

The Gospel According to Paul

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[0 : 00] Friends, please be seated and I'll lead us in prayer before I speak. Lord our God, we ask that you would help us to taste and see that you are good.

I pray that you would help us to capture something of a glimpse of your glory through the preaching of your Apostle in the book of Acts and through my words. And Father, lift yourself up that we might see you, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well friends, one of the great doubts that people have, and I think if you have a doubt about your faith, it's good to talk to someone about it. I think one of the lingering doubts people have is whether the Christianity that we talk about today, is that the same as the Christianity that actually began in the first century?

After all, organisations change. The church has changed. Is the gospel that we believe today the same gospel as was taught in the first century?

Non-Christians will say there's been some Chinese whispers or over time the church has domesticated the message and such things. Well, how do you really know that our gospel is the true original gospel?

[1 : 13] Another form of this kind of doubt that you may have heard, which I think is quite prevalent, is that people teach that Christianity has two forms. The Jesus form and the Apostle Paul form.

And Paul the Apostle kind of sidetracked Christianity into a new direction, a new trajectory that is different from Jesus' original teaching. So people will claim that there's a gospel according to Jesus and a gospel according to Paul, and they're a little bit different.

Some say a lot different. They'll say Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. Paul talked about justification by faith alone. Very different gospels. They'll say Jesus was a Jew and a preacher to Israel, and Paul was an apostle to Gentiles.

So very contrasting kind of things. And it is argued that there are different messages, different versions of Christianity, and the Paul one is the one that has actually taken hold of the church and we've left the Jesus one behind.

If that's true, then we're in big trouble because we follow Jesus as Savior. Now, of course, we don't believe that. We believe that there's one gospel. But it is still quite awkward, isn't it, friends?

[2 : 28] Some Christians argue that, well, maybe you're going to be more of a Paul spirituality, and others will be a Jesus spirituality. Or they'll say, you know, we need to read the gospels through the lens of Paul.

So people read, say, the gospel of Mark as if it's the book of Romans in narrative form. They look for bits of Romans in Mark. Well, that's hardly fair to Mark or to Jesus.

Friends, I'm excited to share with you today that we are going to see the apostle Paul in action before there were any Paul epistles, before there were any Pauline churches.

He hasn't planted them yet in the book of Acts. And we're going to watch the apostle preach the message. And I think what we'll see is a bridge between the message of Jesus in the gospels and Paul's gospel in his letters.

And we'll see that actually they are the same message. And we believe that same gospel today. We've actually skipped a bit in the book of Acts. We've skipped some work that Paul did on the island of Cyprus.

[3 : 38] And he basically worked from east to west on Cyprus, preaching the gospel. And Paul has a model that he follows all the way through the book of Acts. He starts in synagogues.

And after he's preached to Jews, then he goes to the Gentiles. So as he says, his gospel is for Jew, then Gentile. And on the island of Cyprus, he got into some trouble. There was a Jewish prophet, a false prophet called Elimus, the sorcerer, who confronts Paul.

And Paul confronts him. They have a kind of a spiritual battle. And Elimus ends up blinded. And Paul wins. Paul's gospel wins. And also on Cyprus, a very important official called Sergius Paulus, the pro-consul of the island, is converted.

So a major Gentile man is converted to the gospel. So that's exciting times earlier in chapter 13. And then what happens is they leave Cyprus and they sail to the mainland of Eastern Europe, to modern-day Turkey.

And as soon as they get there, something bad happens, really. In verse 13, it says, I'll read it carefully. Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos, that's on the west of Cyprus, and came to Perga in Pamphylia.

[4 : 57] John, however, left them and returned to Jerusalem. Now, that's actually a bad thing. That's actually a result of a fight between Paul and John Mark. John Mark is the cousin of Barnabas, who's Paul's preaching partner.

And it seems that John didn't like the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. And so instead of, he wants to go home, and he doesn't even go back to Antioch, the base of the mission.

He goes back to Jerusalem, I think, to do on Paul and say, he's preaching the gospel to Gentiles. And they're accepting it. And then later in Acts, you'll actually see people come from Jerusalem, and they'll have the Jerusalem Council to settle this fight.

