

The True Gospel

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Date: 07 February 2016

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[0 : 00] One of the things that we could always say about the Apostle Paul is that he was somebody who was never afraid to be different. Not that he was somebody who wanted to be different just for the sake of being different, but he lived in a day when it was tough, it was difficult to stand on the side of Christ.

In fact, we're moving into that kind of day in our own land here more and more, because the majority of people today will not be going to church.

The majority of people in our land do not believe or accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. And that often makes it increasingly difficult, because we're living in a day where there's less and less acceptance of people becoming Christians.

And maybe for you, like the Apostle, you're having to stand alone. The Apostle often had to stand alone. It's one of the things that he said.

We read about him saying that in Acts, for instance, no one stood with me except the Lord. He was aware that there was nobody standing with him except the Lord.

[1 : 14] Sometimes he was as lonely as that. And maybe for some of you it's like that. Maybe you're the only Christian in your home. Maybe the only Christian at work, in your place of work.

Maybe the only Christian in your class and school. That's tough. These things are difficult. And that is why it's so encouraging when we go to God's Word, because very often we find that loneliness is something that is highlighted, but also to make us aware that in Jesus Christ we're never alone.

We're never, ever alone. Sometimes when a person can be feeling alone, and particularly if you're suffering in your loneliness, it can be very, very difficult to lay hold upon God's promises sometimes. And that's what we really need to pray. Say, Lord, help me. I'm struggling. We've got to be honest with the Lord and just tell the Lord how it is and what we're going through.

As we were saying to the young folk, we bring everything to the Lord, not just select things, but we bring everything to the Lord and tell the Lord everything. But the apostle was somebody who always highlighted how positive a thing it is to become a Christian.

[2 : 33] Because, again, there is an incredible negativity surrounding Christianity. Even the portrayal of the Christian always on the screen or whatever, it is always so biased.

It is always an incredible negativity attached to it all. And a lot of people today look on Christianity with this negativity, in negative terms.

But the apostle was always showing what a wonderful experience it is to become a Christian. And Satan has had a wonderful job of blinding people's eyes to the reality of Jesus Christ as Savior.

We read about that in Corinthians, that the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. That's one of the things he's a master at doing. It's the same way if you have two people, one who has lost their sight and another who has fantastic vision.

And they're standing there in a beautiful evening and there's a glorious sunset surrounding Sidillic. And there they are. The person who has lost their sight, who is blind, is totally incapable, sadly, totally incapable, of seeing the beauty, the magnificence, the splendor, the awe of the scene in front of them.

[3 : 55] Whereas the other person can just be almost spellbound by the beauty of it. And that, in a sense, is how it is spiritually. Because if a person is blind, they cannot see.

They cannot see the beauty. They cannot see the beauty of Jesus. They cannot see his saving power. They see no beauty, as Isaiah said, they see no beauty in him that they should desire him. That's the reason, that's the bottom line, why people don't want to follow Jesus Christ, why they don't want to submit to his authority and his rule. They see no need. They see no beauty.

They see no desire. There's nothing appealing to them about the Lord Jesus Christ. But we know that once we see Jesus, once we see the way of salvation, once we're able to grasp this, everything changes.

And the scene becomes wonderful. And our desire for the Lord is totaled. We want to follow. Often we may feel that we're not following the best that we can.

[5 : 07] And none of us here will be able to say, you know this, I'm the best follower that the Lord Jesus Christ ever had. None of us would ever dare say that. In fact, you're more likely to say, I'm probably one of the poorest followers that the Lord Jesus Christ ever had.

But I'll tell you one thing. The Lord knows deep down that I actually do love him. That's what the Apostle Peter, remember when he was being quizzed by Jesus, Peter, do you love me?

In the end, Peter just said, well, Lord, you know all things. And there's one thing you know, that I do love you. And so the Apostle Paul is always highlighting the wonder of becoming a Christian.

Because the Apostle shows it is the most liberating experience. It is where real freedom is found.

And the Apostle was so determined to highlight the freedom in Jesus Christ.

