

Not Man's Gospel

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: 21 June 2026

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Two blokes in a white van pull up in a little town just off the main road.! They park in the town square and they get out and they go straight to the synagogue where they sit down.

! Somebody comes to ask them, do you have anything to say? Yes, they say. And they start to explain that they've come to town to dig a foundation for a brand new house.

It's not a kind of house that's been seen before. See, its foundation is cross-shaped. They want to dig a very deep foundation, make it so that it lasts, and then they'll start building on it.

Who's going to pay for it? It's already been paid for, they say. Well, what's it for? Well, it's for any kind of person to come and live in.

See, it's a home for a brand new family made up of anyone who wants to build their life on the cross. Ah, they say, so the rent will cover the cost of the building.

[1 : 12] No, the people will live there completely free. The only requirement is that they believe in the architect and trust in the foundation. So what's the catch?

No catch. We're just here to build a cross-shaped house for a cross-shaped family to live in. And so they did.

The white van pulled up in town after town, and the two men laid cross-shaped foundations to build cross-shaped houses for cross-shaped families to live in.

And at first, it was great. Some people in the town didn't like the new house or the family who had lived there. But everyone who moved in found their lives filled with joy and comfort and freedom.

They were from really different backgrounds and walks of life, but discovered that once they planted their feet on the cross, they could love and serve each other as a family. But a few years later, another posher van pulls up in town.

[2 : 20] The sign on the side says, God's Own Building Contractors Limited, established 1400 BC, family trade for 50 generations best in the business.

The guys get out and start walking around the cross-shaped building, muttering to each other, making notes. They get their fancy equipment out of the back and start measuring this door, testing this wall.

What are you doing? Asked the cross-shaped family. Who threw this thing up, they say? Absolute cowboys. Well, Paul and Barnabas, say the family.

The guys in the van shake their heads. They think they can turn up in a place like this and build something newfangled like this house. It's irresponsible. They've got no business doing that.

Look at this. This door is far too wide. Anyone could get in here. And this foundation, well, it's deep and strong, but it's completely the wrong shape. No, it should be shaped nice and square like a rule book with some rough edges and some hard corners.

[3 : 28] And every room in the place is exactly the same. Where's the luxury suite for the high-paying customers? You know, the people who really put the effort in. There's no gym. There's no office.

There's no factory. Where are people meant to work up a sweat? All this rest, this peace, this freedom, it just encourages laziness.

Everyone's got to earn their keep in a place like this. Listen, they say, we know what we're talking about. We've been in this business for a thousand and a half years.

We know what a house like this is meant to look like. Don't pay any attention to those jokers in the white van. They've set you up on the wrong foundation.

But don't worry. We can fix that. On they go up the road, saying the same thing to every cross-shaped family in every town that they pass.

[4 : 26] Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derby. Now, here's the question. Which man in which van would you listen to?

The guys from the prestigious, well-known family building company, or two blokes who go about seemingly on their own with an apparently untested new model.

That's the crisis that these Christians are in as Paul writes this letter to them in the province of Galatia. They were some of the very first people that Paul had preached the gospel to in the very first churches that he'd planted.

You can meet them in Acts chapters 13 and 14. But within a few years, another set of teachers have turned up with another gospel, so to speak, which the Galatian churches have begun to believe instead.

And as we just heard in our reading, Paul hardly disguises his feelings. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel.

[5 : 38] He goes on to call it a distortion of the gospel, and contrary to the gospel he taught them. The churches think, these guys who have come in there renovating, improving the house that Paul built, Paul says, no, they are wrecking it.

They are tearing it down. And it's clear that part of the reason these Christians have listened to the new teachers is because they've lost confidence in Paul and his gospel.

No doubt the false teachers were telling them something like this. This, Paul, he's just some random with some crazy ideas. After all, God has been speaking for centuries, and we're telling you what he's always said, how he's always taught his people to live.

