

One Gospel

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] This is God's word. Please keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray for the Lord's help with it. Father, we do thank you for this, your word. We thank you for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We pray that you would remind us afresh of that glorious gospel now, that you would encourage us by your Spirit to hold fast to Jesus, forsaking all other things for his glory. Amen.

Amen. We have, I think, very recently witnessed history, because I think for the first time ever, the World Cup started three times in a single week.

Mercifully, for those of us in Scotland, it didn't end in the same week as well. That would have been pretty disheartening, wouldn't it? Of course, there was only one start to the World Cup, but this time around we were treated, if you can call it that, to three different opening ceremonies.

I wonder if any of you watched them all. Then you've got far too much time on your hands. But each of the three different countries hosting the World Cup, right, Mexico, the United States, and Canada, each of them held their own opening ceremony at the start of the first game in each of the countries.

[1 : 20] And when they're doing that, east of the host nations, aren't they, they're putting on a show. And the point is, I don't know what the whole point is, but part of what happens in these kind of shows is that the countries, they put on display what they want the world to see about their country.

They show off, don't they, their traditions, their heritage, their culture, their music. This is what we want to show you, worlds. You might be more familiar, perhaps, with the London Olympics opening ceremony.

It was a long time ago now, wasn't it? But it was full, wasn't it, of Britishness. Right, there was James Bond, there was Mr. Bean, there was the Queen, there was the NHS, there was the Industrial Revolution.

All over it, it was, at least in the eyes of the director, what Britain wanted the world to see.

Sometimes we see that kind of thing happening on a grand scale at these worldwide events.

It might impress us, it might not, but it is really, I think, just a blown-up version of something that is going on amongst us every single day. There are things in all of our lives, aren't there, that we want people to see, that we want people to think of when they see us.

[2 : 43] That things we have are things we've done, things we're proud of. You'll have grandparents, won't you, who are quick to pull out photos of their grandchildren. The bus driver says hello, and then comes, have you seen my grandchild?

You have kids, don't you get in their presence, they're excited to go and see their friends, what they got. Maybe even at work, if you've done a job well and poured lots of time into it. We often want someone to see what we've done, or at least acknowledge it.

But whether it's personal achievements or prized possessions, there are many things in life, aren't there, that we want to show people. We love to show each other lots of different things.

But there's coming a day when what you choose to show will be the biggest decision of your life, the biggest decision you'll ever make. We love to show each other lots of different things, but what is it that you hope to show God?

On the last day in history, there is a day coming when you and I will be standing before His judgment seat. But when your eternal destiny is in His hands, what are you going to show Him?

[4 : 07] What in your life are you going to point to and say, look at this? What is your answer going to be? Let me just give you a second to think about that.

On the last day, what do you plan on showing God that you might enter into eternal life? We won't go around the room, but let me just say this.

If your answer did not mention Jesus, you need Galatians. Because this short book in the Bible gives us a wonderfully clear presentation of the gospel.

Jesus Christ as our only hope in life and death. If your answer pointed to Jesus, but also pointed to some things you've done in your own life, then Galatians is a book written very directly to you.

Even if you're just pointing to one or two things you've done or not done, maybe you're thinking about going to church, praying, reading your Bible, taking communion, giving to charity.

[5 : 19] If you're wanting to show Jesus and even just one or two tiny little things in your life in order to be justified before God, Galatians is very much for you.

because as harmless as that might seem, it is an extremely dangerous place to be. If your answer was to point to Jesus and nothing but Jesus, to say only because of him and what he has done, that is good news.

but let me say Galatians is for you too because there is a seed of sinful pride in every one of our hearts that should we let it grow, we'll be very quick to want to take some of the credit for ourselves.

to show Jesus and even just a little something I've done. We need to guard against that and we always need to guard against that.

And we can do that by listening carefully to what this wonderful little book has to say to us. As I mentioned a moment ago, we're going to spend most of our Sunday evenings between now and the beginning of September in this letter and I trust it will be good for us all.

