

Stand firm on your belief

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[0 : 00] We thank you, Lord, that you call us, that you desire everyone to come to know you. And Father, we give you our praise and the glory this morning.

Be with us among us this morning as we lift up praises to you. We thank you for your gospel that we will be learning about today, that there is no other gospel other than you. There is no other way. And Father, we praise you. Amen. I'd like to start with you all reading. So if you want to stand, I've got Psalm 91.

Yeah, I want to stand for this. It feels like there needs to be some oomph in this, and I feel like oomph is not attained if we're sat down. So if you want to stand, I'm hoping you, can you see that okay?

I realize that my computer screen at home is very different to this. Is that okay? Lovely stuff. This is from Psalm 91. I'm hoping that today this will have some relevance to our new series in Galatians.

[1 : 04] I'm going to have to turn around because I can't see that. I'm going to join you down here. Let's read together. Live under the protection of God Most High, and stay in the shadow of God All-Powerful.

Then you will say to the Lord, You are my fortress, my place of safety. You are my God, and I trust you.

The Lord will keep you safe from traps and deadly diseases. He will spread his wings over you and keep you secure. His faithfulness is like a shield or a city wall.

You need not worry about dangers at night or arrows during the day. And you won't fear diseases that strike in the dark or sudden disaster at noon.

You will not be harmed, though thousands fall all around you. And with your own eyes, you will see the punishment of the wicked.

[2 : 05] The Lord Most High is your fortress. Run to him for safety, and no terrible disasters will strike you or your home.

God will command his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will carry you in their arms, and you won't hurt your feet on the stones. You will overpower the strongest lions and the most deadly snakes.

The Lord says, If you love me and truly know who I am, I will rescue you and keep you safe. When you are in trouble, call out to me, and I will answer.

They're there to protect and honour you. You will live a long life and see my saving power. What an amazing promise we have from our Lord.

Let's come to our Lord now in prayer. We're going to have a time of extended worship. One of the songs is going to be new, and I'm going to let Ben handle that one. Let's sing.

[3 : 10] There is good news for the captive. He's our rescuer.

He's our rescuer. We are free from sin forevermore. How sweet the sound.

How grace abounds. We will praise the Lord, our rescuer. There is good news for the captive.

Good news for the shame. There is good news for the one he walked away. There is good news for the doubter.

The one religion failed. For the good Lord has come to seek and take. He's our rescuer. He's our rescuer.

[4 : 17] We are free from sin forevermore. How sweet the sound. Hey. Hey. Oh, how grace abounds. Hey.

We will praise the Lord, our rescuer. He is beauty for the blind man. Richest for the poor.

He is virtue for the one the world ignores. He is foster for the weary. Rest for those who strive.

Oh, the good Lord is the way, the truth, the light. Yes, the good Lord is the way, the truth, the light.

He's our rescuer. Hey. He's our rescuer. Hey. We are free from sin forevermore. Oh, how sweet the sound.

[5 : 17] Hey. Oh, how grace abounds. Hey. We will praise the Lord, our rescuer. So come and be shameless.

Come and be fearless. Come to the foot of Calvary. There is redemption.

For every affliction. Here at the foot of Calvary. He's our rescuer.

Hey. Come and be fearless. Come to the foot of Calvary. There is redemption.

For every affliction. Here at the foot of Calvary. He's our rescuer. He's our rescuer.

[6 : 18] Hey. He's our rescuer. Hey. We are free from sin forevermore. Oh, how sweet the sound.

Hey. Oh, how grace abounds. Hey. We will praise the Lord, our rescuer. We'll praise the Lord, our rescuer.

Amen. Lord, thank you that you rescue us. And that we don't deserve your love. But you love us so much. And yeah, help us. Fill our hearts with praise this morning.

Help us to thank you with all your heart. All our hearts. Amen. Cool. We're now going to do a new song, which I'm very excited about. It might be one of my favorite worship songs.

It's called Thanksgiving. It's all about entering God's courts, God's place with praise. It's thanking him for what he's done. And it's really simple. The verses are like a call and response.

[7 : 16] So how it's going to work. I'll sing the first line. And then you repeat after me. It's very simple. And then for the choruses. So what we're going to do, we're just going to play through the first verse in the chorus.

You can get an idea of it. So it goes like this. So enter in. And you sing. Enter in. His courts with praise. His courts with praise.

For he is greatly. For he is greatly. To be praised. To be praised. Again. What shall we do?

And what shall we do? We shall lift up a shout. What shall we do? We shall praise him. What shall we do? For our God made a way.

We'll give him our thanksgiving. Cool. You nailed that. So we're going to go through it all again. So one, two, three, four. Enter in.

[8 : 34] Enter in. Enter in. His courts with praise. His courts with praise. For he is greatly. To be praised.

To be praised. Enter in. Enter in. His courts with praise. His courts with praise. For he is greatly.

For he is greatly. To be praised. So what shall we do? What shall we do? We shall lift up a shout. What shall we do?

We shall praise him. We shall praise him. What shall we do? For our God made a way. We'll give him our thanksgiving. For our God made a way. What shall we do?

What shall we do?

[10 : 48] What shall we do?