It is one of the things he was always emphasizing is salvation is by grace. It's not by works. And that's part of what this whole letter is about, is showing that gospel freedom is in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone.

[6 : 24] And Paul, wherever he went, he was plagued by people who were coming after him. And they were trying to undermine his teaching. And there were what we termed Judaizers.

These were people who were steeped in the Jewish religion. And they were saying, now, it's not just Jesus Christ. Okay, yes, Paul, we'll accept.

We'll accept there's Jesus Christ. But there's got to be more than Jesus Christ. What about all the old rituals of our faith? What about all the...

They went all the way back to the covenant that God had made with Abraham and the whole right of circumcision and all the different rituals and all the different days that were celebrated.

All these things. These had to be part, they were saying. You cannot just have faith in Jesus Christ. There's got to be all these other things in order to be a proper follower of the Lord.

[7 : 26] Paul would be often... You could feel this exasperation because he was saying, no, none of these things anymore matter. Only one thing counts.

And that is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so that's what really this letter is all about. And people found it very hard in Paul's day to believe that God could accept them just as they are and that God could save them just as they were in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

They really struggled with that in Paul's day. They struggled with it at the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther's day. That's why this particular letter became Lutherish along with Romans his favorite epistle because it released him from the shackles and he began to see it's Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

It's nothing else. It doesn't matter what I do. It doesn't matter what I don't do. That has no bearing upon my salvation. It is what Jesus Christ has done for me.

And you know it's one of the hardest things for us to lay hold of because we still think we've got to do something. You know at the very beginning we term it although there wasn't an actual covenant as such made but we term it the covenant of works where God said to Adam at the beginning this is what you do this is what you don't do.

[9 : 05] And of course we know that Adam and Eve disobeyed God. And there's almost like a legacy of that left within us where we think that somehow by what we do or we don't do that we can get right with God.

You know a lot of people have this idea that at the end of the day your life is all about a balancing of the good and the bad. And that God will say at the end of the day right here's all the good things you did and there's the bad things and that you know the good things actually outweigh the bad things you're all right.

And because yes you followed me a bit and you did this and you did that and there were so many good things you did and I'll work it out that you're good outweighed the bad and so we get eternal life.

A lot of people think like that. Well it's got nothing to do with that. In fact one of the most disturbing things the Bible tells us is that there is no one good.

That our righteousness what we think are the good things are in fact in God's sight filthy rags. Now that doesn't mean that it gives us a license just to do anything and say there's no point in trying to be decent and upright and morally right and all these things.

[10:23] Of course not. We ought to strive for these things. But the point is that with regard to our salvation we cannot bargain with God.

And it's one of the faults and problems that so many people make. They think before I can become a Christian I've got to make myself right with God. I've got to sort out there's things in my life I've got to sort out.

And if I stop doing this or I start doing this then maybe God will accept me. But no. That's going back exactly to where Paul was dealing with these Judaizers who were saying it's faith in Jesus Christ plus other things.

Paul says no. There is not one other thing that you can bring or do or not do that is going to give you salvation. It is grace and grace alone.

And that is really hard for us to understand. so that I just what I have to do is to come to the Lord and say Lord here I am. You know my life from start to finish.

[11:33] You know the good things I've done and the bad things I've done. And I know that any of these things that ultimately it has no bearing upon my salvation. All I want Lord is for you to save me.

Save me by your grace. Give me the faith to believe. And that's the way salvation is. All the things that we are and done count for nothing.

The apostle remember in Philippians he brings that point out and he says you know if anybody had qualifications to be right with God it was me.

And he goes through the whole list of all the Jewish rituals and experiences and being born in the right family and in the right tribe and having all the proper qualifications.

And you know what he said? I take the whole lot of them. All these things that people put so much value on and he said I count them like dung. They're just to be discarded.

[12:35] They're of no value whatever with regard to my salvation. It's not that Paul ever turned his back on his Jewishness. He thanked God for it.

He was proud of being a Jew and he thanked God for all the privileges that he had. But he recognized that he had been blinded to the actual truth.

And so this is part of what this whole letter is about is emphasizing that it is by grace that we are saved. Jesus kept saying that.

Jesus said he said I came for the sick not for those who are well. I came for sinners not for the righteous.

This is Jesus' point that he was making so often. So the apostle when he's writing this letter he can't get over how this church the church in Galatia have all of a sudden have started reverting back.

[13:36] And that's why he calls them in chapter 3 oh foolish Galatians. and we saw last week he was actually astonished at how they had moved. In chapter 4 he's saying to them how can you turn your back again to the weak worthless elementary principles of the world.

Do you want to be slaves again? So Paul is absolutely nonplussed as to how they have reached there. so then his language becomes very strong because he's saying look at these people they're teaching you false things.

And he goes on to say this even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached let him be accursed. If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received let him be accursed.

That's quite an extraordinary thing. Paul is saying supposing an angel supposing you had a vision through the night and there was an angel there and the angel said to you I to be a Christian yeah Jesus Christ but you need more than that.

In order to be a Christian you have to you have to give so much to the church you have to attend you have to stop there there's a whole lot of things you have to stop doing.

[14:59] Paul says if that person comes and supposing you saw an angel and said that that angel would be accursed. Any person who says anything other. And you know Paul is making a very very strong statement here because basically what he is saying here is that the church does not judge the Bible but the Bible judges the church.

Now that's a very very important thing to say. You might not think it's that important. It's hugely important. Paul is saying that the standard for everything is the word of God.

And one of the great faults possibly of the church and when I say the church I talk about it in its very broadest sense is that the church has sat in judgment upon the Bible instead of allowing the Bible to judge the church.

The Bible as the word of God. And all the faults and problems that have arisen when you look at the church and I'm talking about the church in its very broadest sense here is that you have theologians and even ministers and so on who accept some of the Bible but they don't accept all of it.

They have sat in judgment upon the word of God. And they're doing a kind of pick and mix. They pick the bits they want and they discard the bits they don't. So the church has all of a sudden it's sat up and stood in authority against the word of God and sat in judgment against the word of God and said well we'll accept what we want and we'll take out of it what we want and the rest we put away.

[16:44] And Paul is saying any person who does that is accursed. The curse of God comes upon any person who takes God's word and puts aside from it what they want.

Again you go to the book of Revelation and it tells us the very same thing. If we add to God's word or we take away from God's word, God's curse is on us. So it's an incredibly serious thing to take God's word and to try and twist it or to fit your own ideas.

To have you, supposing, I could never come to the pulpit, it would be completely wrong for me to have my own ideas or my own hobby about this and that and try and find something in God's word that would fit.

And maybe I'd have to twist it a wee bit, twist a verse a wee bit in order. That is wrong. God's curse would be on me for doing that. There has to be an honest appraisal taking God's word as faithfully as we possibly can and trying to expound, trying to teach from that exactly what God's word is saying.

So Paul is, as we say, using incredibly strong language on these things. It's incredibly solemn. And we know, and it's one of the sad things within, and I talk about the church in its very broadest sense, taking in, we're not talking here in any way denominationally or anything, but taking the Christian church in its very widest sense that I've spoken to.

[18:21] A minister who said to me, you know, I don't believe in any of this born-again stuff. I said to him, how can you be a minister if you don't believe in that?

I said, I don't get that. Well, I said, you cannot preach the kingdom of God unless you're born again. Because Jesus says, except a person be born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God. You cannot understand it.

You cannot see anything about it. And so it's almost bewildering. You cannot understand that. And then from verse 10, Paul begins to give his testimony and what a testimony it is.

And he's using his testimony to try and defend himself against the accusations that were leveled against him. There's these two forward accusations. The first accusation was that the message that he proclaimed wasn't from God, but that it was from man.

[19:28] And the other thing that they were saying is that he was just trying to please people. Paul is saying, that is absolute rubbish. Paul is saying, look, if I was trying to please people, I would preach what you want me to preach.

You see, they're accusing Paul and they're saying, you're giving a watered-down message. You're taking away all the traditions and all the rituals of the law, and you're only preaching Jesus Christ. That is so easy. You're making it an easy gospel for people. And they're saying, you've taken away all the tough standards that are required.

And so they're accusing Paul of trying to water down everything so that loads of people will believe. And they're saying, Paul, you're just wanting it so that you'd make a name for yourself.

And Paul is saying, no, he said, if I was trying to please people, I would preach exactly what you want me to preach. And you see, I suppose there's always a danger of trying to play to a gallery, but Paul was his own man.

[20:42] No, he was Christ's man. And Paul was going to preach only what the Lord gave him. And that's what made him so unpopular. And Paul is saying that.

He said, he's more or less saying just how difficult it has been for him, but he is adamant that this is, if he's going to please men, he would have preached something completely different.

And we see the incredible responsibility that is put upon the preaching of the gospel. And one of the things that Paul always tried to do, even when he was giving theological lectures, even when he was being incredibly practical, the one theme that he never stopped preaching was Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And he never stopped appealing to people. And I pray that that'll be how I and every preacher will be, that we'll never stop appealing to people to come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we're always aware that there is nothing greater in the whole wide world than the peace a person can experience once they come to rest in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 57] And every time we preach, it's an opportunity to tell people again. Even although they've heard it a hundred times, even although they've heard it a thousand times, probably I heard the gospel thousands of times before I came to believe.

And yet it was the same message. Jesus Christ and him crucified. And that's where the apostle Paul always proclaimed, always preached.

And he was emphasizing, I didn't get this from men. This is not a man-made gospel. This is the power of God unto salvation.

This is a power that changes people's lives. And I pray today that if there's anybody here who does not know of that power, who has never experienced the reality of Jesus coming into their heart, of knowing the peace of God, of that desire, and maybe sometimes it's very, very hard to understand or to know just when you become a Christian or even how you become a Christian.

And you might be here today and you've got all kinds of questions and you say, I don't know. I have no idea. Am I a Christian or am I not? Am I? And you have all these kind of things going on in your head.

[23 : 22] Let me ask you first and foremost, do you have a desire to follow the Lord? Is this deep down in your heart, you say, you know, above everything else, I really want to follow the Lord.

I can't see Him properly, so much I don't understand. But you know, there's nobody else I really want to follow. I've done so many things in life.

I've been here, I've been there, and the next place. But this is the one I know. This is who I want. But let me tell you, that hasn't come from yourself. That is not your own natural thinking.

That is from the Lord. Lord. And then you ask the Lord, Lord, make that clearer for me. Just lead me on into the place where I will really know, know you as my Lord and my Savior.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, oh God, we give thanks again today for this great gospel. We give thanks that it is a gospel that changes lives.

[24 : 23] And we pray that we will hear what God the Lord will speak, and that you will guide us and uphold us and direct us in the way of truth. We pray, oh Lord, that you will be our shield and our shelter and that you will lead us in the way of truth.

Pray to bless a cup of tea, coffee in the hall after. And we ask, Lord, that you will be with us throughout this week, granting us grace and guidance and help and strength in everything that we have to do.

Wash away from us all our sin. In Jesus' name, Amen. Let us conclude singing in Psalm 71 from the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 71, Scottish Psalter.

I'm going to sing from verse 14 to verse 17. Psalm 71. Psalm 71. But I with expectation will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more I will thee magnify.

Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show, even all the day, for I thereof the numbers do not know. And I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord, and thine own righteousness even thine alone I will record.

[25 : 41] For even from my youth, O God, by thee I have been taught, and hitherto I have declared the wonders thou hast wrought. Psalm 71, 14 to 17, and the tune as weather be.

That's on page 311, but I with expectation. will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more I will be magnified.

My justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show in all the day for I thereof the numbers do not know.

And I will constantly go on and I will be magnified.

In strength of God the Lord and light for righteous death in night alone I will record.

[27 : 36] for even from my youth, O God, by thee I have been taught, and hitherto I have declared the wonders of us all.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Job Lord Let us pray.
Amen.