

Intro: Thoughts on the Club; Christ building his church... It's wholly appropriate that we would be starting a series on the Sufficiency and Power of the Gospel on this Sunday... The book of Galatians is all about the gospel.

“No Other Gospel” Galatians 1:1-10

There are few books in the Bible that hammer home the nature and significance of the gospel like Galatians. What we are going to find in the opening verses and in the book as a whole is this:

The Point: Because the gospel is an inestimable treasure, we should be passionate for its purity.

I. Understand the gospel is the good news of God's rescue mission through Jesus (1:1-5).

Read 1-5: Introductory Matter

- **The author: “Paul, an apostle—not from men . . .”** & all the brothers who are with me...
 - We find in the book of Acts that there was a man named Saul who persecuted Christians, even approving of their death. Paul was a self-described “blasphemer, insolent opponent and destroyer of the faith.” All of that was true, until he met Jesus on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians.
 - We will cover this in much greater detail next week, but what you need to know is that Jesus flipped Saul's world upside down, saved him, and sent him out to bear witness to his resurrection and the life all may receive through him.
 - So, when Paul says, “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead,” he means it, 1000%!
 - He was called by Jesus and commissioned by the Risen Christ. This made him an apostle, on par with Peter, James, John, and all the other apostles.
 - His apostolic authority meant he carried divine authority. Paul had to defend his credentials and apostleship because, as we will see, there were false teachers who were attacking Paul's authority and more importantly, attacking Paul's gospel.
 - This is the primary reason Paul penned this letter, which most scholars believe was written around AD50, less than 20 years after the death of Jesus.

- **The Recipients:**
 - He is writing to **“the churches of Galatia...”**
 - There are *two major views* on who the recipients of the letter were: the churches of Northern Galatia, or the churches of Southern Galatia...
 - I side with a majority of scholars today that Paul is writing to the churches of Southern Galatia. Acts 13 & 14 tell us Paul took the gospel to the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, all in Southern Galatia on the first of his three missionary journeys
 - So there were smaller, local churches in the larger region of Galatia, which is why Paul can refer to “the church of God” (in 1:13), as in the universal church (all Christians, in all places, in all times), and he can also refer to the churches of Galatia, as in individual local churches. This points to the wisdom of not simply belonging to the universal church of all Christians, but also joining a local church to live out your faith and the mission of God (church membership).
 - If you want to be encouraged about the spread of the gospel, go read Acts. We want to emulate this today. So we are not simply trying to start a church in Medford, but we want to see churches spread all over greater Boston and to the world. That's why we are supporting and starting a CG in Charlestown. That's why we are praying and providing encouragement for new works in Newton & Stoneham. That's why we are supporting and praying for a new church that launches today! in Toronto, CA. That's why Jon & Navin spent three days in

Raleigh, to meet with our new global partnership in India, brainstorming on ways we can be a part of God's global mission there.

- Why is this so important? Because the gospel is so important and that is what Paul unpacks beginning in v. 3
- There are some key themes Paul traces throughout Galatians... Contrasts: law vs. grace; works vs. faith; flesh vs. spirit; bondage vs. freedom; slave vs. son. In every case, each of these contrasting themes help us understand the gospel in a fuller sense. What is the message of the gospel? He tells us in v. 3ff

The Message of the Gospel

- **"Jesus"**

- The eternal Son of God became man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He was born of the virgin Mary in a little town called Bethlehem.
- He grew up as the son of a carpenter, learned how to swing a hammer, and did not launch his public ministry until he was around the age of 30. From that point he began preaching the good news of the kingdom: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Gospel of Luke).
- Mighty in word & deed... His greatest deed happened on the final day of his life and that's what Paul explains with the next words where he says, "Jesus . . ."

