

### This is My Gospel!

*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*

Tell me, have you ever thought about what you might consider to be your core values? Things that you really hold dear. Maybe it's your family, or your faith, or your personal integrity. Or maybe it's a particular principle that you try to live your life by. For example, "Be the best you can be or Carpe Diem (Seize the day) or "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." Or maybe it's simply a personal conviction you have about something. Maybe you're convinced that essential oils are, well, essential to your wellbeing. Or maybe you just firmly believe that the Packers are going to the Super Bowl.

If you think about it, we all have beliefs, we all have values that we hold dear. And typically, those core beliefs have an impact on how we think and what we do. Well, nowhere is that fact more evident than in the life of the Apostle Paul. There was once a time when Paul, who was then called Saul, was absolutely convinced that the Christian faith was from the devil. He believed that Christianity was a heresy that had to be stamped out at all costs. And that core belief in Saul's heart had an impact on how Saul lived his life. Isn't that right? Because of what Saul believed, he went door-to-door arresting Christians and throwing them into jail.

But then what happened? The Lord Jesus himself appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. He convinced Saul that what he was thinking was completely wrong. Jesus revealed that he himself was the resurrected Lord, who had lived and died to save even a persecutor like Saul. You might say that Jesus revealed to Saul, the Gospel, the good news of God's love for him in Christ. And it was that gospel that changed Paul's heart. It changed Saul from the greatest persecutor of the church, into Paul, the greatest apostle of the church. For Paul, the gospel was not simply a piece of information. The gospel wasn't something that he could take or leave. No, for Paul, the gospel was personal. It was something that changed him from the inside out. It gave him a purpose to his life. It gave him something to cling to, no matter what was going on in this life. In fact, that's what led Paul to say what he does here in our text for the day. Paul's words serve as our theme for today, namely,

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Today, we want to take a little closer look at what those words mean, and what they don't mean. And then, we'll consider how the gospel that Saint Paul believed still has an impact on our hearts and lives today. Our text for the day is a continuation of the letter which the Elder Apostle Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy. Which, by the way, if didn't hear the sermon that our Pastor Timothy about this Timothy, you should really go back and watch that sermon. It was a good introduction to this whole sermon series which actually finds its theme in these words from 2 Timothy 2:8, where St. Paul makes the statement, "This is my gospel."

Now the question is, what does Paul mean by that? Is he saying, “Timothy, this is my gospel—and you can't have any?” Kind of like what we might do with that last piece of apple pie. “Sorry, this one belongs to me. I'm not sharing.” No, that can't be what Paul means. Elsewhere in scripture, Paul repeatedly said that the gospel is something that must be shared. How does he put it in 1 Corinthians 9:16? *I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.* St Paul knew that the gospel was meant to be shared.

So then, what does Paul mean when he writes, *This is my gospel?* Really, there are two ways to look at those words. On the one hand, Paul is reminding Timothy that the gospel that he preached was different from a lot of the popular preaching in his day. Back in Paul's day, there were a lot of false teachers promoting all kinds of myths and heresies like the worship of angels or the abolition of marriage or maybe the most dangerous false doctrine of all for Paul's Jewish readers, the idea that God's favor comes not by faith in Jesus but by keeping the Old Testament ceremonial laws. Those false prophets were called Judaizers. Time and time again in his letters Paul had to draw a distinction between the gospel he preached, the good news of God's free grace won by Jesus, and the “so-called gospel” of those who said that man must do something to earn God's favor. Remember how Paul kind of bawls out the Galatians for falling for that kind of false gospel? Paul wrote, *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.*

You see, when Paul uses the term “my” gospel, he's simply contrasting it to all the other man-made gospels out there. Remember what he told the Galatians? *I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

But not only was Paul's gospel something he received directly from Jesus. It was also something that was all about Jesus. St Paul says as much here in our text. Paul says to Timothy, *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.* In other words, Paul is saying that his gospel, the true gospel, begins and ends with Jesus. Jesus, who was descended from David. In other words, Jesus was true man, born from the line of David, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus was born as a man, so that he could live under the law in place of all mankind. And then after fulfilling that law perfectly and then surrendering his life to the cross and the grave, Saint Paul says that Jesus was raised from the dead. That was the Father's way of announcing that Jesus' death had been accepted by God as the payment for the sins of the world. Jesus' resurrection meant freedom for those who are held in bondage by their fear of death.