We'll sing it again and again. You are worthy. Worthy of honor and praise. You are worthy.

We'll sing it again and again. What shall we do? We shall lift up a shout. What shall we do?

We shall praise Him. What shall we do? For our God's made a way. We'll give Him our thanksgiving. What shall we do? What shall we do?

We shall lift up a shout. What shall we do? We shall praise Him. What shall we do? For our God's made a way. We'll give Him our thanksgiving.

[12 : 07] We'll give Him our thanksgiving. We'll give Him our thanksgiving. We'll give Him our thanksgiving.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[14 : 57] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I believe in you And I believe you rose again And I believe that Jesus Christ is born And I believe in you And I believe you rose again And I believe that Jesus Christ is born

I believe in life eternal I believe in the virgin birth I believe in the saints communion And in your holy church I believe in the resurrection When Jesus comes again For I believe in the name of Jesus I believe in God our Father I believe in Christ the Son I believe in the Holy Spirit Our God is three in

one I believe in the resurrection That he will rise again For I believe in the name of Jesus For I believe in the name of Jesus

Father God we praise you this morning We thank you that despite everything that's gone wrong with us That you still love us so deeply that you draw us close We praise you this morning Amen Amen Please take a seat We're going to pray for our children And our young people Before they go out to their groups If your children haven't yet been registered The desk is downstairs Please do that before they go to their groups Let's pray for our children and our young people Before they go Father we thank you so much For these wonderful young people That we have been entrusted with We pray for their leaders We pray for their groups this morning That they would be taught of you That they would have fun That they would have fellowship And there would be joy this morning We pray for their leaders That they would be given patience and joy We pray all these things in Jesus' name Amen Amen Off you go children Amen Thank you.

Give praise to the Lord. Proclaim his name. Make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him. Sing praise to him. Tell of his wonderful acts. Glory in his name.

[19 : 14] Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength. Seek his face always.

Let's draw together in faith. Let's seek God's face and look to his strength as we bring our prayers and petitions before him together now.

Lord, we pray for the world. We pray for those who need your strength as their world seems vulnerable and uncertain.

We pray for the many nations of the world torn apart by violence, political unrest, storms, floods and wildfires.

We pray for all world leaders and governments that they would govern their people with integrity, with truth and that they would work for the common good and safety and well-being of all.

[20 : 21] We pray for all people. We pray for all people. We pray for our wider community in High Wycombe.

For our homes, our neighbours, schools and places of work and for those sitting alongside us right now.

We thank you for the range of skills in our community, for the hope that we have in our children, for the unsung heroes who sustain local life, for the voluntary organisations that care for every need.

We remember those who live among us, who have lost hope, who live in fear, those who have turned away from you and those who live in darkness and not in light.

Give us the grace and courage to be the salt and light that you have called us to be as your church.

May we be real and authentic, being available and committed to spend time with those in need.

[21 : 34] Lord, we pray for all those who will find this day long and hard.

For those who are in hospital or ill at home, those struggling with despair or depression, for those waiting important news or making big decisions, for those waiting for a friend to call, those struggling to pay their bills or to feed their children, for the rough sleepers and for the unemployed. Lord, we pray for all in need.

Encourage and hope and a share in your light as they face each day. And gracious Lord, we pray for us, your church family here at UBC.

that your presence would be seen vividly in all we do and say each day. Father, as we continue to pray for the final days and weeks of the Living Stones building project, we continue to pray for us as your church that we would be your Living Stones, built up as spiritual houses to be that holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to you through Jesus Christ.

[23 : 22] May your joy and your love flow freely in us and through us. May we never be seen by those around us as falling short of the teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord, help us to hold high to the standard of your teaching, even when it's hard to apply it to our modern lives. May we strive to never lower your standards or to change what you teach, to pray diligently for a realistic understanding of what you want for us in every area of our life.

And may we honour you and live lives worthy of the calling we have received. So Lord, at the start of this new year, may we daily invite your Holy Spirit into our lives.

Enable us to love and to serve and to be a community of Christians who love God, follow Jesus and share the hope that we have in him.

Amen. Thank you very much, Helen. We're going to have a time now of testimonies.

[24 : 42] Now, I wasn't able to be here last week, but I understand it got a bit out of hand. There was a lot of people wanting to share testimonies last week, and it had to be put to end, basically. You had to stop it. So this week is an opportunity for people who have yet to share a testimony, if they would like to still do so, to do that.

I will have a lollipop mic, and I will take it away from you if you get out of control. There are a few people who have already expressed an interest in sharing a testimony, so I'm going to invite Kate to come up, and then I'm going to go and find Joyce.

But if anyone else would love to share, that would be a wonderful opportunity to encourage each other and share what God has been doing in your lives in the last year. Hello.

Hello. I just thought last week it was really important to share what's been happening with Wickham Homeless Connection. As you are, I hope, aware, night shelter started this week.

Night shelter has been on hold for four years because of COVID and everybody in, and I cannot begin to express what a huge undertaking it is to bring it back.

[25 : 55] It is such a short thing to say, we're bringing back the night shelter. But in reality, every church that had worked with us before has had changed circumstances.

