



Sermon & Small Group Study Guide



Free at Last!

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Contents

Passage	Sunday Sermon	Page
Welcome		2
Small Group Purpose Statement		3
Introduction to Series		4
Paul's First Mission Trip to Galatia (Acts 14:8-20)	3 rd January	5-6
The Letter Writer & the Recipients (Galatians 1:1-5)	10 th January	7-8
The Uniqueness of the Gospel (Galatians 1:6-10)	17 th January	9-10
The Source of the Gospel (Galatians 1:11 – 2:10)	24 th January	11-13
The Heart of the Gospel (Galatians 2:11-21)	31 st January	14-15
The Foundation of the Gospel (Galatians 3:1-14)	7 th February	16-17
The Fulfilment of the Gospel (Galatians 3:15 – 4:7)	14 th February	18-19
The Threat to the Gospel (Galatians 4:8-31)	21 st February	20-21
The Freedom of the Gospel (Galatians 5:1-15)	28 th February	22-23
The Fruit of the Gospel (Galatians 5:16-26)	7 th March	24-25
The Outworking of the Gospel (Galatians 6:1-10)	14 th March	26-27
The Boast of the Gospel (Galatians 6:11-end)	21 st March	28-29
The Weeping King (Luke 19:28-44) PALM SUNDAY	28 th March	30-31
The Risen King (Luke 24:1-12) EASTER DAY	4 th April	32-33
Evidence that Demands a Verdict: The Empty Tomb (Matt 28:11-15)	11 th April	34-35
Evidence that Demands a Verdict: The Appearances of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)	18 th April	36-37
Evidence that Demands a Verdict: The Growth of the Church (Mark 16:9-20)	25 th April	38=39

Welcome to this new study guide for the spring teaching series.

This term we are exploring Paul's Letter to the Galatians, a brief ancient letter that has had an explosive impact on countless people over the last 2000 years.

You may be holding this study guide because you are a member of a small group at St James. That's fantastic! Small groups are key to our strategy for nurture and discipleship, so we are delighted that you are in one. We hope you enjoy using this guide to prepare for your group meetings and then to explore the material together. Being in a small group is by far the best way to learn and grow as a disciple of Christ.

You may be holding this study guide as a member of St James who, for whatever reason, is *not* in a small group. You can find out more about small groups by reading the Small Group Purpose Statement on page 3 of this study guide. If you would like to join one, then please speak to Rob or Johan. If you can't manage that, then we don't want you to miss out on the benefits of the studies. Why not work through the studies yourself after each sermon or, better still, arrange to do them with a friend over a coffee.

The study guide is also available on the church web site – www.stjames-streatham.org

We have had positive feedback on the new feature of blank pages for sermon notes, so we have continued to include them in this guide. Why not bring your study guide to church on Sunday morning and take notes during the sermon, or, if we are still online, do it at home? And, if you miss a sermon, you can always catch up by visiting the church web site where all sermons are posted soon after being preached.

So, fasten your seat belts, here we go!

Small Group Purpose Statement

Small Groups at St James are small, Christ-centred communities meeting regularly for Bible study, fellowship, prayer, worship and service, fun, mutual support, accountability, and mission. Group members will encourage each other to grow as active disciples, rather than passive spectators, encourage others to join a group and support those who wish to grow in leadership.

Our expectation is that:

Group members will come to know the saving love of God in their lives more deeply as they pray and study the Bible together.

They will be mutually encouraged to become more like Jesus in every part of their lives.

Group members will support each other in prayer and keep all prayer requests confidential. They will come to trust each other and be accountable to each other for those things the Holy Spirit is prompting them to change in their lives.

Group members will share each other's practical needs and seek to provide what they can to meet them.

They will be encouraged to grow as active disciples rather than passive spectators.

Group members will encourage others to lead and join a group.



Introduction to the Series



Saul of Tarsus was a Jew belonging to the strictest sect, known as the Pharisees. Born and raised in the city of Tarsus, in what we would now call Turkey, he attended Rabbinic school in Jerusalem under the tutorship of Gamaliel. He believed in the ancient promises of God, that He would one day send the Messiah who would restore the glory days to Israel and judge the pagan nations once and for all. He was not convinced that Jesus fulfilled the prophetic criteria to be the Messiah, especially because of his shameful public execution on a Roman cross. In fact, he believed the followers of Jesus were blasphemers who deserved to be imprisoned and even put to death. However, he received the shock of his life when, on route to arrest Christians in Damascus, he encountered the risen Jesus, and, in a flash, the world received its greatest ever missionary.

Many Christians were initially sceptical of his story and, to escape their hostility, he went home to Tarsus where he stayed for ten years. However, once the dust had finally settled, Barnabas went looking for Saul, now called Paul, and brought him from Tarsus to help teach the many new Christians in the multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan church at Antioch in Syria. Paul gained such a good reputation during that year-long teaching programme, that he was chosen, along with Barnabas and John Mark, to go on mission, to take the Gospel to new territory, to break new ground for the Christian faith. They headed first to Cyprus, the home island of Barnabas, and then onto the mainland in Pamphylia (modern Turkey) where they headed north into the province of Galatia. There they visited four major towns - Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. It was quite a trip and you can read about it in Acts 13 & 14. Some of those who heard them preach became Christians and Paul formed them into brand new Churches, appointing leaders to oversee these young Christian communities.

Sadly, not long after Paul left to return to his base in Syrian Antioch, he received the devastating news that other travelling teachers had come to the Galatian towns and were leading the new converts astray, threatening their faith and undermining the Gospel. It was in response to this news that Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatians.

So, buckle up, here we go!

Study 1: Paul's First Mission Trip to Galatia

Acts 14 v 8-28

Context:

The Church in Antioch, on the Syrian coast, was the first multi-ethnic Christian community in the world. It was here that followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Paul, also called Saul, spent a year there with Barnabas, teaching the young believers and then, in response to the initiative of the Holy Spirit, the two of them were sent off on their first mission trip (Acts 13:2-3). Heading to Cyprus first, they then journeyed on to the mainland and visited Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:4-52) and Iconium (Acts 14:1-7). Their method was to preach first in the local synagogue, where they met both Jews and God-fearers (Gentiles who were attracted to the worship of the God of Israel). Then, when the synagogue leaders became hostile, they turned to preach to the Gentiles. As we join the intrepid missionaries in Acts 14:8, moving on to Lystra and Derbe, they have so far seen some success in the towns already visited as both Jews and Gentiles turned to Christ, but they have also met with some stiff and violent opposition, a sign of greater troubles to come. Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe are all in the province of Galatia and it is to the citizens of these towns, who became Christians through Paul's preaching on this mission trip, that Paul writes the letter we will be studying later in this series, the Letter to the Galatians.

