins by reminding them of this gospel. So we're now at point one in your outline and verse one and two in your Bibles. 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.

And all the brothers and sisters with me to the churches in Galatia. Now, Paul actually starts by reminding them that he is an apostle who is not sent from people, but from Christ himself.

[3 : 42] I will see a lot more of this next week. But he starts here this week so that they might listen to him. And the first thing he wants them to really listen to is the true gospel that saves.

So verse three, grace and peace to you from God, our father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and father.

Now, as many of you know, the word gospel means good news, but good news about what? Well, it's there in verses three and four, isn't it? It's the good news that the Lord Jesus, who is the Christ, gave himself for our sins at the cross to rescue us from the present evil age.

You see, in the Bible, there are two ages or two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of this world, which we are all born into. The king is the devil, we're told. The prince of this world, says Jesus.

And his right hand man is sin, who has the power over people such that people naturally do wrong and naturally don't believe in God.

[4 : 59] As I've said before, as other people have said before, you never have to teach a child to do the wrong thing, do you? It comes naturally. And even as Christians, our old natural instincts often rise to the surface, even when we don't want them to, don't they?

So if someone cuts you off on the road or pushes in front of you, our natural reaction is not to say, oh, you first bless you. It's how rude I'll get you, isn't it?

You see, because we're all born into this present evil age, we naturally sin and naturally don't believe in God. And the problem with this is that it leads to judgment and eternal death.

But then there's the other age or kingdom, the kingdom of God, whose king is Jesus. And his right hand man is the spirit who enables us to believe in God and who enables us to do good that pleases God.

As chapter 5 of that letter, Galatians says, to bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience and so on. Things that this world needs much more of, doesn't it?

[6 : 07] And being in this kingdom, God's kingdom leads to ongoing forgiveness, past, present, future sins and eternal life. Now, both these ages or kingdoms are spiritual, but they come with physical consequences.

We've already felt some of the physical consequences of having been born and lived in this present evil age, haven't we? I mean, we experience things like disease and disaster and death.

But there's actually worse to come. A physical eternal judgment. On the other hand, the kingdom of God will one day come with the physical blessings of a new heavens and earth, a perfect body to enjoy life to the full.

But the thing is, the only way to get out of the present evil age and into God's kingdom is to be rescued, because we cannot do it ourselves.

We cannot buy or earn our way out of the present evil age. Perhaps the most famous rescue story of last year was the rescue of the Thai boys soccer team.

[7 : 14] Do you remember that? It was June, July last year, and it captivated the world, actually. Actually, the boys and their coach went walking into a cave where they were trapped by the water, if you remember.

And no matter how hard they tried, they could not get themselves out. They needed divers with air tanks to come in and rescue them.

In fact, one of the divers actually died in the process, if you remember. Well, this present evil age is like that cave. We are trapped, not by water, but by sin.

And we cannot get ourselves out. No matter how hard we try, nor how good we are, we cannot buy or earn our way out. We needed someone to rescue us, to pay for our sins so that we could be released from that present evil age, that evil kingdom.

And the gospel, or the good news, is Jesus has done just that. The Lord Jesus gave his life for us at the cross to pay for our sins so that we could be released and rescued from this age and brought into the kingdom of God with new spiritual life now, such that God is our father.

[8 : 29] I mean, verses three and four, Paul says twice, God, our father. God doesn't remain distant. He becomes our heavenly father, which means we have a family to belong to and a father who will never leave us nor forsake us, but care for us and work for our spiritual good.

And this kingdom of God also comes with new physical life later, as I mentioned before. But more than all this, God and Christ did it all for us, even when we didn't deserve it.

I mean, the Thai boys didn't deserve to die because their coaches decision to enter the cave, but we deserve judgment because of our decision to reject God. And yet God's grace, his undeserved generosity towards us, meant he graciously gave his son, who himself graciously gave his life for us, even when we didn't deserve it.

I mean, it's an extraordinary act of grace. And no wonder Paul then says in verse five, he praises God saying, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. You see, the good news about Christ is such good news. It ought to drive us to praise God for it. And yet the astonishing thing here is the Galatians were now deserting God.

[9 : 59] And the grace of Christ, because they were turning to a different gospel. So at point two in your outlines and verse six in your Bibles. He says, I am 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.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion, those false teachers, and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. You see, it's only been about a year since the Galatians believed the gospel about Jesus.

And yet so quickly, says Paul, they've turned to a different gospel. They are like the Israelites in our first reading, whom God had just rescued from Egypt, but then so quickly turned to worshipping God by adding an idol, the golden calf.

