The Heart of Our Church

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] Well, we're going to turn now to the message of the Lord Jesus. And we're reading in our Bibles in Paul's letter to the Galatians. And in Galatians chapter 1.

If you don't have a Bible with you, if you don't have your Bible, there are visitors' Bibles outside. So do ask one of the stewards. They'll be glad to give you one. And you can follow along with us. It's important to do that and see where this is coming from.
And see the Word of God yourself. So Paul's going to be preaching to us from some verses in this chapter. The beginning of Paul's letter to the church in Galatia.
And we're going to read together from chapter 1, verses 1 to 10. Galatians 1, verse 1. And Paul, an apostle, 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 to the churches of Galatia.
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.
[1:21] Amen. I am astonished, says Paul, that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.
As we've said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God?
Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Amen.
May God bless to us his word. Well, thank you very much indeed for your warm welcome.
[2:39] It is a real privilege to be with you this weekend. I owe a lot to this church. I owe a lot to your former ministers. I owe an awful lot to the friendship of your current minister.

And so it really is. It's a joy. I bring with me the greetings of the International Presbyterian Church in Ealing in West London. We are united in Christ with you.
We preach the same gospel. And so I bring you those greetings. Would you turn with me to Galatians chapter one? Galatians chapter one.
And I really want to speak to you about what has been at the heart of your church since its beginning. What's at the heart of your church now? And what should be at the heart of every Christian church?
And that is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians is one of the earliest letters of the New Testament. It's a toss up between Galatians and 1 Thessalonians.
[3:36] But a lot of people, including me, think it is Galatians. That means it's written about 48 AD. Only 15 years. One, five years after Jesus died.

That's not a lot of time. These are probably the first words that the Apostle Paul wrote. Possibly the first words in the New Testament.
It's exciting. The first words written by a New Testament believer. And that's important because many of the skeptics that we meet today, many of the doubters around today, they will tell you that Christianity kind of evolved in the hazy mists of time.
That the doctrines that we believe about the New Testament, they weren't contemporary to Jesus. They kind of evolved. You know the argument, don't you? Jesus was just a good guy.
He was a good man. And gradually, over the mists of time, people started to worship him. He wasn't the son of God then, but kind of Christians evolved into thinking in that way.

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[4:45] It developed over a long period of time. They would say Christianity started, well, simply and unsupernaturally.

And gradually, those doctrines evolved. But that just isn't the case. The great truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ were there right from the very beginning.
And so here in these first three verses, just look at them with me. You have Jesus, don't you? Alongside the Father. Can you see that in verse 1? Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.
In verse 3, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you see you've got the resurrection in the very first verse?
God raised Jesus from the dead. You've got the atoning death of Jesus for our sins in verses 3 to 5.
[5:52] And so all of these key doctrines that we believe and we hope and we trust in and we proclaim are there right from the very beginning. From the very first words of the New Testament.

The first two verses, Paul states more clearly than anywhere else, really, the divine origin of his apostleship.
Look at verse 1. Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.
He emphasizes his apostleship. The divine origin of his apostleship. That he is an official spokesman for the living God.
Why does he do that? Because there were people throughout the region of Galatia who were trying to influence the Christians there. And they were casting doubt on Paul.
[6:50] They were saying he's not really the real deal. He's not one of the originals, one of the OGs. And so he stresses, doesn't he, in very strong words that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am a bona fide official spokesman on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am an authoritative witness. It's not from man.
It's not by man. It's not something that the apostle Paul kind of took upon himself as some kind of public schoolboy who feels used to the manner born. No, it's not something that was appointed to him.
Or was conferred upon him. It was the choice of God who raised Jesus from the dead. And as you go through Galatians, which I hope your minister will preach through again very soon.
Because he's brilliant on it. You will see that. But I want to look this morning at verses 3 to 5.
Because what you have in verses 3 to 5 is a glorious summary of what churches like ours should be about.
[8:00] And so I wonder whether you and I can read it together. I don't know how it will work in a couple of satellite sites. But I think it will be good for us. If you've got the ESV, that will help. If you read from the original Greek, we'll bear with you.

All right? Okay? And so what you have here is one of the earliest statements of the New Testament about the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ. And it is dynamite.
So will you read with me verses 3 to 5 after 2, 1, 2. Memory verses are out of fashion, aren't they? And yet I think there are no greater verses that you could learn this week, you and your household, to understand the heart of Christianity. Let's pray together.
Heavenly Father, as we come to look at the cross of Jesus Christ, we thank you for this greatest of all subjects. We thank you for the scriptures which you have given to us.
[9:20] Lord, we thank you for our apostle, the apostle Paul. And we confess to you that sometimes we switch off when we hear about the cross. We think that we've heard it all before.