There was a wonderful committee at Wickham Homeless Connection made up of staff and volunteers who led this project through the whole of the last year to get it up and running.

We've had seven churches that have stepped up in faith to say, yes, we will open our premises to you. We will allow you to use our buildings to be able to house people overnight.

We've had 300 people step up to be volunteers to enable the shifts to run so that we can take people, guests in, we can feed them, we can give them showers, we can give them a safe, warm, dry place to sleep, and then give them something in the morning to take away with them.

And we could not do that without having God on our side, being there, supporting every single person whose heart has been opened to work with vulnerable people in that way.

[27 : 04] So I thank all of you that are helping us in some way. I thank the church for being so supportive of the organisation. And I thank God for the way in which he's worked with all of us and our community to enable this to happen.

Thank you. Thank you, Kate. That's an amazing encouragement. Joyce. Joyce. Good morning, God's people.

My name is Joyce Mukubo. And I've been coming to this church since 2004. But I know I don't know many people and I forget. My testimony.

My life is a miracle. On the 26th of August this last year, I had my three children, grandchildren, seven, 12, and 14.

I had a severe, severe headache on my left side. And I asked the 14-year-old to go and get me some paracetamol.

[28 : 31] By the time she came, I'd passed out. The little girl didn't know her mum lives in Surrey. She phoned her mum and the mum said, we need to contact 999.

So she did. And there was a three-way communication. So she was instructed to put me on the floor and to start pumping my chest, which she did.

The 12-year-old was running both backwards and forwards from the road looking for the ambulance to direct them if they came.

The little boy was kneeling. When I asked him, he said he was praying for the doctor to come and take me to hospital so that I get better and come back home.

So she was pumping and then my sister-in-law, my daughter-in-law, phoned my address, the daughter in South Africa, to say, mum is collapsed, this is the situation.

[29 : 38] She phoned two sisters in Canada and the three of them were having a three-way communication, four-way communication with the niece who was still pumping my chest.

My daughter, when she was telling me, she said, I thought you were gone. And she said, what are you doing that for? You know, and she said, no, they told me to continue doing it until they come. They came after seven minutes and tried to resuscitate me in the flat. It's a small flat. Then they took me to the ambulance.

They resuscitated me for 25 minutes. And then she came back to tell the children that I'm breathing. From there, you know, I vomited, I contracted pneumonia, and then I went to, they transferred me to Stokmandifu.

[30 : 46] The doctor was there, said, oh, for this lady to have a chance, she needs to go to John Ratcliffe. So I was transferred to John Ratcliffe after x-rays and what have you.

And meantime, my daughter, my son and my daughter-in-law arrived at Stokmandifu. So we went to John Ratcliffe Hospital. God is great.

I want to thank you for your prayers because I won't be here by now. Anyway, I looked at my notes. It said I had a glass, a glass caucoma scale of three.

The doctors and nurses will know. It's the lowest. The lowest is three. The highest is 15. So they put me on oxygen, whatever, from Stokmandifu, and I went to John Ratcliffe.

And at John Ratcliffe, I had an operation. I did a bleed on the left side of my head. So I had an operation.

[32 : 00] They phoned. I couldn't do anything myself. They phoned my son, and the consent was given over the phone. And they said, my son was now telling me, your mom has got a chance.

If we don't do anything, she'll die. If we do the operation, she's got 30% of getting well and be all right.

30% of getting better, but she'll be disabled. And 30% she'll die. So my son said, what should I do?

She just said, okay, get on with it. So on the 27th, they did the operation for four and a half hours.

They came out.

I remember my son saying, mom, have you had an operation on your head? And I'm touching my head. There was nothing there. And I said, no, I haven't. And said, yes, you did. Anyway, I was getting better after that.

[33 : 05] And unfortunately, I had to sit back. I collapsed again on the 1st of September. I remember falling in a corner of all the places in a corner.

So my head was fixed in the corner. I could not lie down. I could not get up. And then a voice said on my right ear, call help.

So I just said, help, help. A man came and then he ran to get the nurses. I remember the nurse coming and saying, why did you get up, Joyce? You're not supposed to get up on your own.

Da, da, da, da. You know what the doctors and nurses say. And from that time, I don't remember anything. So I couldn't eat.

I couldn't walk. I couldn't talk. So I was completely not able to do anything. And, um, they tried to put a drip up.

[34 : 08] The doctors, the nurses, they were not able to. By then my, all my four children were there, uh, preparing for the rest.

And, uh, the chapel came last, as a last resort. He tried twice and he said, oh, I can't do anymore. I'm only allowed to do it twice.

And my youngest daughter is a dentist. And she said, you know, I also belong to the medical field. If you can only do the third time. So this third time, my children were praying.

They said, mom, we're standing up and we're praying. And that was a success. So that was when they started giving me drugs and fluids and everything.

I was getting a bit better. And then I collapsed again. And I was sent to ICU on the 8th of September to the, uh, 8th of September.

[35 : 10] And then I came out of, uh, ICU on the 20 something. I can't remember. But now 19 September, I think. and I, um, was better still weak.