- **"gave himself"**

- The mission of Jesus culminated in his death on the cross. He was, in the truest sense, born to die. "No one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord..." (John 10:18) Listen to these powerful words from my man **Octavius Winslow**: **"When he could give you no more—and the fathomless depths of his love, and the boundless resources of his grace, would not be satisfied by giving you less—he gave you *himself*. Robed in your nature, laden with your curse, oppressed with your sorrows, wounded for your transgressions, and slain for your sins, he gave his entire self for you."**

- **"for our sins..."**

- Original Sin. We are born sinners. We sin because we are sinful. Just go upstairs to Bus & Subway 1. We want our own way. We fail to keep God's standards, and if you would say, "Well, I don't really care about God's standards so you can use that against me." Fine. You can't keep your own standards. Something is broken within us!
- We are proud. We want what rightfully belongs to others. We tear others down and delight in doing so. We love the ephemeral. We rob God of his glory . . .
- We are in deep trouble. . . We need to be delivered. And that is why Jesus came.

- **"To deliver us from the present evil age,"**

- The word "deliver" can also be translated "rescued."
- Pic: Tim Keller says, "If someone is drowning at sea, we don't throw them a manual on how to win, we throw them a rope!" . . . "Other founders of religions came to teach, not to rescue."
- Sure, Jesus was absolutely a great teacher, the greatest, but he was more than that. He is the rescuer.
- You see, apart from grace, we are completely helpless... this is where our sin leaves us. We see the pages of Scripture describing our unconverted state with words like: helpless, blind, lost, and dead. We need rescue and this is why Jesus gave it all on the cross. All of this was...

- **"according to the will of our God and Father."**

- So, the ultimate purpose behind the death of Jesus was not simply the Jewish leaders. It was not simply the Roman authorities... It was not simply the willingness of Jesus to lay his life down...
- It was also, and ultimately, the will of the Father to accomplish the redemption of the world.
- Isaiah 53:10 says, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him." This is why he was bruised for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities as verse 5 of Isaiah 53 tells us.
- Jesus and the Father are one. Their heart was one in the sacrificial death of Christ.

Is this not enough to move you to tears? The gospel is rich, free, and incomprehensibly astounding. When we grasp the gospel, it should cause us to stagger. Matt Carter pastors the Austin Stone in Austin, TX. When he interviews church planter candidates, the last question he always asks is this: **When is the last time the gospel made you weep?**

Trans: When we truly understand the gospel it will move us to weep, and it will move us to worship.

- **“to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”**
 - We saw this last week with Romans 11:33-36. It is very hard for Paul, almost impossible, to unpack the gospel and not erupt into praise. We praise that which we love. We promote that which we are passionate about, and there was nothing Paul loved or was more passionate about than the gospel.
 - God’s work for us is the greatest reality in the world and should be treated as such. That is why we see such a stark transition in vv. 6-9. “I am astonished...”

Trans: We need to not only understand the gospel is the good news of God’s rescue mission through Jesus, but #2 because the gospel is that good, that momentous (wc) we should . . .

II. Be consumed with an indestructible passion for the purity of the gospel (1:6-10).

Did you notice how Paul tied the gospel and the glory of God together in verses 3-5? This is why Paul was so passionate... because the glory of God was at stake. “If you mess with the gospel, you are messing with the glory of God.” – Danny Akin

- This is why Paul was provoked in Athens (Acts 17:16).
- Similarly, in verse 6, he is absolutely astonished, surprised, shocked, that these Galatians who had heard and responded to the gospel, are now, as he says in v. 6 “deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to another gospel.”
- The word “turning” carries the idea of transferring allegiance. I know Paul sounds strong here, but when the gospel is at stake, frank and honest conversations are the most loving thing we could do!

Paul is so upset because false teachers were coming in and troubling the Galatians by “distorting the gospel.”