But notice in verse six, turning to a different gospel meant turning away from God who called them. And in case that's not bad enough, they were also turning from the grace of Christ.

Remember, these false teachers were saying the Galatians had to believe in Jesus plus be circumcised in other works of the law. And so this false gospel was really Christ plus works of the law.

[11 : 26] But as soon as you say your salvation relies on what you do, you know, some good work, then you're saying what Christ has done is not good enough.

Which is pretty offensive when you think about it, actually. I mean, it's like saying, oh, thanks, Jesus, for dying. But I don't think your death was good enough. Let me do some good works to add to your death for you, help you out.

I mean, how arrogant can you get? And what's more, you're now depending on your works rather than God's grace. As Paul says towards the end of the letter on the next slide, he says in chapter five, verse four, you who are trying to be justified, that is made right by the law, doing works of law like circumcision, have been alienated from Christ.

You have fallen away from grace. It's pretty serious, isn't it? Their salvation is at stake. You see, adding a few good works as a requirement to be saved might not seem like a big deal.

But whenever you add to the gospel, it's no longer the true gospel. You've changed it. You've perverted it, verse seven. And in the end, it's a false gospel that condemns.

[12:46] I mean, let me see if I can illustrate it like this. Just here I have a ring, a safety ring. So it's like those lifeboat rings, you know, that you throw to people who are drowning.

And so imagine there's someone out there drowning in the water, and up here I'm in the boat, nice, safe and dry. And then someone's drowning. I'll grab this thing, and before I throw it to you, I thought, oh, let me just add something to it.

And so I just get this, wait, let's see. All right, we'll just add this to this. Here we go.

Put that around there, just add that. Here's a weight I've just added to it. Here you go, new and improved. Catch this and live. What have I done? I've turned something that saves into something that drowns.

You add a weight to it, it's going to take that down with the person. And that's exactly what Paul's saying here. You add something to the gospel, you've perverted it from something that saves to something that drowns, something that condemns.

[13:50] And it doesn't just condemn those who hear it, it also condemns those who preach it. See 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 in case you didn't hear me, as we've already said, so I say now again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel other than the one you accepted, let them be under God's curse.

Paul says whoever preaches a different gospel, then they're under God's curse. In other words, he's saying let them be condemned to hell. That's God's curse. Now we might think Paul is overreacting a little bit here.

You know, he got off on the wrong side of the bed today. But he's not overreacting. Because to lead people to hell by teaching them a different gospel is an act of pure evil that deserves God's judgment.

I mean, back in 2012 in Britain, a man called Dale Gregan rang the police saying there was a burglary taking place at a home in Manchester. Our two police officers, Nicola and Fiona, responded to the call.

[15:02] But it was a hoax intended to lure them out. And as they arrived, Dale came out and shot them and for good measure threw a grenade at them. The headline on the next slide from the Sydney Morning Herald at the time says, pure evil, unarmed female police officers lured to their deaths in gun and grenade attack.

And on the next slide, here are the officers. And Nicola and Fiona, Nicola on the left, was about to get married actually. Now imagine they were your daughters or sisters.

How angry would you be at this Dale guy? How deserving of judgment would you think he is? These Galatians had not long become Christians through Paul.

They are his spiritual sons and daughters whom he helped to faith. And now there are these false teachers preaching a false gospel, luring them not to their death, but to their eternal death in hell.

It's a pure act of evil. Paul is not overreacting here. And notice he says, it doesn't matter what credentials, verse 8, the preacher has.

[16:15] You know, if it's me, Vijay, if it's Paul himself or even an angel, it doesn't matter. If they preach a different gospel, unless they repent, let them be under God's curse.

And the kicker in all this is that these false teachers were actually preaching this false gospel, not for the good of the Galatians, but for their own good. On the next slide, chapter 6, verse 12, this is the full verse.

Paul says, those who want to impress people by means of the flesh, you know, these outward works like circumcision and so on, are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Remember that for the Jews, circumcision was a massive deal. And so these Jewish teachers are preaching this false gospel of Christ plus circumcision because they want to impress their fellow Jews and avoid being persecuted by them.

It's for their own good, isn't it? So Paul adds in verse 10, in contrast to them, he says, am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God? Or am I trying to please people, impress people?

[17:32] If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. The implication being these false teachers are not servants of Christ.

And sadly, this is not just an ancient problem. This is a modern problem today. I remember someone who was at our church as a student minister.

