

The One Gospel (Praise Night)

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to read together from Galatians chapter 1, just a few short verses, verses 3-5. And Paul the apostle writes, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- Let's pray. Lord, we do ask now that for just a few minutes, as we think about what Paul is teaching us here through this letter, that you would be with us and that you would open our hearts.
- We ask, once again, meet us where we are, Lord. We want to understand more of the gospel. For some of us, we want to hear the gospel afresh. For some of us, maybe for the first time. For some of us, maybe we don't yet know that we need this message, the good news of Jesus.
- So, we do ask that you would help us to receive your word tonight. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Just a few minutes, thinking through these few verses, Galatians is the earliest New Testament book.
- And so, this is one of the very first things that was ever written and put into the New Testament that we just read. And it was written just a couple of years after Paul planted some churches in a region called Galatia.
- [1 : 1 8] And this region, Galatia, is today in southern Turkey. And he writes here because of an explosive issue that was taking place in this whole region.
- And that's that there were people coming and they were teaching a message and saying that Christianity was the message Paul taught, what we call the gospel, plus good works, plus all sorts of types of behavior, plus what we call works of the law, things that came from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, that they were expecting people who were Gentiles, not Jewish, to behave according to Jewish custom.
- And they were adding things to this gospel message that Paul had come in with. Now, if you read about Christianity in the public media, if you listen to your children, if you have children talk about what they said at the RHSP class at school, one of the things I know I consistently hear is that when people in the public talk about Christianity, they say things like, Christianity is following Jesus' moral commands.
- Christianity is trying your best to be like Jesus. And that's a regular refrain. It's been around for 2,000 years. It shows up right here in this letter. It's something Paul was addressing.
- And Paul comes to write this little letter to treat something so explosive, and that's a corruption of the message, the central message, the essential message of Christianity, the gospel.
- [2 : 4 4] Sometimes today people will say that if you want to follow Christianity, if you want to be a Christian, you've got to be like him. You've got to practice the way. Even language like that gets used, and practicing the way, following Jesus is a good thing, but it's not the gospel.

The essence of Christianity is slightly different than that. And so here we've got a little text about that, and I'll just spend a couple minutes on it. Charles Spurgeon, in the 19th century, he was preaching on a different passage, and he told a story.

He talked about how many people in his generation were still coming thinking that you could come to God by way of your good deeds, and you could earn a place before the Lord by way of good works.

And so Charles said, you can feed the hungry, you can clothe the naked, and you can think you're doing it all for God. And then he told a little story. This was the story. He said, once long ago there was a kingdom in a far, far away land.

And there was a gardener in that kingdom, and he grew carrots. And the gardener grew the best carrot that he had ever grown. And so he decided, I'm going to take this carrot to the king.

[3 : 48] And he brought it to the king, and he gave it to the king, and he said, out of love and respect and awe for you, my king, I want to give you the best thing I've ever done, this carrot. And the king said, the king was really moved, actually, by it.

And the king said, I'm going to give you an entire field, so much acreage so that you can make your harvest even greater. And the man was really blessed by it.

And at the same time there was a nobleman in the court that heard this conversation. And the nobleman came, and he said, big land, lots of acreage for just a carrot.

I'm going to bring a horse. So he brought a horse, and he brought a horse to the king, and he brought a black stallion. And he said, this is the greatest horse in all of the kingdom. And the king took it, and the king said, thank you.

And the king started to ride away. And the man, the nobleman, said, where's my land? Where's my crown? Where's my status and title? And this is what Spurgeon says. He puts these words into the king.

[4 : 45] He says, the gardener was giving me the carrot. You gave yourself a horse. And what he meant by that was if you approach God presenting your good deeds, your good works before him at all, your treasure, your horse, your carrot, anything that it may be, without discerning your neediness, that you can never earn his favor at something that's only given.

It's a gift. It can never be earned. It can never be exchanged by you at all. If you don't come discerning that, then good works are for nothing. And that's what he meant by it.

Now here Paul gives us in verses 3, 4, and 5 that we read the whole gospel in just a couple little sentences in such an explosive moment for the Galatians when they're hearing, you've got to come in by your good deeds.

You've got to come and earn this by your good works. And this is what he says. He focuses on this one line. Now I want to focus on it. He says Jesus is the one who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, to deliver us is the language he uses.

Let me tell you three things about the gospel. First, we learn here from this little line, we all have a great need. And the language Paul uses is Jesus came so that we would be delivered.

