

Jason Upchurch - Galatians 1:1-10 - Believe, Preach, Hold On - Easter 2024

This Easter Sunday I want you to turn to the book of Galatians, chapter 1.

What we celebrate this morning is really the most remarkable event in all of human history past, present and future. We celebrate the Son of God rising from the dead. There is a sense in which we do that every Sunday, of course. We gather on the Lord's Day as a reminder of the Lord's resurrection. But it is especially appropriate for us to be reminded once a year of the actual day that Jesus rose from the grave.

If you think about it, it's really an amazing claim: a man who claimed to be God was dead for 3 days and then life came back into his body as he rose again. No medical intervention, no laboratories to revive him, no tricks where he pretended to be dead but was actually just faking it, his followers didn't hide the body.

No, the claim of Christianity is that the perfect Son of God was murdered on a Roman cross and rose from the grave in actual space time. That's an astonishing claim.

And part of the reason it is astonishing is because it can't be done. People cannot rise from the dead. It's not possible. Benjamin Franklin once wrote that there are 2 certainties in life: death and what? Taxes.

Death comes to us all. When Adam sinned in the Garden he unleashed a tidal wave of sin that always ends in death. The reason there is death is because there is sin. Sin is rebellion to God and it is part of our nature. Adam passed down his sin nature to us and so we sin not only by choice, but also because it's part of our nature.

So death is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. We will die. You need only to look at any of the genealogies in the Bible to be reminded of the deaths of thousands of generations.

And so to reverse that course is nothing short of miraculous. And that's exactly the Christian hope. It's central to everything:

So much so that after his resurrection one of the features of Jesus that is highlighted is that he is the risen Jesus. Or he is the Jesus who was dead.

Rev. 1:7: He is coming on the clouds and every eye will see him even those who pierced him.

He was pierced - ran through on the cross - and yet he's coming because he is very much alive.

Rev. 2:8: John writes a letter to the church of Smyrna from Jesus who says they are the words of the first and last, who died and came to life.

The Alpha and Omega - God himself - died and came to life.

For those of you who were raised in a Christian context, this is just part of your understanding of God. And so sometimes we forget just how radical this claim is.

And although we talk about it regularly and should talk about it regularly, it is good for us to consider afresh what our hope actually is. And I want to do that this morning from **Gal. 1**. This is a remarkable little book written by the apostle to the churches he had planted in the region of Galatia which is modern day Turkey. This is written not just to one church, but to a variety of churches Paul had planted on his missionary journeys.

There is much more we could say about this section, but for our purposes I want to break this up into 3 simple encouragements to you that I think the apostle Paul is getting at: The gospel is to be believed, the gospel is to be preached, the gospel is never to be abandoned. So that's our outline as we look at this passage this morning.

The opening paragraph of the letter is not only an introduction, but it is an amazing distillation of the gospel message in just a couple of sentences.

1) The gospel is to be believed. **Read 1-4**

What Paul lays out for us in these opening verses is not just a greeting, but also the foundational elements of the gospel. In fact they are so foundational Paul simply assumes that his readers know these truths. He gives no argument or defense for them. He just lays them out.

And he lays them out, as he says in **Vs. 1**, an apostle. He was specifically chosen by God in this particular way to proclaim these truths.

Think about that: God Almighty specifically chose maybe 16-20 very average ordinary guys to proclaim this infinitely amazing message. They didn't choose themselves, they didn't invent the message themselves. They were chosen by God to proclaim the good news about Jesus.

What is the good news about Jesus? Well, there are several elements.

1) The Son of God was raised from the dead. **Read 1**

So this apostleship that Paul has is through Jesus and God. We could say God the Son and God the Father. Paul mentions 2 of the 3 persons of the Trinity here in this opening paragraph. He'll mention the Holy Spirit later in the book. But he is very aware that his mission to preach the gospel was given by God.

And it seems here that he can't help but mention that God raised Jesus from the dead.

This is the most fundamental truth someone needs to know for salvation: To be a Christian is to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. It is of first importance.

In fact, no other truth really matters until that truth is believed.

