

No Plan B

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[0 : 0 0] Excellent. Well, folks, Galatians chapter 3, as we get back into this series this morning, having had a little break last week. It's great to think about last week, wasn't it? Jesus saying that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and that reminder to be a church that's driven by that zeal to reach lost people with the good news of Jesus. But we're back in this morning at Galatians chapter 3. So come with me to verse 15. And maybe to get us started, I wonder if you've ever heard the joke about Michael O'Leary, the owner of Ryanair. He walks into a pub in Dublin one evening and he asks for a drink. And the barman nods, goes to the till and says, that'll be 65 pence, please.

Wow, that's cheap, says Michael O'Leary. Ah, says the barman, but that's just the price for the drink. You'll be wanting a glass as well. And back to the till he goes. Ryanair is the masters of the hidden terms and conditions, the changing terms and conditions. What is it we'd say today? Someone has moved the goalposts. You know that phrase? Have you ever used it? The terms have changed.

What's going on? Where can we stand? What's true in life? Friends, here's the wonderful thing that we can be strengthened by from this passage today. And it's that the God of the Bible is a God of wonderful consistency. There's no shadow of change due to him. And if you're in our world, if you're living your life in this world today and you're thinking, I don't know what's going on. I see so much change. I don't know who to trust. And this passage is for you, my friend, because it tells you about who the God of the Bible is. And at the heart of this, it tells us that he's the God who is wonderfully trustworthy. And if you're after a story in your life just now, one that's maybe bigger than what you can see, then it doesn't get much older than this. Someone that's been tried and tested and not found wanting, but found to be wonderfully delivering. He's the God of wonderful consistency. He's not like the football manager who switches formation at halftime because who knew Harry Maguire couldn't play in a back three. Or the politician who gets wind of shifting public opinion and so rose back on manifesto pledges. Or like the tradesperson who rings you up saying, listen, perhaps I underestimated how long this is going to take and how much this is going to cost. You know, I just love those phone calls. No, human beings are like that. Our world is like that. But this passage here is telling us, if you take one thing from this, let it be this, that this God isn't like that. He never goes back on his word. And in his wisdom, he really has planned the end from the beginning. And that kind of God we can totally trust with our uncertain times and our uncertain lives. And we're going to find exactly where specifically we can entrust them today in this passage. Here's the thing though. Paul knows there's a rumor that's doing the rounds in Galatia. All about how we're made right with God. Essentially, the rumor is that God has ditched plan A and he's now moved to plan B. The word standing at the center of plan A comes up eight times in these verses. And it's always worth when you're reading the passage looking for words that are repeated because it more often than not gives you an idea into the center of the passage. Did you pick up the word? It's the word promise. That's the word that's at the center of plan A. The phrase at the middle of plan B, however, is keeping the law. And Paul's arguing in this passage that God's never had a plan B.

[4 : 1 1] You can't even really call it plan A. It's just always been the plan. A plan that centers on a promise that God made that cannot be, verse 15 and 17, a plan that cannot be set aside.

And so as we enter the game at verse 16, see the connection to what we thought about last time about the promises God made to Abraham back in Genesis 12.

promises of a place, promises of a people, promises of blessing that through him and his line would come to the nations of the world. And key to the argument in this passage is the timeline.

those promises were made 430 years before the law was even a thing. But see who Paul says these promises that God made were specifically made to. Do you see it?

Do you see it in the passage? And that word, according to Paul, isn't plural.

[5 : 35] That word is singular. Now we're building up a case here that we're going to hopefully, magnificently come back to at the end. So these details are all really important, okay? It's singular. Do you see him say it? So God made these promises, not so much to a people, but to a person who would come down Abraham's family line. You with me? Right? What does he say?

That person is Jesus. Didn't quite get the arc or the PowerPoint. So Jesus, even though he comes way later in the Bible story, is no late addition.

He's in the father's mind, even as he speaks these promises to Abraham. Now Jesus is the one who deserves the blessings of God. Jesus is the one who will inherit the promises of God.

So these promises in Genesis 12 are made to Jesus. Park that thought for where we're going to finish in about 15 minutes time, okay? Promises made to Jesus.

So Paul anticipates a question at verse 19. If it's always been about that promise, then what on earth was the point in God giving the law to his people?

[6 : 50] Do you see the question? Great question. And the law there is almost like it's an umbrella term for the Ten Commandments and all the periphery laws and the sacrificial system that God had given to his people.