[6 : 03] And the word delivered there is a translated word, and it's just the word also that could be rescued. And delivered, rescued, sometimes it's translated plucked out or pulled through or go across, like going across a river, all sorts of ways like that.

And it's very simple what he's saying. He's saying that when it comes to the good news of being saved, of coming into God's presence, being reconciled to God, the one you were made for, you don't earn it.

You can only receive it. In other words, you need to be rescued. You need to be delivered. You need to be brought across. You need a status change. That's why he chooses this word. Imagine for a second that you are a hostage to a terrorist.

A scary thought. And in this situation, you know, MI6 comes, I think, I don't know, do they actually exist? I think so. And the CIA, that's American, but it's just an illustration.

We can mix it all up. The police, everybody comes, everybody. And they come to you, and you know what they don't do? They don't say to the terrorist, listen, we're going to send in a hostage negotiation manual.

[7 : 11] And if you'll just give it to the hostage, it's about 300 pages. And tell them, just read through it. You know, and if you really kind of ingest it enough, over time, you will be able to negotiate your own way out of this.

It's a very probable chance. You know, if a man is drowning, you don't throw him a manual, an instruction manual on how to swim. And in the same way, Paul says, the gospel is not something you earn.

You don't learn it. You receive it. It's a status change. It's being delivered. It's being rescued. So that's the first thing he tells us. Secondly, Christianity tells us, secondly, the essence of the Christian message is, how does this happen?

How do you get rescued? You know, you need a hero. You need a redeemer, not just a teacher. And so how? And he says, Jesus gave himself for our sins.

So the little important word there is the preposition for. He gave himself for our sins. And there's lots of prepositions in Greek that can be translated as for in English. But this one means on behalf of.

[8 : 15] And so this is the language of substitution. That he took our place. That he exchanged something with us. And it doesn't just say here that he gave something. It says he gave himself.

He exchanged himself for us. Meaning that before the Lord, our life is owed. But Jesus Christ exchanged himself for us. He went in our behalf.

So this is talking about the cross. The cross of Christ where he was crucified. Where he died. And what it's teaching us is that in Jesus' death, God could not simply overlook the guilt of humanity that we bear.

You might say if he did, it would be loving. But it certainly would not be holy. It certainly would not be justice. And at the same time, at the same time, he did not leave us to die for what we deserve.

And so what we learn about here on behalf of his substitutionary work is that at the cross, God's justice and his mercy kiss, as the Psalms tell us. He satisfies the justice that we deserve, that our sins deserve.

[9 : 22] And yet he kisses us with mercy. His justice and mercy kiss in that moment. It's an expression of his love. The demonstration of his love. That's what the cross is. And some of us come tonight, perhaps, and we're still trying.

Some of us may come tonight, and you've been in church for a long time. Or maybe not very long. Or maybe this is the first time. And whatever our condition, it could still be the case that we're trying to negotiate our way with God out of a spiritual conundrum.

And that's that we feel the weight of guilt in our lives. And yet we actually do, in the bottom of our souls, long to be in God's presence. So we want reconciliation with God.

But at the same time, we know we have a guilt problem. And here we see the message of the gospel. It's entirely received, not earned. It's that Jesus stood on your behalf.

He died on your behalf. His justice, the justice poured out to him, satisfied the justice that we deserve. It's absolutely essential to the Christian message.

[10 : 22] Some of you, most of us know, all of us know, I think, the story of Chernobyl, the disaster. And in 1986, there was a famous story that came after Chernobyl about the three young divers.

They had filled up the reactor. I'm going to talk like I know anything about nuclear physics or whatever this is. I don't, but they had filled up the reactor, the core, I think, in Chernobyl with water.

And they desperately needed that water to be drained or the explosion that was about to take place would be far more devastating than it ended up being, even though it was absolutely horrific.

And these three young men at Chernobyl simply volunteered themselves. And they said, we will go down and we will drain the reactor. And they probably saved, the estimates are, millions of people's lives.

And they knew that the water was radioactive, that it was certain death. And they went and they did it and they gave their lives away for it. It was an exchange. They gave their life away so we didn't have to give ours away.

[11 : 23] Jesus Christ gave himself away. He died so we wouldn't have to before the Lord. We could be reconciled. We could have real reunion, real reconciliation with the living God. The only difference, many differences, one of the main differences in the Chernobyl divers and Jesus Christ is that he also rose.

Jesus Christ not only died on your behalf, he rose on your behalf. And that means, and we don't have time to flesh it out right now, but that means that he secured your acquittal fully in his resurrection.