My friends, this was the ultimate good news. It was the Gospel that the Apostle Paul boldly proclaimed. The gospel that was focused entirely on Christ. How did Saint Paul put it in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth? *I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).* You might say that Paul's gospel was in fact Christ's gospel. It was the good news about Jesus.

And yet, there is another way to take Paul's words, “This is my gospel.” With those words, Paul is not only looking back to the content of the gospel, namely the life and death and resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ. He's also looking to the impact that those truths had on his heart and life. When Paul says, “My Gospel” he means, “This is what I believe. This is at the heart of my personal belief system. This is my primary core value. It's what is now impacting the way I think and the things I do. In fact, it's even impacting the things that are being done to me.”

Isn't that right? When Paul writes these words, where is he? He's sitting in prison.

Why? Because he had been preaching the gospel! What does Paul say here in our text? *This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.* The gospel had brought suffering into Paul's life, but it had also given Paul the ability to bear up under that suffering with patient endurance. Why? Because Paul knew that even if we was put in chains, the gospel never would be. Paul says, *But God's word is not chained.* In other words, no one can completely stop God's Word from accomplishing what God intends. What did God say through the pen of the Prophet Isaiah? *As the rain and he snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).* God's word has the power to break through stony hearts. It has the power to set people from the stranglehold of sin and self-deception. St Paul knew that. He had experienced it himself. And therefore he was committed to bringing the good news to as many people as possible. What does Paul say? *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect* (in other words, for the sake of those whom God will call to faith), *that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

You see, the gospel made a difference in Paul's life. It gave Paul a purpose for living, namely to share with others the good news of what God had done for them in Christ. The gospel gave Paul the ability to bear up under whatever persecution he faced from those who rejected the gospel. The gospel gave Paul a proper self-identity. Paul could say with confidence that even though he was the worst of sinners, he was still forgiven by God, and washed in the blood of the Lamb. And the gospel gave Paul a powerful vision of his future, when at his death he would be taken into the arms of his heavenly father—not because of what Paul had accomplished, but because of what Jesus had accomplished for him. You might say that Gospel allowed Paul to know who he was, where he was going and why.

My friends, isn't the same thing true for you and me today? In grace and mercy, God has given his gospel to us, in Word and Sacrament. In his Word, God has recorded for us the plan for our salvation, in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. But more than just historic facts, the gospel is the tool that God uses to work saving faith in our hearts. God uses the gospel to turn “what Jesus did for the world” into “what Jesus did for me.” In the end, the gospel is always personal. By the power of the Holy Spirit, John's gospel or Paul's gospel becomes your gospel and my gospel. It's what now shapes our attitude about ourselves, about our lives, about our future.

I don't know about you, but I find it easy to kind of take for granted the impact that the gospel has on how I see my life. When I think about all the people in the world who have no clue about what's going to happen to them when they die, people who are scared to death of death, people who see God as distant or religion as another set of rules to follow, or obligation to fulfill—and then I realize that in the gospel, God gives me a totally different perspective. I don't have to wonder what's going to happen to me when I die. Jesus' death and resurrection has taken the sting out of death. My death will be nothing less than the passage of my soul to heaven. My life becomes my opportunity to say thank you to God for what he's done for me in Christ. Does that mean that my life will be a bed of roses? No, we all still live in a world corrupted by sin, with bodies infected by sin. But that doesn't change the Gospel. The gospel declares that God has redeemed you and me. He's made us his own, prepared a place in heaven for us and now promises to cause all things to serve our eternal good, all because of Jesus. That, my friends, is really good new. In fact, it's the gospel. And it's yours! Believe it. Cling to it. Make

it your greatest treasure. For then, by God's grace, you will be able to say with the Apostle Paul of old, "This is...MY...GOSPEL! In Jesus' name. Amen.