Paul's message, that's only been doing the round for the last couple of decades, right? Who are you going to believe? Paul is a man sent by men with a gospel invented by men.

To that accusation, Paul says in our passage tonight, verse 11, for I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

[6 : 55] That building project that I came with, that cross-shaped one, that's no human invention, no human design. That is God's building project, what God is doing in the world.

That's what I came to do, he says. Now let me prove it to you. And that's what our passage tonight and our passage next Sunday night are about, the credibility of Paul's message.

Should we believe the gospel that Paul preached? And that question is as relevant today, isn't it, as it ever has been.

Whether people we know quizzing us about why we believe in Jesus, and maybe we feel we don't really have much to say. What does my faith rest on?

Is it credible? Or maybe for some of us in our own hearts, we wonder at times, is this right? Have I got the right message?

[8 : 00] Can I build my life on this gospel? Will it carry the weight of everything I carry? Every decision I make?

Every struggle I have? Every temptation? Can I rest the whole weight of my life on this message? Or Paul gives us two big reasons to trust his message about Jesus tonight.

Then he gives us even more next week. So how do we know that Paul's message is not man's gospel? Firstly, he says, because of an unexpected change.

An unexpected change. If you've been keeping up with the World Cup, I'm not usually a football fan, but it's on and it's free, so it's great. You'll have seen a few upsets along the way.

The keeper for Cape Verde seems to have achieved overnight fame by holding Spain to a 0-0 draw. Brazil and Portugal and Holland all drew their opening matches.

[9 : 04] One of the phrases you'll probably hear if you've got the football on then is, against the run of play. Against the run of play is a phrase that commentators like to use when one team is absolutely dominating the game and the opposition looks like they've got absolutely no chance of scoring.

And then out of the blue, they get a chance, they put it in the net, and they've scored against the run of play. Unexpected. Well, Paul's point in verses 11 to 16 essentially is that his gospel is credible because he became a gospel preacher against the run of play.

For verse 11, I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not man's gospel, for I didn't receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

For you've heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. Christian writer C.S. Lewis famously called himself the most reluctant convert in all England.

I think the title for the most reluctant convert in world history, though, actually goes to the man who wrote this letter, the Apostle Paul. If we've read much of our New Testament, we're probably used to thinking about Paul as, you know, the seasoned apostle, the letter writer.

[10:32] But to get a sense of just how surprising and shocking this change was at the time, listen to how the church reacted. Acts 9 verse 26, when Paul comes to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

Seeing Paul walk into church would be like seeing tonight members of the Taliban or Al-Shabaab walk in and say, we'd like to get baptized, please, and take communion.

What would be our instant reaction? You kill Christians. You burn churches. You kidnap women and children from Christian families.

You're here to hurt us. That was the church's reaction to Paul when he walked in for the first time. He struck fear into their hearts because he persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

That's this man. And he had no good reason to stop. He was on the fast track, he says, to celebrity in the Jewish world. Verse 14, I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people.

[11:57] So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. You know, if anyone ever knew how to build a house like God's own building contractors limited 1,400 years in the business, it was Paul.

No one was ever more pedantic about following the blueprints or particular about the snagging. He'd build you the best rule-keeping house you'd ever seen. I think there's even a little dig maybe in there at the guys who are troubling the churches because Paul says he was advancing in Judaism beyond many my own age.

Who is he talking about? Well, possibly the very guys who are now undoing his good work in Galatia. He used to sit in class with him as kids. They'll tell you I don't know what I'm talking about, he's saying, but I used to wipe the floor with them in our Jewish law exams.

I was so extremely zealous for the traditions of our fathers. So if this was a football match, team Jewish rules and traditions look like they can't lose, right?

Team Jewish rules and traditions was absolutely dominating and driving this game. But, against the run of play, verse 15, but, when he who had set me apart before I was born, who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

[13:36] Wait, what? What? Where did that come from? How? Why? Against the run of play, God revealed Christ to Paul and flipped the whole game on its head.