And Paul simply anticipating the question, what on earth was the point in all of that? Because up until this point in the letter, you could be forgiven for thinking that Paul is anti-law.

Like he's encouraging people now to ditch it. But Paul's attitude to the law in this letter is a lot more nuanced than that. Paul knows, and remember his background, we thought about it a few weeks ago, his background having been raised in the school of Judaism.

Paul knows that the law that God gave Israel after he saved them from Egypt and called them out to be his special possession is a glorious thing. It is a revelation of just how good and how different and how just and how holy and how perfect and how loving this God is.

And if you want to know what it looks like to keep the law, just look at Jesus who kept it perfectly and who kept it joyously. In fact, you read Psalm 119. It's a psalm that's all about the beauty of the law.

[8 : 32] Paul's not against the law. How could he be? But he is against people thinking they can use it as a means by which they try and get right with God.

So what was the point then? Paul's going to give us three things in this passage. Now, if you're a note taker, I've tried to break this up into three Es.

And if you're thinking about the Bible and how it fits together and how you can understand particularly the Old Testament and light of the new and Jesus coming, friends, this is a great thing to get into today if you want to understand the Bible story.

Are you with me? Here's the three things. If you're taking notes, three Es. First purpose was to expose people. Verse 19, do you see in the passage here, the law was given because of what? Transgressions. Do you see it? That word there, it just means overstepping the line, overstepping the mark, crossing the line.

[9 : 32] What we would say as parents, if you're like me, you've gone too far this time, right? What was thin ice is now cracked. So the law was given so that God's people would know what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes.

I guess it's a bit like the scene in The Lion King when Mephasa says to Simba, that shadowy place, don't go there, right? Elfin graveyard, don't go there.

Why? Why? Because it's for your good that you don't go there. It's for your good that you don't go there. And I think that's why so much of it is in negative form.

Again, it's because of the hardness of the human heart. We need to be told what is not good for us to do, right? Like God's saying to his people, it's not good for you or your neighbor or your community for you to do that.

But you know what? It is good for you and your soul and your community and your neighbor if you'd go this way. And so the law, if you like, it does two things. It curbs sin, stops them doing things that God knows is harmful.

[10 : 41] But here's the other thing. Think back to Mephasa. What does Simba now know? He knows where not to go. Mephasa has named it.

He's named it. And that's what the law does. It names sin. Names it. So it's not like anger and murder and stealing and envy weren't a thing before the law.

No, those things, if you like, now God has written down on paper so that you see it. God's named it. So you see that you've crossed the line and you see it in a new way and you see it for the evil, for what it is.

And by naming it, verse 21, you see that no one gets righteous by trying to earnestly and perfectly keep it. You can't do it.

The law, it exposes. Exposes us. Exposes you. And because that's true, secondly, verse 23, it enslaves you.

[11 : 51] Enslaves you. That's the image that the custody language there is meant to conjure up in our minds. Twice Paul says it, doesn't he? Verse 22, first of all.

And verse 23, the law had you locked up. It found you guilty.

It found you facing life in the cell. Enslaved you. So God's people were meant to look at the law, understand that they couldn't keep the law perfectly, and conclude that I am up the creek without a paddle.

It enslaves you. And thirdly, verse 25, it educates you. So Paul uses, and we'll riff on this for a little bit, right?

He uses that word, do you see it in the text? Guardian. In the Greek, it's pedagogos, that's it there, but it is someone who is in authority over you, and whose job it is, because of that authority over you, to teach you.

[13 : 04] And a big function of the law was to teach you about and get you ready for Jesus. And here's how this plays out in your quiet times, in your Bible reading, in our Bible reading every day.

You're reading Exodus, for example. That whole rescuing people from slavery stuff, what's the point? Paul would say, in its own unique way, it was to teach you things about the person and the work of Jesus, ultimately.

You're reading Leviticus, what's the point of the day of atonement, all this stuff about me needing to offer a sacrifice, and blood needing to be shed for my trespasses.

What's the point? Paul would say, in its own unique way, it was to teach you something about your heart, and about the person and work of Jesus.

And this is what you get, particularly in the first five books of the Bible, history. You get types, you get pictures, you get, as you move on in the story, you get prophecies.

[14 : 16] The law is prepping you for Jesus. And all of that made me think about my old biology teacher at school. His name was Dr. Williams.