[6 : 45] Whatever category you were in with those answers, Galatians has something to teach you, to remind you of, to assure you of.

Whatever your answer was, Galatians is for you. As we begin this week, let's begin maybe with a very kind of brief bit of background in the letter before we think about those verses that we read a moment ago.

It was during Fort Paul's first missionary journey. There's a few missionary journeys that Paul's kind of recorded for us in the book of Acts. During the first of those, he traveled to various places in what is now kind of the southern part of modern Turkey.

Paul went around there preaching the gospel and planting churches. And it is to some of those churches that he is writing this letter to. They weren't ethnically Galatian, that the ethnic Galatians lived further north, but they did live in the Roman province of Galatia.

And so Paul kind of addresses them geographically rather than ethnically. That's okay, I think, isn't it? Even if there was no native Scots in the room here. An American would be okay when he's referring to us as the Scottish church.

[7 : 58] I don't think we'd put too much of a fight up against that. That is what Paul is doing here as he writes to the Galatian churches. So these are some of the first churches planted by Paul.

And it is likely that the first letter in the New Testament that he wrote. When Paul is penning these words, the New Testament church is still in its infancy.

But as young as the church was, as much as there still needed to be figured out, there was one thing that was never up for debate. And that was the gospel.

Here in Galatia were churches who had received the gospel Paul had preached. But at some point, at some point, some people had come and started persuading the Galatian churches of a slightly different gospel.

that maybe sounded a little more appealing because it was a gospel that gave the Galatians just a little bit of credit for their salvation.

[9 : 15] A gospel that said, why just show Jesus in the last day when you can show a little bit of what you've done as well? A gospel that gave rules and rituals alongside Jesus.

So the Galatian churches has something to show on top of Jesus. There is something appealing about that to people with a pride problem.

Which is every single one of us, isn't it? Something appealing about doing something for ourselves.

Now a couple of years ago, a report came out about the so-called quiet revival happening in the UK.

There was lots to be encouraged about in that. But one thing that came from it was a growing interest, a significantly growing interest, in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

In part, because of the appeal of former, formal ritual. It is still appealing today.

[10 : 24] to hear people say, what the Galatians were being appealed by then. To hear people say, you can do something. You can contribute to the salvation of your soul by taking part in the sacraments.

You can show God your baptism, your confirmation. You can show God that you took mass. You can point at them and say, look, look at the good I did. We love to show people what we've done. And so people coming and preaching something that sounds very like the gospel, very like the gospel, but just gives us a little something to show for ourselves, that can be very, very attractive. It might seem like a minor thing, but Paul writes this letter with such urgency. We've seen some of that language already.

Such urgency because what might seem minor could not in fact be any more dangerous. If you add anything onto Jesus, you lose Jesus.

[11 : 40] If you add anything onto him, you lose him. As Paul begins this letter, he does so by first reminding the Galatians what they have with the gospel of Jesus before warning them that there is no other gospel, there is no other way to salvation apart from this gospel, the one that Paul preached to them.

We've got two points this evening, they're very simple, the gospel of Jesus Christ, no other gospel. Let's begin with the first of those, the gospel of Jesus Christ. You only need to read, I think, four words, is it there?

Four words into Galatians before you feel the distinctive tone of this letter. Paul, an apostle not from man, not from man.

Immediately, we get a sense that Paul is pushing back against something here. He is an apostle not from man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.

We'll have that kind of statement authenticated over the next couple of Sunday evenings where Paul leaves us in no doubt about the source of his ministry and therefore his message. That is coming, but what we begin with is the question, I think, which will ultimately determine whether Paul's letter will achieve its purpose or not for them then and for us today.

[13 : 14] Because the question being put to us right at the beginning of this letter is very simply, who are you going to listen to? Are you going to listen to God or are you going to listen to man?