A lot of times when we talk to unbelievers about our faith and the Bible or what we believe we often skip to other issues. Morality, creation, how the Bible is reliable, gender issues. All those are good to discuss and declare, but what it's central to the Christian claim is the resurrection.

Turn to Acts 17:23-34. This is Paul in Athens and he's preaching the gospel to pagans. Unbelievers at the Areopagus who are surrounded by all these statutes of fake gods. And so Paul gives them a crash course about who God really is. **Read 23-34**

How does Paul know all this stuff? How does he know that God gave life and breath? How does Paul know that God commands all men everywhere to repent? How does he know there's a Day fixed for judgement? Because **Vs. 31** says God assured the world by raising Jesus from the dead.

As Christians, everything we know about God and who he is and what he's done is confirmed because he raised Jesus from the dead.

That's the assurance he gave everyone that judgment is coming. That's why the aftermath is about the peoples' reaction to resurrection. If you don't believe in the resurrection then nothing else matters.

And if you do believe in the resurrection then nothing else God says is hard to believe either.

If you read through Acts you'll also realize that the arguments Paul has with the Jews is usually over the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Since Jesus died and rose again according to the Scriptures, he is the Messiah. So no matter who we're talking to the resurrection of Jesus is the central element of what we believe.

Back in Gal. 1 we see the second element of the gospel.

2) Jesus died for our sins. **Read 3-4**

In these 2 verses we really have another fundamental element of the gospel: that Jesus died for our sins.

Now, most of us have heard the gospel message. Most of you are here week in and week out. You're familiar with it and truly I hope that you could easily explain it to someone who might ask about it. But I want to encourage you that many people are not familiar with it. It seems as though in our day less and less people have a basic understanding of Christianity and what Christians believe or why.

When I was a kid I knew there was some guy who was crucified, he was buried and rose again. I had gone to a church that had an Easter play every year and they reenacted the crucifixion and resurrection. But I really didn't understand what that had to do with me. What is the significance of Jesus dying and rising again?

This is important because people can have information but if they don't know what it means they're no better off.

If I told you that about 55 years ago some guy named Neil jumped off a ladder and said "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" that wouldn't be all that amazing. But if I told you that guy was standing on the moon when he said it, that might help you understand how amazing that is.

The same thing is true with Jesus. They know that Christians claim he died and rose again, but they don't know why he died or why he had to rise or how that is connected to them.

Why did Jesus die? **Verse 4** says to give himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.

So several things. He gave himself for our sin. This was the basic mission of Jesus, to rescue us from sin. Jesus died for our sin.

The Bible says that we are all sinners. We are sinners both by nature and by choice. We are born sinners and we choose to sin and violate God's Law. Just as sure as someone breathes oxygen, they are a sinner.

And because God is a holy God, perfectly just and perfect righteous he cannot let sin go unpunished any more than a human judge could just let a murderer go free. The wages of sin is death: physical death and eternal punishment in hell forever. Hell isn't for just the worst people in society: Hitler and Stalin and Genghis Khan. Hell is for the average person who thinks they're a good person, lives a mostly decent life, but has never actually repented from their sin and trusted in Christ.

That's everyone. We are all destined to stand before a holy God and the problem is we're all sinners, So from the moment of conception we are children of wrath, children of Satan, born to a life of willful disobedience. And just like we saw Paul preach to the Athenians, he will bring every single person into judgement.

That's bad news because no one will escape that judgement. And it will be a thorough judgement.

Ecc. 12:14: ...God will bring every deed into judgement with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Nothing escapes God's notice. There are no secrets with God, our lives are laid bare before him and all sin is exposed.

And some will say, "Yeah, but he knows my good works too. And I've done a lot of good things, and those good things are much better than the bad things."

The Bible says that the reality is that no one does good things.

All our righteous deeds - the best things we could possibly show God - are like filthy rags.

There is no one who does good, no not one. Even the good things someone might claim they do are not done for the glory of Christ. And wouldn't overturn a guilty judgment anyway.

No one who is found guilty of a crime in the court of law says to the judge "Hey I paid my taxes and did volunteer work - doesn't that let me off the hook?" Of course not. And it doesn't with God either.

