

# Grace Delivers

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[ 0 : 00 ] We thank you that we have a strong deliverer in Jesus Christ, that he has saved us and brought us into your kingdom. We ask that you would give us grace that we might live lives joyfully and thankfully because of this great fact, and that these gifts given would be a token of our living sacrifice of ourselves back to you. We pray that you would use these gifts to bring others to know you through the ministries they support. We pray for David that you would give him your Holy Spirit so that he might faithfully preach your word and that we all would be humble before you to receive your truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. It would be great if you took your Bibles and opened to Galatians chapter 1. And as you do so, that's page 176. I just want to ask whether the people in the chapel on my right here can hear my voice. And the chapel on the left? Well, over the last few weeks the people in the chapel have had this strange smile on their faces and I've wondered why and it has to do with the fact that the speakers haven't been working. But now they're working. For those of you who would like to, the fire truck is at the front and will be available for viewing after church. I've never seen so much interest from the young boys on the fire truck. I have a friend who worked in the fire department as a fire guy for many years and then went into the ministry and in his third parish, he was preaching on the second Sunday and someone had a heart attack in the congregation in about row five. And Barry raced down from the pulpit, climbed over the seats, grabbed the person, called out, call 911 and started giving CPR, which saved the life of the person. And from then on in, it didn't matter how godly or ungodly he was, the congregation was in the palm of his hand forever. But I want to tell you, if you start feeling faint, I don't know CPR. Dan may, I don't, and there are many doctors in the congregation. If you start feeling faint, just wave a hand, go to the back. I can pray, but you probably need an ex-fireman. I also want to say thank you to David Lay for offering to pray for the Australian cricket team. That was an unfair blow. This will be a very painful time for Australia because we've lost five rugby tests in a row as well. And some Australians are saying it's out of the generosity of the Australian spirit, but that of course has nothing whatsoever to do with it. I was once in a church in London on the day when England played Ireland in soccer, I promise you this, the person who prayed, prayed that England would win. And lots of people said amen. There was a little corner of people, a group of people in the corner who did not say amen. And Italy won, for which I was very grateful.

[ 3 : 21 ] Well now let's have a look at Galatians, shall we? I have wanted for some time for us to look at this letter which is the most passionate and most pastoral of all letters in the New Testament.

It's written with a white hot love and piercing truth. Of all the letters in the New Testament, it reveals something of how radical the gospel is, the desperate, liberating freedom of the grace of God. Grace is the keynote of every sentence.

By grace God revealed the gospel to us. By grace he sent his son and rescued us from a life of futility. And it's through grace that he sustains us until heaven.

And everything we do and everything good that we have traces its source back to the grace of God, his kindness and his goodness. And there is perhaps no clearer revelation of God's grace, I said, than in this letter.

And I have called this series A Grace Which Wounds and Heals. That is a quote from Flannery O'Connor, an author.

[ 4 : 53 ] She wrote, The grace must wound before it can heal as a way of capturing the fact that grace is not just some pick-me-up. It's not just something that makes me feel good about myself.

It's not a soothing, empty, fast fix. But the grace of God gives me and you, in Jesus Christ, transcendent joy.

And this is the spirit that breathes through every line of Galatians, grace which wounds and heals. And today we're going to look at the first five verses where the apostle makes two very simple points, but before we do I want to get some orientation.

Keep your finger in Galatians and turn to the maps at the back of the Bible. I really, I love doing this, I must say. On the second to last page in your Bible, there are a series of maps.

And if you were with us last year, you will know that in 46 AD, the wealthy and well-fed church at Antioch in Syria, if you look on the right-hand side, you will see the green country of Syria, and at the north is Antioch, the church in an act of generosity and faith sent Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.

[ 6 : 05 ] And they sailed to Cyprus and then to the mainland, and they walked up, and you see the green country in Asia called Galatia. They went to the city of Antioch called Pisidian Antioch, then to Lyconia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

And if you can see that, you're doing very well. That is Galatia. Galatia is a province, it's a Roman province, in the mainland of Asia Minor.

Do you remember when Paul went to Pisidian Antioch with Barnabas? He went into the synagogue on the first Sabbath morning and proclaimed the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And many believed. And the next Sabbath, the whole city turned out, and because they were envious, the leaders of the synagogue started persecuting Paul and the new believers, turned the whole city against Paul.