And we pray, Lord, that we might not do that this morning. And that the death of the Lord Jesus, the cross of our Savior, would come to us with a new power and with a new freshness.
And we ask that your Holy Spirit would bless his word and focus us on Jesus and what he's done for us. And send us away this Lord's day with glad hearts.
Bring us to him, we ask. In Jesus' name, amen. I want to make six points. Six points. You can get away with that when you're a guest preacher, alright?
Six points. There are children dreading this. But they'll be quick, I promise. Six points about the cross of Jesus Christ. Number one. Jesus' death was voluntary.
[10:26] Jesus' death was voluntary. Can you look at verse four? Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins.

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And he gave himself. Jesus gave himself. The Lord Jesus chose to die. It wasn't that he was betrayed and arrested and put on trial and condemned and ill-treated and tortured and crucified against his will.
When Jesus died, it wasn't something that he resisted. It wasn't that he was finally overcome by his enemies and was caught up in the trap of the Pharisees. He wasn't dragged to the crucifixion against his will.
He didn't go sullenly accepting the inevitable. No, this is what Jesus wanted to do. This is what Jesus chose to do.
He gave himself. The good shepherd lays down his life, gives his life for the sheep. Jesus says in John chapter 10, No one takes my life from me.
[11:46] I lay it down. Jesus gave himself. He chose to do what he did. It's so clear, isn't it, in Mark's account. You read the first half of Mark's gospel.

And you see that Jesus reveals to his disciples who he is. That he is the Christ. That he has absolute authority over demons and disease and sickness and nature.
He has absolute authority even over death. And then at the midpoint of Mark's gospel, he tells his astonished disciples that they are going to Jerusalem.
And when they get there, he will be rejected and he will suffer and he will be killed. He will be brutally crucified. And Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem.
And he does it knowingly. He drinks the cup that his father gave him to drink. He willingly drank it. He forbids his disciples, doesn't he?
[12:50] He says, put your swords away when they want to fight back. He tells them, don't you realize I could call 12 legions of angels from heaven if I wanted. And they would come and they would rescue me and they'd get me out of this.

No problems at all. Put your swords away. Jesus chose to go to the cross. He gave himself. And why did he do that? He did it for love.
Love was why he did it. I look at Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20. We love this verse, don't we? Where the apostle Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ.
It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. That's the glorious reality if you're a Christian today. And the life that you live, I now live in the flesh.
I live by faith in the Son of God. And here's the point. Who loved me and gave himself for me. Those last few words, they're so precious, aren't they?
[13:51] The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. He loved me. And because he loved me, he gave himself for me.

So the death of Jesus was voluntary. But secondly, the death of Jesus was an act of obedience. Look at verse 4 of chapter 1 again. He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.
Jesus gave himself because it was what his father had planned. Jesus went to the cross because it was what his father wanted. Again, you go to those passages in Mark's gospel where he talks about how he will go to Jerusalem to die.
And he says it must happen. Have you noticed that? And the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem. The Son of Man must be betrayed. The Son of Man must suffer.
And why must he? Because it is his father's will. And because the scriptures must be fulfilled.
[14:59] The scriptures foretold it. The father wills it. And that is what the father wanted him to do. And that is why he is giving himself to this.

That is why he was doing it. When you read John's gospel. You see again and again and again that Jesus says he had come to do his father's will.
That he had come to please his father. He had come to do the work that his father had given him. He was doing the will of God. It was his father's will.
That he laid down his life. That he gave his life. In Gethsemane. In the garden. When he is praying and preparing himself for the cross.
With all the horror of what it will be. He prayed and sweat like great drops of blood comes out of him. And he prays. If it is possible let this cup pass from me.
[15:55] Nevertheless not my will. But yours be done. And then he rose. And he meets Judas his betrayer. And the soldiers who have come to arrest him.

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And he says. Shall I not drink the cup. That the father has given me. The apostle Paul later on in Philippians chapter 2 says. And he was obedient to death.
Even death on a cross. And so these first two points. Can you see them? Jesus gave himself. Voluntarily. And his death was an act of obedience to his father.
They show you don't they. That the father and the son are in perfect harmony. When it comes to the death of the Lord Jesus. We must never imply that the son.
Volunteered to do something against the father's will. Or that the father required the son to do something against his will. That loving Jesus placates an angry father.
[16:58] No. The father and the son are perfectly at one. Jesus gives himself in love for you. And obedience to his father.