Observation:

1. Describe the first man Paul & Barnabas came across in Lystra (v 8)
2. What happened to him in v 9-10?
3. What was the reaction of the local people in v 11-12?
4. What did the priest of Zeus do in v 13?
5. How did Paul and Barnabas feel about this acclamation in v 14?
6. What was the essence of their message to the crowds in v 15-17?
7. Did it work (v 18)?
8. Things then went from bad to worse in v 19. What happened?
9. How did it end for Paul and Barnabas in v 20?
10. What was the response to their preaching in Derbe (v 21)?
11. As they then headed for home, they revisited the churches they had just established in the other towns (v21b). What was the essence of their message to them (v 22)?
12. What did they then do before they left for home (v 23)?
13. On arriving home in Antioch what did they do (v 27)?

Meaning:

1. According to Mark 16:15-20, Jesus promised that miracles would accompany the preaching of the Gospel by his disciples. We see an example of this here in Acts 14: 8-10 (see also Acts 14:3). Why do you think such miracles were an important part of spreading the Gospel and do you think that still applies today?
2. Do you think the reaction of the crowd to this miracle was understandable (v 11-13)?
3. Why were Paul and Barnabas so horrified by this response (v 14-15a)?
4. Paul and Barnabas were quite bold in their words in v 15-17. Do you think Christians should be bold like this in sharing the Gospel today?
5. Why do you think some of the Jewish residents of Antioch and Iconium were so opposed to Paul and Barnabas and their message (v 19)?

6. How do you think Paul managed to keep going despite such persecution and suffering?
7. In v 22 Paul warns us that all Christians will suffer hardships on the way to heaven. What are some of the hardships you have had to suffer as a Christian? Where do we find strength and encouragement to help us remain true to the faith at such times (v 22)?
8. Why was it so important for Paul to appoint elders for the new churches (v 23)? Was this a risk, considering that they had only been Christians for just a few weeks?
9. What does the end of v 27 tell us about the role God plays in the spread of the Gospel?

Application:

1. Should we expect and pray for miracles today?
2. Paul tailored his Gospel message in Lystra to the specific audience of his day (v 15-17). What should we include in our message when we share the Gospel in UK today?
3. Why does suffering for the faith seem to be part of the package of being a Christian?
4. If the end of v 27 is true, how should this influence the way we pray (see Colossians 4:3)?

Pray:

- For God's power to be poured out in our church and our lives that others may see Jesus.
- For God's grace to strengthen us to face suffering for our faith.
- For God to open doors for the Gospel to be received in our homes, workplaces, & streets.

Sermon Notes:

Study 2: The Letter Writer & the Recipients

Galatians 1 v 1-5

Context:

Unlike the letters we write, which tell you at the *end* who has written it, letters in the first century told you the writer's name up front. All Paul's letters in the New Testament begin in a very similar way – he tells us who is writing the letter and to whom it is being written, he then gives a greeting and often summarises, in a pithy way, the main thrust of the letter before launching in. This is exactly what we see in the opening five verses of Galatians.

Observation:

1. Who are the writers of this letter according to v 1-2?
2. The word 'apostle' means 'one who is sent'. Who sent Paul (v 1)?
3. What did God the Father do to Jesus according to the end of v 1?
4. Who are the recipients of this letter according to the end of v 2?
5. Which churches are being referred to here (see the previous study on p.5-6 and the introduction on p.4 and locate them on the map on p.4)?
6. What two things does Paul greet them with in v 3 and where do these two things come from?
7. What did Jesus do for us and why, according to v 4, and whose will was he obeying?
8. How does Paul end this opening section in v 5?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think Paul mentions who sent him, right at the beginning of this letter (v 1)?
2. Why, of all the things Paul could have said about Jesus as he starts his letter, does he mention the resurrection in v 1?
3. What is this 'grace' and this 'peace' that come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v 3) – how would you define these two things with which Paul greets the Galatians?
4. How did Jesus give himself for our sins (v 4) – what event is this referring to?
5. What does Paul mean when he says this event '*for our sins*'?
6. Why is the present age described by Paul as 'evil' (v 4) and in what sense does Jesus rescue us from it?
7. What does the fact that Jesus' death was '*according to the will of our God and Father*' tell us about who was responsible for the cross?
8. How does God receive eternal glory through all this (v 5)?

Application:

1. Paul always travelled on mission with a team of others and always wrote his letters with the help of others (v 1). Why is team work so important in the Christian life?
2. In what ways are you experiencing the grace and peace that come from God and Jesus?
3. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus gave himself for your sins?
4. If Jesus gave himself to rescue us from the present evil age, how does this impact on our everyday life? How do we live *in* the world and yet not be *of* the world?

Pray:

- For all those who minister and volunteer at St James, in whatever way.

- Pray for those you know who need God's grace and peace.
- Pray for God's grace and peace in your own life.
- Thank Jesus for dying for your sins.
- Pray for God's help to live in the world yet not be of the world.
- That God might receive all the glory he deserves for all that he has done for us.

Sermon Notes:

Study 3: The Uniqueness of the Gospel

Galatians 1 v 6-10

Context:

Many people, both inside and outside the church, have their own views about God – what he is like and how we should relate to him. There are different opinions as to what the Gospel, the good news, is and how it impacts us. Of course, anyone can believe anything they like. However, the Bible *does* present us with a clear, definitive understanding of the Gospel – there is in fact only **one** Gospel. Paul is at pains to point this out in our study today as we look at the Uniqueness of the Gospel in Galatians 1 v 6-10.

Observation:

1. What feelings does Paul express at the beginning of v 6?
2. Why does he feel this way (v 6)?
3. Who are they deserting (v 6) and how did he call them (v 6)?
4. What, according to v 7, does Paul think of the Gospel they are turning to?
5. What pronouncement does Paul make in v 8 and repeat in v 9?
6. Who is Paul trying to please (v 10)?
7. Why are being a servant of Christ and pleasing people incompatible (v 10)?

Meaning:

1. We will find out later in the letter exactly what the content of the different Gospel was that the Galatians were turning to, but what clue about this other Gospel can we pick up from Paul's use of the phrase '*called you by the grace of Christ*' (v 6)?
2. What light does v 4 shed on what Paul might mean by '*the grace of Christ*' and the content of the *true* Gospel he had preached to them?
3. Most false gospels, in Paul's day and now, are really perversions of the real thing. Can you think of any examples of these false gospels today?
4. To be 'eternally condemned' (v 8-9) means 'go to hell'! Why is Paul so strong in his condemnation of attempts to pervert the true Gospel?
5. If the true Gospel is such good news, why do you think preaching it doesn't gain human approval (v 10)?

Application:

1. How do you feel when Christians desert the true Gospel and preach or believe a perverted version of it?
2. Do you ever feel confused (v 7) by the various theological views and opinions in the church? Can you give some examples? What can help us in our confusion?
3. We all want to be liked by others but standing for the true Gospel may not win us many friends. How can we make sure we stay strong and resolute in the face of opposition and the danger of losing friends because of our beliefs?

