



# THE GOSPEL STORY

My son Ryan has had three really important interviews in his life which have drastically impacted the direction of his career and life. When he was interviewing for entrance into his Athletic Training program, I helped prepare him for the interview and he said it helped a lot. During an interview, a lot of employers will ask the passion question—"Tell us what you are passionate about?" If you have ever been asked this question in an interview, you know it can be a challenging question to answer. I found some really crazy answers to the passion question that people shared in the job search. Imagine sharing these in an interview.

*What are you passionate about...?*

10. I like learning languages – I'm currently teaching myself to speak Wookiee.
11. Witchcraft.
15. Time travel.
17. Collecting firearms.
18. Arguing with people online.
23. Entering food-eating competitions.
24. Ferret racing.
35. Donating blood – 12 litres so far.
49. I am the batman.
50. You don't want to know...<sup>1</sup>

No one would dispute the fact that the apostle Paul had passion. We saw that last Sunday when he was carrying off men and women to prison for the crime of being a Christian. He said this exact thing about himself in Philippians chapter three—"as to zeal, persecuting the church." He was so zealous, so passionate that he was willing to imprison and kill men and women. You can argue that Paul's passion was not lessened when he became a believer in Jesus the Messiah. His passion was simply funneled into a radically different direction. The other major difference is that instead of inflicting suffering on others he became perfectly willing to endure suffering for the sake of Christ. Instead of casting people into horrible prisons, he was now willing to go there himself if necessary. Instead of causing the death of others, he himself was willing to die in order to follow and serve Jesus.

Nevertheless, his passion and zeal were still turned up to high. And this is very evident when you read the book of Galatians. Which was Paul's first letter to a church which we have preserved as the inspired book to the churches in Galatia.

- In chapter one he laid down the threat of a curse. *If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed* (1:9).
- In chapter two he opposed Peter to his face in front of the whole church. *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned* (2:11).
- In chapter three he called them foolish and bewitched. *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?* (3:1)
- In chapter five he wrote these shocking words. *I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!* (5:12)

Lest you think he was some sort of monster, listen to his gentle tone in chapter four. *My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!* (4:19) But even in his gentleness he was still very passionate. He cared for them like a mother caring for her children. With that as a backdrop, let's read the first part of chapter one.

*Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:*

*<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have 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.*

*<sup>10</sup> 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.*

### **Paul's Commission**

Do you recall Paul's commission that we saw last week in his conversion story in Acts 9? Jesus said three key things to Ananias concerning Saul.

- he is a chosen instrument of mine
- to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel
- For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name

How much of this is still true for you and me? Every bit of it except perhaps the part about kings and the nation of Israel. Every believe is God's chosen instrument. We see this in Ephesians chapter two. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Consider that God not only chose you before the foundation of the world, he also created good works for you to accomplish. In every possible

way, we are God's chosen instrument. Paul was chosen to speak for Jesus and to suffer for Jesus. Again, the same it true for us. But Paul has one part of his commission that is different from yours and mine. Paul is an apostle, which is a statement of authority. We can and should do all of the works that Paul did, but we will never have his authority. And he's very clear about the source of this apostolic authority—*an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.* We are once again watching one of the most fascinating, historic and brutal presidential election we may ever see. Just some unprecedented sorts of things happening all in the quest to either seize power or else hold onto power. Men and women elect the president but only God can make an apostle.

Apostolic authority is the highest possible human authority as it is what granted Paul the authority to write Scripture and share it as the very word of God. And as we will see, Paul's apostolic authority will feature prominently in the big idea of the letter, which is summarized in verse six. *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.* If many in the church of Galatia were going after another gospel, how many other gospels are there? Paul answers that question himself in verse seven- *not that there is another one.* So there is only one true gospel so what Paul mean was that they were going after false gospels? And how many false gospels are there? Countless, endless, right? There's no end to the distortion and deception and multitude of ways that the gospel can be wrong.

This is why Paul used such strong language such as invoking curses, confronting Peter, calling them foolish and bewitched and wishing they were emasculated. This was not just a matter of life and death but eternal life and eternal death. At the end of the day there are only two options—the true gospel and every other false gospel. It's that simple.

### **Paul's Message**

This is why Paul was so clear in his own presentation of the gospel. It may seem like just an opening statement but the gospel is presented with clarity and completeness in the first four verses. I'll take it one phrase starting in verse four.