They wanted, you know, I had to, someone sit with me. At one point, they set a, uh, uh, uh, a carer to sit with me and call me, Joyce, Joyce, every 15 minutes.

And in between my children were calling me back and say, stay with us, mom, stay with us, mom.

Why am I saying this? Why am I sharing my life with you?

It might give someone hope. When I look at my life, those from September 26 to now, um, it's a miracle.

There were angels at every station at home. My granddaughter, she's 14, mind you. And she resuscitated me for four, for seven minutes before the paramedics came.

[36 : 19] The paramedics were the other angels. They didn't give up on me. I think the nurses and doctors know if you resuscitate someone, you can keep on forever.

But they kept on the, one of the ladies kept coming to the children and say, we are trying. She's not breathing. We are trying. She's not breathing. And then she eventually came and say, she's breathing.

It's talk. Mandeville. The doctor who saw me, the, my daughter in law said she actually cried. When she was told that a 14 year old child was the one was desastating me.

So I'm really grateful. Thank you very much for your prayers. It's a church. I want to thank you.

From the bottom of my heart, may God bless you.

And those who came to. It's a long way. I know it's a long way. I've never been to Stokman, to John Ratcliffe. I've never been there myself. It's quite a distance.

[37 : 24] Thank you. Because you came, you gave me hope. You came, you prayed for me. And that not affected me. Where am I now with my life?

When I was discharged on the 3rd of October, I refused to go and live with my brother, my niece, my nephew, my son.

They were all very angry. But I had to, because I thought if I lived with them, they were going to spoil me and give me tea, give me everything. The paramedics, when he came, when they put me in the flat, I asked them if I could make them a cup of tea.

And they said, oh no, we are the ones to make you a cup of coffee. Right. So they left. I said, no, no, don't worry. After they've left, I felt the whole world on my shoulders.

How was I going to cope on my own? I wasn't working properly. I wasn't steady. So I tried. I just got up. I was feeling sorry for myself.

[38 : 31] I almost cried. And I said, Joyce, you've got to come out of this. You made a choice.

You've got to live with it. So I got up, holding on to stuff, doors and doors, went to the kitchen, made a cup of coffee.

I couldn't lift a full cup. So I have it. I came, I sat down. And I said, thank you, God, I've managed to do it. So from that time, I was having four carers coming four times for six weeks for me to be into, to get better.

But they were coming. I would tell them what, you know, stand there and look after me, but I'll do the thing. And they said, you're pushing yourself. I said, yes, I have to push myself for me to get better.

When I left, when I left ICU, one of the doctors said, Joyce, you are one of the most lucky person to survive.

The professor who did my operation, when he discharged me on the third, he said, Joyce, you are a lucky woman. And in my heart, I was saying, I am a child of God.

[39 : 47] So thank you so much. I could go on the whole day. I'm sure you just. But thank you. And don't ever give up.

Even if life is so tough, it will be. Don't ever give up. When your family, your friends, whoever, are in a desperate situation.

Pray to the Lord. Amen. Amen. Let's thank God for you. Father, we thank you for how you looked after Joyce, how there were people, every step of the way, looking after her.

Thank you for the people that you put in those positions, with the education, the training, that they were able to bring her through. And Lord, we thank you that you were watching over her. Amen.

Amen. Thank you. Yeah.

You have to wait until next week now, if you want to do a testament. Thank you so much, Joyce.

No, that was wonderful. Thank you. We're going to have a little time of a little Q&A.; We're going to start a new sermon series on the book of Galatians.

[40 : 50] Now, hello. I don't mind. I'm very comfortable with pink. It's fine. So, new sermon series, new year.

We're in the book of Galatians. Yes, we are. Now, you have that one. I've got this one. Yes. So, the book of Galatians is sort of squeezed, buried in all those letters at the back of the Bible.

Now, I'm aware that Paul wrote quite a lot of letters. You've got Ephesians, Thessalonians, Corinthians. And if someone asked me what Galatians was about, I would probably panic and say, Jesus?

And I'd have to go and research. Could you, let me give us a bit of an overview of what Galatians is about as a book. Yeah. So, Galatians were, it was written to a church, the church in Galatia, which is now somewhere around Turkey.

Paul wrote it in about AD 48. He'd set up that church a few years before that, but there were some issues that had developed, some serious issues that had developed in that church.

[41 : 51] And he was writing the letter to address these issues. So, what happened was that some false teachers were teaching that non-Jewish people who became Christians had to follow certain Jewish customs and practices, particularly circumcision, which is mentioned a lot in order to, to really be part of God's family.

And Paul was saying, and that's absolutely wrong. He's very, very strong about this. You'll, you'll, you'll notice this as we, as we read it, you're absolutely wrong about this. We're put right based on what Jesus has done for us, not by the outward things that, that we do.

And he really, the theme of the letter, I would say is a lot about grace. It's about what God has done for us to put us right with him, not about what we try and do ourselves. Super. I like that.

Um, so, um, what was it that made us, made you think that by Galatians, well, let's do this book now. What, why? Yeah, I think, uh, part of the answer is because it's in the Bible.

And, uh, as a church, we believe that the whole Bible is God's word to us. And therefore it, all of the Bible has something to say to us about how we live as Christians and how we, uh, how we, uh, respond to God and learn about Jesus.