The answer might seem obvious, but what are you going to do when one of those sounds a bit more appealing, when one of those appeals to your pride?

Who are you going to listen to? Are we going to let God's word be the voice we are listening to? It's not always easy to hear. For the Galatians, some of these words would be very uncomfortable, but this is the voice we must listen to.

When God speaks, we must listen. And Paul starts here because he knows that there are other voices that the Galatian churches have started giving an audience to.

Got clever sounding arguments, persuasive people, attractive ideas. There is always another voice. Sometimes that voice can be very convincing, sometimes it can appear more appealing.

[14 : 23] why not have something to show for yourself? Wouldn't you be more confident in your salvation if you just topped it up with a little bit of your own obedience?

It might sound attractive, but it is from man. Paul comes with a gospel from God. And he comes with this gospel from God wanting what is best, not for him, but for the Galatians.

One thing you might be familiar with in Galatians is the strength of language Paul uses throughout. We've already seen his astonishment there towards the church in verse 6.

Later on in the letter, he'll call it with seeming exasperation, oh, foolish Galatians. He does use some pretty forceful language towards the Galatians, and we'll see why that is the case a little later on.

But we shouldn't let that distract us from his opening words to them in verse 3. And indeed, his closing words right at the end of chapter 6.

[15 : 29] What is the first word he says to them? Grace. Grace. Strong words of warning bookended by grace.

That says something about Paul's heart for these people. He wants what is good for them. Even if it means saying some uncomfortable things, he's taking the time to write this letter to them.

It also tells us something of his hope for these people. to know, to receive God's grace, his unmerited, unearned favor towards them.

That is a significant opening words to these churches. He wants them to have to know what God gives freely. Verse 4, grace from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who gave himself up for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of God. He lays down, doesn't he, the gospel in a nutshell.

[16:44] And it's one the Galatians needed to hear. Not because they didn't know it. They did know it. But because they were clearly quick to forget it. Wilma read it earlier for us from 1 Corinthians 15.

What is of first importance, the very heart of the gospel? Christ died for our sins to save us, to deliver us. He died for our sins and was raised from the dead so that we might be saved by grace. Like Paul, by grace we are what we are. just notice with me there the three kind of building blocks that come in each of those verses.

Verse 3, what do we earn? Nothing. We don't earn anything through our deeds. It is grace, a free gift of God. Verse 4, what is the gift? Salvation from sin, from every sin.

It's saved wholly and only through the freely given blood of Christ. not started off on the right path by Him, not kind of partially cleaned up leaving us to do the rest, no, completely saved from sin, every stain removed by the free gift of God.

[18:01] Verse 5, who gets the glory? God gets the glory because it is all of His doing. A total, complete salvation freely given by God all achieved through Christ's sacrifice so that God alone deserves the glory.

Now I hope if you've been coming to church for any length of time none of that is new to you. I trust that's the gospel you know. But let me ask, is it the gospel you live out?

Do you really appreciate that that has been freely given to you through faith in Christ? That there is nothing, nothing you do day to day that can add or take away from that salvation?

If you trust in Jesus this gift is freely given to you and your performance has no bearing on it. We'll learn later in the letter that there is fruit that should come from faith and if the fruit is missing we might have questions about the faith but the fruit does nothing for your standing before God. that depends solely on Jesus. What do we point to in the last day? What do we want to show God in our lives?

[19:39] We point at nothing in ourselves. Nothing we have done. Nothing we have. No amount of service is attended, no sacraments taken, no charity supported, no prayers offered.

We point only at Jesus and say because of him and only because of him.

And that is cause to praise God, isn't it? Not to pat ourselves on the back and say, good job, Donald. You did the best.

no praise be to God. Does God get the glory for your salvation in your life? But perhaps maybe that's the most helpful measure of where we are in this question.

If we think we are doing something, anything to keep ourselves in his good books, we will probably be slow to praise him and quick to measure our performance. understand that this is the most wonderful gift freely given to those who have done nothing to earn it and we will be quick, won't we?

