

# The Only Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] Have you ever owned or been given something that was amazing, maybe even quite precious, but you never actually got any benefit from it? I remember when Sal and I were engaged, we went through the very important rite of passage that is doing your wedding registry.

Now for the uninitiated, those who haven't had that delight, basically what you do is you go to one of the big department stores, a Meyer or a David Jones, and they give you one of the barcode scanning guns, and you just walk around scanning things you want. It's amazing, you don't have to have any money at all, you just scan things and hope that somebody else will spend the money for you. So you wander through the shop and you get all the essentials like towels, sheets, flat screen TV, all those sorts of things, and just really hope that somebody's feeling generous when they're going through for those big ticket items. And the point of it is that hopefully you don't get 50 towels and no dinner plates, that sort of thing. Doesn't always work, but that's the theory. Now for full disclosure, I should concede that for our wedding registry, I survived about the first 20 minutes in David Jones before Sal set me free from those shackles and instead went back with her mum afterwards about seven or eight times. So I really didn't know what was coming when the delivery truck arrived after we'd come back from our honeymoon. But I do remember as we were opening all these things wrapped up in David Jones wrapping paper and trying to figure out where we're going to put these things in the place that we were living, there was one, maybe more than one, but at least one thing which to this day I still don't understand. It was the same in my house growing up. It's the same in almost every house that I've ever visited. The fancy plates. I don't understand. We have the usable plates and then we have the fancy plates. And so this is the stuff in your house that lives in a special cabinet, usually next to the dining table. I'm not sure why, but that's where it is. And there's glass so that you can see these beautiful plates piled up there. Maybe view the pictures of them. And it's there for the special occasion when the queen comes to visit.

Now obviously not really, but it feels like we're holding out for something special. But really the only function that these plates serve is to insult the bulk of your guests who sit at your table looking at the plates that they weren't special enough to get out on the table.

I remember as a kid, so there was five kids in my house growing up, so we were pretty good at breaking stuff. And we would break plates and cups regularly. And I remember our regular plates, our boring, unimportant, not special person plates, that set was starting to struggle.

[ 2 : 45 ] And so I thought, obvious solution, we have a set right next to the table on display that we could bring out. Apparently it wasn't so obvious. Instead, we bought another set of regular plates so that our special plates could stay special, stay unused and sit in the fancy cabinet.

What is the point of fancy plates? I mean, the value of a plate is its ability to hold food so that you can eat off it. And the plates in the cupboard had all the necessary needs for being a plate. They were firm enough. They were flat enough. They weren't broken. In fact, they were more than good enough. They were fancy. But because we put them in the cupboard, in the cabinet, we never got any benefit from them. They didn't deliver as plates because we refused to use them for the very thing they were made to do, hold food. Now, it's possible to have good, valuable things in your life, things that are there for your benefit and to waste them because you never used them. Instead, we put them in a cabinet for a special occasion that never seems to eventuate. It's even possible to do that with the good things that God blesses us with. It's possible to go from people who are struggling in life, trying to figure out what we're here for, trying to figure out how to please God, feeling the burden of our failure, and then to discover His amazing grace and love for us, even though we don't deserve it, to discover free forgiveness and unconditional love and think, wow, this is the solution I've been searching for. And then to put it in a display cabinet and go back to feeling insecure and guilty and unsure and kind of lost in life and having to try really hard to convince God

to love you, when we do that, we make following Jesus a struggle.

We make following Jesus difficult because we know we're not good enough and then being not good enough with the solution in the cabinet makes us want to try harder and then trying harder doesn't work because we still fail and then we feel worse and so then we try harder and it's this vicious cycle and then because we're feeling insecure, we start looking down on other people to try and make ourselves feel better, but then because we're looking down on other people, we start to worry about what other people are thinking of us and it just is exhausting trying to follow Jesus when the only thing that can help you, the solution you need, the solution you need has been put in a display cabinet for the special occasion.

Often the challenge for many Christians is not discovering the good things that God has to offer, but having discovered them, actually using them day by day, actually getting the benefit from them in your week, in your job, in your relationships.

That was the problem for the churches in Galatia. We're embarking today on 12 weeks in this book.

[ 6 : 08 ] This is a letter from Paul the Apostle to a group of churches in the region of Galatia. That's what is now southern Turkey. These churches were started by Paul on one of his missionary journeys.

He travelled through the region preaching the gospel. It's there in verse 8. He says, the gospel that we preached to you, or in verse 9, the gospel that you accepted.

When they heard the gospel, churches began. These people went from being in that pattern of struggling, lost, unsure, searching for security, to thinking, we've found it.