So he knows our hearts, our sinful thoughts and actions. The darkest, most atrocious, disgusting thoughts and actions and words we've spoken will be played like an iMax movie when we stand before him.

And the punishment for sinning against an infinitely holy God is infinite sentence of eternal conscious punishment in hell and ultimately in the Lake of Fire. People who die in their sins don't go to a better place, they're not resting in peace, they're not happy to be reunited with their family. They are in torment.

This is what all people deserve for their sins. That's the bad news.

The good news, which is what the word gospel means - good news, is exactly what Paul writes here in **Vs. 4:** he gave himself for our sins.

This is what we read earlier in **Isa. 53.** When Jesus died he didn't die for his own sins because he didn't have any. He was God in the flesh, perfectly holy and righteous in every way. No, what Jesus was doing as he died was substituting himself for those who believe in him.

He was dying as a substitute. The Bible gives pictures from the very opening chapters that when someone sins, death is required. We see that in the OT: sinners would offer a sacrificial lamb or goat or bull. They'd bring it to the altar, lay their hand on it to symbolize transferring the guilt of their sin to the animal and then they would slaughter the animal in their place.

The animal had to be perfect, spotless, without any blemish. So that a perfectly pure animal would receive the punishment of death that sin deserves.

What we find out was those were all just previews of what Jesus would do on the cross. The blood of bulls and goats can't really take away sin. They just give a picture of it. They were just pointing to Jesus, the Son of God, who really did die for our sins.

So when Jesus suffered on the cross, what was happening was that God the Father was pouring out his wrath on his own Son. Why? Because his Son was the substitute for his people.

This is the Christian gospel: that Jesus died for us. He gave himself for our sins, as Paul says. Who's sins? Is everyone in the world automatically saved from the wrath of God because of Jesus's death?

The answer is no. The one who is saved from God's wrath is the one who believes in Jesus. How do you know if you've actually believed in Jesus? It'll be shown by your life. Someone who truly believes in Jesus is someone who's life is transformed from rejoicing in sin, to someone who rejoices in truth and obedience to the Lord Jesus..

It's those who have faith in Jesus that have peace with God. **Read 3**

How do we have grace and peace with God? Through faith in Jesus who died for our sins and lived for our righteousness.

So he died for our sins. Notice the result. **Read 4**

What does that mean? He delivered us from the present evil age? This present is the present world system that is run by Satan and bent toward sin. We've been released from the world's hold on us.

Look at Eph 2:1-3 for a moment. Here we see Paul talking about the same thing. **Read**

So before we were saved, before we followed Jesus, before our sins were forgiven we walked in our sins. Our life was defined by the sins we loved: greed, envy, drunkenness, pride, vanity. Immorality.

And we followed the course of this world. That's not a good thing. The world is sinful and wretched. The course of the world in this age is to follow the Prince of the Power of the air. That's the devil. And he's at work. I know we often say this vaguely and generically, but the devil really is at work in the world. And Paul says that prior to salvation we were all just following along with that.

And people will say "I wasn't a Satan worshipper!" Maybe not directly, but those outside of Christ are sons of Satan just as much as those in Christ are sons of God. And the sons of the devil follow the devil's lead.

They go along with the devil's agenda and course whether they know it or not. They live according to the passions of the flesh, and the sinful desires of our body. We just went with the flow.

Look how Paul contrasts it here. **Read 4-9**

This is transformation that happens at salvation. God makes us alive together in Christ. He saves us. He gives us grace and faith and salvation - it's all a work of God.

A lot of people want to point to themselves to show how good they are. They're nice or polite or moral. They get good grades or make good money.

Paul says when it comes to salvation the only person we can point to is God who gave us grace in Christ.

Back in Gal. 1 that's what it means that God has delivered us from this present evil age. He's delivered us from all the sinful nonsense of the world we were in love with. He's given us new desires in Christ.

There's people who want to claim that they're Christians even though they run after every worldly desire and their lives look no different than the pagan world. They're not believers. How do we know? Because they've never been delivered from the present evil age. They haven't been rescued out of that.