We read how that happened in Acts 9. As he went on his way and approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, who are you, Lord? He said, I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. Paul's not just talking there about a private, inward revelation, is he?

Like a realization in his own head, something that only he could really know how it happened and couldn't really be verified. No, he's talking about riding down the road and a firework exploding in his face.

We're told the people who were with him could even hear the voice of the Lord as he spoke to Paul. This was no gradual process of reasoning or a change of heart over time.

[14:45] It was a public, audible, blinding revelation from God. And the result of that revelation is that in a single day, overnight, Paul went from breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord to proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues and saying, he is the son of God.

Now I defy you to name a single example of a bigger or less expected change that has ever occurred in the history of the world than Paul the persecutor to Paul the preacher.

There are instances which may become close. Maybe you have heard of the story about when ISIS was in its kind of dominance, 2015 in Libya, and 20 Christians, professing Christians, members of a church, were taken and knelt down and beheaded.

With them was one other man, a migrant worker from Ghana, who could have walked away that day with his life, forgotten all about it, never said a word.

As he saw the faith of the 20 Christians kneeling on the floor, losing their lives for the sake of Christ, he said, their God is my God.

[16:17] I am a Christian. And he was taken and knelt down beside them and killed. He had nothing on earth to gain from doing that, but instead he found in that moment he could not confess Christ to be his Lord.

Many of us here have undergone that change of heart too, not under such drastic circumstances, often over a longer period of time. And yet if our faith is in Jesus tonight, we can say, no less than Paul, that he who loved us from before the beginning of the world, in time called us to himself by his grace when he revealed his son to us as the Messiah, our only savior, and we rested our faith in him.

It's a glorious, glorious testimony that we tonight share with Paul and every Christian since then.

Whoever you are here tonight, you too can share that testimony with us.

That invitation is there. But that doesn't mean, does it, that we share Paul's experience. We're not to expect that a normal conversion to Christianity will involve blinding lights and hearing Jesus' voice audibly.

In fact, Paul's whole point here is that what happened to him was unique. God had chosen Paul specifically for a special job, verse 16.

[17:49] He was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles. The risen Lord Jesus visibly and audibly revealed himself to Paul because Paul was to carry his gospel to the ends of the earth.

It is as much Paul's commission as it is his conversion. That language of being set apart from the womb actually echoes the call of Jeremiah the prophet, Jeremiah chapter 1.

Before I formed you in the womb, says the Lord, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you and appointed you a prophet to the nations. So Paul, like Jeremiah, was specifically set apart by God to proclaim his message to the world.

And so Paul's point here is that the message that he preached is therefore trustworthy and credible and authentic because it comes from Jesus directly, God revealing Christ to him for him to proclaim.

And so if you're here tonight exploring Christianity, you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, you're intrigued, you want to know more, one question that you need an answer for is this, how else do you explain the change in Paul from persecutor to preacher?

[19:19] If he didn't meet the risen Lord Jesus on the road that day, what was it that made him give up his whole life, his heritage, his celebrity, his potential, his fame, his studies, everything, and start preaching the faith that he once tried to destroy?

As Paul says himself, his encounter with the Lord Jesus is well documented, it's backed up by the history and acts, a change this unexpected demands an explanation. And if it's not this, then what is it?

Perhaps you would say that you are a Christian, but you're not really a Paul kind of person. You know, you're kind of simple, back to Jesus, back to basics, no frills.

You know, Paul, that stuff just comes later, it's a bit complicated, it's a bit controversial, you know, I'm just a red letter Christian. Friends, Paul is saying the only reason he had to say what he said is because Jesus himself sent him to preach it.

He's an apostle, verse one, not from man or through men, but through Jesus Christ. So the gospel preached by him is not man's gospel, but a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[20:38] And so if I can put it like this, the Jesus of the gospels would say that we haven't grasped the whole of him if we haven't believed Paul who he sent to proclaim him to the world for us.