Pray:

- Thank God for the true Gospel of the grace of Christ.
- Pray for those you know who believe a different gospel or are confused.
- Pray for the strength to stay true to God in the face of opposition and being unpopular.

Sermon Notes:

Study 4: The Source of the Gospel

Galatians 1 v 11 – 2 v 10

Context:

In our previous study, Paul was astonished that the Galatian Christians were seemingly abandoning the true Gospel he had preached to them on his first mission trip to their region and were adopting a different gospel, which was really no gospel at all. He was so concerned about this development that he called down a curse on anyone peddling this kind of false gospel. Yet, this raised an important question for the Galatians: Why should they believe Paul's version of the Gospel rather than other versions? What authority did Paul have to be so firm with them? This question is addressed in today's study: The Source of the Gospel.

Observation:

1. What does Paul say about the source of the Gospel he preached (1 v 11-12)?
2. What does he say about his previous attitude to the church in 1 v 13?
3. What does he say about his progress in the faith and traditions of Judaism in 1 v 14?
4. When did God set Paul apart to belong to Jesus according to 1 v 15?
5. What happened to Paul according to the end of 1 v 15 and the beginning of 1 v 16?
6. What particular event in Paul's life was he referring to in 1 v 15-16 [See Acts 26 v 9-18]?
7. What was the purpose or objective of this event according to 1 v 16?
8. After this event, what *didn't* Paul do and what *did* he do according to the end of 1 v 16 and the whole of 1 v 17?
9. After 3 years where did Paul go, why did he go there, and for how long did he stay (1 v 18)?
10. Who else did he meet there (1 v 19)?
11. What appeal does Paul make in 1 v 20 to affirm the truth of what he was saying?
12. Where did he go next (1 v 21)?
13. What was Paul's relationship with the churches of Judea (1 v 22-23) and how did they react when they learned that he had become a follower of Jesus (1 v 24)?
14. How long did Paul wait before his next trip to Jerusalem and who accompanied him (2 v 1)?
15. Why did Paul go there and what was his fear (2 v 2)?
16. What *didn't* happen to Titus while they were there (2 v 3)?
17. Why did this issue arise according to 2 v 4 and why did Paul refuse to give in (2 v 5)?
18. What did the leaders add to Paul's Gospel (2 v 6)?
19. What did those leaders acknowledge (2 v 7-8)?
20. Who were the pillars of the Jerusalem church and what did they do in 2 v 9-10?

Meaning:

1. Why was it so important for Paul to establish the source of the Gospel he preached (1 v 11-12)?
2. How would you describe Paul before he met Jesus (1 v 13-14)?
3. What does it tell us about the way God works that Paul was '*set apart from birth*' by God and yet spent so many years opposing God by trying to destroy the church (1 v 15)?
4. Both Paul (1 v 15) and the Galatians (1 v 7) were called by **grace**. What does this mean and what clue does it give us about the content of Paul's Gospel?
5. What do you think Paul means when he says in 1 v 16 that God was pleased to '*reveal his Son in me*'?

6. According to 1 v 16 Paul saw his conversion to Jesus and his call to be a missionary as one and the same thing. What does that tell us about our own conversion?
7. Again, why is Paul at pains to talk about the details of his trips to Jerusalem and the people he met there (1 v 18-24)?
8. In what way was Paul in danger of having run his race in vain (2 v 2)?
9. In 2 v 3-5 we get a clue as to the nature of the false gospel the Galatians had adopted, which Paul will elaborate on later in his letter. Paul mentions the Jewish practice of **circumcision** (2 v 3) and the false brothers who had infiltrated Paul's church to spy on their **freedom in Christ** in a bid to make them **slaves** (2 v 4). What does this tell us about this false gospel and why do you think Paul refused to give in to them? In what way was the truth of the Gospel in peril if he had given in (2 v 5)?

N.B. You may like to read **Acts 15 v 1-11** to understand the background to this problem. This passage may actually describe the visit and meeting Paul talks about in Galatians 2 v 1-10.

Application:

1. In light of this study, what would we say to someone who is preaching or teaching a false gospel, claiming it is God's truth?
2. Paul speaks openly about how he became a follower of Jesus and provides a helpful model of how we can share our own story: Life before he met Jesus, How he met Jesus, Life since he met Jesus. Take a moment to think about your own story using this model and then share it with the group.
3. The Gospel according to Paul is about God's grace and the freedom Jesus brings. How does this grace and freedom impact your own life?
4. Why is it so important that we stand up for the true gospel and not give in to those who seek to pervert it?
5. Paul teaches us that every convert is also a missionary. Who is God calling you to share the Gospel with and how might you do it?

Pray:

- Thank God for the truth of the Bible and the Gospel of grace and freedom.
- Pray for those who are spreading a false gospel – that God would cause them to see the truth and turn to him.
- Pray for God's help to share the Gospel with others.

Sermon Notes:

Study 5: The Heart of the Gospel

Galatians 2 v 11-21

Context:

In our previous study we saw that Paul give us a clue as to the nature of the false gospel that the Galatians were adopting. It had something to do with circumcision which Paul contrasted with the freedom given by the grace of God in Christ. In this next study he begins to unpack this more.

Observation:

1. Who did Paul oppose to his face when he came to Antioch (v 11)?
2. Why did Paul oppose such an important church leader in this way (v 12a)?
3. Why was this important church leader behaving in this way (v 12b)?
4. How far did this hypocrisy extend (v 13)?
5. Why were the leaders' actions so serious (v 14a)?
6. What was the nature of the hypocrisy (v 14b)?
7. Paul declares the heart of the Gospel in v 15-16 – what is it?
8. What objection to Paul's Gospel does he anticipate in v 17 and what is his answer in v 17b-19?
9. With what amazing words does Paul summarise the Gospel in v 20?
10. What does Paul say is the solemn implication of believing that a person can be declared righteous by God through obeying the Law (v 21)?

Meaning:

1. Paul and Barnabas were members of a multi-ethnic church in Antioch (Syria) comprising both Jews and Gentiles. The apostle Peter came for an extended visit and, when a little later some Jewish followers of Jesus came as messengers from James, the Lord's brother and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, Peter and Barnabas, who were both Jews, stopped eating their meals with the Gentile church members. Paul says this was out of fear (v 12). Why would their fear of the 'circumcision group' lead them to act this way and why would Paul call it hypocrisy?
2. The heart of the human problem is that we lack righteousness (v 21), i.e. we are sinners who are guilty before God and deserving of his judgement. The universal need, therefore, is to find a way to gain the righteousness we lack and be justified by God, i.e. to be declared not guilty. What two pathways to this goal are mentioned in v 15-16 and which does Paul prefer and why?
3. What is the link between circumcision and the Law [see Galatians 5 v 3]?
4. In his letters Paul often anticipated objections to his teaching and we see an example of this in v 17 [see Romans 6 v 1 & v 15 for similar examples]. What is the gist of the objection?
5. How do Paul's astounding words in v 20 answer the objection mentioned above? [see also Romans 6 v 1-12]
6. How does it make you feel to hear that the Son of God loved you and gave himself for you (v 20)?
7. Can you turn the negative at the end of v 21 into a positive and say in your own words what this verse tells us about why Christ died and what his death accomplished?