#### **1. The necessity of the gospel.**

*the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins.*

If Jesus "gave himself for our sins," that means there was no other way. Martin Luther comments that "these words are very thunderclaps from heaven against all kinds of righteousness"<sup>2</sup> In other words, his death and resurrection were necessary because our own righteousness, as I said last Sunday, not only is worthless to save us, but it actually gets in the way. If we could have done it on our own, Jesus' death would not have been necessary. Our sin required a sinless God-man to take our place.

#### **2. The exclusivity of the gospel.**

This one phrase also argues for the exclusivity of the gospel. If Jesus' death and resurrection were necessary for our salvation then it also means that Jesus was the only one who could have paid this debt. How many times have you heard someone say that all religions are alike? I've heard it said that all religions are the same at the deeper level. It's just the surface stuff that's different. For example, at their core, all religions teach that we should be kind to one another and

live together in harmony. That's the deeper level beliefs but at the surface each religion is a little different. So what if Islam's God is called Allah and they pray toward Mecca five times a day? As long as it helps them be a nice person, who cares? So what if Buddhists venerate the Buddha as long as they are nice to one another. Christians worship in churches. Jews worship in synagogues and Muslims worship in Mosques. These are all surface level differences that make religions look so different when they are really the same.

This line of thinking could not possibly be more wrong. It's actually just the opposite. In reality it's the core beliefs—the deeper stuff—that are radically different. And here's a quick way to cut through the nonsense “of all religions are the same.” Just ask a Muslim if their religion is the same as ours. What kind of answer do you think you will get? At their core, all religions are completely different but only Christianity has a God who sacrificed himself for his own creation. All others religions have man working their way to God but we have God working his way down to us. The very fact that Jesus gave himself for our sins speaks to the fact that this was the only way we could be saved.

### **3. The submission of Jesus in the gospel.**

Jesus gave himself for us. We know that he willingly and joyfully laid down his life for us So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” (John 8:28-29)

Philippians 2:8 teaches the same truth. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

### **4. The substitutionary atonement in the gospel.**

The key phrase here is that Jesus gave himself “for our sins.” The word for means “instead of” or “in our place.” This is the doctrine called substitutionary atonement, sometimes called Penal Substitutionary Atonement. It simply means that Christ is our substitute. He died in our place. He died instead of us. We deserved the wrath of God for our sin but instead, Jesus died for us, as a substitute for us.

Not only is this the clear teaching of Scripture but it is also what we mean when we say we would die for someone. Husbands, I hope you would take a bullet for your wives and children. If it were absolutely necessary, you would die for them, right? So what do you mean when you say that? You mean that if it came down to either your wife or children dying or you dying, you would die for them. You would die in their place. You would be their substitute in death. But what you don't mean is that you would die for them if you didn't have to. In other words, you would not seek out death as a way to show your commitment to them. That's nonsense. Your death has to have meaning.

Unfortunately, this doctrine is being abandoned by many. Here are some of the criticisms.

The cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. . . . If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated

by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies. . . the idea that God was an angry deity, requiring a sacrifice to propitiate his wrath was surely more like an ancient pagan god than the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Another critic called it the “ugliest theory of atonement that exists.”<sup>4</sup>

Still another claims that Isaiah 53 does not teach substitutionary atonement.

“When we read Isaiah 53 through the lenses it provides, we end up with a totally different reading to what we have been accustomed. We see nothing about God’s wrath being appeased; nothing about God killing the Servant; nothing about substitution; but everything about identification, forgiveness, subversion of violence and restoration to peace.”<sup>5</sup>

Let’s look at Isaiah 53 and see if this holds water.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;

We see nothing about:

- God’s wrath being appeased
- God killing the Servant
- substitution

I don’t see anything clear about God’s wrath being appeased, but neither should we expect every passage of Scripture to support every doctrine of Scripture. And of course we can see the appeasement of God’s wrath taught many other places in Scripture. By a color-coded comparison between what is claimed by the author and what we actually see, I hope you can see how wrong he is in his opinion.<sup>6</sup>

Substitutionary Atonement is the very heart of the gospel but it’s not just a dry doctrine. It is a marvelous truth that is supposed to lead to joy and worship. Did you know we sang about substitutionary atonement this morning?