They went down to Iconium. They were persecuted there. They went to Lystra, where Paul was stoned to death. Well, not quite to death.

[ 7 : 17 ] He survived. And in each town, the Christians came to know the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a door of faith for the Gentiles was opened. But, no sooner did Paul and Barnabas go back to the church that sent them in Iconium, when something went terribly wrong, for the churches in Galatia.

A group of Jewish believers from headquarters in Jerusalem visited every group of Christians in Galatia. And look down in Galatians chapter 1, verse 7.

The Apostle describes them with these words. He calls them, some who would trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

They attacked the Paul's gospel on two prongs, two spikes. The first is they, it was a very personal attack on the Apostle Paul.

I call it the NQWWW attack. And I had a friend who worked in a posh English company for a number of years. And the biggest put down of someone was something that they would privately say to someone other.

[ 8 : 28 ] The most devastating way to demolish someone behind their back was to call them NQWWW, which stands for, not quite what we want. Someone who's trying hard, but they're not really up to our standard.

And that is what these people from Jerusalem were saying. They were saying, Paul is a very fine chap as far as he goes. He has been to all the right schools, but when you listen to him, he does not really speak with the right accent because he does not come from Jerusalem.

He wasn't one of the first 12 apostles. And we've come to give you around it a more balanced view of things. We bring the imprimatur from the Church of Jerusalem. Very personal attack.

And the second prong of their attack was on Paul's gospel. They said, look, yeah, it's very good as far as it goes. Yes, Jesus died for our sins, but the full Christian life requires more than just faith in Jesus.

So much more you have to understand. If you want to be fully Christian, you have to take on all the marks of Judaism, the law and circumcision and food laws and Sabbaths.

[ 9 : 40 ] They are great fun. I'm not sure they said that, but what they said about Paul is that his gospel preaching is really just for children. It must have been incredibly difficult for these new Christians.

They'd heard the gospel through the apostle Paul and come to believe in Jesus Christ under very hostile conditions, suffered terribly. They'd been excluded from synagogues, excluded from pagan

temples for this new faith.

And now a group from head office says, you don't have to be so different. You can go back to the synagogue if you want to follow the law of God and be a full Christian.

And the new Christians in Galatia were being drawn aside from the gospel. And the apostle sees this as both dangerous and wicked because it puts in peril the gospel and their very salvation.

And so he opens this letter of Galatians with two simple points. And the first one I've just called Revelation. If you look down at verse 1 and 2, please.

[10:45] Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead and all the brethren who are with me to the churches in Galatia.

You couldn't get it clearer, could you? Revelation. Paul wants to make crystal clear right from the start that his apostleship does not come from any human origin.

It didn't come through a committee. It didn't come by an emissary, any human being at all. It came directly from God himself.

Look down at verse 12 for just a moment. Speaking of the gospel, he says, I did not receive it from man nor was I taught it. It came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

I wasn't looking for it. I hated Christianity. I was on the way to Damascus to kill Christians. And the risen Jesus Christ met me on the road and literally knocked me off my horse.

[11:49] And in that encounter, God himself called Paul to be an apostle and reveal the gospel to him. What does that mean? It means that when we read the writings of the apostle Paul, we are reading the words that are from God.

Now, if you are an Anglican and have just joined us in the last weeks, you will notice that in our communion service, we don't stand for the gospel reading. Often, it's the practice in Anglican churches that you remain seated for the words of epistle readings and you stand for the words of the gospel readings as though it's based on the idea that Jesus' words are more inspired, more true, more spiritually lifting.

And it's true. The words of Jesus come from the lips of our Lord himself in that sense. But if verse 1 is true, then the apostolic letters are just as much from God as the words from Jesus' mouth.

And pretending that they carry any less authority, I believe, is disrespectful to God himself.

Incidentally, did you notice in verse 1 that the apostle draws a line between humans and God and he puts Jesus on the God side of the line?

He's very conscious of the fact that he stands before God in the same relationship with Jesus Christ as every other Christian. That's why he sends greetings from brothers. He's just a brother.