To thinking, I'm going to change my life. This is the best message I've ever heard. What was it that he preached? What was that message that began the whole journey for them? Verse 3.

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, to whom be glory forever and ever.

[ 7 : 16 ] Amen. Now, this is a classic way to start a letter in the ancient world. It's classic to Paul's letters as well. You get to look at that in your community groups this week. But Paul uses this to take them back to their foundation.

It starts with who's writing Paul, who it's to, the churches in Galatia. And then normally, third, you would say something like, greetings, or I miss you. But Paul takes that opportunity and makes it a gospel opportunity.

So what is the gospel? Let's just walk through those three verses a bit slower. Firstly, grace and peace to you from God our Father. It's a gospel of grace.

Absolutely foundational to Paul's message, to the gospel, to the message of the whole Bible, is the reality that if you want to know God, he needs to decide to grant you that privilege, even though you don't deserve it.

That his mercy is the starting point. Because you and I and everyone ever and the Galatians are just straight up undeserving of the privilege of knowing God the creator.

[ 8 : 29 ] The gospel is the good news that by grace, God gives you what you do not deserve. In fact, what he offers is peace.

It's grace and peace to you. And that's not like peace as in like peacefulness, some sort of serenity. It's not peace as in life being easy and comfortable. It's more, it's bigger than that.

It's more like, almost like world peace. If in that phrase you can catch the sense that it's God bringing justice on the earth, fixing what's wrong, judging the guilty, recreating our world to be the perfect place it's supposed to be.

Removing sickness and death and pain. That's the peace that the gospel holds out for people. It's a hope for the future that God is preparing for those who belong to him.

Those he's chosen by grace. So the gospel is grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Secondly, and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins.

[ 9 : 39 ] The gospel is the message that says God's grace is available through Jesus. And not just Jesus generally who was a carpenter's son or some other detail about his life.

But the Jesus who came and lived a perfect life as the only one who deserved a relationship with God. And most importantly is the one who died as an innocent man in our place for our sin.

For our rejection of God. While we were his enemies. Jesus died that we might become sons and daughters. He took our punishment.

He handed us his perfection. So that we could have the relationship with God that we were made for. The relationship with God that we are eternally restless without.

So that that longing and searching could be met. Jesus came and died for our sins. And then thirdly, to rescue us from the present evil age.

[10:40] He did it to rescue us. The whole issue, the whole reason we need a gospel, we need a good news, we need a message of hope. Is because sin is in the world.

And because of sin, all of creation has been separated from God. Everything that is wrong in the world and in your life is a result of sin. And it's a result of us being separated out from God and his goodness.

We've lost access to him. We now lack the ability to please him, even if we want to. We are fenced in by death.

Fenced in by our own failure and limitation. But Jesus comes to rescue us from that. He comes to give us a new life. He comes to give us the power of his Holy Spirit, which enables us to finally please God.

And live for him. And then lastly, it's according to the will of our God and Father. Again, it's all about grace.

[11:48] It's all about what God has done. It's all about what God chooses to do. And for no other reason. Because of his great mercy.

The gospel is the message of God's grace to us in sending his son so that we might be forgiven and so that unworthy people like you and I can know him as father.

That is the gospel. Before we get into anything else in Galatians, before the Galatians get into anything else, Paul needs to drag them back to there, to their starting point. If you're a Christian, that is the message that you heard and accepted.

If you're not a Christian, that is the invitation of the gospel. The invitation from God to you is that you could know this forgiveness.

You could receive this gift of love and acceptance from God that you do not deserve. You could be rescued from the frustration and futility of this age.

[12:58] You could have the hope for peace. The hope for heaven. The hope for the day when God will return and rescue those who are his finally and fully.

That gospel truth was sufficient for many of us in this room to make the decision that our lives would no longer be about ourselves but would be about the one who had done all this for us.

This gospel was sufficient for the Galatians to make the decision to leave other religion and other idol worship and other cultural commitments and make Jesus their defining reality.

And then, verse 6, Paul says, 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. They just deserted him. I mean, notice that word there. They didn't desert it. They didn't desert information. They didn't desert content.

[14:15] They deserted the one who called them. They turned away from God himself who offered them grace, who offered them their solution.

Astonished, almost doesn't feel like it does it justice. I mean, having experienced the grace of God, having been loved in spite of who they are, having been forgiven through the blood of Jesus on the cross, having discovered the significance and satisfaction that can only be found in Jesus, how do they just turn away?