[42 : 58] Uh, I think particularly the book of Galatians, it's really important. It's about getting our foundations right in our, in our faith and getting our foundations right in what God has done for us.

Uh, whereas that's the kind of thing that had gone wrong for the people that Paul was writing to in Galatia. I think also how we respond to, it helps us think about how we respond to cultural pressures.

So where we're, where we're now in this day and age, we're under pressure as Christians who believe the Bible. We're under pressure from the culture to maybe compromise on aspects of our faith, which are kind of less acceptable to the culture that we're in.

Galatians really helps us with that. And also I think, you know, at this time we're thinking about what good things we can put in place to help us to grow into the people God wants us to be. We've talked about seeking God's presence, about being part of a community where we're vulnerable with each other, where we support each other.

There's also things that we have to, negative things that we have to do away with. And we, we get stuck sometimes as Christians and as churches in wrong patterns of behavior and wrong patterns of thinking.

[43 : 58] And this was written to address one of those particular wrong patterns of thinking that we're all susceptible to the idea that I've got to strive to do things and do the things I've always been doing in order to, to be accepted by God.

So we need to address those. Okay. So you actually kind of begun to touch on this. So as a church, as we read this book, what's our, what's the hope? Like what are we hoping for God to speak to us? And what's up of learning, hoping for us to get out of this book? Yeah, well, I mentioned about grace and about understanding what God has done for us that we could never do for ourselves. And that's a big theme here.

And I think, uh, what I hope is that we will be more and more transformed by God's grace. As we understand that just amazing depth of mercy that God has shown to us and what he's done for us that we just never deserve.

And really our Christian life, it all has to flow from that. And, you know, we can, the more we study grace, the more we can just be, just overcome and overawed and inspired by the extent to what, to, to how God has shown his love for us.

[45 : 03] And how we live as Christians and how we live out his purpose as a church has to come from an outflowing from that. So I, you know, my hope and prayer is that we'll be transformed by grace. Even if we thought we'd got grace, there's always more to discover there.

And I think the other thing is for, for where we're at as a church right now about growing as a, as a diverse church. Uh, someone did a count last year and we've got 31 different nationalities represented in our church family.

I suspect it may be higher now. Um, that's a wonderful thing, but I think we've got a way to, a way to go in terms of growing, in terms of embracing and celebrating all those different cultures, as well as celebrating the fact that we're all united by the fact that, that God's grace has, uh, has welcomed all of us into, into his family.

And I think understanding how we grow as a, uh, as a multicultural church, as a, as a diverse church, I think Galatians has got a lot to help us with that because there were kind of multicultural

issues that Paul was dealing with.

So I'm excited about that as well. Excellent stuff. Fabulous. Well, on that note, I'll put this back and, um, I forget who's been to the reading for us now. Oh, it's Kate again, is it? So the reading can be found on page 1168 of the church Bibles, and it's from Galatians 1, 1 through 2, chapter 2, verse 10.

[46 : 34] Paul, an apostle, sent not from men, nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God, the father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers and sisters with me.

to the churches in Galatians 2, to the churches in Galatia, 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.

Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ, and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion, and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let them be under God's curse.

As we have already said, so now I say again, if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse.

[48 : 00] Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it.

Rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

[49 : 13] I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later, I returned to Damascus.

Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Zephas and stayed with him 15 days. I saw none of the other apostles, only James, the Lord's brother.

I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is no lie. Then, I went to Syria and Sicily. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

They only heard the report. The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy, and they praised God because of me.

Then, after 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. We went in response to a revelation.

[50 : 20] And meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.

Yet, not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false believers have infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

We do not give in to them for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

As for those who were held in high esteem, whatever they were makes no difference to me.

God does not show favoritism. They added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised.

For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Severs, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.

[51 : 47] They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

This is the word of God. Amen. Thank you very much, Kate. I'm going to invite Chris up now, who's going to bring us God's word and open it up to us, and I'll pray for him before we close.

I'm just going to pray for you. Father, we thank you for Chris. We thank you for the message that you were given to him, and the preparations that have been going on in these many days beforehand. I pray that your word and your voice would be channeled through Chris, that we would hear you directly.

Amen. Amen. Amen. I just want to say, God is great, isn't he?

It was so encouraging to hear about how God has enabled us to run the night shelter again this winter from Kate, and to also hear from Joyce about how God has brought healing, and how God has been with her every step of the way over the last few months.

[53 : 12] And yeah, that really encouraged me. So thank you, brothers and sisters. Let's pray before we have a look at the passage.

Father God, thank you so much that you've given us your word. Thank you that it's a living word, and that you breathed it out, and that you speak to us through it.

And I pray that you'd help us to see Jesus in a new way this morning, and you'd help us to see the freedom that he gives each one of us, and the grace that he gives us.

Amen. So our world is full of misleading ideas about what freedom is.

So 10 years ago or so, Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, told us that buying an iPhone would make us feel free, and now we're all addicted to our smartphones, aren't we?

[54 : 22] Can't get off them. Most of the candidates at the last general election told us that we should vote for change, but whenever I try to get a train, they still don't turn up on time.