[13:30] But at the same time, God has chosen him as an apostle to reveal the gospel and the authority of his words rests on Jesus himself. Now, why does Paul go on about this?

I mean, if you have some special status, it's not very good manners going around and telling everyone, is it? Paul doesn't have any interest in defending his own personal dignity.

He speaks about God's direct call not for his own sake but because the gospel that he preaches is at stake. Let me put it to you this way. If what Paul is saying here in verse 1 is true, to challenge Paul's teaching, to challenge Paul's doctrine, is not challenging Paul, you're challenging the authority of Jesus Christ and of God himself.

if this one is true, it is just not possible to take the line that seems so popular among theologians over the last 50 to 100 years, that Paul and Peter and the other apostles were just first century witnesses, we're 21st century witnesses, our opinions are just as valid if not more than theirs.

Some of you, I know some of you who are here today were at that evening in Vancouver some years ago when John Stott debated John Spong.

[14:56] One of the saddest moments of that evening was when Spong, a bishop in the Anglican Church, said, I long for the day when the Anglican Church acknowledges that the Bible is wrong.

Well now you see, if verse 1 is true, to disregard Paul's teaching is to disrespect Jesus himself. To reject the apostles' gospel is to show contempt for God.

You cannot say you love Jesus Christ if you disagree with the apostle Paul. We have many friends now in the Roman Catholic Church and I have to say to you that it is not possible, I think, if this verse is true, to take the Roman Catholic view of scriptures.

The Catholic Church teaches that the Church wrote the Bible and therefore the Church has equal authority with the Bible and can supplement the doctrines of the scriptures. But if this one is true,

Paul is saying I wasn't commissioned by the Church, I was commissioned by Jesus Christ himself. I think it's very important for us to remind ourselves this morning as we enter into this new fall term in 2005 that the basic Christian posture is one of listening and receiving from God.

[16:16] Christianity is a revealed religion. It's not a religion for the academic elite or those who have gone through the stages of enlightenment.

It has been revealed from heaven by the risen Christ to the apostolic hearers and writers. And our life together and our growth together and our effectiveness together come from submitting to and surrendering to the grace of God revealed from heaven.

I'm going to talk more about those words in the weeks to come. That is the first point Paul makes, revelation. And the second simple point that he makes is rescue.

Let me just read again the verses so they're in our minds. Verses 3 to 5. Actually, let's read them together. Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. He goes straight to the gospel. He's not two verses in when he goes to the gospel and at the heart of the gospel is this phrase that Christ gave himself to deliver us, to rescue us from this present evil age.

[17:39] This is an amazing word. It's not a religious word. You remember the disturbing saying Jesus had that if your eye causes you to sin pluck it out and throw it away? Pluck is this word here.

It's used of delivering someone in great danger. In Acts 23 when the apostle Paul was under arrest in Jerusalem a group of 40 men took an oath with one another.

They bound themselves by an oath that they would not eat nor drink until they had murdered the apostle Paul. It was kind of an early suicide assassin group. And when the Roman authorities bring Paul out into the streets of Jerusalem there's a riot that breaks out and the text tells us that Paul is about to be torn limb from limb and the Roman tribune takes a couple of hundred soldiers from the palace and rides down and rescues, physically rescues Paul out of the crowd, delivers him.

That's the same word as here. This last two weeks we've been watching news reports from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and on the news footage in the early days it showed helicopters hovering low over homes surrounded by water plucking survivors from the rooftops rescuing and delivering them from ruin.

It's a wonderful picture of what happens to us through the gospel. You see, it didn't matter to the helicopter when it came over the house whether that person was a good person or a scoundrel. It didn't matter whether the person had paid up their tax or were on the run from the IRS.

[19:26] All they needed was rescuing, was to be allowing themselves to be rescued. I understand some of the helicopters were shot at. Is that true? That's another sermon.

I've got to think about that one. The word here implies that we are in deep trouble even enslaved. It's used for the rescue of Israel from Egypt and it opens the door on this wonderful freedom that we have as Christians which we're going to look at more in Galatians that apart from the rescue that God has given us through the death of Jesus we are slaves in the dungeon of our own egos. And this is how God rescues us you see in verse 3. It is because our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins. Jesus dies as a sacrifice.