And so quickly. I mean, if they've been following God for a long time, maybe you've been a Christian for a while and that joy that you had at the beginning, that wonder that God would do this has kind of faded in the struggles of life and in the challenges.

Maybe then you could understand, but near the beginning? I remember when I became a Christian, I was 14 years old, I felt invincible.

It was quite literally, even to now, the most exciting and significant thing that I had ever discovered that God would love me like this and love me like this forever. I wasn't going anywhere.

[15:39] And yet, these churches, so quickly, after discovering the grace of God, have deserted the one who called them to live in that grace.

How? How does that happen? Do you remember when you discovered grace? If you're a Christian, do you remember what it was for you for the first time to understand that God would love you like this?

How do you go from there, from amazed, from wondered, from overwhelmed, from this is what my life will be about from now on, to just turning away?

What happens between those two points? One of the things that my family and I like to do, and when I say like to do, I think we've done it maybe three times, but Bailey's a big fan of scenic world in the Blue Mountains.

He loves going on the train that goes kind of essentially down the cliff and back up. He loves going on the cable cars and, you know, it's a pretty amazing thing to have an hour and a half up the road. But I have to confess that on the cable car, I think it's the yellow one, that has a clear bottom that kind of stays frosted until you're in the middle of nowhere and then it goes clear so that you can see that certain death awaits you if something goes wrong.

[17:09] I remember sitting on there and just pondering for a moment that the only thing at that point between me and certain death, I eventually started worrying about my family and kids as well that were with me, but initially me and certain death was a cable about that round.

Now, I'm no engineer, don't pretend to be, but I just remember for a moment just second guessing my decision to step onto that cable car, especially the second and third time because Bailey was having so much fun.

But the reality is in the country that we live in with the security standards that we have and the engineering that's available, it's a very safe thing to be on.

Even if you get stuck in the middle, that cable's not snapping. It's getting regularly checked. It's probably capable of holding about 15 of those cable cars plus people. They're going to overrate it to make sure that it is secure.

But when you're in the middle between these two cliffs, miles above the ground, not miles, but it feels like it, it doesn't matter that I'm completely secure if I don't feel completely secure.

[18:23] If I'm standing in that car looking through this clear bottom at trees, that cable could be this thick, if I don't feel secure in that moment, I'm going to act based on how I feel.

I'm going to panic. I'm going to be telling the operator to hurry up and accelerate this thing to the other side. I'm going to be crying. I'm going to be, you know, getting a piggyback from sales so that I'm not going to hit the ground first.

I'm going to act based on how I feel even though in reality I'm completely secure. It's going to be dictated by how I'm feeling in that moment.

These Galatians have heard the gospel. They have heard the truth of the irreversible reality that God has loved them by His grace.

Loved them in spite of who they are and so in fact nothing that they do or don't do could ever change His love for them. They are secure in His love. But their issue is in spite of the concrete objective reality that they are secure they don't feel secure.

[19:37] They're second guessing their security. They're panicking. They're doubting the engineering. I mean, you've got to understand they're turning to another gospel but they're still turning to a gospel even if it's no gospel at all.

They're looking for a gospel. They still want to be with God. It's not like they're saying forget God I'm not interested in Him anymore. Their issue is they're just not sure that they're on the right track.

They're just not confident that they're secure in God's love. They're starting to worry whether they've ticked all the boxes. They're turning to a false and useful gospel but they're turning to a gospel that they've been tricked into thinking will help them.

They still want to be forgiven. They still want a relationship with God. They still want to get to heaven.

They're putting effort into this new direction. We're going to look at it more over the coming weeks in terms of exactly what was going on for them but their effort counts for nothing.

[20:40] Their effort not just doesn't help them it hinders them because by turning to this gospel they're rejecting the one gospel the only gospel the true gospel that can offer security.

They've been confused. Verse 7 Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

They've been lured into a perversion of the gospel. That's the trick. The enemy is very clever here. The devil's been at this longer than any of us longer than any of the Galatians and he knows that Christians are not completely stupid.

Some of us might be closer to stupid than others but we're not completely stupid. And so these false teachers these some people don't turn up and say oh Jesus is stupid forget about him because we wouldn't fall for that.