Paul is Jesus official spokesperson to the non-Jewish world. And so brothers and sisters, trust him, listen to him, come build your life on the cross-shaped foundation laid by Paul in the church for the cross-shaped family of Jesus to come and make a home in.

We can do that confidently because of the unexpected change that God made in Paul's life. And secondly, we can believe Paul's message, he says, because he's an untaught apostle.

Just read in with me from verse 15, but when he who'd set me apart before I was born called me by his grace and was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I didn't immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were

apostles before me, but went away to Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

Now, we might think that's quite an odd argument that we should believe Paul because he didn't check what he was saying with anyone for over three years. On Tuesday afternoon, I had the great privilege of seeing Joe and Pauline graduate from the Ministry Training Academy.

[22 : 18] It was a lovely service and a really fitting way to mark the end of two years of really hard work and study. But does their two years of study at MTA therefore discredit anything that they might now say about the Bible because they consulted with others and learned from church leaders?

They better not because Joe's preaching next Sunday. I studied for three years at our seminary in Edinburgh, ETS. Would those three years have been better spent doing itinerant preaching around Saudi and Syria?

Is Paul actually saying you're a more credible teacher if you haven't been taught? Well, no. He's not saying that and we know that because in our passage next time in chapter 2, he says he later did check his teaching with the apostles to make sure he says, I wasn't running or hadn't run in vain.

So Paul's not one of those teachers who says that, you know, God has spoken to me and God's told me something secretive. You know, the Spirit has told me.

If Paul heard a preacher say that, he would say, oh, that's funny. If it's so important God wanted you to know it, then I wonder why he didn't tell anyone else. Even Paul checked his working with the apostles, with the witness of the rest of the New Testament, but that came later.

[23 : 42] His point here is that for a long time, about 14 years, he was getting on with preaching the message that he'd been taught by Jesus and no one else, and yet that message meshed perfectly with what the original churches in Jerusalem and Judea were teaching and believing at the same time.

See that? He says he didn't compare notes with the other apostles. He didn't even take the opportunity while he was with Peter and James in Jerusalem. If he had, think how easy it would be to discredit Paul by saying, okay, he had an unusual experience, but he got the interpretation of that experience from the apostles, you must have seen the risen Lord Jesus.

No, he says, I know what I saw and heard. I don't need anyone to tell me that it was Jesus and he gave me this gospel. Nor did he visit any churches in Judea, which is the kind of region in which the gospel first goes out from Jerusalem, and yet, verse 23, those churches were hearing it said, he who used to persecute us is now preaching, what?

The faith he once tried to destroy. See that? What are they saying? Unbeknownst to Paul, he's not been there, the original Jewish churches were getting wind of what he was preaching and recognized it as their same faith, the very faith that Paul had fought so hard against, a genuine gospel message.

And so, they were able to glorify God because of Paul and his preaching. Evolutionary biologists are interested in this kind of thing, when two species or animals in totally different parts of the world appear to have very similar or identical bodies and behaviors, they call it parallelism, different, and they're interested in trying to work out how these separate organisms that don't seem to be related in any way look so similar.

[25 : 54] And so, they'll talk about kind of distant shared ancestry or similar ecosystems or the separation of tectonic plates or what they call convergent evolution, which to me sounds like they don't really know what it is, but here's a word for it.

I guess Christians over time have offered a theistic explanation of that, originating in God's design and creation. The point is simply that when two things look so strikingly similar but aren't obviously related, it calls for an explanation.

How is it that Paul is able to preach a gospel that the churches in Judea can rejoice in when he hasn't learned it from the apostles or even been part of one of the original churches?

Paul's preaching isn't kind of descended from the other apostles. He didn't learn it from Peter or James or the others, yet it is parallel to their preaching, aligned with it.

So how? Well, Paul's answer is they share a common origin. His claim is that the same Jesus who taught Peter and James and John and the others in his ministry on earth appeared to Paul in his resurrection glory and taught him the same gospel, which he summarizes like this in Acts chapter 26.