So many people who make promises of freedom fail to deliver, don't they? But not everything to do with freedom is a lie.

You can know what it feels like to be truly free. Over the next few weeks, as Andrew and Ollie were saying, we're going to be looking at the letter to the Galatians, a book in the Bible, in the New Testament.

And Galatians is a letter about how Christ can set you free. This is from chapter 5 of Galatians, verse 1.

Paul writes, saying, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

[55 : 37] So, Galatians is about what true freedom looks like. And today, we'll learn about how the gospel, the good news about Jesus, can set you free.

First, we'll look at how the gospel frees us to live. Then we'll have a look at how the gospel frees us from lies about God. Thirdly, we'll look at how the gospel can free you to change.

And finally, we'll look at how the gospel is free for everyone. No matter who you are, or what you've done. So, let's start with the first verse of Galatians.

So, Galatians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul. It says, Paul, an apostle. First couple of words. And an apostle is someone sent directly by God to tell people the good news about Jesus.

So, all Christians are indirectly sent by God. We're told by Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations. But Paul was given a special job to bring the good news to the Gentiles.

[56 : 54] God gave him that job on the road to Damascus. And it was his job to go and share the good news with non-Jewish people, so Gentiles, like most of us here in this room.

So, that was who wrote the letter. And who was it written to? Well, it was written to the churches in Galatia. As Andrew was saying, Galatia is in modern-day Turkey.

It's that red bit on the map. And it's written to churches in the plural. So, it's a circular letter. It's a bit like one of those emails you might get at work where everyone's copied into the same message.

And that's because Paul wants all of the churches in Galatia to be reminded of the good news about Jesus. Have a look in your Bibles at verses 3 to 5 of chapter 1.

Paul writes, 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.

[58 : 09] Amen. I wonder how many of you remember the good news story from a few years back about the boys who got trapped in a cave in Thailand.

I do when it was on. I remember it when it was on the news. They were a football team. And they'd gone into a cave to explore it. And as they were exploring the cave, the water rose up and trapped

them.

And they were stuck for 18 days inside of the cave. And there was absolutely nothing they could do but wait for someone to rescue them.

But help eventually did come. A team of divers went back into the cave in treacherous conditions. And one of the divers sadly died during the rescue effort.

But they eventually reached the boys and their coach. And they sedated them and took them out in groups of three or four. And the amazing thing was, is that all 12 boys and their coach made it out of the cave alive.

[59 : 19] The good news about Jesus is a rescue story. A little bit like what happened with the boys in the cave.

You and me are trapped by our sin. And sin is a life lived apart from God. It's living in defiance of God. And our sins have helped to create what Paul calls this present evil age.

You see, no one is born free. Parents who raise us are flawed. We're flawed. The governments under which we live are corrupt. Even the natural world around us can be very cruel at times.

So we're living in a present evil age. But the good news is that help has come. The Lord Jesus Christ, full of grace and peace, was sent by God the Father to rescue me and you.

He gave up his life for our sins on the cross and was raised from the dead to rescue you from this present evil age. Christ has set you free.

[60 : 30] Christ has pulled you out of the cave. To God be the glory forever and ever, says Paul. Amen. So it is only Christ who can set you free from sin and the evil it creates.

Only Christ can set you free to live. But the gospel doesn't just free us to live. It also frees us from lies about God. Have a look at verses 6 to 9 of chapter 1.

Now normally Paul's letters start with him thanking the churches that he's writing to. But you don't get that in Galatians. And that's because Paul is angry.

And he's not just mildly irritated. He's absolutely furious. This is what he says. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse.

[61 : 56] As we have already said, so I now say again, if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse.

Paul is angry because people are lying about God. But why be so angry about that? Isn't it how you live that matters?

Well, nothing counts for more in the way that we live than what we believe about God. As we shall see, wrong ideas about God translate into fearful minds, into hatred towards other people, and a distorted view of ourselves.

So what was the lie? Well, if you read the rest of this letter, it tells us about a group of Jewish Christians who visited the churches in Galatia after Paul had planted them.

And these false teachers were adding things to the gospel that Paul had already preached. They were saying things like, Yeah, Christ has set you free, but just to make sure that you really have been rescued, you need to get circumcised, just like us.

[63 : 13] Or, Yeah, Christ has set you free, but you still need to obey God's law. You still need to observe the Sabbath and not work on a Saturday. That's what the true people of God do.

Now, Paul isn't being anti-Semitic. He's ethnically Jewish, like these false teachers. He's not even, I don't think, against the idea of getting circumcised or observing the Sabbath.

If you're a Jewish Christian and you freely choose to do those things, circumcision in the Old Testament is a bit like getting baptised. It's an outward sign that you trust in God.

And the principle behind the Sabbath is about stopping work to worship God. So they're both good things that God made. Now, what makes Paul really angry is people who pervert or literally reverse the gospel, as he says in verse 7.

So instead of saying that you're loved and accepted by God, so you're free to do good things, these false teachers have turned it around. They're saying, you know, you need to do good things to be loved and accepted by God.