In love for us. And love for his father. And in his desire to do his father's will. Point number one. Jesus death was voluntary. Point number two. Jesus death was an act of obedience.
Point number three. Jesus death was for our sin. Look at verse four. He gave himself for our sin. Why was this act of loving obedience necessary?
Jesus says it was for our sins. It was for our moral failure. The things that you and I are deeply ashamed of that we wouldn't want anyone else to know.
The things that we're embarrassed about before others but certainly before God. Our disobedience. Our outright rebellion. Our transgression. Saying Lord I don't want you in my life.
[18:04] It was our sins. That made it necessary for Jesus to do this. Jesus was without sin.

And so his death was not on account of sins that he had done. But it was on account of our sin. Again it's a message that runs right the way through the New Testament.
In 1 Corinthians 15 which I'm sure you'll look at around Easter. Paul says here's the most important things about the gospel. Here's of first importance. Number one that Christ died for our sin.
That he was buried and that on the third day he rose again. Christ died for our sin. In 1 Peter 3 verse 18. Christ also suffered once for sins.
The righteous for the unrighteous. To bring us to God. And of course that builds on doesn't it? The teaching of the whole of the Bible of the Old Testament. That there were animal sacrifices for sin.
[19:10] And one of the differences is with an animal sacrifice. The animal did not give themselves. The animal did not kind of voluntarily trot up to the altar and lay down.

The animals were dragged weren't they? Kicking and screaming. To the place of sacrifice. Sometimes they would have had to be tied up so they couldn't escape. And they would be put wriggling on the altar. But Jesus gives himself to be a sacrifice for sin. So it's words by Isaiah 53 which we love isn't it?
That the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. That he, the servant of the Lord, was wounded for our transgression.
He was bruised for our iniquity. The punishment that brings us peace was upon him. And with his wounds, by his wounds we are healed. In the Bible it's really clear that death is associated with sin.
[20:20] Before sin entered into the world, there was no death. God warns Adam and Eve right at the beginning of time. On the day that you shall eat of it, you will surely die.

It's why death is always unintruded. So unnatural is that no one goes to the crematorium and thinks, Oh, do you know what? I was made to be here. I love this place. None of you do that.
No one does it. Sin has brought death. The wages of sin is death.
And Jesus' death, like all deaths, was associated with sin. But in his case, the sin was ours. And so that means Jesus acted as our substitute.
Jesus died instead of us in our place. He was our representative. Let me try and illustrate this in the simplest way.
[21:20] Let's imagine that the Tron have a football team. Do you have a football team? I don't know if you do. That's not the kind of thing that churches really should have, to be honest. And let's say that I am one of the star players of the football team, which again is not unsurprising.

But I am getting old and I am injured more. And so I ask Edward Lobb to take my place. And Edward Lobb becomes my substitute. He takes my place in the team.
Edward Lobb becomes my representative. And because Edward plays, I don't have to play. He plays instead of me. And I can sit at home while Edward plays the game.
He is my representative. Which means that he kind of plays in my place. He speaks in my name. And when Edward scores, I score.

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When the team scores, we score. When the team wins, we win. And it's not just that Edward wins. It is the Tron that wins.
[22:25] His victory is our victory. So in and through Edward, the whole team plays. The whole team wins.

And so in and through the Lord Jesus, our substitute, our representative, he dies instead of us. It's very, very simple. And because he died, we don't have to.
And if we trust in him, he is our representative. He acted as head of the church. So what Jesus did, he did on our behalf. And what he did, the church has done.
Not because we've actually done anything. But because Jesus, the head of the church, has done it. Jesus obeyed the law of God in a way that I've not done it.
Never obeyed it. And Jesus died on the cross and took the penalty for my sin. And he suffered what I should have suffered. And because he did it as the head of the church, God regards us as having done it.
[23:28] And so Jesus' death was for our sin. Number four, Jesus' death wonderfully rescues us. Can you see that verse four? Well, Jesus' death rescues us.

Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us, to rescue us from the present evil age. The word rescue is an unusual word in our context.
It's not usually used of what Jesus did for us. It's used particularly in the book of Acts and Luke. It's used for, for example, Peter being rescued from prison by an angel.
He's delivered. He's rescued from prison by an angel. It's used of Paul when he's preaching and there's a kind of lynch mob and there's a riot. And the Romans rescue Paul.
It's used in Stephen's speech when he talks about the children of Israel being rescued by God in Egypt from captivity. And so the picture here, Paul says, is that Jesus' death rescues us.
[24:31] That implies that the situation we were in was hopeless. And we're facing misery and disaster. And we are facing certain death unless someone intervenes.

And it is Jesus who intervenes and it is by his death that he rescues. And it is the only thing that can rescue. Jesus' death is the only thing that can rescue you from yourself and what is coming.
From the death that you will face and from the judgment that you deserve. And because of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation is possible.
What that means is this. You should give up trying to save yourself. You should give up trying to rescue yourself. What is it that Jesus' death rescues us from?
What is it that Jesus' death delivers us from? Can you see it? This present evil age. In 1 Corinthians 4, 2 Corinthians 4, the same apostle Paul calls the devil the God of this age.
[25:43] The Jews divided history into two ages. So I've got an illustration for you. I asked Terry McCutcheon whether he could get me some hula hoops, not the crisps.

I wasn't brave enough to ask Willie. And so these are the hula hoops that I think Terry McCutcheon often plays with. All right? Okay? And so he's got to be... So I'd like to thank Terry for this.
So the Jews divided history into two ages. The present age and the age to come. This age is dominated by evil.
And by sin. It is Satan's age. Dominated by sin and death and judgment. This age was inaugurated by Adam's fall.
Now, how can we get out of this age? Every single one of us is born into this age. But Jesus' death rescues us from the age of death and judgment.
[26:52] And it rescues us from this present evil age. Jesus came into this present evil age. Jesus, our substitute and our representative, accepted God's judgment upon this evil age.

And because he died on the cross and his death was accepted. The new age has been inaugurated. The new age has become.
And so when you become a Christian, you move from being just in this present evil age to in the age that is to come. Jesus' resurrection has become. Jesus' resurrection has begun a new age.
When Jesus stepped out of the grave on Easter Sunday morning, it was one small step for man. But it was one giant leap for mankind.
A new age has begun. And when you become a Christian, you move from just being in this present evil age into the age that is to come. The Jews thought that it was going to be two completely separate ages.

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[27:58] But Jesus says, no, no, no, no, there will be an overlap. Jesus dies and raises again. But one day he will come again. One day the Lord Jesus Christ will come again.

And it will be the end of this present evil age. But you and I, we live in the overlap. Alright? We live in this little bit.
Can you see it? And Jesus, by his death, he is delivering you. He has delivered you out of this present evil age. Jesus' death rescues us.
Now, if Edward, let's go back to that illustration. If Edward is my substitute and my representative and he plays instead of me. If our team, if the Tron football team is languishing in the second division.
And Edward plays brilliantly and the Tron football team is promoted to the first division. We are in a new realm. We are in a new division. The goals are not mine.
[29:03] They are his. He scores the goals, not me. But now we are in the first division. And we as a church football team are in a first division. Because Edward, our substitute, and our representative has scored the goals for us.

He has got us out of the second division into the first division. And Jesus, by his obedience and by his death and by his resurrection, has brought you into the age to come.
You live in a new realm. Satan no longer has the power he once had over you. And one day, one day, this present evil age is going to pass away.
What a glorious day that will be. And we will be part of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. But you are part of it right now.
If you trust in what he has done for you. When he died on the cross. Number five. Jesus' death. Brings grace and peace.
[30:12] Did you see that in Galatians 1 verse 3? 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. So this work of Jesus. Grace and peace. Brings us into a life of grace and peace.
At nearly all of Paul's letters begin in that way. Grace and peace to you. From the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This age to come.
That we've been brought into is an age of grace and peace. And we are now in it. And we are now in it. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. We enjoy it. We enjoy it through the Lord Jesus.
Grace and peace. This is how Christians. This is Christian experience. If I could put it like that. It is grace. God's grace. It is grace. God's undeserved kindness and favor in his son.
[31:13] Which leads to peace. Peace comes from grace. And peace can only come from grace.

Peace. And so God's grace is the only way to peace. What that says to you this. If you are here this morning.
And you are looking for peace. And so much of our culture is. The only way that you will ever have peace. Is by relying on this grace of God.
And so as long as you look to yourself. And all the little hacks that you can find on Instagram. And all the well-being tips. As long as you look there. You will never find the peace that they pretend to offer.
If you look to yourself. You will never have peace at all. Because you will never be sure that you have done enough. The Christian life is lived by grace.
[32:12] It is lived by God's undeserved. Unmerited kindness in Christ. And so we stand in grace. And it is that grace of God in Christ.