[27 : 21] I stand here, he says, testifying to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to both our people and the Gentiles.

Paul didn't learn that at church or seminary, he learned it from Jesus himself. That's why his gospel is the same gospel as Peter and James are preaching, even though they'd never spoken.

They share this common origin in Christ himself and his revelation. That's what makes Paul a legit apostle, and his message, therefore, God's message.

Now, as interesting as all of that is, you might be wondering, how does that help us? It all seems a bit remote. These things happened 2,000 years ago. How does that equip me to face the coming week?

Well, I think Paul wants the church to get two things from this. One is his big aim throughout the whole letter, that we're going to kind of loop back to you probably time and time again, and one is more specific to these verses.

[28 : 42] His big aim in this letter is to convince the churches in Galatia to settle back into the gospel he preached to them, to feel at home again in the cross-shaped house, and evict these non-gospel teachers who were there to unsettle them and are messing around with the foundation of their Christian life.

And so as we go into this new week, brothers and sisters, one point that I hope we hear often through our series in Galatians is relax. Relax.

Relax into the truth that you know about Jesus. Rest in the gospel. Know the peace that comes from the truth of knowing what God has said, and let no one disturb you or unsettle you from that truth, that simple truth that Jesus Christ suffered, died, rose again, and forgiveness of sins has been preached in his name.

Cling to that simple gospel. The truth you believe in about Jesus Christ is the same as what Paul preached in the beginning is the same as what he was taught by Jesus to say.

It comes with an authenticity and an authority from God that means that you do not have to stress, do not have to worry, that there's something that needs to be added or adjusted or tweaked, that there's a question that someone's going to ask you that you don't have the answer for, that there's something over here that you've never heard of before that unravels the whole thing.

[30 : 32] You know, brothers and sisters, be at home in the cross shaped house, relax back into the gospel and let no one unsettle you from it.

And more specifically tonight, let us glorify God because of what we have read and heard, like the churches in Judea, because Paul preached the faith he's once tried to destroy.

It is a glorious, glorious gospel that comes from God himself. It is not a human invention. Who could come up with the gospel? And even if they had, how could it have had the effect and the impact that it has had through world history?

How could a man-made gospel have turned Paul's life around? And so let us glorify God for this gospel. Paul is clear that we're not to finish up by saying, thank you, Paul.

We're not to finish by saying, thank you, Peter, or thank you, church, for the gospel. But thank you, God, our Father, for revealing your Son, Jesus Christ, to Paul so that he would proclaim him throughout the world.

[31 : 45] Thank you, Lord Jesus, for having suffered, died, and risen again to shed the light of God onto our hearts. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for breathing out and protecting and preserving that gospel for us to read and know and preach and believe on today.

Thank you, triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, for the gospel that you sent out so long ago through the apostles, which we stand on and rest in today, that is alone, able to save all those who believe. Brothers and sisters, let us glorify God for the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Let's do that as we pray and then as we sing together.

Amen. Our Father, we glorify you, we thank you so much that it was your will that we would be forgiven our sins and delivered from the present evil age through the redeeming work of your Son, Jesus.

Jesus, we thank you so much, our Father, that you revealed your Son, Jesus, to Paul on the road to Damascus. And Lord, though that experience is not ours, yet that testimony is, because you gave Paul the gospel to preach to us that we might believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

[33 : 23] And Lord, we know you believe in him, that resurrection power in us from death to life, from sin to you. And so, Father, we pray that we would always glorify and rejoice in you for it. We pray, Lord, for those of us who struggle with doubt and with confidence in the gospel. Father, we pray that you would assure our hearts that what you say is true about your Son. Help us to believe when we struggle to, Lord. And Father, we pray for those who as yet do not believe. And we pray that the credibility of the gospel might take down objections, barriers to belief. Or we pray that we might be those who are able to give an answer to those who ask us about the hope that we have. These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.