[64 : 34] And that's not good news at all. That's not a gospel. That's just really, really bad advice. Let me maybe give you an example of what that might look like today.

Imagine you meet someone at work, and they say, I'm so glad you're a Christian, and that it makes you happy. But I think what really matters, whether you're religious or not, is living a good life. You know, add that little bit, Jesus plus living a good life. Or is it a little bit? Because what you're saying is that your good deeds are enough, and we've already seen that they're not.

All of us live in defiance of God. All of us live in a broken world, and we need rescuing, and Christ has come to set you free. And the scary thing is, is that this can happen with religious people too. So even in a church like this one, you can reverse the gospel without realizing it. You can say, I don't know if you've ever heard people saying things like, you know, if you're really, really sorry, then God will love you more.

[65 : 53] Or if you give lots of money to the church, then God will bless you and make you happy. If you go to mass, and regularly go to confession, then God will truly forgive you.

All of these things are lies about God. They all imply that your religious experience or your good deeds can save you.

And they can't. Only Christ can set you free. And what are the consequences of promoting this fake gospel?

Well, they're very serious. God says in verse 8, that people who preach a fake gospel are under God's curse. And just so you don't miss it, Paul says it twice.

So if you believe this fake gospel, you're putting yourself under God's judgment. You're robbing people of their freedom in Christ. And you're making God out to be a petty and corrupt lawyer, rather than a gracious and loving father.

[67 : 03] What a tragic thing to do. Jesus has already rescued you. You don't need to add anything. So the gospel frees you to live, and it sets you free from lies about God.

And in verses 10 to 24 of our passage, we see how the gospel frees you to change. So Paul was being accused of people-pleasing.

Listen to verse 10. He says, Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God, or am I still trying to please people? If I was still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. So the false teachers are accusing him of being like a kind of rogue missionary, saying whatever people wanted to hear, without the backing of the church leaders in Jerusalem.

And so to show them that he's an authentic apostle, Paul gives his testimony, a bit like what we were doing earlier.

[68 : 15] Paul tells them the freedom story of how God changed his life. And in his former life, Paul describes himself, in verse 14, as advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age.

And the book of Acts in the Bible tells us about how he was raised in a Jewish family and educated under a great rabbi called Gamaliel. And he used all of his great learning and energy in service of the traditions of his fathers.

And what did Paul do with all that learning, with all that religion? Well, look at verse 13, the end of it. He says, I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. So Paul's religion set him passionately against what he thought was wrong.

But then God showed up on the road to Damascus. And Jesus spoke to him and turned his life around. Paul says in verse 16 that God revealed his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

[69 : 29] So Paul had got it all wrong. He'd got it really messed up. You know, life wasn't about knowing and doing things to earn God's favour.

It was about letting God do something for you. Letting God choose you. Letting God save you and graciously call you to go and share the good news with others.

And Paul did let God change him. And later on, some of the Jewish Christians who'd maybe heard about Paul persecuting them, they heard the news and it says this in verse 23, that the man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

And they praised God. Isn't it amazing how God can change someone like Paul? Someone who got things so, so wrong.

And it doesn't have to give so much hope for us. You know, the good news is that God has given you the freedom to change too.

[70 : 42] It doesn't matter if your former life was in Judaism like Paul or in Islam or in secularism. Whatever it is, Christ can set you free.

And God has a wonderful plan for your life. He pre-loved you before you were born. He's rescued you from this evil age. And he's called you by his grace to share the good news with others. And if you already know that Jesus loves you, then have a go at sharing your story with others just like Paul did. It was great to do that in the service. I'm sure you could pray for an opportunity to do that this week.

Give it a go. Share your God story with someone who doesn't know Jesus yet. So the gospel frees you to live. It frees you from lies.

It frees you to change. And then finally in the first 10 verses of chapter 2, we see how the gospel is free for everyone. So 14 years pass and Paul goes back to Jerusalem with a Jewish man, a Jewish Christian, sorry, called Barnabas and a Greek Christian called Titus.

[71 : 59] And he goes to meet the leaders of the churches in Jerusalem because some false teachers are spying on the freedom that they have in Christ Jesus.

That's what it says in verse 4. So these people are preaching the same lie that the Galatians were hearing. And did Peter, James and John give in to the lie? Well, thankfully, they didn't.

They didn't force Titus to be circumcised. They recognized that God had given Paul the task of preaching the gospel to non-Jews, to Gentiles, and that God had given Peter, James and John the task of preaching the gospel to the Jews.

They realized that the good news was free for everyone. And my question for you today is, well, do you believe that the gospel is free for everyone?

It's so easy to insert conditions, isn't it? To say, oh yeah, we'll accept you so long as you dress like us or talk like us or behave like us or learn this or accomplish that.

[73 : 15] And then people get rejected, don't they? They get the door shut in their face and they're not allowed to join the family of God. and that's really sad when that happens.

But the good news is that the gospel really is free for everyone. Whether you are Jewish or Greek like Titus, whether you're British like me or Brazilian, whether you are deeply religious or have never set foot in a church building before, Christ has set you free.

no matter who you are or what you've done, God loves you so much that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead to rescue you from this present evil age.