Application:

1. How should we handle situations of theological disagreement in the church? Can you think of any examples, past or present?
2. Why is Paul's Gospel such universally good news?
3. What difference should v 20 make to your daily life?

Pray:

- For situations of tension or disagreement in the church, locally or nationally.
- Thank God for the Gospel of justification by faith alone.
- Pray for God's grace to allow the life of Jesus to be lived in and through you every day.
- Pray for those you know who do not yet follow Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

Study 6: The Foundation of the Gospel

Galatians 3 v 1-14

Context:

In our last study Paul argued that the biggest problem we have as human beings is a lack of righteousness because of our sin. Though people try various ways to earn the righteousness they lack, not least by trying to obey all God's laws perfectly, it can never be done. Salvation comes only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and, when that happens, we die to our old life and begin a new life with Jesus living in us and helping us to live differently. This stunning truth puts all people, whether Jew or Gentile, on the same footing – the way of salvation is the same for everyone. But Paul isn't finished with his argument yet as we will see in today's study.

Observation:

1. How does Paul describe the Galatians in v 1? What question does he ask them and why in that same verse?
2. List the four subsequent questions Paul asks in v 2-5?
3. Which Old Testament character does Paul refer to in v 6 and what does he say about him from Genesis 15 v 6?
4. What qualifies a person to be regarded as a child of Abraham according to v 7?
5. What did Genesis 12 v 3, 18 v 18 & 22 v 18 foresee according to v 8?
6. How is Abraham described in v 9?
7. What dangerous position does Paul describe in v 10, quoting from Deuteronomy 27 v 26?
8. What propositions does Paul make in v 11-12 referring to Habakkuk 2 v 4 & Leviticus 18 v 5?
9. What good news does Paul declare in v 13, referring to Deuteronomy 21 v 23?
10. What was the dual purpose and result of the death of Jesus according to v 14?

Meaning:

1. Paul wonders if someone has put a magic spell on the Galatians, because they seem to have stopped believing in the significance of the death of Jesus (v 1). Practically speaking, how do you think Paul would have portrayed Jesus Christ as crucified to the Galatians when he first went to them with the Gospel and, from what follows, why was this portrayal so important?
2. How can false teaching sometimes seem bewitching to us?
3. How does Paul contrast the Jewish Law and faith in Jesus in v 2-5?
4. Why do you think Paul specifically chose the example of Abraham in v 6-9 when he was opposing the arguments of the Jewish teachers in Galatia?
5. Read Genesis 15 v 1-6. What do you think it means that '*he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness*' and why does Paul quote this in v 6? How does this answer the problem of 2 v 21?
6. Why would Paul's words in v 7 be such stunning news to Gentiles and so problematic to some Jews?
7. How does Paul assure his readers that this good news isn't some recent unexpected development, but has its roots in the distant past (v 8)?
8. Why is v 10 such bad news for us and how is v 13 a solution?
9. What was the blessing given to Abraham (v 14)? – see v 8 for a clue.
10. How do we Gentiles receive that blessing (v 14)?

Application:

1. How can we make sure Jesus is clearly portrayed as crucified *today* (v 1)?
2. Paul mentions the blessing of receiving the Spirit several times in this passage (v 2-5, v 14). What are some of the benefits you enjoy by receiving the Spirit?
3. Why is it such good news that we are counted as righteous before God as a gift by faith in Jesus Christ rather than our own efforts?
4. In what ways do we sometimes rely on our own efforts to earn our salvation rather than simply accepting what Jesus did for us on the cross?
5. How does understanding that Jesus became a curse for us on the cross help us to make sense of what was happening in the crucifixion.

Pray:

- For God's grace not to be bewitched by false teaching.
- Thank God for the cross and all it accomplished for us.
- Pray for God's power to portray Christ crucified to others.

Sermon Notes:

Study 7: The Fulfilment of the Gospel

Galatians 3 v 15 – 4 v 7

Context:

We have seen that the crisis in the churches of Galatia that has prompted Paul to write this letter is the malign influence of certain teachers proclaiming a false gospel. This false gospel, which is really no gospel at all, is telling the Gentile followers of Jesus in Galatia that, in order to be truly saved, they must not only believe in Jesus, but must be circumcised and obey the whole Jewish Law, both the 613 commandments of the Old Testament and the extra traditions and customs added by the scribes and teachers of the Law. Paul resists this with a passion, suggesting the Galatians have been brought under some kind of magic spell, and arguing strongly that faith in Jesus is sufficient for salvation. And in a master stroke, we saw in our last study how Paul draws heavily on the Old Testament to support his arguments, showing his Jewish opponents that the true Gospel was prophesied all over the Old Testament, if only they had eyes to see it. Paul will continue this approach in today's study.

Observation:

1. What example does Paul give in v 15?
2. Who were the promises of Genesis 12 v 7, 13 v 15 & 24 v 7 made to according to v 16?
3. What does the example of v 15 and the implication of v 16 mean for God's promise according to v 17?
4. Why does inheriting God's blessings not depend on the Law (v 18)?
5. So, what was the purpose of the Law given at Mount Sinai (v 19)?
6. Is the Law opposed to the promises of God? Why/Why not (v 21)?
7. What is the bad news and what is the good news of v 22?
8. What role did the Law play before the Gospel came (v 23)?
9. What role did the Law play according to v 24 and what implications for the Law does the coming of the Gospel have according to v 25?
10. Rather than being prisoners of the Law or under its supervision, what are we if we put our faith in Jesus (v 26) and what part does our baptism play in this according to v 27?
11. Which human distinctives are no longer significant for salvation (v 28)?
12. What are the benefits of belonging to Christ in v 29?
13. What illustration does Paul give in 4 v 1-2?
14. How does Paul apply this illustration in v 3-5?
15. What are the blessings of being made a son of God through faith in Jesus (v 6-7)?

Meaning:

1. Why is it important for Paul to argue that the Law, including circumcision, given at Sinai 430 years after God's promises were given to Abraham, does not nullify or cancel those promises (v 15-18)?
2. What does Paul mean by saying that the Law was added, 430 years after the promises were given to Abraham, *because of transgressions* (v 19)?
3. In what sense is *the whole world a prisoner of sin* (v 22)?
4. The promise that both Jews and Gentiles can be counted as righteous before God by faith, by believing God's promises, rather than our own good deeds, was given to Abraham and his Seed (i.e. Jesus). Now that Jesus, has come, what does that mean for us (v 23-25)?

5. In ancient Jewish society, the only people who could really inherit property or other legacies, were Jewish, free men. Gentiles, slaves, and women were excluded. How does Paul show in v 26-29 the radical impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
6. How does 4 v 4-6 link together Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost?

