

Freedom Through Jesus Alone

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[0 : 00] Okay, so if you have a Bible, why don't you turn to the letter of Galatians? And if you don't have a Bible, grab one in the pews round about. Or you can scroll in your phone and get the book of Galatians.

Feel absolutely no embarrassment, absolutely no embarrassment when you're using the contents page of your Bible if you need to do that. It's absolutely fine. It's in there, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

The way I remember it in the order is God eats popcorn. Okay, you can have that for free. Let's pray, though, as we come to this letter. Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much for this morning.

And we thank you for this opportunity to hear from you and encounter you, the living God, as we come to your living and active word. So, Father, I pray this morning that you would do that which I am incapable of doing.

And that, Lord, that you would transform hearts today. Lord, wherever we're at, perhaps we've been a Christian for many, many years. Father, perhaps we've just walked into church this morning without really understanding why or what's going on here.

[1 : 09] Lord, may today be a day when we look back and say you were at work. So, Father, we come expectantly to your word. We thank you for who you are. We lift our eyes to you. Thank you, Lord, for your love for us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, folks, here's what we're going to do this morning. We're going to marvel at the difference between Christianity and every other religious and moral impulse that exists inside of us.

You see, as we step into the letter of Galatians this morning, so much of this might feel like we've stepped into a completely different world.

Like if you've ever had that experience of going to a supermarket in a foreign country, you know the one? And the aisles are full of brands that you don't recognize.

The layout of the shop floor is completely different. Where's my middle aisle in Aldi? The signs are in a different language. The person at the checkout is asking for money in a different currency.

[2 : 20] And the whole experience leaves you feeling like this isn't the world I'm used to. Listen, Galatians might well give you those kind of vibes.

Right? It's full of words that we don't use much in our lives today. Words like circumcision and kingdom.

And it's full of people that their names, their likes, we might not recognize. Like Abraham and Hagar. But listen, don't let that put you off.

And here's two reasons why you need to stay in the game. Number one is the promise that this letter holds out to every single one of us today. If we embrace the message at its heart, the promise is true freedom and lasting peace.

That sound good in our world today? True freedom, lasting peace. That's what this message holds out to us in this letter. Number two is that the bullseye truth at the heart of this letter is something that people in our world today are so deeply concerned about.

[3 : 35] And Galatians is going to say, see that thing that you're chasing? See that thing that you think you can achieve? I'm going to tell you the only place that you can find it. Here's what I mean by that.

Here's what one fan said after the Oasis concert the other night. In which they expressed the reason that they loved the concert so much.

Now try this one on for size, okay? They said this, When I go to a gig, I don't want to feel bad about myself. I don't want to see Palestine flags or get preached at about the climate.

I just want music and a good time. Do you hear it in their voice? Why was it so good? It was so good because it was a concert with no causes.

For three hours, they put literally on mute the noises that we are surrounded with every day in our world. It doesn't matter who you are.

[4 : 41] If you're a massive global brand, it doesn't matter whether you're a corporate firm or on the high street shop, university organizations, sports teams, neighborhoods, WhatsApp groups, Facebook profiles, music festivals.

What does everyone in our world today want to be seen as being publicly? We want to be known as people, if I could put it in the language of our culture, people who are on the right side of history. People that the rest of the world looks at, weighs us up, looks at our lives, and declares us to be good. Or if I could put it in the language of Galatians, we want to be known as people who are righteous, people who the world looks on at, weighs us up, looks at our lives, and declares us to be justified.

Or to quote 90s rapper Tupac Shakur, I believe that everything that you do bad comes back to you. So everything that I do that's bad, I'm going to suffer from it. But in my mind, I believe what I'm doing is right. So I feel like I'm going to heaven.

[6 : 15] Of course, it's not just the logic of the world, it's the logic of so much of the other religions out there. If I could take one for example, it's why the Buddhist concept of karma gets so much traction in our world.

We don't call it karma, we just call it what goes around comes around. Why does that get so much traction? I think it's because it makes logical sense to us. And yet, friends, that's not how the God of the gospel works.

You want some good news this morning? He is so much far above the things of this world. His logic is not our logic. See what Tupac is saying?

Can I suggest, friends, his logic has more holes in it than a big bit of Swiss cheese. Here's the biggest one. How do you know that you're good enough? Sit on that for a wee bit.

How do you know you're good enough? And more importantly, who gets to decide? See, when I was at school, I remember once playing and I dislocated my shoulder.

[7 : 30] I was expecting a little bit of sympathy, but we'll run with it, okay? These are all I remember. I dislocated my shoulder. I'd love to tell you that the guy came off worse than I did, but honestly, I can't remember. I dislocated my shoulder.