It was a few years ago. And he was studying at Ridley. And a then bishop, he's a retired bishop now, came and spoke to the class at Ridley just before Easter, it was.

So it was around this time of year. And he said, look, the world doesn't want to hear, it doesn't like hearing about judgment and sin. So when you preach this Easter, don't talk about those things.

Just talk about God's love. Now, apart from the fact it's actually loving to warn people about something bad. I mean, that's loving, isn't it?

[18:28] Warning people so they don't get hurt. The gospel he was advocating was Christ minus judgment, which in the end was no gospel at all.

Why? Why? Well, to please people who don't like hearing about it. And I hope he has repented. Otherwise, despite his credentials, a bishop, what do you think God's word would say to him from this passage?

What does all this mean for us? Well, for those here this morning who are not yet Christians, then firstly, will you believe the good news about Jesus? That is, will you believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior?

The one who gave himself to pay for your sins, to rescue you and bring you into God's kingdom, the hope of life after death. Will you trust in him?

And for us who do, then I have one don't and two do's of application. At first, don't add to the gospel. And so desert God and grace in Christ.

[19:39] I mean, we have some friends who we went to university with. They live in northern Victoria. They're great people. But they started going to a church that taught in order to be saved, you had to believe in Jesus, plus be slain in the spirit, is what they said.

I'm not exactly sure what that means. But they explained, and as far as I could make out, it was to have an extra spiritual experience of some sort.

And then I asked them for more clarification. I said, so if we don't have this, does this mean we're not Christians? We're not saved? Yes, they replied.

It kind of killed our friendship a bit, I must confess. But it wasn't until this week when I was preparing this sermon that I realized it could kill their salvation too. I need to pray for them all regularly.

We need to try and reconnect with them, actually. But we can add things to the gospel, can't we? I've had people who have come to our church and visiting, and they've left a bit angry because we didn't have communion.

[20 : 44] Because in their minds, communion, which is a good thing, is what saves. We cannot turn things that are good and that encourage us into things that we think will save us.

Only Christ saves. Baptism, communion, Bible reading, they're all great things to do to encourage us. We're doing communion this morning, but none of them save us, which is a relief because how good really is our Bible reading?

No, we are saved through Christ alone, by grace alone. As soon as we add things to the gospel, we fall from grace. So don't add to the gospel and so desert God and fall from the grace of Christ.

That's the first don't. Second, do know the gospel so we can share the true one and not fall for a false one. The gospel is the good news that Jesus is King and Savior, who by his death and resurrection saves us from sin and brings us to life with God.

Sometimes the Bible just speaks about one aspect of the gospel, and sometimes it doesn't use the word gospel, but it uses those ideas in different language. And if it's a bit confusing, because I know it can be sometimes, then I've printed out a little summary sheet about knowing the gospel.

[22 : 12] It's also yellow. I didn't realize there was another yellow handout, but it's a big yellow handout. It's just on the welcome table as you leave, if you'd like it. But we need to know the gospel, especially those who teach it, so we can share the true one and avoid falling for a false one.

And thirdly, do praise God for it. I mean, when the Thai boys were rescued, there was pictures of people rejoicing, like on the next slide, rejoicing and praising the rescuers.

In fact, two of the divers who helped rescue them were Australians, who on the next slide both received, for the first time, two people at the same time received Australian of the Year just last January.

And on the next slide, they're even praised by the prime minister. Now, they deserve to be praised, but how much more so does God deserve it?

I mean, he gave his son to rescue us, and not from death in a cave, but eternal death in hell, even when we didn't deserve it. And so apart from that church, I wonder, when was the last time we praised God for rescuing us?

[23 : 21] It's so easy to take our rescue for granted, isn't it? To forget God's grace. But without it, we would have no comfort of help in this life.

We would have no hope of life after death in the next. We would have no contentment in hardship, no forgiveness of sin or freedom from guilt.

We would have no intrinsic worth as God's dearly loved children. No assurance of eternity and no higher purpose in life.

We'd have none of that. But because God has rescued us from this present evil age, we have all of that, even when we deserve none of it.

And so with Paul in verse 5, we had to keep praising God. Not just with Paul, but we're going to do that with our last hymn in particular. We are to keep saying and praying to God, be glory forever and ever.

[24 : 26] Amen. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for the true gospel that has been handed down through the ages.

The one we have evidence for. Father, we thank you that this good news about Jesus is what saves us when we hear and believe.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us not to add to the gospel and instead help us to know the gospel and to keep praising you for the gospel.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.