Right? I sat in his class for about four years trying to learn biology. I remember, I don't tell him this, I remember one phrase from all that time that he taught me. Do you know what it is?

You'll never guess. Three words. Larger surface area. Everyone know what I'm talking about?

Yeah? No? Right. Larger surface area.

It's all I can hear in my mind. Right? So every time, here's how this plays out, every time we get some new flowers in our house, I get the stems, and the first thing I do is I cut them at a right angle. Anyone else do that? Why? Larger surface area. Yeah? No. Okay. Larger surface area.

[15 : 16] I learned this stuff from him. He was kind of prepping me for what life would be like in the real world when I graduated. Okay? But here's the thing about Dr. Williams. He's taught me stuff, but he didn't take any snash.

Didn't take any nonsense. He was no stranger to the dishing out of detentions. He taught me stuff. I was under his authority. And in the same way, the law, says Paul, the law was your teacher.

It was your guardian teaching you and disciplining you. But you know what would be the weirdest thing, going back to Dr. Williams for a minute, the weirdest thing, is if he phoned me tonight and he said, are you remembering your homework for Monday morning?

I tell him to get on his bike. Because the moment I walked out that door of his class at the end of sixth year, our relationship totally changed. And that's what Paul is saying has happened with the arrival of Jesus in terms of your relationship to the law.

the law has served its exposing and enslaving and educating purpose.

[16 : 38] It has done its job. It's done its role because now Christ, the one who the law was getting you ready for, the promise inheritor has arrived.

So do you see in the context of Galatians, Paul is saying it doesn't make any sense for you to go back to the law, to think and that's how you get right with God.

If you do that, do you see how you're just self-admitting yourself to prison? Now Christ has come, Paul says, verse 29, by faith you are now Abraham's seed.

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Time out. I thought Jesus was Abraham's seed.

You've just told us that, Paul. I thought Jesus alone, singular, you made a big thing about that. I thought Jesus alone, singular, inherited the promise.

[17:48] Correct. Well, how does that work? And friends, this is where it gets really good. Paul would say, it works because of your, verse 29, faith, because of your faith, and notice this, you belong to him.

Do you see it? Got to see it. You belong to him. now, imagine one with me that one day a team of scientists discover a new tallest mountain in the world.

It's twice the size of Everest. It is more dangerous than Kilimanjaro. In fact, so treacherous is it that no one has ever or will ever have any hope of getting to the top.

Except one day a woman does. No team, no Sherpa, no nothing. She overcomes all the odds.

She reaches the summit. She plants her victor's pole at the peak. And let's assume they get mobile coverage at the top of the mountain. She takes a selfie of herself, posts it on Instagram with the caption, we did it.

[19:13] We did it. Sorry, we? Well, it turns out this woman is carrying a child.

We did it. Now, question for you, how did the child come to share in her victory? Not by doing anything other than being one with the woman.

Now, friends, Jesus, through his life and his death and his glorious resurrection, is the great victor. Unrivaled, unmatched, unrepeatably, no one can topple him from his throne. To him alone belong the blessings of God.

To him alone belong the promises of God. And we sang that song earlier, Christ is victor. Jesus is the victor. But my friends at Nidri would call that a kingdom banger.

[20:23] Okay, looking forward to learning it. Christ is victor. And I love singing songs about the victory of Jesus. But here's the question, what on earth does that have to do with me? Friends, if your faith is in Jesus, the answer to that question is everything.

Everything. His victory. victory. Because we are one with him. The promises he's inherited. The future that he has won. The victory over sin and death that's his.

How do we share it? We belong to him. That's it.

That's it. We belong to him. And if you're feeling today like, what on earth am I doing with my life? Is there any future? Is it worth keeping on going? Life is so hard. Friends, this one's for you. You belong to him.

[21:39] Can I just give you two quick things that that means to try and whet your appetite for next week? You've got to come back next week and Ian will take us through the first little bit of chapter four, which is golden.

Two quick things that that means. Firstly, it means, friends, that there's a new me. Because I belong to him. In Christ, you are someone who has been, verse 27, clothed with Christ.

You see the language? Put off the old, you've put on the new. You are a child of God. That is who you are. It's not speculation.

It's declaration. You have new privileges. You have a new future. And you have a new calling on your life. Kevin de Young in his great little book called *The Hole in Our Holiness* says this rather cheekily and I love it.

