

What you need to know

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[0:00] If you turn to Galatians, chapter 1, I've been here 22 years, and over the summer I worked! out the books that I hadn't preached on in the Bible. And so we've got Galatians, 1, 2, 3 John, and then the greatest hits of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations, Joshua, 1 and 2 Chronicles. So you're in for a great few years, all right, coming up. And I've shied away from Galatians, but I'm quite excited about preaching it. And there's many things that I'd love you to know as a church family.

There's many things I want you to know, lots of things about the Bible and about the Christian life that I want you to know, but I think what Galatians gives you is what you need to know.

And particularly as we start this morning, I need you to know this. Many things I want you to know, but what is the key message of the church we need you to know? And that's Galatians, chapter 1, verses 1 to 5. Really, we're going to look at the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what I need you to know. Galatians might be one of the earliest, well, it might be the earliest of the New Testament letters. It's a toss-up between Galatians and 1 Thessalonians. But most people think it is Galatians.

It means it was written about 48 AD. It's only 15 years, 1-5, 15 years after the death of the Lord Jesus. It's not a lot of time. These are the first words we read of the Apostle Paul. Possibly the first words in the New Testament. They're exciting words. The first words written by New Testament believers.

And I think that's really important. It's important because lots of the sceptics that are around today, and the kind of default that people think is that the Christian faith kind of evolved.

[2:03] Jesus was a nice guy. He did lots of good things. And then he's kind of evolved into what we believe about him today. Those who were there at the time, they didn't really think that. They admired him.

But it's evolved into this kind of more complex Son of God kind of stuff. The Christian faith, they would say, started really simply and unsupernaturally.

And gradually, those doctrines kind of evolved. But that just isn't the case. The great truths which Christians believe, that we believe, are there right from the beginning.

Just look at the first few verses of Galatians. Verse 1, you have Jesus alongside the Father. And you've got the resurrection in the first verse, haven't you?

God raised him from the dead, right from the off. You've got verses 3 to 5, the atoning death of Jesus Christ for our sins. So it's all there, right from the very first words of the New Testament.

[3:06] Now I want to pass quickly over verses 1 and 2, where Paul states more clearly than anywhere else in the New Testament, his kind of divine right of apostleship. Verse 1, Paul, an apostle, a saint one, not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me.

He emphasizes his apostleship there. It's something we're going to come back to again and again in Galatians. There are people in the church in Galatia who are trying to influence the church, and they're very anti the apostle Paul.

And they're casting doubt on his apostleship. So can you see, right from the very first words of verse 1, Paul stresses, doesn't he, in very strong words, I am an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am an authoritative witness, and I am an authoritative spokesman of Jesus Christ. It's not from man. It's not by man. It's not something that I took upon myself.

It's not something I applied to. It's not something anyone appointed him to, or was conferred upon him. It was the choice of God, who raised Jesus from the dead.

[4 : 22] And he's going to say much more about that in chapter 1 and chapter 2. But I want to start with verses 3 to 5, and we're going to do something slightly different in this series. We're going to do memory verses, all right?

And so we have given you a little card. And if you can get it, it should have been in all your service sheets. I want you to pin it on your fridge, put it in your Bible, stick it on the windscreen of your car if you want to.

But I want us to start, in the words of Psalm 119, hiding God's word in our hearts that we might not sin against him. And we get children of our church, don't we, to learn the Bible, but for some reason we think when we get to about 14 or 15 that we've outgrown it.

And so would you read with me Galatians 1, verses 3 to 5. Let's say it all together. Amen. And so what we have in those verses is really the earliest statement.

in the New Testament about the meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus. And I want to give you six points, yes, six points about the death of the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 47] Before we do that, let's pray. And we thank you, Lord, for this, the greatest of all subjects. And I guess, Lord, that some of us, when we hear about the message of the cross, or that we're going to hear a sermon on the cross, we switch off because we think we've heard it all before.

And we pray, Lord, that we wouldn't do that this morning. We ask that the death of the Lord Jesus, the cross of our Savior, would come to us with a new power, with a new freshness.

We ask that your Holy Spirit would bless his word and focus us on Jesus and what he's done for us. And we pray that we would be sent away today with glad hearts.

Bring us to Jesus, we ask, in his name. Amen. Six points. Number one, Jesus' death was voluntary. Jesus' death was voluntary.

Verse 4, can you see it? Jesus. Christ who gave himself. Jesus gave himself for our sins.

[7 : 06] Jesus chose to die for us. Jesus wasn't betrayed and arrested and put on trial and condemned and ill-treated and tortured and crucified against his will.

His death on the cross was not something he resisted. And then he was finally overcome by his enemies. Jesus wasn't dragged to crucifixion against his will.