- The astute reader of the NT will notice that this is the only letter of Paul where he does not give his customary remarks of thanksgiving for his readers. Usually the flow of Paul’s letters go: Greeting, word of thanksgiving, and then the body of the letter.
- This time it’s: “Hi, I’m Paul, Grace & Peace. . What is going on with you?!?!”
- False teachers arrived after Paul left and distorted the gospel of Christ. Some translations say “perverting the gospel.”
- They were essentially saying: “It’s Jesus plus keeping the law in order to be justified in God’s sight.”
- If you’re a Jew, you must continue following the Mosaic law in order to really be accepted by God. And, if you’re a Gentile, you’re really messed up! You need to get circumcised and keep the Mosaic law in order to truly be pleasing to God.
- And that’s where Paul jumps in and says, “If it’s Jesus + anything, you just lost me, but more importantly, you just lost the gospel! If you add any other requirement to the finished work of Christ in order to be justified, you have abandoned the faith altogether.”
- **“The moment you revise the gospel, you reverse it.” – Tim Keller**
- The gospel is not open for revision. If you are a student, writing a paper, revision has immense value. Write your papers and then revise them thoroughly. Sorry, I went there.. I get great pleasure out of grading papers now and not writing them. Very nice. Cup of coffee, red pen, showtime... We revise because there is usually so much to improve, for some of us, still after the 4th, 5th and 6th draft! ☺

- That's not the case with the gospel. It needs no revision or tweaking. The gospel is the historic news of what God has done in Christ, and we must never move away from it!
- Anything that detracts from the once for all, finished work of Jesus on the cross, is getting into the realm of a "Jesus +" theology.
- The central theological concern of this letter is salvation by grace & justification by faith.
- **Martin Luther said: "There is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ you must build your confidence on your own work."**
- There are plenty of false gospels to go around, plenty of cults and false teachers that walk around playing the part of real teachers, when they are really, as Jesus said in his day, the blind leading the blind. Many of them have angelic visions as their foundation, like Islam and Mormonism, for example.
- **But beyond that . . .** It's not Jesus plus my church attendance and Bible reading. It's not Jesus plus any number of sacraments or penance to get to heaven. It's not Jesus plus my good works. It's just Jesus.
- Do you want to know why people embrace these kind of religious systems? Here's the primary answer: We want to save ourselves. We want something to do with it, so we can say "God, look how great I am, aren't lucky to have me in your presence."
- We can add nothing to the finished work of Christ. Jesus and his cross define our existence and drive everything about us.
- **"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2)**
- **"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14)**
- This is so serious Paul goes on to say: "But even if we or an angel from heaven..."
- This is so good, and so deep, get ready. Not only can the gospel be twisted, distorted, or perverted by external sources (which usually comes in the form of teachers, writers, and other religious or philosophical systems), but the gospel, at a very practical level, can also be twisted, distorted and perverted by internal sources (our subjective feelings, sensations, and experiences)>
- This is what cripples many people I meet and try to encourage in the faith. They base their faith on their feelings.
- I am not suggesting feelings and experience are unimportant, but we can have some really wrong feelings and really bad experiences and trust that they are giving us the right answers. I don't feel like God loves me. I don't feel like God is with me. I don't know if ____. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.
- Everything in life, including our own feelings, must come under the authority of the gospel.
- All other sources of authority come under the authority of God's Word. Paul's statement here even helps us understand why it is the Bible that is supreme over reason, experience, and tradition or the church if you will. Why? Because there is a standard, a set of truths to our faith, that create the plumb line to which everything else in our experience, reason, and tradition must accord. So Paul says, if I contradict, even though I'm an apostle, the gospel that was given to you, don't listen to me.
- He says, "Let [that person] be accursed" That means, "let him face final condemnation." Hell is a big deal. Heaven is the bigger deal. We don't soften our message. Hell is real, unimaginably horrific.

Trans: All of this real talk from Paul on the purity of the gospel can seem quite in your face... Listen to his heart in verse 10...

Verse 10: "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

- So here's Paul's deal. He is a servant of Christ. He is not trying to make enemies. His aim is to please God. Danny Akin, one of the two men that mentored me through seminary said his philosophy of life could be summed up in ten words: "All that matters in life is that you please God."
- Your willingness to share what you believe with others is a good litmus test to see will help us gauge to what degree we are seeking man's approval and pleasure or God's approval and pleasure.

Conclusion:

- So as let me ask: How important is the gospel to you? Have you embraced it? Is it the ruling principle in your life? Is it moving you to both weep and to worship? Are you sharing it? The gospel is that good. It is an inestimable treasure. It is worth receiving and it is worth sharing.
- Receive it and live in its power!