

No Other Gospel but Christ's

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 September 2018

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 0 0] Well, there are often times in life when only the real thing would do, when fake is worse than not having it at all. So for some of you, that's the first thing every morning, when you need to have real coffee.

Not that instant, watery, fake stuff, but from your favorite cafe made by your favorite barista. And I'm trying here not to look at any particular person.

Or take your 21st birthday party, where one of you, I remembered, wanted a croquembouche. You know, remember this one? And so if you want a real croquembouche, I think that's how you croquembouche, yeah?

It's got to be Zumbos croquembouche, isn't it? So the party venue was actually chosen precisely so you could pick up and transport your croquembouche with ease.

Got to be the real one. And of course, the one time when something's got to be real is when it comes to the engagement ring.

[1 : 0 8] Better to have a small but real stone than to have a huge but totally fake rock. Well, tonight we begin a new series in Galatians.

And part of what we'll discover in the coming weeks is that when it comes to the gospel, the same principle applies. Only the real thing would do. That is, only the true gospel would do.

And it's the only one that gives true freedom. It's the only one that brings real salvation. And sadly, we'll see from the letter that the temptations to desert the gospel are only too real.

Now, we know that the letter to the Galatians was written relatively early in Paul's ministry. It's probably one of the earliest letters in the New Testament. And the fact is, even though the church was only about 20 years old and probably younger in Galatia, there were already people undermining the truth of the gospel.

When Paul visited Galatia, which I've got a slide of where that might be, it's in modern Turkey, he planted churches at places called like Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

[2 : 2 3] And so if you look up Acts chapter 13 and 14, Luke records Paul's visits there. But what happened was when he left, others came along and didn't just question the content of his preaching, but also questioned Paul's credibility as an apostle as well.

This is then what forms the background to the letter. And in response, Paul exposes not just the fallacy of what they're saying, but he also defends his own credentials.

He does it not for his own reputation, but to ensure that the Galatians know that his message is true. And so this is what Paul takes up immediately in his opening, where under point one of my outline, Paul lays out briefly both the source and the summary of the gospel.

So let's begin Galatians chapter 1 verse 1. 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 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.

[3 : 39] Amen. And so from the outset, Paul explains that his authority comes from God. He hasn't been sent by fellow human beings, nor was his message given to him by them.

Rather, he's sent by God the Father, and the message was given to him by his son, Jesus. In other words, the gospel which he is preaching is not second-hand transmission or something that he's picked up from Chinese whispers.

Rather, his message comes directly from the source. And in these first three verses of the letter, Paul summarizes what this message is for the Galatians.

It takes the form of a greeting and blessings, of grace and peace, but Paul doesn't miss the opportunity to summarize the gospel. In fact, the gospel is actually the basis for his relationship with the Galatians.

They are related and united with Paul by the gospel. So in verse 2, Paul first spells out the historic event on which the gospel is founded. The gospel is good news because God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

[4 : 51] It is good news because something amazing happened in history. You see, the gospel isn't simply a set of home truths or a series of maxims to live by.

Rather, the power of the message of the gospel lies in the fact that Jesus really did rise from the dead. And because he did, verse 3 tells us its life-changing significance, namely that we are rescued by Jesus from this present evil age.

The word rescue implies that we as humans are helpless. We are unable to save ourselves. Our own sin debilitates us and puts us under the judgment of death.

Only Christ, who is without sin, can free us when he takes our place with his death. As a result of that, we are freed from the penalty and power of sin.

We are rescued from this present evil age. Now, nowadays, from time to time, we hear politicians stand up and tell us, don't they, what the greatest moral challenge of our age is.

[6 : 04] Or so they think. So, in 2007, we had Kevin Rudd telling us that climate change was the greatest moral challenge of our time. Well, previous to that, some people thought it was the AIDS epidemic.

Or the threat of nuclear holocaust. Or if you go back all the way to World War II, it was fascism and communism.

Nowadays, we hear talk about the war on waste. And together with carbon dioxide, I think plastic is now supposedly the greatest pollutant on the planet.

Now, I get all these campaigns. You know, it's good for us to be stewards, good stewards of this earth. But sometimes, we get so caught up with these things that we lose sight that actually the most, what is most evil in this present age is our sin.

Always has been, and it always will be. It's our stubborn desire to be independent of God, whether as individuals or as a society.

[7 : 15] We want to live our lives our own way without the intrusion of the one who lovingly created us and continues to graciously sustain us.

Imagine for a moment someone who was an orphan at birth. A couple comes along, adopts him and raises him as their own. Gives him the best that they have to offer.

And then one day, when they're old and frail, he turns around, takes all that they have given to him and throws them onto the street.

Now, what would you use to describe a person like that? Evil, probably, might come to your mind, wouldn't it? And sadly, that's how we are as humans.

We've taken all that God has given us and turned our backs on him. We are evil. And yet, by his grace, God has given his son to rescue us from our evil and from this present evil age.

[8 : 30] And Paul says that this is according to the will of God. He's done this not because he has to, not as an afterthought, but out of his own goodwill, which he purposed from the very start.