Jesus didn't go suddenly on that road to Calvary, kind of sullenly accepting the inevitable. No, this is what Jesus wanted to do. This is what the Lord Jesus chose to do.

He gave himself. At the good shepherd, gave himself for his sheep. John 10, he says, No one takes my life from me.

I lay it down myself. Jesus gave himself. He chose to do what he did. That's very clear, isn't it?

[8 :11] If you take Mark's gospel, do you remember Mark's gospel? Chapters 1 to 8. Jesus reveals to his disciples who he is, his identity. He is the Christ. He is the one who has absolute authority.

He has authority in his teaching. He has authority over demons, over disease. He has authority over nature. He has authority over disability.

He has authority even over death. And then he gets to the halfway point in Mark's gospel. And he tells his astonished disciples that this one who has authority over absolutely everything is going to Jerusalem.

And when he gets there, he will be rejected. And he will suffer and he will be killed. And we're told that Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem. That he knowingly drinks the cup that his father had given him to drink.

He willingly drinks it. When he's about to be arrested, you remember the soldiers approach him and Jesus forbids his disciples to resist.

[9 :16] He says, put your swords away, boys. He says, don't you realize that I could call to my father in heaven and 12 legions of angels would come and rescue me if I wanted them to. They would get me out of this. Put your swords away. Jesus chose to die. He gave himself.

So the question is, isn't it, why did he do that? Why did he voluntarily choose to give himself? And the answer is love.

Love is the reason why he did that. Love was why he did it. If you just look at Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20, flick over the page. These remarkable verse.

Halfway through the verse he says this, Paul. And the life I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[10 :21] It's what every Christian can say, isn't it? The son of God loved me and gave himself for me. So the death of Jesus was voluntary.

Secondly, the death of Jesus, Jesus' death was an act of obedience. Can you see that in verse 4? He gave himself for all our sins and to deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.

And Jesus gave himself willingly. He gave himself because it was what his father had planned. And it was what his father had wanted. You can go to those passages in Mark's gospel.

Where he will talk about how he will go to Jerusalem to die. And do you remember how Jesus says it in Mark's gospel if you read it? He says, it must happen. It must happen.

It says, the son of man, which is the way he refers to himself. The son of man must go to Jerusalem. He must suffer. So why must he? Because it is his father's will.

[11 :30] And because the scriptures, God's word must be fulfilled. The scriptures foretold it. The father wills it. It's what the father wanted him to do.

And that is why the Lord Jesus gives himself to this. That is why he was doing it. So you go to John's gospel. And you read over and over and over again where Jesus says he'd come to do his father's will.

He'd come to please his father. He'd come to do the work that he'd been given to do by his father. He was doing the will of God.

It was his father's will. That he lay down his life. That he give his life. And so you go to the Garden of Gethsemane again. And where Jesus prays.

And it's the night before his crucifixion. And he prays and sweat, as it were, like great drops of blood falls from him. And he prayed, didn't he? If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

[12:33] Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. And then he rises to meet those soldiers that we just talked about. He rises to meet Judas, who've come to arrest him.

And he says these words. Shall I not drink the cup that the father has given me? The Apostle Paul in Philippians says that the Lord Jesus was obedient.

Obedient even to death. On a cross. And so can you see these first two points that Paul is making in Galatians 1, 3 to 5.

That Jesus gave himself. And his death was an act of obedience to the father. These first points tell you, don't they? That the father and the son are in perfect harmony.

They are in perfect harmony when it comes to the death of Jesus. We must never imply that the son volunteered to do something against the father's will.

[13:31] Or that the father required the son to do something against his will. The father and the son were completely at one.

Jesus gave himself in love and obedience. In love for us. And in love for his father. And in desire to do his father's will. Number three. Jesus' death was for our sin.

Jesus' death was voluntary. Jesus' death was an act of obedience. Number three. Jesus' death was for our sin. Look at verse four. He gave himself for our sins.

And why was this giving of himself and this act of loving obedience necessary? Well, Paul says, it's necessary that Jesus died for our sins.

Our moral failure. Our rebellion. Our disobedience towards God. It was our sin.

[14:38] Our sin. Our sin. That made it necessary for Jesus to do this. Jesus was without sin. So Jesus' death was not on account of his own sins.

But on account of our sins. His people's sins. And again, that's what the New Testament says right the way through, isn't it? In 1 Corinthians 15 and verse three, the Apostle Paul says, And these are the really key things about my ministry.

Here are the most important things about the gospel. Here are the things that I need you to know. Christ died for our sins. He was buried on the third day.