He says, God does want you to be true to yourself. But the you that he's talking about is the you that you are by grace and not by nature. Yeah?

[22:44] The you, the new you, the you that you are by grace. He wants you to be true to yourself. No, they owed you. Do you see what he's saying? God has saved us for radical holiness that baffles the world.

And I take it if growing as a Christian is being transformed more into Jesus' image, if it was a joy for Jesus to obey the law, friends, it's going to look like that in our lives as well.

We're going to think about that in a few weeks' time. Not saved by the law, but as we follow Christ, I take it this will be all over our lives. Number two, it means that there's a new we.

And this is bigger here. Because you belong to him, you belong to each other.

God's holy blessings of God in the same way? Do you see how God has created a radical equality among you?

[23 : 46] Remember we saw a few weeks ago how Peter, he withdrew himself from the Gentiles because of the sneers of these Jewish teachers that had come up from Jerusalem, who said to Peter, you're eating with who? You're eating with them? I wonder if the Gentiles in Galatia might just have been feeling like second-class citizens in God's kingdom. Like if God's people were all to board a flight, they would be shown right to economy while the Jews would go left to business.

Why? Well, because they've got the history, they've got the law, got all the stuff, got all the stories. Remember Jewish men in this day would pray each morning thanking God that he hadn't made them a Gentile, a slave, or a female. Categories that would have meant an awful lot in terms of the social hierarchy of the Roman Empire as well. Paul says, see when it comes to being children of God? Not so.

And that's why verse 28, friends, is so, so explosive. And it is the proverbial cat in among the pigeons. And remember in the context, it's all about being God's children, probably more accurately God's sons. Again, that's not the gender stuff there is specific and important because it's all about inheritance. We'll see that more next week. But here's what Paul writes, there's neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. All one in Christ Jesus. Now, understand that the distinctions haven't disappeared. But the barriers have been demolished. And the relationship between you all has totally changed.

Imagine a community like that living in the Roman Empire. A CEO working in Mayfair in London, hanging out with a single mom living in the east end of Glasgow. They're one. Why are they one? Well, they're one in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 09] See how radical that is, what he's saying. Oh, friends, you are all one in Christ Jesus. Listen, just as we close, our doorbell went at 6.43 on Monday evening.

And I opened it and there was a lady standing there. And she said, it's Graham, isn't it? And I could see where the conversation was going. And I almost thought about saying no, but I thought, no, I'll go with this one.

So I nodded. And she said, do you mind me asking who you are planning to vote for at next year's election? And at that point, I was so grateful for four little children who poked their heads around the door at that precise moment. And she read the room and got the vibe that now maybe wasn't the time for a long, deep and meaningful conversation.

But here's the thing. See, as I closed the door and said my goodbyes to her, I wondered why that question made me so uneasy. And I think the answer that I came away with is that we're all aware just how divisive a question that is currently.

And if you like it, that is just a difference of opinion. But you look at our world, friends, and it is full of so much inequality. Economic inequality, social inequality, ethnic inequality.

[27 : 32] And we don't have any answers for it. And this week of all weeks has helped us realize the evil that exists in human hearts and the divisions that there are amongst the peoples of our country.

And so do you see how glorious a picture that is? In a world that is so divided and hotly so, do you see how precious and beautiful and stunning the unity and diversity, the radical equality that God has brought about through his son?

In his multinational, multi-generational, multi-lingual people of faith, that somehow, somehow, through the cross of Jesus, he has made them one.

And it's all because God doesn't have a plan B. This is the plan. And this is what Jesus is doing. He is building his church.

And so maybe, listen, maybe put it at this point. As we move towards communion, since we pass it around to each other, friends, take a moment just to look the other person in the eye. Right?

[28 : 54] Just think to yourself, brother and sister in Christ. Let me pray. And so, Father, we're just so thankful this morning for Jesus.

Jesus, who is our life. Father, we thank you for the forgiveness and the newness of life that we have in him. That nothing in our hands that we bring simply to the cross we cling.

Naked run to you for dress, helpless run to you for grace. Thank you that Jesus is an all-sufficient saviour. So, Father, I just pray, Lord, that you would remind us this morning of the glorious unity that we have.

What we were thinking about a few weeks ago, this snow globe, this little microcosm of this global reality across the church, that in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. So, Father, be with us as we move to a time of communion now. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.