We'd be like no no no Jesus is the important bit we just learned a couple of weeks ago Christ alone and we're all about that. And so they didn't turn up and say forget Jesus they turned up and said Jesus is great isn't it fantastic what he's done all this stuff it's done so much for you and helped you there's just a couple more things that you need to do just to really begin just to be be sure that you're the genuine article be sure that you're legitimate see the devil presses the buttons that he knows are sensitive for them see these Galatian Christians were Gentiles they're basically everyone who's not Jews and these some people who had turned up were Jews and so these Jews claimed a certain level of Christian heritage if you like they were God's people and so these Galatians were looking at them thinking they must know what they're talking about I mean they've been here longer than I have and so they figured I guess we need to do what they say these Jews turned up and they were telling you you know

[ 22 : 43 ] Jesus is fantastic there's just a couple more Jew things that you need to do things like being circumcised things like eating certain foods things like the way you wash yourself all that sort of stuff it all sounds pretty harmless except for maybe circumcision but it all sounds pretty harmless it sounds like the kinds of things you go yeah maybe God does want me to do those things maybe they're good things for us to do and in fact whether you do them or don't do them isn't the issue the issue is if you are doing them and thinking that by those things you will be forgiven the issue is that by doing whatever it is that these people are asking we begin to think that they're the things that enable us to have a relationship with God that is not the gospel it's not the gospel Paul preached it's not the gospel they accepted the gospel is a message of grace alone not grace plus some other things by definition grace has to be alone if grace is giving you something you don't deserve as soon as you do something to try and deserve it then grace disappears grace is by definition alone and the only gospel is a gospel of grace whenever we add something to the gospel we make it grace plus something else we make it

Jesus plus something else it's a perversion it's no gospel at all it's not good news I've been around churches like ours for a little bit over half my life I just want to flag one particular perversion that is a danger for us there's two big ones one is that you take the gospel and say I'm forgiven so God doesn't care what I do and I can do whatever I want we're going to talk about that one a bit more in a few weeks the issue for the Galatians was the issue of here's the gospel Jesus has done everything he's just one or two extra things I just want to challenge us I want us to reflect on how do we do that because in my experience both personally and my experience in churches like ours is that we have what I call the be like me gospel the be like me gospel is the gospel that says Jesus has died for your sins you don't deserve it there's nothing you can do come and find forgiveness and be like me you know be into the same things

I'm into I've been a Christian for a while and my hobbies are kind of a little bit holier than your hobbies so just shift sideways the way I dress is a little bit holier than you are so dress like me the way I speak is a little bit holier than you so speak like me the way I think about political issues is a little bit holier than you so share my stance on all things political I remember someone who used to come to our church just really briefly he used to smoke sometimes he used to smoke out on the deck out here where the atrium is that used to be a deck that we hang out on and I remember the extent when this person and I don't mean that in a good way when this person would light up a cigarette at a church event I remember as a pastor being prodded and asked if I was going to intervene let him know about you know his eternal damnation as he lit up that cigarette his Christian character was called into question for the record

I think smoking is dumb not trying to offend you if you smoke it's bad for your health it smells bad but it has nothing to do with the gospel nothing to do with whether or not someone deserves God's grace of course they don't deserve God's grace that's the point that's what makes it grace no one deserves it as soon as we require somebody to be like us or to think like us or to speak like us or to dress like us we're doing gospel plus so many churches are full of identical people because they're very subtly doing the be like me gospel we don't say it's a gospel issue but we just won't be friends with you if you're not like us you won't be welcome unless you start acting like us talking like us thinking like us our vision as a church is to be transcultural God's vision for his church is to be transcultural a church full of people who are completely different and yet have all received the same

grace of

God in Christ people who speak different languages people who are rich and poor people who are polished and refined and those who are a little bit more rough around the edges people who swear and smoke people who feel out of place among nice middle class Anglicans except for the fact that they're depending on the grace of God just as much as the rest of us one of the first signs that you've lost hold of the only gospel and are holding on to some perversion is the way that you look at and treat other people if your response as you look around the room is pride at how much better you are than others or disgust at how sinful they are or even frustration that they're not putting in the same level of effort as you at being a Christian what do you think it is you're trusting in to save you at that point the answer is you your gospel has become you you're trusting how good you are how much better you are than others how hard you're trying that's not the gospel that's no gospel at all that's not good news that is a prison of guilt and fear and shame and failure and disappointment there is only one gospel there is only one message of hope there will only ever be one gospel for sinners like you and me and it is the gospel of grace alone in Christ and so Paul says emphatically in verse 8 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 as we've already said so I say again if anybody's preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted let them be under

[ 29 : 26 ] God's curse there is only one gospel we just spent five weeks being reminded of this we stand on the one message of salvation that is offered through what Jesus has done on the cross and so the last question we've got to ask and I promise I'm finishing how do we resist the perversions of the gospel how do we make sure we don't like the Galatians get dragged away from this amazing message of hope how do we make sure that we stand firm in this one and only true gospel well some of you will be aware that when I was a little bit younger I used to drink quite a bit of coke I've since matured I have an adult palate now and I've moved on to V when I say a lot of coke I'm in litres per day two litres would be a slow day for me