Here's all I remember. The doc came up to me in hospital. Before he got there, it felt like my lungs were working double time. Couldn't breathe, fighting for breath.

The doc came along and he puts over me the oxygen mask. And he says, breathe. And honestly, it felt like someone from the outside had just poured life into me.

The testimony of so many Christians over the years is that breathing in the truth of this letter did exactly the same.

For some of us, friends, this message will be humbling at the heart of this book. It will be humbling. What do you mean I can't be good enough for God? God's going to say to you in this letter, think again.

[8 : 39] You think you're good enough? Think again. But some of us, what this letter will offer us is healing. Because just like a match of the day sequence, you're replaying the highlights reel of your life and the word that's just there is guilt.

And God's not disagreeing with that verdict. But what God is saying is, you think you can't be right with me? Think again. Friends, this book is not about our performance.

This letter is all about the wonder of his promise. This letter is all about how you and I can be made righteous. we can be made and declared to be justified.

Not in the eyes of our fellow human beings, but way more importantly, in the eyes of the God who made us and loves us.

And the reason that this letter is so explosive and counterintuitive is that is 0% due to us. And it's 100% to do with Jesus.

[9 : 54] You see, here is this man called Paul. Get into the letter here. See the third word that he uses there. We're going to hear more about his story of coming to know Jesus next week.

But for now, notice what he calls himself. He's an apostle. That word apostle tells you Paul is someone who received his message about Jesus, not secondhand. He received it, not hearsay, but he received it from Jesus himself. That's what that word means there. He's how he's using it. Can I suggest, friends, that that really matters? Really, really matters. In our world of AI deep fakes, in our world of fact checking, reliability of your source is absolutely everything. When Paul uses that term, what he's saying is that his message, he's got it, if you like, straight from the horse's mouth.

That's what he's saying. He's an apostle. And in this letter, he's writing to a group of churches in what today is central Turkey.

[10:57] Just on the map, they're trying to locate where this is going. Galatia is a region that Paul traveled to on his first missionary journey. You can think of those things like the Jesus preaching, church starting roadshow.

That's what a missionary journey is. Paul does three of these in his lifetime. You can read about the first one, Acts 13. And during it, he speaks about Jesus to people in the cities.

Just clock them there. Poseidon, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derby. Not in the Midlands, okay? What's happened as he does this is that God, through this message of the Jesus who came, the Jesus who lived, the Jesus who died, the Jesus who rose, the Jesus who has ascended, is that message has gone out.

People have come to faith and churches have started because God, through his Holy Spirit, is at work. Churches start in these places. So what's interesting is that this letter is dated probably AD 50.

But why that's important is that because these Christians, Paul left them probably only about a year after first visiting them. Right? Significant.

[12:17] And that's usually surprising as well as significant. You've got to ask ourselves, why? Because you'll imagine some 2,000 odd years ago before the iPhone. Paul's not set a yearly reminder in his calendar that I better check in on these guys after a year.

This letter isn't the equivalent of the I wish you were here postcard. There's a reason that Paul is writing after such a short time ago having been with them.

And here's what I want to do as we take in the first 10 verses here and we're going to read it in a second. I want you to think about why. Here's the question I want you to ask yourself as we get into the first 10 verses together.

How would you describe his tone? Are you going to come with me? Let's read it together. The first 10 verses. Paul, an apostle sent not from men nor by a man but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead and all the brothers and sisters with me.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be glory forever and ever.

[13:49] Amen. I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one that we preach to you let them be under God's curse.

As we've already said so now I say again if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted let them be under God's curse. Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God?

Or am I trying to please people? If I were trying to please people I would not be a servant of Christ. Now friends rhetorical question what word would you use?

I've written down here concerned probably understating it a bit I've written down here concerned and anxious right? I've got three words but I can go with it.

[15:06] He's anxious isn't he and we've got to ask ourselves why? What has he heard has happened in Galatia that is making him so concerned about these Christians?

Well as we make a beeline towards answering that question over the next 20 minutes or so here's what I want to do I want us to see him say to them two things in this text in these opening verses you ready for this?

If headings help note these down here's the first thing he wants them to see how costly their rescue was you know it was the late John Stott who called Christianity a religion of rescue a religion of rescue and this is where he got it from you see that word in the text?