[20:57] Not to look at our performance, but to praise him. In one sense, Paul is giving a somewhat customary greeting at the start of this letter, but his greeting is laden with the gospel, that the Galatians and we here today desperately need to be reminded of.

Reminded of the one gospel of Jesus Christ. I trust it is not new news to many of us here this evening, but that does not make it any less good news, does it?

We never move on from the heart of the gospel. Or perhaps better to say, we never should move on from the heart of the gospel. But that is exactly what the churches in Galatia had begun to do.

Second point this evening, no other gospel. They had started with the gospel, Paul had come and preached, Christ crucified to them, they had put their faith in the risen Lord Jesus.

The heart of the gospel that we have just been reminded of, that was their gospel. But it did not take long for another gospel to take hold. Verse 6, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

[22:30] As we noted earlier, some people or somebody had come amongst the Galatian churches and had started preaching a slightly different gospel. people, that they weren't bringing in different gods, but they were doing something just as dangerous.

They were, see the language there at the end of verse 7, they were distorting the gospel of Christ, adding just one or two extra little requirements, some icing on the cake, just to finish the job off.

But here's the thing, any distortion of the gospel of Christ is no gospel at all. A distorted gospel won't be quite helpful as opposed to very helpful, it will be of no use whatsoever.

It's like that kind of category of media that's surfaced over the last few years, fake news. It's news, or at least that's how it presents itself, but the content betrays it, doesn't it? It's not news at all.

Once you bend the truth, it doesn't become a different version of the truth, it just ceases to be the truth. So too with these other gospels that were troubling the Galatian church.

[23 : 43] They weren't other versions of the gospel, they simply aren't the gospel. Because the gospel is salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

But here were people removing the word alone. grace, yes, absolutely. Faith, definitely.

Jesus, without a doubt. Oh, but one other thing. They were preaching a faith plus gospel.

But Paul's point in this letter is that there is no such thing as a faith plus gospel, gospel. Because faith plus is not faith at all.

Sometimes there will be occasion in our house to measure something. Usually, see if a bit of furniture will fit in a certain space. The answer is usually no. But out comes the measuring tape. My wife, Mary, she goes to measure something.

[24 : 55] She comes back and tells me, it's, I don't know, 85 centimeters. What happens next? I pick up the measuring tape. I watch the room that she's just come from and I start pulling out the measuring tape to measure exactly the same thing.

Pretty sure husbands in the room know what I'm talking about. And as I'm going out, right, this voice is calling to me, don't you trust me? To which I'll say something like, yes, of course I trust you.

I just wanted to make sure. Here's the question. Am I trusting my wife in those moments? Do I have complete faith in her?

My words say yes. My actions say no. My actions say I don't trust you to have done a good enough job.

I think I need to go and make doubly certain of this myself. It's harmless enough in the DIY department. I've got a very patient wife.

[26 : 10] It's mortally dangerous for our souls. That is the gospel the Galatians were sliding into. one that verbally professed faith in Jesus.

Of course I have faith in him. Of course I trust him. But actions that showed otherwise. What you've done, Jesus, it's good, it's great, faith in But I just want to make doubly sure.

I just want to go back and measure it myself. I just want to go and do a few things just to round off the edges. things just need to make sure of my own salvation.

That if you add anything onto Christ, you lose Christ. Because it is through faith that we are saved.

Trust, absolute trust, complete confidence. confidence. And if we add anything on to what Christ says is a fully saving work that he has done, we are saying, aren't we, I don't trust you.

[27 : 21] I don't completely trust you. This was not a minor theological error. This is a matter of life and death.

Paul, as we mentioned, uses some pretty strong language throughout this letter, but this is why. The situation the Galatians have put themselves in is one of such grave danger that forceful language is needed.

Their salvation is on the line. If you see someone walking into mortal danger, you don't kind of, if they're stepping out in front of a bus, you don't kind of lightly invite them, would you like to come back to the pavement?