Application:

1. How does it feel to be held as a prisoner by sin? Read Romans 7 v 14-25 – to what extent do Paul's words here describe your experience?
2. On the other hand, how does it feel knowing that you are an heir of God's promised blessings simply through faith in Jesus, rather than your own good deeds or efforts?
3. What kind of impact should Paul's radical words in v 28 have on our life as a church?
4. How does it feel to know that God is your Father (4 v 6)? Can you describe a time the Spirit has helped you to *experience* the Fatherhood of God in a personal and powerful way?

Pray:

- Thank God that his promises are given to us through faith alone in Jesus alone.
- Pray that our church would demonstrate the reality of Paul's radical words in v 28.
- Pray that every day might be Christmas, Easter and Pentecost all rolled into one!

Sermon Notes:

Study 8: The Threat to the Gospel

Galatians 4 v 8-31

Context:

The universal problem of humanity is that we lack righteousness because of our sin. This puts us in grave peril with God who is holy and cannot look upon sin. There is nothing we can do to resolve this dilemma ourselves, because the whole world is held prisoner by sin. God's Law, given to Israel at Mount Sinai, though an expression of God's righteousness, could not actually make anyone righteous, because our sinful hearts are unable to obey it perfectly. In fact, the purpose of the Law was to expose our sinfulness and our inability to obey God. The good news is that, way before God gave the Law, he made a promise to Abraham, that one day he would solve our dilemma himself. He would count as righteous anyone who believes in Jesus, the Seed of Abraham. This righteousness would be a gift to all who believe. So, the Jewish Law has served its purpose, according to Paul. Its mixture of moral and ritual commandments have found their fulfilment in Jesus and no longer have a significant role to play in the lives of those who follow Jesus. Of course, Jewish followers of Jesus are welcome to continue observing their laws and customs if they wish, including the practice of circumcision. But Gentile followers of Jesus cannot be expected to do so, and, in fact, Paul argues that it would be damaging for them if they did. He knew this was controversial teaching, but he continues to drive it home in today's study.

Observation:

1. What was the spiritual condition of the Galatians before they came to know God (v 8)?
2. What is Paul's concern in v 9?
3. In what practical ways is Paul's concern being played out (v 10) and what is Paul's fear because of this (v 11)?
4. What is Paul's plea in v 12?
5. What memories does Paul recall in v 13-15?
6. What critical question does he pose in v 16?
7. What is the aim of the false teachers according to v 17?
8. Is spiritual zeal a good thing according to v 18?
9. What powerful image does Paul use in v 19 and what longing does he express in v 20?
10. To which story in Genesis does Paul refer in his illustration in v 21-31?
11. What was the difference between the birth of the two sons of Abraham (v 23)?
12. In this illustration, what do Hagar and her son Ishmael stand for (v 24-25)?
13. In contrast, what do Sarah and her son Isaac stand for (v 26-28)?
14. What was Ishmael's attitude to Isaac and how is this mirrored for the Galatians (v 29)?
15. What action did God tell Abraham and Sarah to take (v 30)?
16. What is Paul's conclusion in v 31?

Meaning:

1. In the previous study Paul claimed that Jewish people were slaves and prisoners to the Law. Now he says that the Gentiles were also slaves – but by what were they enslaved (v 8)?
2. Why does Paul suggest that if the Gentile Galatian Christians adopt the Jewish Law, it would be the same as returning to the worship and practice of their former idolatry before they became Christians (v 9-10)?
3. Why would Paul fear that all his efforts had been a waste of time (v 11)?

4. It seems that the reason Paul first visited the Galatian cities was because he was ill and needed help. The illness was possibly something to do with his eyes. How did they welcome him and his Gospel message and why does Paul refer to this (v 12-16)?
5. What does the image of a woman in labour tell us about the nature of pastoral and evangelistic ministry (v 19-20)?
6. Paul's illustration in v 21-31 would have been extremely controversial and provocative to Jewish hearers. They believed that they were descendants of Isaac, born to Sarah the free woman, whilst the Gentiles were descendants of Ishmael, born to Hagar, the slave woman. How does Paul turn this on its head in these verses?
7. What does Paul mean that believers in Jesus are '*children of promise*' (v 28) '*born by the power of the Spirit*' (v 29)?

Application:

1. What are the dangers of following religious rituals and rules, even if they seem good? Can you think of any modern examples of this?
2. What kind of spiritual zeal should we have (v 18) and how can zeal become dangerous?
3. What does it mean to you to be a child of promise, born by the power of the Spirit, free?

Pray:

- For a right attitude to rituals and rules in the Christian life.
- For those who work full time seeking to form Christ in those who don't yet know God.
- Thank God for giving us new birth by the power of the Spirit.

Sermon Notes:

Study 9: The Freedom of the Gospel

Galatians 5 v 1-15

Context:

“Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we’re free at last!” The iconic words of Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr, proclaiming his longing for a day when racial justice would be established in the USA, bringing freedom to the African American community. Freedom is a powerful hope and aspiration for us all as human beings and freedom is what Paul promises in today’s study.

Observation:

1. What did Christ set us free *for* according to v 1 and what, therefore, must we be sure to do as a consequence (v 1)?
2. What would be the serious consequence of the Gentile Galatian Christians allowing themselves to be circumcised (v 2)?
3. What requirement would being circumcised bring for them (v 3)?
4. What are the two tragic consequences of seeking to be justified (acquitted, declared not guilty before God) by means of obeying the Jewish Law (v 4)?
5. In contrast, what are Christians eagerly waiting and hoping for according to v 5? By what and through whom does this come (v 5)?
6. What value does circumcision (or uncircumcision) have for Christians (v 6)?
7. In contrast, what is the only thing that matters (v 6)?
8. What image does Paul use in v 7 to describe what has happened to them?
9. What image does he use in v 8-9 to describe what has happened to them?
10. What two things is Paul confident of in v 10?
11. If Paul were preaching the necessity to be circumcised, what would have been abolished according to v 11?
12. What does Paul cheekily wish for in v 12!?
13. How should the Galatians *use* their freedom and how should they *not use* it (v 13)?
14. What is the central gist of the Law, the summary of it (v 14)?
15. What does Paul warn them about in v 15?

Meaning:

1. Knowing all that we have learned so far in Galatians, what would you say is the essence of the freedom Paul speaks of in v 1? Why would adopting the Jewish Law be tantamount to being burdened by a yoke of slavery?
2. Why would being circumcised as a Gentile Christian render Christ of no value, alienating them from Christ and causing them to fall away from grace (v 2-4)?
3. Again, drawing on all we have heard so far from Paul in our previous studies, what does v 5 mean?
4. What is the offense of the cross (v 11)?
5. Paul’s teaching about righteousness being gained only by faith in Christ rather than our own religious efforts led some of his opponents to accuse him of encouraging people to sin, to live a carefree, godless life, serving self rather than God and others. How do Paul’s words in v 6 & v 13-15 counter that accusation?
6. How do the two images in v 7 & v 9 help to illustrate the problem in Galatia?