And Paul takes a while to patch things up with John Mark. Later in Acts, he has a fight with Barnabas and says to Barnabas, I don't want him in the team. So there are tough times for the gospel.

But Paul plods on. He's got his message. And he arrives in Antioch in Pisidia, which is a different Antioch. This is an Antioch in modern-day Turkey, not the Antioch that's north of the Holy Land, so to speak.

[6 : 07] And he arrives there and does his normal thing. He goes to the synagogue. And then he'll go to the Gentiles. And so what we're going to see, friends, is the real deal. Paul, the great church planer, the great evangelist, do his thing.

And we're going to get to watch him do his gospel thing. And he begins in verse 16. Paul stood up with a gesture, began to speak. Paul's going to kind of do a Jewish kind of thing.

He's going to give them a history of Israel, which is a good way of making a connection with his audience. But it's also Paul's genius way of actually showing them that within the history of Israel, they need a saviour like Jesus.

So you might remember earlier we looked at Stephen, the first martyr, who gave a long history of Israel. It was actually a way of preparing for the gospel. Well, Paul's going to do a similar thing.

And Paul's history of Israel is all about leadership. It's all about who's going to rule Israel. Who's going to rescue Israel? And he says that Israel began with a bang.

[7 : 28] In the beginning, God himself chose Abraham. God himself made them great. God himself rescued them with an uplifted arm and brought them out of Egypt.

In the beginning, God himself was the saviour and the king of Israel. God himself was with them. So he's saying Israel used to have the glory days.

And they were literally glory days because God himself led them in a cloud of glory and a cloud of fire by night. They knew God. They were close to God.

He was their saviour very clearly. But after that, Paul says, things went pear-shaped. Things went bad. So in our verse 18, after the exodus, for about 40 years, God put up with them in the wilderness.

They knew the story that God's people grumbled. And God, instead of being the great rescuer, was the God who had to put up with his people, who turned to other gods, who grumbled, who wanted to go back to Egypt.

[8 : 36] And over time, God, in a sense, had to start to distance himself from his rebellious people. After he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, verse 19, he gave them the land as an inheritance for about 450 years.

Paul reminds them that God did everything they needed to take the land, gave them every power they needed. But, of course, the history is that. And they know that Israel failed to take the land as God told them to.

And the nations that remained in the land grew to become their enemies and grew to oppress them. And that's why Paul is, in fact, preaching to them in modern-day Turkey and not in the land of Israel, because God's people are still being pushed around by other nations.

And they haven't actually taken the inheritance that God offered to them. And then they had, until the time of the prophet Samuel, then, verse 21, they asked for a king.

And God gave them Saul, son of Kish, who reigned for 40 years. Actually, I've skipped a little bit, I think. He also mentions the, verse 20, he gave them the judges until the time of Samuel.

[9 : 59] Of course, the judges was a time when Israel constantly turned their back on God. He sends a judge, he rescues them, they turn their back again. That's an embarrassment to Israel. So it reminds them of the time of judges.

Then he says they asked for a king. They asked for Saul, which, if you read what happens in the Old Testament, they actually reject God as king, and they want a human ruler like the other nations. And so they get Saul, who turns out to be not a very good king, and God rejects both Saul and, in a sense, his people.

And so Paul maps out this history of Israel that it began with a bang. God rescued them. God was their king. And then things fell apart. Then God had to work through human agents.

And even then, they didn't respond to God. And they got worse and worse and worse. And finally, God gave them King David, verse 22, and says of him, I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my own heart.

And he will carry out all my wishes. The implication is that the other leaders of Israel haven't been men after God's own heart, haven't carried out God's wishes.

[11 : 11] But of course, we know, friends, and Paul's listeners knew that David made mistakes. David stuffed up in many big ways. You know, he chose Bathsheba and committed adultery with her and had her husband killed.

And we know that after the time of King David, the kings only kind of got worse and worse, with a few exceptions. But on the whole, it was downhill from there. And at the time of where Paul is, there is no king in the line of David.