That word rescue maybe some of your translations might have delivered do you see it? here's what that word is Paul's using it like a hyperlink you know when you get an email or you're reading an article on BBC News and there's certain words that are maybe bold and underlined and if you click them it takes you to another page that's what Paul's doing with this word Paul's wanting to take them and us back in the Bible to the Exodus right Genesis Exodus the events that happened there that's the hyperlink okay the Exodus this mighty work of God whereby he rescued his people from their biggest enemy he took them out of slavery in Egypt triumphing over their enemies so that they could live for delight in and worship this God forever ever so that the world will know that there is no one like Yahweh there is no one like the Lord it's not a message that's constrained to the nation of Israel the nation of Israel always supposed to be a people that declare the mighty works of God to the world there is no one like God no one compares with him he has no rival he has no equal this God specializes in saving he takes slaves he rescues them he saves them and he transforms them into sons and daughters now hold that thought for where this letter ends in a few chapters time this God specializes in taking slaves and turning them into sons and just when we're thinking to ourselves can anything top the exodus story it's as if in Galatians

Paul says hold my glass and let me tell you about how that was but the warm-up act for the greater exodus that God would achieve in the gospel see friends here's the deal right humanity we out with Christ out with faith in him we've got a double problem we are sinners and we're slaves we are utterly powerless to save ourselves and we are utterly powerless to reform ourselves that whole word rescue what does it imply that we need help from the outside we are powerless to do these things what Paul is saying here is that the gospel is the double solution to our double problem do you see that in verse four just track the logic he said Christ what's the words and he's going to return to this word later what did Christ do he gave himself do you see that he gave himself his body nailed to a Roman cross that's what

[19:08] Paul is saying he gave himself why try the logic for our sins for for our sins for the rhythm of that yeah logic remember it recall it for our sins Christ gave himself for our sins that word for there tells you that there's a purpose in Christ dying and it is the language there of substitution he died in our place and took the penalty on himself that our sin our cosmic treason against a holy God deserved and he took it on himself that is known as the doctrine if you want to be stretched a little bit the doctrine of substitutionary atonement right that sounds a long phrase but here's what I want you to know that is foundational to the Christian faith Christ gave himself for our sins for our sins one of those things it's like a game of

Jenga friends if you take out that truth of the Christian faith the whole thing crumbles but we're not just the doctrine police we fight for that for our joy Christ deals with our sin problem!

That's what that phrase for our sin means he deals with our sin problem and as wonderful as that is see if our gospel as it were ends there it's half baked we can't stop there because Paul doesn't stop there again see the logic why did he do this to deliver us again see the Exodus word from the present evil age now Paul's point now Paul's point is that believers with their sins forgiven and identified with Christ verse 1 in his triumphant resurrection friends we belong to a whole new state of affairs to be a Christian isn't just to be like everyone else in the world but you make a few ethical and moral decisions which are questionably different from everyone else take the language from the text to be a Christian is to be somebody who has been delivered from this present evil age and called into God's kingdom of marvelous light how often we just underestimate it how wonderful it is we've got a friend called

Trevor in London always says that it's a wonderful thing to be a Christian and this is why and who has this planned you see it was according to not our efforts it's according to the will of God friends here's the thing right say it's a control freak like myself who wants to control everything that happens in this world are you like me here's what this does wonderful freedom to be found here it's always good to remember and be reminded that God has been here a lot longer than we have and that God will be here a lot longer than we will be here and it's good to be reminded that this holy God that we've been singing about is so far above the things of this earth and it's good to be reminded that his plans his promises are so much deeper than my wisdom and my finite minds can comprehend and all of that is tied up in that phrase according to his will do you see how

comprehensive that phrase is friends the salvation that

God offers here is no New Testament novel idea our salvation rests entirely on God's sovereign initiative Genesis 3:15 God says he's going to deal with our sin problem he makes a promise that he is going to do it he's going to send the serpent crusher all we are is people needing rescued God's plan from the fullness of time is to call out a people of faith saved by Jesus animated and indwelt by his spirit whose very reason of existence is now the praise of his glorious grace and if that doesn't give purpose to our lives I don't know what will what's interesting is that this is the only place in the New Testament where Paul talks about the gospel as being a message of rescue that interesting remember that comes up in a pub quiz you can play that one right there okay but that's really interesting we've got to ask ourselves why

[24:05] I imagine it's to underscore the central message of his letter right up top that our salvation was a hundred percent Jesus friends here's the salvation equation you ready for this if you're taking notes here it is how are we saved it's going to be the message of this letter salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone it's not my idea the anthem of the reformation way back in the day salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone he wants them to see how costly their rescue was and because that's true he wants them secondly to see how deadly their deserting is can I just pick out in the time that we've got two d's in these verses the first one of which comes at verse six and it's the word deserting it's the kind of word that you'd use when somebody runs away from the army right they're run away from the rest of their troops they kind of run away desert them at the post abandon them it's the kind of word that