Application:

1. The word 'justified' (v 4) is taken from the law courts and means to be acquitted or declared not guilty. Imagine you were in the dock of the law court of heaven with God in the judge's seat giving an account of your life. The charge is that you haven't lived a righteous life according to God's standard, you haven't loved God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength or your neighbour as yourself. How would you plead and what have you learned in Galatians that might give you hope?
2. The message of Galatians could be summed up in 3 words:
 - **Legalism** says 'You are NOT free to sin and the Jewish Law will make sure you don't'
 - **License** says 'You ARE free to sin and Jesus will forgive you if you do, so don't worry'
 - **Liberty** says 'You ARE free NOT to sin – Jesus died to give you the gift of being counted righteous by faith and the Spirit lives in you to empower you to live an increasingly righteous life for God and all this comes to us by God's amazing grace'To what extent do you find this a helpful way of thinking of the essence of Paul's teaching in Galatians so far? Which of the 3 do you choose and why?
3. In what ways can the message of the cross be offensive today? Should we stop preaching it if it is going to offend some people?

Pray:

- For God's grace to use our freedom wisely and well.
- For courage and compassion in preaching the cross of Christ.

Sermon Notes:

Study 10: The Fruit of the Gospel

Galatians 5 v 16-26

Context:

'All you need is love' sang the Beatles and Paul would agree, almost at least. For Paul, all that counts is faith expressing itself through love (5 v 6). *Faith* in Jesus is what enables us to be counted as righteous by God and then we are called to live a life of *love*, seeking to serve others rather than ourselves. And all this is the work of the Spirit in our lives, because it is the Spirit who makes what Jesus did for us on the cross *real* in our lives (5 v 5) and, as we will see in today's study, it is the same Spirit who produces the good fruit of the character of Jesus in us, the sweet and colourful fruit of selfless love.

Observation:

1. What is the key to being able to avoid gratifying our sinful desires (v 16)?
2. What internal battle with external consequences does Paul describe in v 17-18?
3. What are the acts (literally 'works') of the sinful nature (v 19-21)?
4. What is the deadly serious danger of living like this (v 21)?
5. In contrast, what is the fruit of the Spirit (v 22-23)?
6. What has happened to those who belong to Christ according to v 24 (see also 2 v 20)?
7. What should we do according to v 25 and what practical example does Paul give in v 26?

Meaning:

1. What does living by the Spirit actually mean (v 16) and why would it keep us from gratifying our sinful desires?
2. In what ways do you see the acts (works) of the sinful nature, mentioned in v 19-21, in the world today?
3. Why would living like this, without repentance, disqualify a person from heaven (v 21)?
4. Go through the list of the fruit of the Spirit and see if you can give an example of each (v 22-23).
5. The fruit of the Spirit is essentially the character of Jesus. Where do you see this fruit in the life and ministry of Jesus? See if you can find an example in the life of Jesus of each of the 9 flavours of the Fruit of the Spirit.
6. What does it mean to have crucified the sinful nature (v 24) and why, if this is the case, does sin still exert a pull on us even after we have become a Christian?
7. How do we 'keep in step with the Spirit' (v 25)?

Application:

1. In what ways do you experience the battle described in v 17? How do you fight it and win?
2. Although Paul has made it clear in Galatians that no one can be saved by their own efforts, but only by God's free grace through faith in Jesus, he nevertheless is equally clear in v 19-21 that this does not mean Christians can just live any way they please so long as they believe in Jesus. In fact, to do so would disqualify you from heaven! So, how do we hold these two seemingly contradictory truths together?
3. What is the significance of the contrast between the words '*works*' in v 19 and '*fruit*' in v 22, and also between '*the sinful nature*' in v 19 and '*the Spirit*' in v 22?

4. How does Paul's argument in today's passage support the view that the Christian life is about **Liberty** rather than **Legalism** or **Licence** (see the previous study for definitions - Question 2 on page 23)

Pray:

- For God's power to live by Spirit and to keep in step with him.
- For God's power to fight and win the battle within us.
- For the fruit of the Spirit, the character of Jesus, to grow more abundantly in us.

Sermon Notes:

Study 11: The Outworking of the Gospel

Galatians 6 v 1-10

Context:

Paul has argued that, though we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus alone, this grace and faith are never alone. In fact, the grace that comes to us as a gift through trusting in Jesus, not only saves us from the objective guilt of our sin but also saves us from the subjective experience of sin in our daily lives. The first is a one-off event, the second is an ongoing experience. So, just as it is impossible for us to save ourselves from our objective guilt by our own efforts, it is equally impossible for us to save ourselves from our subjective sins by our own efforts. So, God's grace through faith in Jesus provides both **Pardon** for sin and **Power** to live a holy life. In our previous study Paul described the fruit of the Spirit that grows in us as we follow Jesus. In today's study he gives us some practical examples of what this might mean.

Observation:

1. What responsibility does Paul mention in v 1 and what warning does he give?
2. How is this responsibility summed up in v 2?
3. What warning does Paul now give in v 3 and what responsibility does he mention in v 4?
4. How is this responsibility summed up in v 5?
5. What command does Paul give in v 6?
6. What agricultural principle does Paul use in v 7 and how does he apply it spiritually in v 8?
7. What encouragement does Paul give in v 9?
8. To whom should we do good according to v 10?

Meaning:

1. How can we follow the teaching of v 1 without appearing arrogant or holier-than-thou?
2. How would this be an example of carrying each other's burdens (v 2)?
3. Which law of Christ do you think Paul is thinking of here (see 5 v 14)?
4. Why and how is comparing ourselves to others such a waste of time (v 3-4)?
5. How can v 2 and v 5 both be right?
6. What do you think v 6 means practically?
7. How do we understand v 7-8 considering what we have learned so far in Galatians?
8. What is the harvest we will reap (v 9) according to v 8 and what does this actually mean?
9. Why do you think Paul teaches that we have a particular responsibility to do good to our fellow Christians (v 10)?

Application:

1. Can you think of an example of when you have been on the giving or receiving end of v 1?
2. How is the principle of v 6 fulfilled in the life of our church?
3. How can we ensure we do not grow weary and give up doing good? How can we guard against compassion fatigue?

Pray:

- For gentle courage to help others overcome their sin.
- For humility to let others do the same for me.
- For grace not to compare myself with others.

- For generosity in supporting the ministry of the church.
- For grace not to grow weary and give up doing good.

Sermon Notes:

Study 12: The Boast of the Gospel

Galatians 6 v 11- 18

Context:

The world is full of boasting and, as Paul brings his letter to a close, he too does a bit of boasting. It is not the kind of boasting we might expect, but it is a great way to finish this magnificent letter.