Because he was raised, you can be pronounced clean, forgiven forever. That's at the heartbeat of the gospel. Paul tells us here, and I'll move to the third thing, but Paul tells us here why God did it.

In this verse 5 he says he did it for God's glory, that it was all about God's glory. Boy, you know what that means? That means that he didn't look down and think sometime in history some people are going to deserve this.

Sometime in the future it could be the case that someone will deserve this. No, he did it for his glory. It was all grace. He did it simply out of love and for his own glorification.

[12 : 32] That's what makes it good news. Now third, finally, Paul says that Jesus bore our sins in his body. He gave himself for us to deliver, to rescue us.

And then the last little line, from this present evil age. And the question here is just simply, when is this salvation? And we think, we look at that from this present evil age, and we can think about the fact that life is messy, life is suffering.

The evil all around us, the evil in our world, the evil in our news. And we say, I want, do you want, I want deliverance from such a broken world, yes. And he is saying that, but that is not all he's saying.

When he says that Christ came to deliver us from this present evil age, it is a present tense reality. And Paul points to this all across his epistles. He's saying, yes, this is talking about heaven.

Yes, this is talking about new creation. But Paul is saying, if you come with neediness today, he has already delivered you. That's the message. He's delivered you presently from this present evil age, is one way to say it.

[13 : 42] And just think about it. But this evil age, this evil age we live in, is any age in the New Testament where you center your life around anything but the real God.

That's part of the evil age. Things aren't, evil just simply means things are not the way they're supposed to be. So when you center your life around anything but the real God, that's part of the present evil age.

It's deep down in the bottom of our souls. Maybe for you it's deliverance from the anxiety that keeps you up at night because you are chasing something in this life that's never going to satisfy you.

Maybe it's deliverance from walking into every room wanting everybody's approval. Maybe it's deliverance from the fear of death that hangs over every single one of us. And it's saying that by the power of the cross and resurrection, when Christ unites you to himself and reconciles you to God the Father, he actually delivers you now, today, from your heart, your guilt, your pride.

He delivers you today from the grip of idols. He delivers you today from a meaning that is searching for a meaning that is entirely situated within circumstances. He rescues you from that.

[14 : 49] He gives you freedom from that. He can deliver you today from so many issues of the present evil age. And so here's the scandal, and I'll finish with this. You really only need one thing to receive this message, this gospel, reconciliation, true reconciliation with God.

And the thing that you need tonight is nothing. The only condition by which you can come to receive this message is that you come without any conditions. You come empty. You come and you bring nothing at all.

You come needy. That's the only condition. It's not a condition at all. It's just an expression of your neediness. You come and look to him by faith for rescue and hope. You come empty-handed. Martin Luther said it like this, All you bring to your salvation is the sin from which you need to be redeemed.

So we have no qualifications before him tonight, yet in love. He wants to know you. He wants to meet with you. He wants to reconcile himself to you. And he's done it. He has delivered us from this present evil age.

And so it's so simple. And yet to come by faith tonight really is, for some of us, it's been a lifelong call maybe that's gone out and out and out and out. But it's actually felt so hard, so difficult to come before God in any real moment with your neediness.

[16 : 05] And to say, Lord, I actually know who I am. I want to be rescued. But tonight's an opportunity, so I'll ask you to join me in prayer in a moment. It's an opportunity to pray exactly that.

C.S. Lewis said that the grace of God does not calculate. It does not keep a balance sheet. He doesn't measure you by your deeds.

He wants to pour his love upon you. He has in the cross of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. Let's pray. Father, we come to you and express our neediness.

We feel the weight of our guilt, the shame that we brought onto ourselves in this life. We are sinners. sinners. We were made by you and for you, and yet we ran away.

We choose everything but you. We want ourselves to be God. We build golden statues of ourselves in our hearts and bow down before them. We are self-glorying, self-divinizing, prideful people.

[17 : 07] We struggle with lust and greed, and all of it brings shame. And yet, Lord, you've been pursuing us from the foundation of the world. You've been rescuing us from the very beginning moment where we first sinned.

And we thank you for that tonight. I do pray, Lord, that you would help some folks in this room, all of us perhaps, to see the bounty of the gospel, the fullness of it, how it really can treat every single problem, but especially our sin.

Lord, and perhaps as we sing our closing songs tonight, you would show us that without being reconciled to you, we are empty. We have a big hole in our hearts.

We will never have what we really need. And so teach us, Lord, that you are who we need. You and Christ are who we have. And we pray that all in Jesus' name.

Amen.