They still live in it, and love it.

When God truly saves someone, you guys, they are delivered from the present evil age. They are taken out of it. You don't have to wonder if it's true or not. You don't have to guess.

Will they still struggle with some sin? Of course? But the change is obvious. The repentance from sin is obvious. The course correction is obvious.

The people who heard the gospel at Pentecost radically changed their lives, sacrificing land and money for their newly minted brothers in Christ.

The guys in Ephesus converted from witchcraft and burned all their books in the streets - 50,000 pieces of silver worth. They didn't become sinless, but they were radically transformed.

And when this happens you guys, it happens because of the will of God. **Read 3-5**

What happens according to the will of God? All of it. The grace from God, the peace we have with God, being delivered from this evil age. Salvation is entirely a work of God.

As has been said many times: The only thing I contributed to my salvation was the sin that made salvation necessary.

That's why Paul says there weren't many noble, weren't many wise, weren't many mighty that God chose. Why? Because people who are smart and strong and rich tend to think everything they have is because of their own effort.

God says my team's going to be weak, and lowly, and not from the upper crust of society. Why? So God gets all the glory.

This is the faith that we're called to believe for eternal life. Jesus crucified for our sins, risen from the grave, delivering us from this age, by his own will all for his own glory.

So we believe it. But we don't just believe it, we preach it.

2) The gospel is to be preached.

Those who believe the gospel are called to turn around and preach the gospel.

Notice that in **Vs. 8** Paul says the gospel "we" preached to you. Paul rarely preached the gospel all by himself. There was usually a group of people with him who preached. You think of Barnabas, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla. Timothy, Titus, Luke, others.

Those who have believed the gospel are called to preach the gospel. Not necessarily stand up on the street corner and preach. Or ever go to the mission field and preach. Although if God has called you to that you need to be faithful.

But in a general sense we become gospel people every where we go.

1 Pet. 2:9: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession.

Through faith in Jesus God has made us his covenant people. Why? Peter says: so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

He's talking primarily to Gentiles who had no standing before God in the world. But now God has turned everyone who has faith in Jesus into his chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation for one purpose: to sing his praises.

That's why in the Great Commission Jesus said to go into all the world proclaiming the gospel.

We don't go proclaim religion. We don't go proclaim a 12 step program to holiness. We don't go proclaim psychology. We don't go proclaim simple morality.

No, we proclaim news. Good news. The best best news. That God sent Christ to rescue us from his own wrath. And if we've been rescued, we want others to be rescued as well.

3) So we believe the gospel, proclaim the gospel. And finally we hold on to the gospel.

This section is actually the biggest concern for Paul. The danger in every generation is that people will believe in Jesus **temporarily**. They will say they follow Jesus, then turn away to some other gospel.

A false gospel that says sexually immorality is okay. A false gospel that says my works are what save me. A false gospel that affirms my sins.

Paul says there is no other gospel. There's only one gospel. There's only one way to have our sins forgiven: to trust that our only hope in judgement is the grace of Jesus. That he is everything.

But there's always been a danger to abandon the true gospel. And Paul mentions that it has happened quickly. Have you ever known someone who proclaimed Jesus and then abandoned him quickly? I have - there's hope and joy and excitement over the sinner who repents. Or seems to repent. But then abandons Jesus for some other religious thing. Or no religious thing.

You guys, there is no other gospel. But there are always temptations to believe there is. Don't do it. Paul says "if we or an angel from heaven" were to preach to you something else, don't believe it.

Why? Because to forsake Jesus and follow something else results in hell. It results in the wrath of God.

That's not a fun message to preach because people don't like hearing that. But it's essential.

It's not enough to just believe in Jesus for a time. It's not enough to have made some profession of faith back in the day and then wander from the truth.

No. The faith we are called to is enduring faith in the true gospel. That the crucified and risen Jesus is our only hope in life and death.

If you've believed that - believe it now because he is risen.

If you believe that, then preach that he is risen.

And if you believe and preach the gospel, then hold on to the gospel until the end.

Pray