Observation:

1. What does Paul ask his readers to take note of in v 11?
2. Paul reminds his readers of the false teachers in Galatia in v 12. What are they trying to do and why?
3. What is the ultimate motivation behind their teaching and actions according to v 13 and why is this so hypocritical?
4. What does Paul say is the legitimate reason for boasting and why in v 14?
5. In 5 v 6 Paul told us about the only thing that counts, in contrast to circumcision (or uncircumcision). What was that and how does he phrase it differently in today's passage (v 15)?
6. What blessing does Paul invoke in v 16 and to whom?
7. Why should no one cause Paul trouble (v 17)?
8. With what final blessing does Paul end the letter in v 18?

Meaning:

1. Paul usually didn't pen his letters himself but dictated them to a colleague (see for example Romans 16 v 22). However, he almost always wrote a little in his own hand towards the end of each letter, as proof that it really came from him (see for example Colossians 4 v 18 & 2 Thessalonians 3 v 17). How does this help explain v 11?
2. Why might refusing to be circumcised result in persecution (v 12)?
3. Why would the false teachers have reason to boast if the Galatians agreed to be circumcised (v 13)?
4. What do you think it means to 'boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v 14)?
5. In what ways does the cross lead a person to be crucified to the world and vice versa (v 14)?
6. How do 2 Corinthians 5 v 14-17 & Galatians 5 v 6 help us understand what it means to be a 'new creation' (v 15)?
7. How would you define 'peace' and 'mercy' (v 16) and how are they linked to the message of the Gospel that Paul has been arguing for in this letter?
8. The word 'even' in v 16 means something like 'namely' or 'that means'. So, by 'the Israel of God' Paul is referring to the church, the worldwide community of believers in Jesus, both Jews and Gentile. The true Israel, therefore, is not to be defined by ethnic descent or religion, but by faith in Jesus Christ (see also Ephesians 2 v 11- 20). How does this sum up Paul's argument in this letter and why would it have been controversial and provocative?
9. What do you think Paul means in v 17? (see 2 Corinthians 11 v 21b-28).

Application:

1. For what reasons are Christians persecuted today?
2. What kinds of things do you feel tempted to boast about? How can you be better at boasting in Jesus Christ?

3. Three times in this letter Paul has spoken of Christians being crucified (2 v 20, 5 v 24 & 6 v 14). What practical difference should this make to our daily life?
4. Bearing in mind all that Paul has taught in this letter, why are his two closing blessings so appropriate (v 16 & v 18)

Pray:

- For grace and strength to be willing to pay the cost of following Jesus.
- For joy to boast in Jesus Christ rather than anything or anyone else.
- For power to live a crucified and resurrected life as a new creation in Jesus.
- For peace, mercy, and grace!

Sermon Notes:

Study 13: The Weeping King

Luke 19 v 28-44

Context:

Back in Luke 9 v 51 Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem, knowing all that would happen to him there. A lot has happened in the weeks on the road as he travelled with his disciples, and now he has arrived on the outskirts of the capital on what would be a momentous day, with much joy and many tears.

Observation:

1. Which villages did Jesus approach as he arrived on the outskirts of Jerusalem (v 28-29)?
2. Who did Jesus send on an errand in v 29 and what was their task (v 30)?
3. What did they find as they went (v 32)?
4. What question were they asked (v 33), what did they reply and why (v 34 & v 31)
5. What happened next (v 35-36)?
6. Who began to praise God in v 37 and why?
7. What was the essence of their praise (v 38)?
8. Not everyone was joining in the praise! Who is specifically mentioned in v 39 and what did they demand of Jesus?
9. How did Jesus respond to them (v 40)?
10. What did Jesus do as he saw the city (v 41)?
11. What did he say as he wept in v 42?
12. What did he prophesy would be the grave consequences of this (v 43-44a)?
13. What reason does he give for this future disaster (v 44)?

Meaning:

1. The usual route from Galilee to Jerusalem would take you down the Jordan Valley to Jericho (avoiding Samaria), up the Wadi Qelt to Bethany and Bethphage and then over the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem? This is the exact route Jesus took. From what you know of the Gospel stories, why was Bethany a significant place for Jesus, why did he often visit there?
2. Do you think Jesus had prearranged the collection of the colt or was he using his divine power to prophetically see that the colt would be there (v 30-34)?
3. Why did he do this (see Zechariah 9 v 9-10)?
4. What was the symbolic significance of spreading the cloaks on the colt and the road (see 2 Kings 9 v 6-13)?
5. Why do you think the Pharisees were so unhappy with what the crowds were shouting (v 37-39)?
6. In 2 Samuel 15 David is rejected as King and ousted by his own son, Absalom. He is forced to leave Jerusalem, an event described in 2 Samuel 15 v 30. What are the similarities between that event and the description of Jesus in v 41-44?
7. From what you know of history, how and when were Jesus' words in v 43-44 fulfilled?

Application:

1. The disciples obeyed Jesus' instructions to collect the colt and found things exactly as he said? How might this encourage us to be obedient to Jesus too?

2. Why do you think the crowds so quickly changed from jubilant praise on Palm Sunday to 'Crucify Him!' within just a few days? In what way should this be a warning to us?
3. Do you ever find yourself weeping (literally or internally) over the state of the world or the church? What kinds of things move you to tears like this?

Pray:

- For grace to be obedient to Jesus.
- For the help of the Holy Spirit to be faithful to Jesus and to trust him, even if others turn against him.
- For God to break our hearts with the things that cause him pain in the world and church.

Sermon Notes:

Study 14: The Risen King

Luke 24 v 1-12

Context:

In our previous study we saw Jesus as the weeping King on Palm Sunday, but now, exactly one week later, the tears have dried up and it is joy uncontainable! The tomb is empty and the future has begun!

Observation:

1. What day and time was it as our story began (v 1)?
2. Who went where and with what (v 1)?
3. What *did* they find and what *didn't* they find on their arrival (v 2-3)?
4. Who then appeared (v 4)?
5. How did the women react (v 5)?
6. What were they told (v 5-8)?
7. What did the women do next (v 9) and what were their names (v 10)?
8. What was the reaction of the disciples and why (v 11)?
9. What did Peter do, what did he see, and how did he react (v 12)?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the women took spices to the tomb (v 1)?
2. How did you think they would have felt on their arrival at the tomb (v 2-3)?
3. In what ways did the Easter events fulfil the earlier words of Jesus (v 6-7)?
4. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus knew in advance all that was going to happen to him at Easter?
5. What would have been the significance of the fact that it was a group of *women* that were the first to testify to the resurrection (v 9)?
6. Why do you think the disciples considered the women's testimony to be nonsense (v 11)?
7. What do you think was going through Peter's mind as he walked from the tomb (v 12)?