And he was raised again. Christ died for our sins. Christ died for our sins. The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3 verse 18 said this, Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

And of course, this builds, doesn't it, on the whole teaching of the Old Testament. So you read the Old Testament and you will see there that there are Old Testament sacrifices for sins. There are differences, aren't there?

[15:55] Different kinds of sacrifices. But there are animal sacrifices. What's the difference between an animal sacrifice and the Lord Jesus' sacrifice?

What have we learned already? We've learned, don't we, that animals don't give themselves. We've learned that the Lord Jesus gave himself. The animal never gave himself. The animal is taken kicking and screaming or blindly.

They didn't give themselves. They were dragged kicking and screaming to the place of sacrifice. But the Lord Jesus gave himself to be a sacrifice for sin. You go to Isaiah and that most famous foreshadowing of the cross of Christ in Isaiah 53, the servant of the Lord who gives himself for Israel's sin, who is wounded for our transgressions, who is bruised for our iniquities.

The punishment that brings us peace was laid upon him. And by his wounds, we are healed. And so in the Bible, death is associated with sin.

Death is not natural. There's no such thing as a natural death. Death has come into our world as sin. Now, you know that, isn't it? How do you know that? Because when someone that you love dies, it feels like an intruder.

[17:23] It feels so wrong. The wages of sin, the Bible tells us, is death. And so Jesus' death, like all deaths, is associated with sin.

But in his case, the sins are ours. Not his. And that means that Jesus acted as our substitute and our representative.

Jesus died instead of us. He was our substitute. And he also died on our behalf. He was our representative. Let me try and illustrate it.

Let's imagine that IPC Ealing have a football team, all right? And I'm one of the star players, quite naturally. And yet I'm getting old and I get injured often.

And so I ask Andrew Cuey to be my substitute and to be my representative. And because Andrew goes to play for the IPC football team, I don't have to.

[18:33] I can sit at home while he plays the game. He's also my representative. He speaks on my behalf. He speaks in my name. When he scores, we score.

And if his team wins, we win. And it's not just Andrew that wins. It's IPC Ealing that wins.

His victory is ours. So in and through Andrew, the whole church plays and wins. Jesus is our substitute and our representative.

He died instead of us. And because he died, we don't have to if we trust him. And he's also our representative. Jesus acted as the head of the church.

And so what he did on our behalf, what he did, the church did. Not because we've actually done anything, but because Jesus, the head of the church, has done it.

[19:40] Jesus obeyed the law of God perfectly. Jesus died on the cross. He took the penalty for our sin. Jesus suffered what we should have suffered.

And because he did it as head of the church, God regards us as having done it. So Jesus' death was for our sin. That's the third point.

Number four, Jesus' death rescues us. Can you see that verse four? Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us, to rescue us from the present evil age.

The word rescue here is different. It's unusual in the context. It's not usually said of what Jesus has done for us.

This word rescue, it's used in the book of Acts that we studied last year. So it's used, for example, about Peter being rescued from prison by an angel.

[20:43] Peter being delivered, rescued from prison by an angel. It's used of the Apostle Paul when he was rescued from the Jewish lynch mob by the Romans. It's used of Stephen's speech in Acts of God rescuing Israel from the clutches of Egypt.

And so Paul says here that Jesus' death rescues us. The implication is the situation we were in was disastrous and hopeless.

We're facing misery, we're facing disaster, we're facing death unless someone comes and intervenes and pulls us out. And it is Jesus who intervenes.

And it is by his death he rescues. Jesus' death is the only thing that can rescue you from your sins.

And so that tells you, doesn't it, that self-salvation, trying to rescue yourself, is utterly impossible. And you should give up the attempt this morning.

[21:51] Jesus gave himself for our sins in order to rescue us. But what is it, according to our verse, that Jesus' death rescues us from?

What is it that Jesus' death delivers us from? Can you see it? The present evil age. Could be, another way of putting it, is the present age of evil.

Or the present age of the evil one. 2 Corinthians 4 calls the devil the god of this age. The Jewish people divided history into two ages.

At this age and the age to come. So I've got an illustration here. And so there are two ages, alright?

There is this age. And there is the age to come. I couldn't find one that didn't rattle, alright? Okay. So there's this age and the age to come.

[23 : 00] So the Jewish people believed, we lived in this age. And then in the future, there was the age to come. This age is dominated by evil, isn't it?

This age is dominated by sin. And it is Satan's age. Dominated by sin and death and judgment. This age was inaugurated when Adam fell in Genesis 3.

And so how do we get into this age? Let me tell you how we get into this age. We're born into it. Every single one of us. We're born into it.

But Jesus' death rescues us from the age of judgment and death and sin. And we're told, aren't we, that it delivers us from this present evil age.

That Jesus, our substitute and representative, he accepted God's judgment. He entered into this evil age. And because he did, he is now raised from the dead.