God saw our helplessness and graciously came to rescue us. And in the coming weeks, we'll unpack this gospel more fully to see just how rich and how free and how gracious it is.

And yet, in spite of this wonderful gift, the Galatians are now in danger of deserting this gift, this gospel. And so concerned is Paul that he dispenses with his usual prayer of thanksgiving.

If you look at all the other letters, he normally starts with that. But he doesn't even have this in his letter, and he launches straight into a warning for them. So in verse 6, Paul continues, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

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.

[9 : 51] As we have already said, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse. Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, of God, or am I trying to please people?

If I was still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Paul's first point in this second section is that there is no other gospel but only Christ.

This different gospel they're now hearing is actually no gospel at all. It's a fake gospel. It's not the real thing. Instead, the gospel which Paul preaches is the only real gospel because it comes directly from God.

Paul will show them why or how that came about in more detail in the next few chapters. But now he gives them one reason why it's so dangerous to turn to these other gospels.

It's because if they do, verse 6, they are turning away from the one who called them by the grace of Christ. They're rejecting the grace that comes through Jesus.

[10 : 57] You see, grace is the thing that lies at the heart of the gospel. God's rescue of us is wholly unmerited. There isn't anything that we've done to deserve it.

Nor is there anything in our character that prompts God to act to us in that way. Instead, the gospel is all about what God has done for us in Christ.

And again, although Paul doesn't spell it out here, we'll see in later chapters that what the others are telling them is that they needed to do extra things. They needed to add on other stuff in order to be included as God's people.

They're turning the gospel into something that they have to do rather than what God gives freely. And that is why Paul takes such a strident tone in verses 8 and 9.

Woe is anyone who preaches this kind of gospel. He says that in verse 8 and then again in verse 9. Paul says that anyone who does this is under God's curse.

[12 : 00] The Greek word actually is anathema, which is where we get the English word from. So it's an anathema for anyone to preach a different gospel. Don't listen to them, Paul is saying.

He's pleading with the Galatians because that puts their salvation in jeopardy. If the Galatians were to add anything to God's grace in Christ, then it's no longer Christ that saves.

It's no longer by faith in Him alone that we are saved. And God's grace alone is no longer enough for salvation. And so by preaching like this, they're actually gutting the gospel and robbing Christ of His power and ultimately robbing God of His glory as well.

And so for Paul, it doesn't matter who preaches such a gospel. It could even be him. It could even be an angel that's come directly from God. If anyone does this, let him be cursed. Now brothers and sisters, it may be that not many of you today think that your gospel preaches.

After all, you're not up here like me. We can week out preaching the word. And yet, if you think about it, the truth is, many of you do evangelize.

[13 : 18] You're involved in campus ministry, maybe as a volunteer, maybe as a staff worker. You go for beach missions. You lead Christianity Explored courses. You may even be reading the Bible one-to-one with someone at the moment.

And who knows, one day, some of you may be planning to become a pastor or become a missionary like Matt and Kate. Well, if that's the case, then this passage applies to you.

Which means then, it's important for you to be clear what the gospel is. And then secondly, to be faithful to it. To share this gospel and this gospel alone without turning to a different gospel.

Now you may be thinking, oh, you know, I would never do that. But, I mean, what's, you know, this is the gospel. I'm committed to it. But let me say, the temptation to turn away from the gospel is there.

For example, it's tempting, isn't it, not to focus too much on the death and resurrection of Jesus. You know, because in this day and age, it's rather hard to persuade people, isn't it, that miracles are real.

[14 : 26] Or it may be tempting not to mention sin. Because that means having to confront people to repent. It means challenging them to admit that they've gone the wrong way and they need to turn to God.

If, for example, we don't tell people that Jesus is the only way to God, then that too is preaching a different gospel, isn't it? But when we do that, what we've done is offered an assurance of God's salvation when there is none.

And we've done it in God's name, against His will, against His word, and so that makes him out to be a liar. So friends, let this be a warning to us.

If anyone preaches a gospel other than the gospel of Christ, they are under the curse of God. I'm sorry I have to say this, but it is the truth.

And if you think about it, the truth is, the gospel isn't really that complicated, is it? Paul is able to summarize this gospel very clearly in just a few short verses in Galatians.

[15 : 41] And I know of primary age kids who are able to understand the gospel without difficulty and come to faith in it. And if you've been a Christian for a while, you know that in years gone by, people come to faith by hearing it explained simply with a couple of tracks like, you know, the four spiritual laws or two ways to live.

The gospel is not that hard, is it? It can be explained in no more than five minutes or so. So the problem isn't that, you know, the gospel is hard to preach.

Instead, if I'm honest, what's hard is that there's no way to truly preach the gospel without challenging someone as to the way they're living.

There's no way to preach the gospel without having to confront them to see that they need to repent and give their lives wholly to Jesus. That's the hard part to me because there's pride, isn't there, in all of us.

It hurts the pride of the one we're asking to repent, but it also hurts our pride when people reject us. But here's where we need to remember what Paul Nix says in verses 9 and 10, that our aim is not to please humans.