He gave himself. He chooses to give to freely die in our place because of his own grace. And on the cross on that day Jesus made a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

You see it is sin that promises us freedom but it is sin that binds us in slavery. And the apostolic gospel comes and un masks us uncovers us as sinful because grace has to wound before it can heal.

[21:02] I was listening on the radio this week there was a CBC call in program discussing the gang looting and behaviour in New Orleans by some of the survivors.

One of the callers said categorically this is a Vancouver station you may have heard this a Vancouver caller that if a natural disaster happened here in Vancouver we would never see behaviour like that.

You'll be pleased to know that even the talk show host was sceptical. You see the death of Jesus tells us that we're not basically decent people who just need better manners.

That we are in deep trouble and we need to be rescued from this present evil age. The gospel is not about what we do it's about what God has done for us.

It's not a moral code but a rescue mounted by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is at the heart and centre of all we do as a congregation.

[ 22 : 07 ] Everything has to be measured by this grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about far more than just getting along being polite and kindly to one another.

It is a grace from outside us which binds us to the Lord Jesus Christ and to one another. It opens the gate of heaven for us. It brings us into a new life of the Holy Spirit a life that is marked by love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control.

The children go over to Sunday school this morning. It's not a kindly child-minding service. We're not trying to teach the kids to be compliant. We want the children to know about the grace and peace of God in Jesus Christ through the revelation that comes in the apostolic gospel.

And the death of Jesus, it's very difficult to try and get this, the death of Jesus changes history. It brings something into this present evil age. It brings a new creation into the old creation.

creation. Because when we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, we're freed from everything that we can't be freed from, from our debt and our guilt and our shame and every proud and selfish act and our whole lives are involved.

[ 23 : 34 ] The death of Jesus brings freedom. It's not a political freedom or an economic freedom or a physical freedom or a social freedom, but it is a freedom that is more profound and more transcending of every boundary and every barrier and it lasts for eternity.

You can be free from the condemnation of your own conscience. But we cannot become Christian just in one part of our lives. Our freedom and our forgiveness doesn't happen over there in a corner. We can't confine the rescue to one part of our lives. It can't be hidden. It will affect our family and our culture and our economic and our social lives because we stand before God as those who have been rescued.

There is nothing else that can deal with our sin and our guilt. There is no one else to whom we can turn. There is no one who can compare with the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for us and is our righteousness, our freedom and our deliverance.

And that is why revelation and rescue go together. The way in which the rescue comes to us is through the revelation of the gospel.

[ 24 : 43 ] This is not a very good illustration, but bear with me. Imagine you are caught in a two story house after the hurricane and you decide you are going to stay a while even though the waters are rising because you have got food and upstairs in the attic you have got a chess board and a dart board.

And despite the odour the attic seems to be fun. And in the background you hear the sound of what may well be a helicopter. You're not sure what it's doing.

You don't want to make a hole in the roof of the attic because that will ruin the house. And then a voice comes over a loud speaker first at faint and then louder announcing you are in trouble and that they have come to rescue you and unless you take the rescue you will surely perish but that anyone who wishes to will be taken to safety.

And if you are very committed to a brilliant game of darts the revelation of that rescue becomes a nuisance and a distraction.

How dare they say I am in danger. But without the message from the helicopter you would never know why it was there and you would never know the true danger that you and I are in.

[ 26 : 07 ] But once we hear the message of rescue we are in a position to choose to stay with what we know despite the danger or to look to those who have come to rescue us.

I know it's a bad illustration but it is a picture of what is happening here because God does not rescue us from the relative safety of a helicopter.

He doesn't fly over us and call out with a loud speaker. No, no, no. Jesus gave himself for us to the cross according to the will of God.

It cost him his life. It was out of sheer grace to bring us grace and peace. And I want to finish with this. If you see at the beginning of verse 3, Paul's prayer and Paul's desire, grace and peace.

Grace and peace. peace. The direct result of the revelation and the rescue. Saving grace, peace of God which passes all understanding.

[ 27 : 13 ] Here are two words that we should pray for one another and work for one another over these next months. Grace and peace. Let's kneel for prayer. Our Father in heaven, we pray that by your loving grace we will be delivered to you.

peace of view. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace.

Peace.

Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace.