

Galatians 3 vs 28

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to study both of the passages that we've read. But we're going to focus especially on Paul in Athens.

So we've read two passages in Acts 17, Paul in Athens, and Galatians 3. And our study is going to be on this most remarkable man, Paul.

In the scriptures he starts out with his Hebrew name, which is Saul. And then he tends to be known by his Greek name, which is Paul.

He was a man who started out persecuting Jesus' followers to the point of killing them.

Remember, he was the one who kept the coats of those who were stoning Stephen to death. And it said that Saul gave approval of his murder.

[1 : 08] So we're going to study this remarkable man. And we're going to look at things in terms of how God brought about his development.

That he might become the apostle to the Gentiles of Christ Jesus. Now, as I mentioned, our text will be in Galatians 3.

Now, in a way, we're working towards this text as we study the scriptures. But Galatians 3, 28, Paul writes, A little bit of explanation there when he says there is neither Jew nor Greek.

When he refers to Greek, he's talking about non-Jews. He's talking about what we would call Gentiles. So what he's saying here is there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

Now, the reason for that is that it might surprise you to know that at this time in the Middle East, the main language that was spoken was Greek and not Arabic. Because at this time in history, it was just after the time that Alexander the Great from Greece had conquered much of the known world and had spread the Greek language.

[2 : 35] So Greek was the main language that got you by wherever you went, even as far as Afghanistan. So places that we know well from the news today, like Syria or Iraq or Egypt, the main language spoken was Greek.

And it was only with the rise of Islam about the year 700 AD that Greek began to be overtaken by Arabic. So the comment here is Paul is saying, in Jesus, there is no Jew or Gentile at all.

But we'll come to the significance we've had later, because it has a very interesting origin in Paul's life. Just to summarise the sermons, we'll be in three parts.

The first part will be to understand the passage about Paul in Athens. The second part will be to understand God's preparation of Paul in his early life for God's service as the apostle for Jesus to the Gentiles.

And that's also where the text that we've read will come in. And then the final part will be to look at what are the lessons for us now. What's the application for us now from all that we've studied?

[3 : 52] So we're going to begin by looking at Paul in Athens. We have this remarkable record in Acts 17 of Paul's visit to Athens.

And Paul addressing a large group of people known as the Aeropagus. Now those of you who know your authorised version will know that the reference here is to Mars Hill.

And that's because the hill that this committee, this group met on, was called Mars Hill. To start with, it's interesting to point out that of all the references we've had of the preaching of the gospel, interestingly, this is probably the one that matches most to the experience that the church has of communicating with people in this day and age.

So that's what makes this actually very interesting. Here's Paul speaking to a group of people from what appears to be a very different culture to his own, actually a very different culture to the church of the day.

So in a way, this is very useful material as we then look at the modern church, looking at modern society around us, sometimes looking onto it with utter perplexity.

[5 : 11] But let's see how Paul then handled it. Notice some things. There are no Jewish people he's addressing. So there tend also not to be any people of the early church that he's addressing.

The audience is Gentile. Also, if you've noticed, he didn't do what he normally does. He did not quote anywhere from the Old Testament. The quotes we have here, in him we live and move and have our being, and also for we are indeed his offspring, don't come from the Bible at all.

Well, they're nowhere in the Old Testament. They come from Greek poets and playwrights. Another surprise is that Paul does not mention the cross.

He doesn't mention the cross. Some theologians over the centuries said that was obviously a failure on Paul's part.

I'll leave you to judge for yourself by the end of the sermon what you think. Paul does something different.

[6 : 24] But we'll come to that later. And it's actually very important. If we compare to what Paul did in other times as he travelled around, what's modern Turkey or Greece or Syria, he always went to the synagogue first and he preached there and he reasoned with the Jews and the devout people.

And he does this also in Athens. We read that, that he went to the synagogue first. But apart from that, he did something quite different. He also preached in the marketplace.

Not because the marketplace was a place where you would find different people, but for a very special reason in Athens.

In Athens, it was a bit like Speaker's Corner in London. This was the place where anyone who had a new idea would stand up and speak. And a crowd would gather. Because Athens was the place where people liked to listen to things.

And that comes out when he's ordered to go to speak in the Eropagus. So, Athens is a bit different to every other of Paul's evangelistic outreaches.

[7 : 36] He deliberately speaks to the Gentiles in a different way. Now, if we think of Athens, it's the modern capital of Greece. And there are many ancient ruins there.

We can still see them. And those buildings which are now ruins were in use in Paul's day. At the time of Paul, they were about 500 years old.

And as I said at the beginning of the reading, Paul was here and had time on his hands. So he did what everyone does when they go to Athens. He went sightseeing.

He went looking around. That comes out in verse 16 and also in his speech in verse 23. He went sightseeing. And he went especially to find all the places of worship that the Athenians had.

Now, interestingly, you can actually see some of the things that Paul saw. If any of you have been to the British Museum, you might have seen there's a big gallery there with lots of carvings called the Elgin marbles.

[8 : 40] The Elgin marbles are carvings of various images. And they were originally on the Parthenon in Athens. 200 years ago, they were brought to Britain by Lord Elgin and gifted to the British Museum.

And here's a thought. As you look at those carvings and you let your eyes look along them, you can then say to yourself, Paul saw these. Paul looked at these.

And I wonder what Paul made of them. Now, then, think of also about Athens. At the time, in the Roman Empire, it was the intellectual capital of the Roman world.

It was, you might say, the foremost university town. So, as Rome was the capital, it didn't have a university. You sent people who needed an education to Athens.

In the same way that London or Edinburgh are our capitals, but the universities are separate. So, for London, as much as it is universities now, Oxford or Cambridge probably regard themselves as more highly.

[9 : 52] But then, let's focus on this council that Paul had speak to, the Eurubicus. It actually had three functions for that city. It was the city council.

It was also the university ruling court. And it was also the most senior law court. So, if we put it into an island conference, it would be a bit like taking everyone who sits on the West Niles council and everyone who sits in authority at the local college and the sheriff and put them all together.

It had all three of those functions. but on a much larger scale than we would have here on the islands. And it was very powerful in its own right. Now, some other things to notice.

We need to understand the attitude of the people that Paul came up against. The Athenians were renowned for arrogance. Arrogance. Arrogance.

They would look down on whoever they met. That arrogance, that arrogance, firstly, was racial because they had a creation myth that said that they were created differently to all the other races of the earth.

[11:10] If you think about it, Paul teased them in his speech because he then said, he talks about God making from one man every nation of mankind on earth.

But they believed that they were different and that they were special. And that arrogance, there was a second cause for it. It was an intellectual one.

Because this was the place where you went to university, they looked down on absolutely everyone else. And they did this to Paul in verse 18 in the marketplace when the Epicurean and Stuart philosophers are listening.

They say, what does this babbler wish to say? And the word babbler is very derogatory. They're actually saying, what does this stupid person wish to say?

They looked down on Paul. But then looking at these Epicurean and Stuart philosophers, you've got to look at them, the schools of philosophy, just very briefly.

[12:13] If you graded them, there were schools of these philosophers in different cities in the Roman Empire. And the best of the best were in Athens. The best of the best.

The second best were in another Greek city in Egypt and called Alexandria. Let's focus a little on what Paul was doing.

So he's in the marketplace and the people are not really listening to him very carefully. In verse 18, where they comment first on him being a babbler and all that that meant, they then comment on that he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities, plural.

Foreign divinities, plural. Not one, but more than one. And the scripture explains to us because Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. We need to understand how they mistook Jesus and the resurrection for two gods.

The reason for that is that the word resurrection in Greek is anastasis, which sounds like a name. In fact, when we use it in modern English, the girl's name, Anastasia, comes from that.

[13:25] It means resurrection. So when they were listening, they were hearing Paul talking about Jesus and Anastasis. And because they didn't listen carefully, they thought he was talking about two gods, not man.

But to be fair to them, they decided they wanted to hear more. So it says they took hold of him and brought him to the aeropagus. And we need to understand what that means.

When it says they took hold of him, it means they issued him with a formal citation to appear before the council. He was being ordered to appear.

A bit like the dread you have when the letter arrives from the sheriff's court calling you for jury service. or calling you to be a witness in a court case. This was a formal order he had to appear. And he was then invited to address them. So let's focus now on his address. In verse 22, he opens by saying, he talks about them as being very religious.

[14:31] The AV puts it in terms of superstitious. But actually, what Paul's doing here in the front of all of this arrogance and the derogatory terms that would be used against him, he's actually addressing them very respectfully.

On Paul's part, he actually has a very healthy attitude to them despite the way that they look down on him. And then, as I mentioned earlier, in verse 28, Paul starts quoting Greek playwrights and Greek poets.

And he does it quite correctly. If you look at the end of verse 28, it says, as even some of you poets, plural, have said, for we are indeed his offspring.

And modern scholars have found that's true. There was more than one Greek poet who actually used that phrase. And when they looked into it further, they found that one of those poets actually came from the same province that Paul came from in the Roman Empire.

So that would be a bit like a modern free church minister quoting a Scottish poet like Robert Burns in a sermon.

[15:47] That's what Paul's doing here. Or, as some ministers, you might hear them quote modern pop songs and be a bit perplexed about it, but they take their inspiration from what Paul did in Athens.

Because what Paul's trying to do here is he's trying to connect with his audience. He's trying to find the common ground that he has so that he can connect with them.

And the truth is he connects with them in a big way. And this is what I want to show you now. The key point of Paul's talk is about the resurrection.

The key point is about the resurrection. Notice when he speaks we get to verse 31. the very last thing he says is about talking about Jesus, about God raising him from the dead and the speech suddenly stops.

The reason for that is it says then mocking starts. This wasn't polite mocking. This was the same arrogance and looking down on Paul that had happened earlier. and this mocking was loud and it was interrupting in the same way that when you watch the House of Commons on television and you see maybe the Prime Minister speaking and suddenly there's mocking and derision from the opposition benches.

[17 : 15] That's what was happening. And what happened here was Paul got shouted down. Strange as it seems Paul got shouted down. If we think about it though the same thing happened in the marketplace.

If you go back to verse 18 when they were addressing him as a babel they were mocking him. They were mocking him for talking about Jesus and Anastasis.

Now that should give us a clue. This has now happened twice. To talk about Jesus and the resurrection leads to derision in Athens.

Especially in the room because they shout him down. But that tells us something very important is going on. And Paul is up to something.

Paul is up to something. And it's actually very clever. both in the marketplace resurrection causes derision and in the earth because resurrection causes derision.

[18 : 21] As I said earlier we don't always expect Paul to mention Jesus and the cross. But he specifically talks about Jesus and the resurrection.

And the reason is this. And this is where Paul connects with his audience. Paul knew something very special about the Eropagus. He knew something about their fundamental beliefs that they all held.

And this is it. Anyone who wished to be a member of the Eropagus had to believe that resurrection was impossible. Say it again.

any member of the Eropagus had to sign up to the belief that resurrection was absolutely impossible. And that belief went back 500 years to the founding of the Eropagus.

We actually have copies of the speech that was made that day and in it it completely dismisses the possibility of resurrection. So Paul knows that if he hits them hard on this key point he'll provoke a reaction.

[19 : 38] So he goes out to the Eropagus to demolish their fundamental belief. And he gets his reaction. He gets mocking. He gets shouting. He gets derision.

But look what he also gets. He gets actually an invitation to come back and talk again about the matter. And more than that on this one speech some people's lives are turned completely upside down and it says they believed including a man called Dionysius who it says is an Eropagite that means a member of the Eropagus.

So this man remembered all the functions of that council that made him the equivalent of an MP a professor and a high court judge and he believes in Jesus.

Because Paul has found the common ground that he has. He's understood what they believe and then he's deliberately attacked them on that point. So it's not Jesus and the cross it's Jesus and the resurrection.

Now that's the end of the first part of the sermon and we're moving briskly on to the second part.

And I said we would then look at Paul's preparation or put it another way God's preparation of Paul for service as the apostles to the Gentiles and also then how our text then applies that text in Galatians.

[21 : 10] what we're going to do is just take a meandering walk through Paul's life to understand how he got to the point that he did that he was able to do this that day both in terms of his knowledge but also in terms of his attitudes.

An attitude of taking Jesus' love into the most hostile environment. So the first question we've got to ask is how did Paul know to use the resurrection of Jesus as the ultimate challenge against the

Europeans?

And for this we have to go back to his early life. Paul did not grow up in the Holy Land. He grew up hundreds of miles away in what is modern Turkey in a city called Tarsus which is in a province called Cilicia.

He was born there into a Jewish family. But remember I said earlier if you sent your children to university the best of the best went to Athens.

The second best place to go was Alexandria. The third best place in the whole of the Roman Empire was Tarsus. Tarsus had superb Greek schools.

[22 : 23] And theologians often remark that when they read Paul's writings here was someone who was very well skilled in Greek. Now he did not learn that in the Holy Land. It would appear he learned that in Tarsus.

In his talk of that at a very early stage in life this Jewish boy taught Greek things, learned about Greek texts, learned about Greek playwrights, Greek poets, the very things he uses here in his talk to the Eropagus.

He also would have read the foundational text of the Eropagus and the fact that they did not believe in resurrection at all. So, to summarize this early schooling, here Paul was being taught at a stage early in his life about how the world around him worked, how people thought, what made people tick.

The second thing to notice from Paul's early life is that he was given a remarkable gift, one he was able to use again and again in his ministry, but probably early on one that he didn't really think much of, and that was he was given the gift of Roman citizenship.

We knew that he was born with it from what he said in Acts, when he was about to be flogged towards the end of Acts and also in Philippi.

[23 : 52] Now, Roman citizenship is not like modern citizenship, which is something we have by right. In ancient times, Roman citizenship was a gift on behalf of the emperor, and it was given only to special people.

So, it was a bit like our modern honor system, like an NBE or an OBE or an Aighthood, but it was also hereditary. It had been given to Paul's parents by Caesar Augustus, because curiously, Tarsus was blessed by Caesar Augustus because they supported him through a very difficult time.

He gave everyone citizenship with Dura-Genta, which is most remarkable. So, Paul has this Roman citizenship. The third thing to note is that for his, so we've mentioned his early life in Tarsus, then the gift he was given.

And now, his later schooling, he was sent by his parents to Jerusalem, and he sat under the feet of Gamaliel, he tells us. And he was taught in Jewish ways, and he was taught very soundly about the one true God.

He was also very taught very soundly about the scriptures, which we would have as the Old Testament. So he was taught lots of good things, but he was also taught some things that are not good.

[25 : 14] He became a part of the Pharisees. And the sad thing about the Pharisees is that they were arrogant.

One thing that they elevated was arrogance, just like the Eropius. Now, the sad thing is that that arrogance that Paul had as the young man saw, came to its ultimate height as he smugly stood there watching Stephen being murdered in Acts 7 and 8.

He smugly stood there, and the scripture just says he gave approval, which meant he took great satisfaction. That arrogance, though, is also expressed in a prayer that the Pharisees used to pray. The Pharisees used to pray a prayer that started off by saying thank you for not making me a Greek. Or put another word, thank you for not making me a Gentile.

The fact is, the full prayer is even worse. this expresses an arrogance that really is quite shocking. What the prayer says is, thank you for not making me a Greek, a slave, or a woman.

[26 : 45] Now, quite what his mother back in Tarsus made of that, we don't know. but here we find this arrogant young man, probably now in his early twenties, and as the acts record, someone who went out breathing threats, who was violent towards Jesus' followers, who then got letters to go to Damascus and deal with Jesus' people there, and on the Damascus road, Christ Jesus finally put a stop to all this.

Christ Jesus met him and made Paul extremely humble. And here Paul comes to a saving faith in Christ Jesus.

we often think of the Damascus road as the most dramatic of changes in someone's life, and that's true when we truly understand what this man was like.

What I want to do now is come to our text, and you'll notice there's a strange similarity, an intriguing similarity. So we come to our text, and we're going to contrast the Pharisees prayer with our text.

So that's Galatians 3, 28. So we're going to contrast what Paul believed as an arrogant, smug Pharisee, which, with what he then believes, as someone who has been saved by Jesus and had all of his sins forgiven.

[28 : 26] So Paul's attitude changes. there's no more arrogance. And let's read it. He used to pray, thank you for not making me a Gentile slave or a woman.

And then he can write, later in life, being a servant of Jesus, he can write, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you, including him, are all one in Christ Jesus.

so the arrogance has gone. And Paul looks at those who have come to faith in Jesus, he looks out on them, no matter whether they're slaves, like Onesimus, or free, like Parantum, or male or female, or Jew, or Gentile, he looks on them all, and he realises that Jesus gave his life for them all, and that he gave his life for them all equally, that before God, in Jesus, there is no favoritism, that all have equally been blessed.

And this completely changes his attitude, and informs it as he then goes out to deal with whoever he comes across in the Roman world of his day.

And what he does is he actually develops, in his attitude, a healthy respect and love for those who are in his mission field. Because he realises that among those he's speaking to are those that Jesus died for, and that Jesus wants them to come to faith, and so Paul should want them to come to faith.

[30 : 15] So then here he is before the Oeropagus, before the most arrogant people of his day. And what does Paul do? That he loves them. He treats them with respect despite all of the hurt that they are causing to him.

All of the offence, all of the insults, because he loves them in Jesus' name. He wants the very best for them, even if it hurts him.

Now that's the end of the second part of the sermon, and then briefly on to the third. I apologize that things have gone in the middle. So there are lessons for us now.

We can take lots of things out of this. And I'll skip through them and see what you think, see what applies to you. The first is that Paul knew about the world around him.

He knew how it worked. And then he dealt with it with an understanding of how it worked. So with Eurogicus he knew that resurrection was the key issue.

[31 : 17] So that's what he went after them with. And I think it's something as the modern church we have to be careful about. We've got to look at the society around us and we've got to engage with it as it is, not as we like it to be or as it once was.

We often make the mistake that we try to talk to people, assuming that they're like people were 150 years ago. The people around us are the way they are and we have got to go with Jesus' love and Jesus' message now to them as they are.

With all of their faults and sins and things that we find so difficult. But we mustn't be repelled by it. We must go like Paul. And we must not still understand what makes these people tick.

People are still sinful in every generation and the basic sins are the same. But the way the sins express themselves might be different. God. Now all of us who have come to a saving faith in Jesus are in his service to tell others by word and deed about him from right where we are.

And just like Paul, our Lord uses our experiences in life even from a time when we weren't even saved, even those experiences, to be things that can help connect with other people.

[32 : 41] So we mustn't dismiss the past. We mustn't dismiss those things from a time in life that we think wasn't part of God's purpose, because actually all of it is. Intriguingly, if we think about Paul when he went to Jerusalem as a young man, Saul, to sit under Gamaliel, there were probably things about himself that he hushed up because he was very embarrassed about.

It was very unusual for a good Jew to have Roman citizenship, so that's the last thing he was going to tell his friends. Also, his superb Greek schooling and all he knew about Greek playwrights, he

wasn't going to tell them about that.

They would not have been impressed, but God could use them and did use all these things, and the same is true for us. Now, some here might say, well, this is not for me, because I'm not saved. But I want to say to you, be surprised. Our Lord Jesus is calling you to save a faith, save a faith. And even now, experiences that you've had in life are actually a preparation for your service for him.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Now, we're right at the end of the sermon. Now, I'd like to leave the last word to Paul.

[34 : 14] Remember I said he must have been embarrassed as a Jew looking back at his Greek upbringing. Take him forward now to being one of Jesus' people, and think of him looking back in embarrassment at some of the arrogant things he used to say and believe.

And I think, actually, here in our text, he's given us a lovely thing where he looks at himself, but then says, this is how Jesus has changed me.

Remember that prayer. Thanking God for not being a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Here he can say with real meaning, and he can say with real feeling, he can express something majestic about Jesus, and also about those that Jesus died for.

So he can say there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you with me are all one in Christ Jesus.

And that force that he displays the name. That force, in a way, he's telling us about what he used to be like, but also what he's like there, and how he asks us to be now, knowing that Jesus will faithfully reproduce that in all of us.

[35 : 46] That's the end of the third part of the sermon, and the end of the sermon, and I apologise that I have gone too long. Shall we now stand from a short trigger? Sovereign Lord, we always marvel when we come to your word about the things we can discover, and we ask the things we have learned about how you worked in Paul's life, you might work in our lives too, and that you might take us forward in your service, and that you might use us, even in ways that we do not realise.

Oh Lord, please bless us as we go through this place, bless us in our final singing, bless us on this year's special day, bless us in the conversations that we'll have, and bless us with your divine rest. Continue with us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.