[24 : 07] And the new age of the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus, has come. And so when you became a Christian, you moved from being in this present evil age into the age to come.

But here's the truth. The Jews thought that these ages were completely separate. But what the New Testament teaches, and it's really important for you and I to grasp, is that Jesus entered into this present evil age.

And we live now in the overlap. So we live in that bit in the middle. Don't you put a little of that. We live in the middle bit. One day, gloriously, the age to come will be fully and perfectly free, won't it?

But we now live in the overlap of the ages. The Jews didn't think it was going to be like that. And Jesus says, no, no, no. I have died and I have risen. So the cross comes right in the middle here.

And inaugurates the age to come. We live in the overlap. And so as Christians, we have two locations, don't we? We live in this present evil age, but we also live in the age to come.

[25 : 23] And we are living for and looking for this age to come. Jesus rescues us by his death from this present evil age. And so Andrew, if he is my substitute, do you remember that?

He is not mine. But I am in the first division. And we as a church are in the first division. Because Andrew, our substitute and our representative, has scored the goals for us.

He's got us out of the second division and into the first division. Jesus Christ, by his death and by his resurrection, has got us out of the present evil age.

And one day that evil age will pass away. And all there will be, will be the age to come. And we will be part of it. If we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if we trust in what he has done for us when he died on the cross. That is good, good news. Number five, Jesus brings grace and peace. Can you see that? Verse three, chapter one.

[26 : 52] Grace to you. And peace. From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And this work of the Lord Jesus brings you into a life of grace and peace.

Nearly all of Paul's letters begin grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. At that age to come, the age to come, do you remember it?

The age to come is an age of grace and peace. And we enjoy it now, right now, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace is how Christians live in this present evil age.

That is our Christian experience. So, understand this. Grace, God's undeserved kindness, leads to peace. Peace comes from grace. And peace can only come from grace.

God's grace. Receiving God's undeserved kindness is the only way to receive God's peace. The only way that you will ever receive peace is by relying on the grace of God.

[28 : 07] As long as you look to yourself, even if you're looking to yourself for 1% of your salvation, if you look to yourself, you will never have peace.

Because you will never ever be sure that you've done enough. The Christian message is this. The peace of God is, by God's grace, 100%.

Grace, grace, grace. We stand in grace. And it is that grace that is the basis of our peace. Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is totally undeserved. And it comes only through Jesus. Through what he did on the cross. And Christians never move beyond this. So, we never move beyond the grace of God.

We never move beyond the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's nothing to move to. There's nothing beyond it. We are always celebrating the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 12] And so, this morning, if you've lost your peace, and you've lost your assurance, let me tell you this, it is almost certain that you've moved away from the grace of God to a certain degree.

If you've lost your peace this morning, it is almost certain that you have moved away from the grace of God and the cross of Jesus Christ. Number six.

The result of Jesus' death is that God is glorified forever. Look at verse 5. Amen. To whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. And the purpose of the good news of God is not just our personal salvation.

salvation. It's not just our salvation. The purpose of the gospel, the good news of God, is the glory of God. The purpose of the gospel is to display God's character of all that God is, so that God's character and his holiness and his mercy and his grace and his love will be known and praised throughout all the world and all eternity.

[30 : 26] and that is why God sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross. It was not just for us, but for him. He wanted to make himself known.

He wanted to demonstrate his glory. That is what Jesus wanted. So do you remember, he prayed, glorify your name, Father. This is what it's all about. Glorify the Father because of the cross.

Because of the cross, the Father will be glorified forever and ever. And Jesus was entirely centered on the glory of the Father. And for us to be Jesus-centered, which people talk an awful lot about, will mean that we are Father-centered.

Because Jesus recognized that the work of the cross was that the Father might be glorified forever and ever. That is the Apostle Paul's message. The Apostle Paul's gospel centers on Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It focuses on the person of Jesus Christ and his work. It focuses on a message of rescue, pointing to the now and the not yet.

[31 : 45] And it is the best news and it is the only answer for your guilt and mine. And it is why this church exists to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And it is the main thing and we have to fight to keep it the main thing. Because verse 6, he drops the bomb.

And he says to the church in Galatia, he says this, I am astonished, I am astonished, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting, abandoning him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel.

And so may we as a church never abandon the gospel, never abandon the message of Jesus Christ crucified and can you see how quickly it happens?

Look what it says. I am astonished that you are so quickly, quickly deserting, quickly abandoning. May we never abandon the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[33 : 00] May we delight in it. May we rejoice to take this message to others because it's changed our lives. It's changed our eternity.

Would you read with me again verses 3 to 5 of Galatians 1? Let's read it together. Amen. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray. Amen.