Even though God promised, he said, your line will last forever, the only kings are kings like the pagan King Herod, who rules with an iron fist over Israel.

So times are not good for Israel, is what Paul is saying. He's saying, your history is checkered, is littered with mistakes, and turning aside from God.

On the face of it, it looks like from your own history, God has failed you. God's promise to provide a ruler has failed.

[12 : 16] God's promise to redeem his people has failed. They're oppressed. And so Paul's history, in a way, is a way of raising in the synagogue, of saying, has God failed?

Can God redeem his people again? Can God resurrect the Davidic kingdom, and make it work once again? And at that point, he tells them about Jesus.

Verse 23, Of this man's posterity, that's David's posterity, God has brought to Israel a saviour, Jesus as he promised.

So Paul is saying, up until Jesus, it looked like God was a failure. It looks like the old covenant had failed. His promises had failed.

But now in Jesus, you have a saviour. You have a king. You have a rescuer in the line of David. God promised this line would continue forever, and he has delivered on that promise.

[13 : 19] Jesus was a descendant of David, and he ascended as the true king of God's people. And so God has provided the perfect human leader that Israel always longed for.

And not only that, he says his name is Jesus. Now do you know what Jesus' name means? Do you know what it means in the original? Very important, because they would have known.

The name Jesus means, God saves. The name Jesus means, Yahweh saves. And so the point is, he's saying, finally, God has brought a Davidic king to rule and rescue, and he is God himself.

God has done, even greater than in the Exodus, God has finally brought a rescuer and a ruler. Now the people at the time may have thought, that's a bit rich, you know, how come we haven't heard about that?

If that's as big as you're claiming it is, you know, why wasn't, you know, why wasn't there someone to get us ready for that? And he says, well, there was. Verse 24 and 5, before his coming, John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

[14 : 31] So John actually did prepare the way, and they would have heard of John the Baptist because all Jerusalem and Judea went out to be baptized. That was big news in a way. And so news of that may have spread further than the news of Jesus himself.

And so he says, God did prepare the way. Then they may have asked Paul, well, why are you telling us this? Why don't we have people from Jerusalem coming to tell us that the Messiah has come?

The Saviour's come. And Paul has to explain, well, why are they there and not the priests from Jerusalem, not the leadership of Israel? And the answer, of course, is because they rejected him.

Verse 26, my brothers, you descendants of Abraham's family, others who fear God, to us, that is to Paul and Barnabas and his team, the message of this salvation has been sent.

They're the ones who have been given the message because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.

[15 : 36] So the people of Israel in the plan of God rejected their own Saviour, almost in a consummation of their history of turning their back on God. They turned their back on God himself when he came to save, fulfilling what was spoken by the prophets, even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed.

And when they carried out everything that was written about him, the big emphasis here on this is God's word fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection, when they did everything that God had written about him that would happen, they took him down from the tree, laid him in a tomb.

The reason that Paul and Barnabas as Christians are there preaching the gospel is because in the gospel Israel turned their back on their Messiah and he was the rejected, crucified king, risen from the dead.

Verse 30, But God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared, not to everyone, but to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem and they are now his witnesses to the people and we bring you the good news.

So the message is God has delivered on every old covenant promise. This is Paul's gospel and the reason that you don't hear it from Jerusalem is because they rejected him but we're the ones commissioned to tell you.

[17 : 00] And then in verse 32 which I think is the most important verse in this whole chapter, Paul tells you the essence of the gospel, of his gospel. We bring you the good news, so that's what gospel means, good news, that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus.

God had promised Israel a kingdom where they would bless the whole world, where they would receive forgiveness and glorify God in the world. And the good news of the gospel is that God has now fulfilled that.

he has delivered on that promise in the death and resurrection of Jesus. What makes the gospel good? That's an important question.

What do you think makes the gospel good news? For Paul, the goodness of the gospel is that it shows that God delivers on his promise.

God is a champion. God is not a failure but God is glorified and vindicated in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel is about the victory of God.

[18 : 13] The vindication of God is the keeper of his word. The gospel is about the victory of God's word. Now for Paul, the gospel and the Bible promises go together. Friends, this is so different I think to the way that we as Western consumers take the gospel as kind of this thing of goodies for me.