[16 : 58] See what Paul says? Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I was still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Friends, can you hear that? Do you want to be a servant of Christ? Or do you want to please people? Seems to me like there's only, you can't have both options.

You can't have your cake and eat it, can you? So brothers and sisters, we preach in order to win souls. But that doesn't mean we're trying to win their approval.

No, it's God Himself who will call each one to faith. And He does it when we're faithful to Him. When we try to please Him by being faithful to the message He's given us.

Now of course, I'm not saying that we go out and preach in an offensive way or be ungracious or arrogant. But if the message of the gospel itself offends when we're calling people to repentance, then so be it.

[18 : 06] We're actually doing our job. And so, if there's anyone here tonight who's not yet a Christian, then please know that the first thing to do is to believe what God says and repent.

And yes, I know it's never pleasant to have to admit our failings and our pride, but that's the necessary way and the best way for you to humble yourself before God, to acknowledge your need for Him and to ask Him to rescue you from this present age through the death of His Son.

Now as for those of us who are already Christians, then the thing we need to realize as well is just like the Galatians, it's tempting even when we believe the true gospel, it's still tempting from time to time to want to turn away to a different gospel.

You see, sometimes we think the Christian life is like a computer game. Some of you, I'm sure, play computer games. You know, when you first start as a beginner in level one, level one is always free, isn't it?

Everyone can get in. It's easy. You don't have to do anything to begin playing. But then, if you want to get to the higher levels, you know, then you've got to do things, right, to, you know, get the right clues or the right rewards or do this, you know, pass certain challenges or whatever before you get to the higher levels.

[19 : 31] And then you think, oh, when I get to the higher levels, that's when I get revealed, you know, new things about the games that I didn't know at level one, more exciting things. And that's what we may think the Christian life is like, that only when we attain to additional levels of spirituality, let's say, or whatever, or maturity, then more of the gospel will be revealed to us.

You know, that there's Christianity for beginners and then there's Christianity for the experts. Now, others may think, however, that the temptation, the temptation comes because, you know, you're looking for excitement in the Christian life.

So, you start out as a new Christian, it's all really exciting, but then after a while, you know, you know, you're just being asked to be faithful and that's not exciting enough and you think, oh, you know, I need to get, you know, where is God in all of this?

You know, you want to pray and you want to see God answer your prayers immediately. You want to see your weaknesses just disappear overnight. You want to be able to overcome, you know, sufferings in life with some magical, spiritual power that you have.

That is a temptation, isn't it? When you become a Christian and after a while, things seem to just be very ho-hum. And when that happens, that's when the temptation to turn to another gospel comes.

[20 : 53] Others will come and tell you, oh, if you only do this, you know, you do this extra thing apart from the gospel, that's what you really need. You need a second blessing or something. You need to, you know, practice certain rituals or certain disciplines in your life, pray a certain way, a fast a certain way.

Or you need to live in some, you know, tight-knitted community where people follow strict rules or something. Well, these were the very things that the Galatians were told by those who are preaching a false gospel.

But Paul's rebuttal is clear. Do that and we're deserting the one who calls us by the grace of Christ. Now, sadly, that tendency has, it's human and that has actually been around for a long time and we saw that in our first reading tonight, didn't we, in Exodus, where the Israelites, God had just done the most amazing thing for them, rescued them from the evil of Egypt, parted the Red Sea for them, appeared to them on Mount Sinai.

And then what happens next? They grew impatient for Moses to return from the mountain and they asked Aaron to make an idol for them. And in verse 7 of chapter 32, which we just heard earlier tonight, this is what God says of them.

God says to Moses, Go down because your people whom you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.

[22 : 32] They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. Here God uses the same phrase to turn away just as Paul did in Galatians.

They were so quick, God says, to turn away from him to idols. And just as the Galatians attempted to quickly turn away to a different gospel, to a gospel that cannot save just as the golden calf couldn't save the Israelites.

Both the Israelites and the Galatians and us are driven by this same impulse, this impatience with God, this satisfaction with what he has done for us and an unwillingness just to be faithful to God's commands.

And what was the result? Well, in Exodus, God struck them with the curse of a plague and many people died. Friends, we have, I think, few but very clear aims for this new series in Galatians.

My hope is that by the end of it, I pray that we'll be crystal clear on what the gospel is. I trust that it will also become clear why that's important.

[23 : 51] And then secondly, the other aim I have for the series is that once we've understood the gospel clearly, my prayer is that we'll stand firm in it. we will live it out in the grace of Christ.

That we'll never be tempted to desert the one who called us and turn to another gospel, whatever that may be, because any other gospel is useless and it has no power to save us.

So let me pray as we finish to ask God to help us do that. Father, thank you for calling us by the grace of Christ who was raised from the dead for our sins.

Thank you that through faith in him we are rescued from the evil of this present age. Help us to know this gospel clearly, to be faithful in preaching it without fear.

Teach us to seek your approval instead of wanting to please humans. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.