Paul's using here and it's really strong and notice if we pay real close attention to the text notice that it is not a what they are deserting do you see it verse six it's not a what they are deserting so much as it's a who they are deserting to turn away from this message they are walking away says Paul from Jesus himself how are they doing that well here's the second d and it's the word different and this takes us to what's happening in Galatia that Paul's so concerned about a group of teachers have turned up in Galatia after Paul has gone and they're teaching these new believers something completely different to what Paul taught them I don't imagine they're denying that Jesus existed I don't imagine they're denying that Jesus died I imagine they're not even denying that Jesus rose but what they are probably saying to these young believers goes something like this listen I know Paul said it's 100% Jesus yeah guys almost right think of Jesus more like a good start think of him like the deposit that you needed to buy your house and now that you're in it's kind of up to you to keep up the monthly repayments to keep yourself in oh by the way how do you do that well you do it by your good works in fact to keep yourself in God's favour you really need to start behaving like a Jew would begin with obeying the ten commandments and the law that's a wonderful place to start oh and by the way you really need to be circumcised if you want to be in God's favour that's the pitch for different reasons I imagine due to the probably the long history of Judaism compared to the relatively recent events surrounding Jesus all of that sounds quite plausible to people but we've got to see that to that Paul says not interesting theory

Paul says different gospel and he says let them be under God's curse now we'll return to that curse language in a couple of weeks time okay but it's worth seeing it here how strongly strongly Paul says these things you see friends to walk away from Jesus is to walk away from that double cure and to walk back into the double problem because you're still on the hook for the penalty of your sins again if you think you can do it by yourself you can add to what Jesus has done you may as well go to the cross go up take him down and put yourself back on it that's what he's saying you're still on the hook for the penalty of your sins and the things you're relying on have no power to internally transform you these false teachers are telling you to rely on yourself they're trying to persuade you that you can somehow top up what Jesus has done like you would the credit on your burner phone by what you do and if you do that you'll experience

God's favour I'm writing to tell you that if you swallow that and start to live like that not only are you walking away from Jesus but you're back to being the double slave here's what Paul perceives and maybe carry this with us through the rest of this letter friends do you remember that Frank Sinatra song what he said about New York he said if you make it there you'll make it anywhere you know that line so almost as if Paul is singing here to the Christians in Galatia and to us about the gospel see if you go wrong here you'll go wrong everywhere and this is important not just in terms of how we become a Christian but it's massively important in terms of how we continue to grow as Christians and by way of immediate application of this it means that we as a congregation should

be always up for discerning what's being said up here not rating the sermon like some kind of strictly come dancing judge but smelling the teaching like some trained police sniffer dogs with the scent of truth in our nostrils and why because only this message gives life the gospel is as my [30 : 03] American friends would say it is our true north it's what we do isn't it every Sunday as we gather through what we sing and what we read and what we hear and what we speak to each other we are all helping each other we set the compass of our lives back to Christ and his gospel because we all default into thinking that it's all wrapped up with our performance so what I do we leak gospel during the week and we come in here having drifted and we're reminded wonderfully that it's 100% Jesus it's 100% him friends our time is gone that brings me just as we close to the difference between Christianity and every other religious and moral impulse in us can I tell you my beef with Bob the Builder as we get ourselves back to the centre of this message my beef with him is not so much in who he is never met the guy sure he's lovely but my beef with him is about what he teaches us about work in the theme song repeat after me

Bob the Builder Bob the Builder friends catchy lyrics wonderful advertising can I tell you terrible theology everything else out there screams to us yes you can yes you can go and do it can I tell you the difference in Christianity every other religious impulse in us the gospel says Christ has done it not you do it the gospel says Christ has done it and here's what you wouldn't have learned for your maths teacher at school but you'll learn it for Paul the apostle the equation that's at the heart of the Christian faith you ready for this it's this Jesus plus nothing equals everything it's the difference between do and done no one puts this better I think and we'll close with this with these lyrics from hymn writer from many years ago called Augustus

Top Lady now they don't do names like that anymore do they but wrote this wonderful hymn that has been the anthem of the church down the generations and it goes like this nothing in my hand I bring simply to the cross I cling make it come to thee for dress helpless look to thee for grace fall I to the fountain fly wash me savior or I die friends the more that I've got in tune with that song I'm convinced he was reading the book of Galatians as he wrote it it's all or nothing Jesus and so friends let's just close by these reading these words from Isaiah 55 for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways declares the Lord as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater so is my word that goes out from my mouth it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what

I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it and so Lord we thank you today for what we've seen and what we've savoured Lord I thank you that your Holy Spirit is so much better a pastor than I am and so I pray that he would be at work in our lives as we continue to mull on your words may your spirit as he takes the word and applies it deep to our lives may it have the desired effect that you want to have it so lift our eyes to your greatness and to your gospel we pray in Jesus name amen miracle