No, you shout at them, don't you? You shout that they would stop and turn around to safety. Paul loves this church, but they are putting themselves in way of most serious harm.

Urgent warning is required because any gospel other than salvation through faith alone in Christ alone is no gospel at all, so much that Paul goes on to say, verse 8, even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

[28 : 42] As we've said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. And this is strong language, isn't it?

But it is entirely justified by the severity of the situation. We're not far removed, are we, from a pandemic?

COVID was not good, was it? But imagine if it was much worse. Everyone who caught it had a year left to live. And it had spread everywhere.

In that pandemic, right, imagine that two vaccines are produced, one cures, one doesn't. But those who have a financial interest in the latter, even though it doesn't work, they go all out on the advertising campaign.

They lobby the politicians, they persuade the public, they slander the other vaccine, it doesn't work, they say it's dangerous. They do everything they can to get people to take their vaccine instead of the one that will actually save people's lives.

[29 : 55] How would you feel about such people? What would you think of them? How would you respond to those being persuaded by them?

We would be, wouldn't we, rightly furious, enraged, if we saw someone doing something like that with people's very short lives here and now.

how much more so towards those who turn people away from the only hope in life and death?

These people are preaching a distorted gospel that is no gospel at all. They are convincing people to turn away from the life-saving gospel and embrace a gospel that leads to certain death.

Let them be accursed. It is strong language, but it is entirely justified, isn't it?

[31 : 08] The gospel of Jesus Christ cannot, must not be distorted. it. And if you're here, anyone, anyone at all, even someone from this pulpit, even myself, preach any other gospel, pay no attention.

Let them be accursed. Because there is no other gospel. There is no other gospel and there need not be another gospel.

Because the one gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest news there can ever be. As we go through this book together, we will let hope see how empty any false gospel is and just how wonderful the true gospel is.

What a freeing gospel it is. Freed from the fear of not doing enough. Have I done well enough today, this week, this year, through my life?

Freed from that uncertainty. Freed to live for others. Not worried about our own standing before God. There's a false gospel which preaches love of neighbor for the sake of salvation of self.

[32 : 35] That is not the one true gospel. This gospel frees us completely from having to live for ourselves in any way because every one, every one of our sins has been forgiven through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we point to him and him alone, God sees his righteousness on us. There is nothing we could ever possibly do to improve our standing before him.

in Jesus and in Jesus alone, we have it all. And there is nothing we can have. I hope you can rest in that this evening.

I hope you can go home tonight and praise God. Whatever kind of week you've had, maybe you've messed up this week and are wondering how you do stand before him.

Whatever you've done or left undone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, you stand fully forgiven before God.

[33 : 47] I hope you can rest in the amazing grace we sung of this morning, knowing that God has freely given you his son and saved you from your sin through him. There is only one gospel, the one gospel of Jesus Christ and it is the most glorious, most freeing gospel of all.

Before I pray, I'm just going to read a quote from Martin Luther, the 16th century reformer, which I think encapsulates so much we've been thinking about this evening, and I hope these are words we can take upon our own lips.

He says, I do not seek my own act of righteousness. I ought to have and perform it, but I declare that even if I did have and perform it, I cannot trust in it or stand before the judgment of God on the basis of it.

Thus, I embrace only the righteousness of Christ, which we do not perform, but receive, which we do not have, but accept when God the Father grants it to us through Jesus Christ.

Let's pray that those words would be true of us. Father, we thank you for the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, that by your grace alone, through the gift of faith alone, we are saved by Christ alone.

[35 : 24] Help us to rest in that gospel, to defend and protect that gospel from error in others and in ourselves. Help us to know the joy of it, able to rest assured that there is nothing we could ever do to add to it in any way.

We pray that you would protect us from error. May we never depart from this one true gospel. For any that have, we pray that you would grant your grace to bring them back, all so that you might

receive all the glory.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.