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 him be glory forever and ever. Amen. Ollie's going to come up now and lead us in a time of prayer and response. Thank you so much, Chris.

[74 : 37] I don't know about you but passages like this which cause you to focus on the real core of our faith I find so deeply encouraging.

When we're time in a moment of worship and response hang on wrong passcode sorry I was thinking about this passion how best to respond to it and I couldn't quite think of the right thing to say other than to say that God is good the gospel is not complicated and all we do is it's over complicated with other things.

I thought what wonderful thing it would be if you could share with me in just proclaiming something really simple and profound that you love about the gospel I love the fact that I'm a terrible person but God still loves me there you go who would like to share something else something really profound something really simple that's core of the gospel that they love and they hold on to there's nothing you can do to earn it it's free how wonderful is that anyone else it's all about what God's done absolutely anyone else I remember that singing that song I'm special because God has loved me anyone else so many promises in the Bible sorry someone at the back there

God's love is unconditional I think that's a really tricky thing to get your head around as humans unconditional love is a really warped concept that we find really tricky to latch onto that's a fantastic thing to always wrestle with thank you let's praise God shall we in some sung worship you'll notice that the songs I've picked today try to say something and praise God about how simple that gospel is and yet sometimes we forget that so we're going to sing two songs now How Great the Chasm and Man of Sorrows I invite you to stand and sing How Great the Chasm that lay between us how high the mountain

I could not climb in desperation I turned to heaven and spoke your name into the night then through the darkness your lovingkindness tore through the shadows of my soul the work is finished the end is written Jesus Christ my living hope could imagine so great a mercy one heart could fathom such boundless grace the God of ages stepped down from glory to wear my sin and bear my shame the cross has spoken

[79 : 14] I am forgiven the King of Kings holds me his own beautiful Savior I'm yours forever Jesus Christ my living hope Jesus Christ my living hope Mary Mary Mary Mary Mary Mary Praise the one who set me free Hallelujah Death has lost its grip on me You have broken every chain There's salvation in your name Jesus Christ, my living hope It came the morning that sealed the promise

Your buried body began to breathe Out of the silence the roaring lion Declared the grave has no claim on me Then came the morning that sealed the promise Your buried body began to breathe Out of the silence the roaring lion Declared the grave has no claim on me Jesus' voice is the glory Hallelujah Praise the one who set me free

Hallelujah Death has lost its grip on me You have broken every chain You have broken every chain There's salvation in your name Jesus Christ, my living hope Hallelujah Praise the one who set me free Hallelujah Death has lost its grip on me You have broken every chain You have broken every chain You have broken every chain There's salvation in your name Jesus Christ, my living hope Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah desde■!

■■■■■■! Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free.

Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me. You have broken every chain.

[82 : 24] There's salvation in your name. Jesus Christ, my living hope. Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Oh God, you are my living hope. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. His soul betrayed The sin of man and wrath of God Has been all Jesus laid Silence has he stood accused

Beaten, mocked, and scorned Vowing to the Father's will Return the crown of gold Know that rugged cross My salvation Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out Hallelujah Praise the honor run to thee Sands of heaven God's long son To purchase and redeem And reconcile the very ones

Who nailed him to that tree And all that rugged cross My salvation Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out Hallelujah Praise and honor run to thee And honor run to thee Now my debt is paid It is paid in full By the precious blood That my Jesus spilled Now the curse of sin Has no hold on me Whom the sun sets free Whom the sun sets free Oh, is free indeed Now my debt is paid

[86 : 10] It is paid It is paid in full It is paid in full By the precious blood That my Jesus spilled Now the curse of sin Now the curse of sin Now the curse of sin Now the curse of sin Now the curse of sin Has no hold on me Whom the sun sets free Oh, is free indeed Oh, is free Oh, is free indeed Oh, that rugged cross My salvation Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out Hallelujah Praise and honor run to thee And see the stone is rolled away Behold the empty tomb

And hallelujah God be praised He's risen from the grave Oh, that rugged cross My salvation Where your love poured out over me Now my soul cries out Hallelujah Praise and honor run to thee Praise and honor run to thee Amen Please take a seat Amen Father, we thank you for those wonderful truths and those words We thank you that We are free indeed

And there's nothing that we have ever done to earn any of that We thank you that By the precious blood of Christ and that cross We are free Amen We've got a couple of notices as we close Please take a motto text postcard I believe It looks like that If you can find that anywhere Take it It's a motto text postcard Andrew's pointing over there on the table Please take one on your way out Please sign up for the church lunch which is happening next Sunday after the morning service That's an important thing to do I believe She's gone She's left She's now downstairs waiting for you to sign up Please do that Sheila Sheila, yes She There will be a person at a desk Also, the art club is starting from Wednesday the 5th of February

Yes, that is right And it's at half past one If you'd like to take part there's the information there We're going to close with a blessing Live under the protection of God Most High and stay in the shadow of God All-Powerful Then you will say to the Lord You are my fortress my place of safety You are my God and I trust in you Amen God bless you this week God bless you this week You are my fortress God bless you this week God bless you this week God bless you this week God bless you this week

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God bless you this week Thank you.

[90 : 56] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[93 : 26] Thank you.