That is the basis of our peace. Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is utterly undeserved. And the peace that we know.
Is not because we are better. It comes only through Jesus. And you walk away from Jesus. And you lose the peace. And it comes through what he did on the cross.
It is why the Christians go back again and again and again to the cross of Christ. Because it is there where our peace is found. It is why churches like this. Never move beyond the gospel.
And never move beyond the grace of God. And never move beyond the cross of Christ. Because there is nothing to move to. And we are always celebrating the grace of God on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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[33:16] And so today if you have lost your peace. And you have lost your assurance. It is probably almost certain that you have moved away from grace.

To a certain degree. And so grace to you. And peace from God our Father.
And the Lord Jesus Christ. Come back. Come back. To the cross of Jesus Christ. And find grace and peace. Number six.
Last one. The result of Jesus' death finally is that God is glorified forever. Look at verse five. Let me read verse four.
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. The purpose.
[34:17] Of this gospel. Is not just your salvation. It is the glory of God. The purpose of the cross.

Is a display of God's character. Of all that God is. So that his character. And his mercy. And his love. And his holiness. And his justice.
That they will be known. And praised through all eternity. And that is why we come to the cross. And we cannot comprehend it. We cannot fully understand it.
That this is why God did it. Not just for us. But for him. That God wanted to make himself known. He wanted to demonstrate his glory.
That is what Jesus wanted. Do you remember? He prayed. Glorify your name. Father. This is what it's about. Glorify the Father. Father. And because of the cross. The Father will be glorified.
[35:19] Forever and ever and ever. And Jesus was entirely. Centered. On the glory of his Father. And to be Jesus centred. Will mean for us.

To be Father centred. Because Jesus was Father centred. And the purpose of the cross. Was that the Father would be glorified. Forever and ever. That is Paul's gospel. That centers on.
On Jesus Christ and him crucified. On the person of Jesus. On the message of salvation. And it is the best news. And it is the only answer.
For your conscience. And mine. And for your guilt. And for mine. And it is why this church exists. To preach Jesus Christ crucified. And it is the main thing.
And it must always be the main thing. And then in verse 6. Paul drops the bomb. Can you see the bomb?
[36:21] He drops the bomb. He says. I am astonished. I preach through Galatians.

I'd love to know the tone. With which he writes that. There is anger there. But it is incredulous. He cannot believe it. I am astonished.
I am amazed. That you are so quickly. Deserting him. Who called you. In the grace of Christ. And you are turning to a different gospel. Which is no other gospel. And can you see.
It happens quickly. Churches. Churches. Desert the gospel. Quickly. And so brothers and sisters. At the Tron. Do not drift. Do not abandon. Abandon. It is such a horrible word. Isn't it? To be a deserter.
[37:19] In our culture. It is a horrific thing. To walk away. From the gospel. To move from the cross. Of Jesus Christ. The wonder.

Of what we have looked at today. The mystery. Of God made man. Lord Jesus Christ. The wonder. Of the love of the father. For his son. And the obedience. Of the son. To his father.
To move away. From that. To desde. well, it is disaster. And so my prayer for you, and I'm sure it's the prayer of your minister and your leaders and your elders, is that you will never desert him who called you in the grace of Jesus Christ.
You can walk around Glasgow this afternoon and you will see churches everywhere, won't you? It's like where I grew up in South Wales. Churches that are like turning into, I don't know, carpet warehouses or nightclubs, mosques.
Buildings that once, in some form or another, proclaim Jesus Christ and his cross. And now they're empty. The door's just shut.
[38:36] And there's no sound of the cross. Why is that? Because verse 6. Do not desert.

Let's read together. Galatians 1, verses 3 to 5. After 2, 1, 2. 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. Our Heavenly Father, we pray that we would never abandon. we ask that we would delight in and that we would rejoice in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

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Melt our cold, cold hearts with this truth. May we delight to take this message to others because it's this message, this message which looks like foolishness to the world, which looks like weakness to the world.
It's this message which has changed our lives and changed our eternity. And we thank you for this church for the way that generation after generation after generation is kept proclaiming the cross of Jesus Christ.
[40:13] And may that continue until Jesus comes again. We thank you that one day this present evil age will come to an end. There'll be no more mourning, no more pain, no more temptation, no more battling with sin.

We long for that day and we pray, risen Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen. Amen.

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