It's all about God's goodies for me in the gospel. But that's not what makes Paul's gospel good. It's not about the goodies for us. It's about shining forth the goodness and greatness of God.

The gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection shines forth the victory of our God. God has won over his enemies over sin, over the devil and over death in the gospel.

our God is mighty to save with an outstretched arm even more powerful than in the exodus from Egypt even more marvelously than that time.

Paul said we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled. So the goodness of the gospel is in the greatness of God is shown in the fulfillment of promise.

[19 : 25] It's not just about the goodies for us. Let me give some more examples of this from Paul's own writings in his epistles. He says the message of the cross is the foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved that's a goody it is the power of God.

That is the gospel saves us but also shines forth the power of God. It shows the glory of God. Or later in 1 Corinthians Paul says Jesus is your righteousness your sanctification and your redemption all the goodies in order that there are means to an end in order that let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

The purpose of the gospel is so that we can be saved to boast in the Lord our God who delivers on every promise our God who is not a failure our God who does not settle for second best or second place our God is a God who delivers on every promise.

Now this actually makes sense a lot of connections between the gospels and Paul's epistles that you might not otherwise see. So for example John the Baptist in Luke presents the gospel in this way this is his gospel he says God has his winnowing fork in his hand to clear the threshing floor to gather the wheat into his granary but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire and Luke says with many other words John proclaimed the gospel to them now how is that a gospel that God is going to get the wheat and burn the rest how is that good news that God's going to judge and burn it's good news because it vindicates the power and the glory and the holiness and the justice of God it's good news because some are rescued and some are judged and in both God is lifted up God reigns or if you want to go to an epistle

Paul says in Romans chapter 2 that a day is coming when according to my gospel God through Jesus will judge the secret thoughts of all and how is that a gospel God will judge it's a gospel because the goodness of the gospel is that God will reign God will be vindicated in judgment as well as salvation you see if the gospel was just all the goodies for me then that would not be a gospel that God judges but the gospel is actually that God saves and judges and he's glorified in both you see Paul and Jesus both copied their gospel from Isaiah Isaiah 52 says how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace who brings good news who brings a gospel and who announces salvation who says to Zion this is the gospel in Isaiah your God reigns you see that the gospel is about the reign and the glory of God that's why when Jesus arrives he can say the kingdom of God is near repent and believe the good news and you kind of think what's good about that what's good for me in that well it's because the gospel is about the goodness of God being shown not just about good good stuff for you and me

[22 : 52] Paul gives himself in this sermon three Old Testament examples firstly from Psalm 2 he says God is fulfilled by raising Jesus as is written in the second Psalm you are my son today I have begotten you that's good news because up until Jesus' resurrection Psalm 2 was a joke because Psalm 2 said that God's Davidic king would rule the world and clearly that was patently false people would taunt Jews about psalms like that it was so false but now in the resurrection of Jesus that psalm is true and God is vindicated or he quotes Isaiah 55 where God says to the Messiah I will give you the holy promises made to David now until Jesus no one had got the promises to David they were just basically broken they were a failure but in

Jesus all the promises to David that David's king would reign forever that would rule the nations that he would sit at the right hand of God all those are fulfilled now in Jesus' death and resurrection that's good news that God is true God reigns and lastly he quotes Psalm 16 you will not let your holy one experience corruption well of course all of God's kings had experienced corruption Paul says King David's in a tomb rotting away proving Psalm 16 is wrong proving that God can't do it and yet in the resurrection of Jesus we see that God can do it his holy one will not see decay so the good news of the gospel is that God's promises are fulfilled and God's glory is shown God is vindicated to be number one to be the champion of the world and after that Paul does offer the goodies he says in verse 38 let it be known to you therefore my brothers that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you by this

Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins that you could not be freed from under the law of Moses the law of Moses reminds us that we are sinners it sets forward a standard of righteous living that none of us have fulfilled and yet in the death and resurrection of Jesus we are freed from that because we are forgiven and we are set free from the law and in fact the Greek word Paul uses for set free is justified justified so he's moved from the kingdom of God into justification by faith he's saying in the kingdom of God coming in Jesus in the reign of God in the vindication of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus you can be justified by faith and so we see the kind of gospels and the epistles coming together for one gospel the victory friends is God is God's the victory is God's and we as it were are caught up as kind of

God's trophies to display God's power to save you and I as forgiven rescued people are God's trophies that show the gospel that show that God can deliver his promises to rescue and rule and lastly Paul closes with a warning a gospel warning of judgment and he quotes to them from Habakkuk Habakkuk 1 he says beware beware so all gospels should have a warning of judgment it's not just goodies it's about God's reign and he may reign in judgment so as a warning look you scoffers be amazed and perish for in your days I'm doing a work that you would never believe even if someone tells you you see Paul says either way you're going to be amazed by God all creation will be amazed by God on the day of judgment now you will either be as he says be amazed and perish that is the unbeliever will see the glory of Jesus on the day of judgment and think it's true he's Lord of Lords

King of Kings glorious and then Lord and then the Lord Jesus will judge or on the last day as God's glory will see his glory and enter into heaven forever to gaze on that glory and enjoy it forever either way friends every knee must bow everyone must marvel at God's greatness friends this is Paul's gospel it's the same as Jesus gospel the kingdom of God the vindication of God the fulfillment of the word of God of the promise of God the promise of salvation through the death of Jesus rescue through his resurrection warning of judgment through his ascension and his kingship this is a gospel that allows us to bridge the gospels and the epistles it's a gospel that allows us to say with confidence that the message hasn't changed we believe the same gospel as was preached from the beginning it's a gospel that says at the heart of God

[28 : 17] God's highest concern is himself is his own glory is the vindication of his own reputation we rightly pray thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever that's at the heart of the gospel the gospel is not all about us we are swept into the gospel by means of being trophies to display the forgiving power of God or the rescuing power of God but the gospel is about God and about the victory of God through Jesus that's why I think there's many false gospels today people say it's all about me I'm okay God's job is to forgive me that's all he'll do God won't hurt anyone God will bend the rules of the bible or bend the warnings of judgment there will be no hell I'm number one in God's agenda these are all lies these are all kind of self centred twistings of the gospel people see I think if you try and read the bible say friends if you approach the bible and try and read it as if it's all about you you'll quickly become very bored but if you read the bible looking to see and savour and taste the goodness and glory of

God you'll leave well fed I'm massively uncomfortable with the suggestion that God's greatest interest in the world is Wayne Shuler there's something inherently unbalanced about that for me one church I visited had a big sign in the meeting space like that one it said you are the gospel well that's a lie friends that's not Paul's gospel it's a much more beautiful thing to say that Wayne Shuler is a trophy to draw attention to the saving power of God which is God's own greatest interest I'd rather be in line with God's greatest interest than pretend he's interested in something that is just not right friends you too are called to be God's trophy with the whole world of the saving power of God and so gospel people ask how is God glorified in my life how is

God exalted do I enjoy God do I love to praise him do I love to read his word do I taste and see that the Lord is good how is the victory of God made known through me how is my life a trophy for the saving power of God you see friends this is the heart of assurance for us because how else could you be sure that God is going to forgive you how else could you be sure that God is going to keep his promises promises the answer is he has banked his own reputation on keeping those promises to you to rescue you and if God has banked his own reputation on it you know for his own glory he will deliver and rescue you and take you home with him God has risked his reputation on the promises of his word in Jesus in his death and resurrection we see that God can deliver on those promises we see

God's unstoppable passion for his own glory this is Jesus gospel this is Paul's gospel friends may it be your gospel too let us pray to him now Lord God we approach your throne of grace with confidence in the name of Jesus knowing your promises to us are good and you will keep them for your own glory sake Lord God we pray that we would in our lives display and show to the world you are trustworthy that you deliver on every promise that you are not a failure as the world says or implies that you are a great God who delivers and is a champion of salvation and a champion a holy God a just God and so Father we worship you and ask that you'll be honoured in our lives Amen Amen Amen Amen