How great the pain of searing loss  
The Father turns His face away  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory

Behold the man upon a cross  
My sin upon His shoulders  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers

**5. The deliverance through the gospel.**

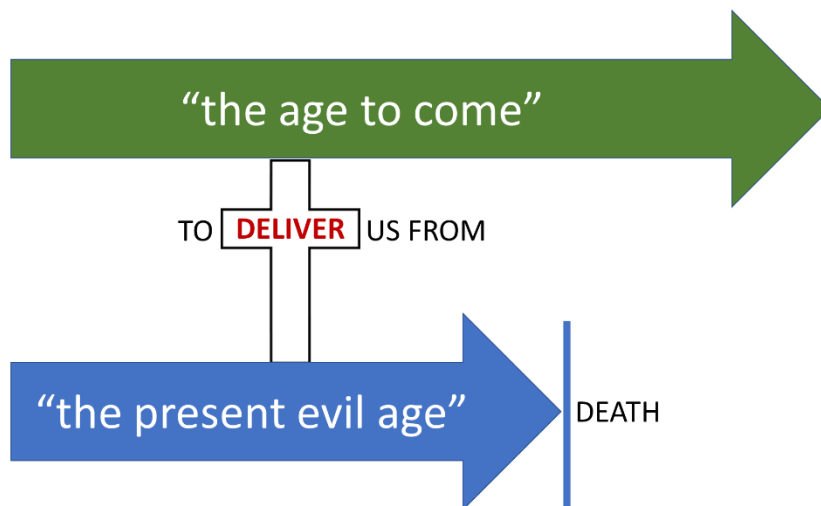
*to deliver us from the present evil age*

The word deliver here means to remove or pluck out something from a group. When our kids were young we elected not to participate in Halloween. No judgment on anyone, that was just our personal decision. as a side note, this is why we have to be extremely careful when living out beliefs that are not absolute beliefs.

Before we made the decision not to participate, Ryan did participate in Halloween one time. So then the next year I had the job of explaining to Ryan why we let him dress up and beg for candy the year before but not this year. So what I did was take a package of M&Ms and mix them together with a bunch of pinto beans. I used this to illustrate that there are good things and bad things about Halloween and it's hard to separate them from each other. Ryan seemed fine with that but he did get to eat the M&Ms after my little speech. And to do so, he had to pluck them out of the pinto beans one at a time. He had to rescue the M&Ms, right? He delivered them from the pinto beans.

This word is used in the book Acts describing the rescue of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery (7:34), of the rescue of Peter both from prison and from the hand of Herod the King (12:11), and of the rescue of Paul from an infuriated mob about to lynch him (23:27).<sup>7</sup> Each of them were plucked out of, were rescued from a horrible fate. This describes our salvation. We were plucked out of our sinful state, specifically, *to deliver us from the present evil age*.

Now you might say that it doesn't feel like we have been delivered from this evil age because we live in it every single day, right? So let me show you what this looks like. Jesus has already



delivered us from the present evil age and transferred us to the age to come, but we are not yet fully there until we die. Ephesians 2:6 says that believers are “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Through the work of Christ, we are already seated with Christ. We are already delivered from the present age but we are not yet experiencing the full realities of these truths.

## 6. The sovereign plan of the gospel.

Paul said that all of this was *according to the will of our God and Father*. This was always his plan. The gospel started in genesis 3 when God sacrificed animals and used the skin to cover Adam and Eve's sin. It was true all throughout the old covenant sacrificial system, practically on every page of the Old Testament. It is found in the beautiful Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. It is on display in Jesus submission and obedience and giving himself for us. It is all over the New testament which looks back on the finished work of Christ. From beginning to end, the gospel was always God's sovereign plan.

**Rich Maurer**  
**February 23, 2020**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coburgbanks.co.uk/blog/friday-funnies/50-strange-hobbies/>

<sup>2</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986). *The message of Galatians: Only one way* (p. 17). Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003], pp. 182-183)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T27av-RF2-Y>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.clarion-journal.com/clarion\\_journal\\_of\\_spirit/2013/10/punished-for-or-by-our-sins-the-suffering-servant-of-isaiah-53-santo-calarco.html](https://www.clarion-journal.com/clarion_journal_of_spirit/2013/10/punished-for-or-by-our-sins-the-suffering-servant-of-isaiah-53-santo-calarco.html)

<sup>6</sup> Here's another attempt at changing the meaning of Isaiah 53.

And because Jesus faced the full force of all human evil, Isaiah 53:6 says, "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." In other words, the Lord faced the entirety of human evil, bearing the full brunt of its crushing power in his own spirit and person, suffering everything that it could unleash upon him, and achieving the victory over it that freed us from its power.

<sup>7</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986). *The message of Galatians: Only one way* (p. 18). Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.