I'm talking from the age of like 12 through to about 25 I would like find scrounge around the house for money I would wander around the playground at school trying to get money off people and I would just buy coke I just love the stuff drink it like it was you know heaven it was amazing I got so familiar with the taste of coke so refined in my palate that I could taste the difference between coke that came out of different containers I could taste the difference between coke in an aluminium can to coke in a plastic bottle coke in a glass bottle to coke in a plastic bottle I became so good at tasting differences in coke I could tell you the difference between a 2 litre plastic bottle and a 1.25 litre plastic bottle I used to brag about this quite regularly I thought it was a bit of a spiritual gift something I should take pride in and in my previous church the youth group kids you know they weren't convinced so they decided to give me a cola challenge and they said we're going to get you know some

Pepsi some diet coke some you know that terrible RC cola stuff that they sell all these different colas and they put them in plain little white cups on a table and the challenge was for me to taste them all and pick the real coke I stood at the table looked at the row of cups and said that's the coke I didn't even have to taste it by sight I could tell the real coke and I was right it was easy it wasn't even a challenge because I drank so much coke up to this point I knew how fizzy it was supposed to be I knew what colour it would be I even knew you know in that small cup how that would impact the darkness of the coke I was really across coke like we're talking serious familiarity I knew it so well that it was easy to spot the imitations easy to spot the dodgy diet versions and whatever else was out there it's the same with the gospel it's not complicated if you want to be equipped to resist the perversions that are out there if you want to be equipped in those moments where you feel insecure to not go running after false gospels and false solutions if you want to be equipped to resist even the false gospels that start here in those moments of doubt in those moments of guilt in those moments of shame you need to get familiar with this one true gospel of grace you need to live in grace you need to make grace your daily meal do the things you did when you first encountered God's grace when you first heard and accepted the gospel do the things that enabled you to taste and experience how good God's love is there's a whole bunch I want to really quickly suggest three that

I think will be true of anybody who is a Christian three things that you did when you first experienced grace that you should keep doing to make grace a part of your everyday first one listen to God's word you had to hear the gospel to respond to it you need to keep hearing it day in day out a little

bit of confession is that when we're writing when I was writing this sermon this week I was feeling a little bit of deja vu after spending five weeks looking at the reformation the reformation we basically pulled apart the gospel for five weeks and I thought we're starting Galatians I'm basically saying the exact same thing this week and there was a part of me that's not going to be interesting we need to hear this over and over again because there is that part of us that goes got it on the shelf you need to be listening to God's word like we are right now you need to be opening the Bible and hearing from God grace and peace to you from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ you need to hear that message over and over again that's first second one you need to confess sin when you first became a Christian I've said this over and over again my community group knows that this is my chorus this is my go-to and I'm going to keep saying it when you became a Christian you confessed sin might not have been fancy it might not have been in clever words like we did together just before but you essentially said God I need your help I need to be rescued and what did you discover God God answers that prayer God forgives God cleanses God washes you and so you need to discover that again you need to confess sin again you need to admit that maybe you've been holding people to standards that the gospel doesn't maybe you've been holding yourself to standards that the gospel doesn't and you need to find that God will forgive you and then as you're experiencing that grace you'll be equipped to know when you hear the lies and the perversions it's the second one third one last one is you need to thank him I'm guessing a little bit here but I think there's a fair chance that when you became a Christian when you discovered grace there was a bit of thankfulness going on for you I remember sobbing just thinking this is like this is stupid good God you are amazing

God has filled your life with grace the fact that we're sitting here right now soaking in the truth of the gospel is a gift from God but there's a chance that we'll walk out of here and not even recognize that he's the one who gave us that gift thank him train yourself to see and recognize the grace and as you're surrounded by it you're ready to resist the false gospel the fake gospel the one that drags you away from the true and only gospel of grace and forgiveness that is found in Jesus grace is not the beginning the gospel is not the beginning it's everything God called us to live in grace so take the gospel out of the display cabinet if you've put it on a shelf get it out and use it eat off it every meal be shaped by it be defined by it because there is no other gospel there is no other hope there is nothing else that has the power to give you security there is nothing else that has the power to give you joy in darkness there is nothing else that can lift you from the limitations and the hurt and the struggle of this life and give you eyes to see the heaven that

[ 36 : 52 ] God is preparing for you so use it live in grace you