



## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019 : Gospel Centred – Galatians 1.1-10

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Tonight, we begin a new series looking at the book of Galatians – this seems such an appropriate place to begin the new year as so much is uncertain, and in the book of Galatians we encounter a Man, Paul who is absolutely certain of what is important, even when others waver.

January – means a lot of different things to different people – often a chance to start afresh.

How are you getting on with your new year's resolutions?

More exercise, less sugar,  
more ginger tea, less caffeine,  
more kindness, less grumpiness,  
how's that going for you?

January often a time of uncertainty and change.

And the start of 2019 has a different feel about it – for us as a country as Brexit is suddenly a lot closer and politically we are in uncharted territory.

If ever we needed some certainty – some reminders of what is unchanging, what can be trusted and relied on, it's now. And I think, we encounter all that in Galatians – so let's hear our reading.

Reading: Galatians 1

Father God, open our minds to your possibilities,  
open our ears to hear your voice,  
open our hearts to encounter you. Amen

**'Paul, an apostle - sent not with a human commission nor by a human authority - but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead and - all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia'** (Galatians 1:1-2)

Paul, an apostle sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father

When the post comes, I have a quick and easy method of sorting through the mail to decide what to open and what to recycle. Some junk mail is easy to spot, pizza menus, double glazing brochures, but others are more cunning – hidden in envelopes addressed 'to the homeowner'. Before I open a thing I look at the return address.

Anything from Virgin Media, or PPI companies straight in the bin. Once you know who it's from, you then decide how seriously to take it.

As you sift through the mail – sometimes there's a return address that jolts you to attention – whether you like what's inside it or not. 'From the 'Inland Revenue' – for those of us who do our own tax returns – those letters are important.

Or what about the jolt of adrenalin that surges through your body when you read 'from the police fixed penalty office' – obviously talking theoretically here.

Imagine what it was like for the Galatians – getting a letter from ‘Paul the Apostle – sent by Jesus Christ’. Imagine the importance that letter would’ve received – immediately taken out of the pile, separated away from the lamb kebab shop menus and the chatty letter from great Uncle Barnabas.

Imagine the jolt of energy, excitement, - ‘it’s from Paul – gather the church, this requires special attention whether we like what’s inside or not.’

Paul’s was an apostle of Jesus Christ, commissioned and sent out by Him.

- This isn’t a chatty ‘hello how are you’ letter – it’s a letter reflecting the unchanging unwavering values of God.
- It’s not some optional advice for you to take or leave, but a powerful reminder of what is certain and what should not be deviated from.

And in verses 3 and 4 – Paul summarises the whole letter – Galatians - this is what is unchanging – this is what is crucial – this is what is certain – this is truth.

**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.**

(Galatians 1:3-4)

Paul is straight in there - introducing the heart of his message. Grace and Peace to you. The fruit of the gospel is grace and peace.

Grace and Peace with God – no longer alienated from him – but able to encounter him, walk with him, know him.

Grace and Peace with God – that makes a difference now - that helps us find peace with others and peace with ourselves.

Grace and Peace with God that is real and means that even in anxious times, like right now - we can be a community of peace.

Grace and Peace with God that starts now but goes on forever, that reaches beyond just you and me and spills into the whole world.

This is the fruit of the gospel.

And all this Galatians 1.3-4 tell us is made possible by Jesus who gave himself for our sins to rescue us because that’s what the Father desired.

That’s the gospel – loved, rescued, redeemed through the cross. It’s so simple and yet so profound. This is the unchanging good news – nothing can be added to it, nothing taken away. The cross is enough.

Loved, rescued, redeemed through the cross.

Nothing more is needed.

Anything more is not the gospel.

Because you cannot add to the finished work of Christ.

- If people can be made right with God through believing they are good enough anyway, or through their good works, then Jesus died for nothing.
- If people can be made right with God through (as the false teachers in Galatians were teaching) through circumcision and obeying the Old Testament rules, or offering animal sacrifices, or because of their race or heritage, then Jesus died for nothing.

Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present age, according to the will of our God and Father so we could live in Grace and Peace. Nothing more is needed

John Stott says, "The work of Christ is a finished work; and the gospel of Christ is a gospel of free grace. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, without any adding of human works or merit. Our salvation is solely due to God's gracious call."

It's so simple – and that's what makes it so hard – because many people want to add to it. Including the false teachers around in the time of the Galatians.

That's why Paul gets so agitated next in v6-7.

**I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by 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.** (Galatians 1:6-7)

Galatians - You have lost your way! You have added more to the gospel and in doing so have deserted the true simple Gospel. The cross is enough – any addition on top of that – any other conditions for salvation empties the cross of its power. There is only one Gospel.

Paul is clear - you can't add to it without taking away from it.

Any message, any sermon, any book or article that adds to the finished work of Jesus is not only a perversion it's a sign of a desertion. To add is to take away.

See how the two are linked.

Perverting the message of Jesus is to desert God.

- That is why Paul exerts his authority.
- That is why Paul expresses his anxiety.
- This is why Paul is so strong in verses 8-9

**But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let that person be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let that person be eternally condemned!** (Galatians 1:8-9)

This is some of the strongest language in the New Testament letters. Notice this is a universal condemnation: There are no exceptions. It equally applies to human teachers, angelic beings or the apostle Paul himself.

We might not like the strength of this, or the language used – but what is unmistakeable is Paul's absolute surety that the cross is enough. Let no one say otherwise.

So what are we to do with all this?

In all the changes that January brings, let's remain centred on the gospel after all – that's what is at the heart of what we believe, and who we are - and trust its simplicity. We are loved, rescued and redeemed. Let's allow that simplicity to shape our response.

I am struck afresh by the fruit of the gospel being grace and peace. Two words that seem particularly important for right now.

I want to be a person of grace and peace.

I want to model grace and peace even in the anxiety and change around me.

And I recognise, I can't do that on my own – so the challenge is, will I, will we, go each day to the foot of the cross, acknowledge our need of God and our gratitude for Jesus, and every day trust the simplicity of the gospel and receive grace and peace.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:3)