Application:

1. Looking back on our study of Galatians, why do you think the Son of Man *had to* go through the Easter events (note the word 'must' in v 7)?
2. Why would some people, then and now, think the resurrection was and is nonsense? What would you say to someone who says this?
3. What difference does it make to you that Jesus rose from the dead?

Pray:

- Thank God for the resurrection of Jesus.
- Thank God that he keeps his promises.
- Pray for those for whom the resurrection seems like nonsense.

Sermon Notes:

Study 15: Evidence the Demands a Verdict Part 1

The Empty Tomb: Matthew 28 v 11-15

Context:

We saw in our previous study that when the women reported the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to their male colleagues, they didn't believe them at first because it sounded like nonsense to them. So, can we be sure that the resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact or is it just a matter of faith, to be believed or not? One former Lord Chief Justice of England claimed that the resurrection of Jesus is one of the best attested historical events in human history! Was he right in his bold claim? Our next three studies are entitled 'Evidence that Demands a Verdict' and we will be examining some Biblical texts to see if there is any weight to the Lord Chief Justice's claim. We start today with the end of Matthew's Gospel; written perhaps a couple of decades after the events they recount.

Observation:

1. What had the women just seen and where were they going (v 11)?
2. Who went into the city and why (v 11)?
3. Why had they been posted at the tomb of Jesus (see 27 v 62-66)?
4. What did they report (see 28 v 1-7)?
5. What were they given and what were they told to say (v 12-13)?
6. Why were they told to say this (v 14)?
7. What did they do (v 15)?
8. What was the extent of the circulation of their story, in time and space (v 15)?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the chief priests and elders were so keen to devise a plan (v 12)? What were they afraid of?
2. Do you think it is credible that the disciples would have stolen the body of Jesus from the tomb (v 13)? What are the arguments both for and against this theory?
3. V 15 tells us that at the time Matthew was writing his Gospel, maybe a couple decades after the events they recount, the story of the disciples stealing the body was common currency amongst Jewish people. In an ironic sense, why is this good news for those who believe that the resurrection is historically true?

Application:

1. Matthew's words in v 15 tell us that the tomb was definitely empty on Easter Sunday, otherwise there would be no need for a story to be devised to explain it! So, what other possible explanations could there be for the empty tomb and how credible are they?
2. A former Bishop of Durham once infamously said that the resurrection story was just a conjuring trick with bones. He didn't believe it was a historical fact, but that it had a kind of spiritual or moral truth only. How do you think Matthew would respond to him?
3. Why is the historical fact of the empty tomb so important – what do we gain by it and what do we lose if we reject it?
4. If archaeologists were to find the bones of Jesus in a tomb in Jerusalem, what would that do to your faith?

Pray:

- For confidence to believe the Gospel account of the empty tomb.
- For those who do not accept it as historical fact.

Sermon Notes:

Study 15: Evidence the Demands a Verdict Part 2

The Appearances of Jesus: 1 Corinthians 15 v 1-8

Context:

In our previous study we saw that Matthew reported, decades after the reported resurrection of Jesus, that the explanation circulating amongst some Jewish people was that the disciples stole the body during the night. This at least proved that the tomb was definitely empty on that first Easter morning. So, the historical fact of the empty tomb demands a verdict and, today we will see that the reported sightings of Jesus after his death also need explaining. Let's see what the apostle Paul has to say about this.

Observation:

1. What does Paul want to remind the Corinthian Christians about (v 1)?
2. Why is this so important (v 2)?
3. Where did Paul get his information (v 3 & see also Galatians 1 v 11)?
4. What is the first historical truth of Paul's Gospel (v 3)?
5. What are the second and third historical truths of this Gospel (v 4)?
6. What is the fourth historical truth of this Gospel and how many different witnesses are mentioned (v 5-8)?

Meaning:

1. Why is it so important that Paul tells us he 'received' this Gospel (v 3) from Jesus himself (Galatians 1 v 11)?
2. Thinking back to our studies in Galatians, what does Paul mean when he says this Gospel saves us if we keep believing (v 2)? What are we saved from and for?
3. In what sense was the death of Jesus 'for our sins' (v 3)?
4. This death was in accordance with the Scriptures (v 3). Where in the Old Testament do we see the death of Jesus trailed or prophesied?
5. Thinking back to our previous study, why do you think Paul stresses the fact that Jesus was buried (v 4)?
6. Paul says Jesus' resurrection as well as his death was according to the Scriptures (v 4). So, where would you look in the Old Testament for trailers of Jesus' resurrection, specifically on the third day?
7. Why are the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus an important piece of evidence in the case for the historical resurrection theory (v 5-8)?
8. Can you identify in the New Testament any of the appearances mentioned here?
9. What possible alternative explanations are there for these appearances and what credibility do they have?
10. What do you think Paul means by referring to himself as one 'abnormally born' (v 8)?

Application:

1. Why is it so important that the Christian Gospel rests on historical facts? To what extent does this distinguish the Christian faith from other religions?
2. Based on v 2-3 and looking ahead at v 14-19, what would you say to someone who claims the Christian faith is just a human invention rather than based on historical facts?

3. If you were to share the Gospel with a non-believer, how would you do it? What historical events would you include and why?

Pray:

- Thank God for the historical reliability of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments.
- Pray for God's grace to hold firmly to the faith.
- Pray for courage to share the faith with others.

Sermon Notes:

Study 15: Evidence the Demands a Verdict Part 3

The Growth of the Church: Mark 16 v 9-20

Context:

So far, in these post-Easter studies, we have seen that there is evidence in the New Testament that demands a verdict on whether the resurrection of Jesus is historical truth. We have looked at the fact of the empty tomb and the multiple appearances of Jesus after his death and we have explored some of the alternative explanations for them. A third piece in the jigsaw is the remarkable growth of the church, beginning very quickly after the reported resurrection of Jesus and continuing to this day. How do we explain this explosive growth if in fact Jesus stayed dead rather than rising again as the Bible claims? This is our focus in today's final study.

Most Bibles contain a brief note before Mark 16 v 9-20 explaining that the earliest copies of Mark and other ancient texts end the Gospel at 16 v 8. It is highly likely, therefore, that v 9-20 were added after Mark had finished his work. However, they clearly reflect belief and practice in the early church and have been accepted as true and authoritative by the church.

Observation:

1. To whom did Jesus first appear on Easter Day and what had Jesus previously done for her (v 9)?
2. Who did she go to tell and what was their reaction (v 10-11)?
3. To whom did Jesus then appear and what was the response to their testimony (v 12-13 – see also Luke 24 v 13-35)?
4. To whom did Jesus later appear and what did he say to them (v 14)?
5. What command did he give them (v 15)?
6. What would the consequences of this command be (v 16)?
7. What sign would accompany the preaching of the Gospel (v 17-18)?
8. What happened to Jesus after he gave them this command (v 19)?
9. What did the disciples then do and how successful were they (v 20)?

Meaning:

1. How would the ministry of Jesus have affected Mary Magdalene (v 9 & see also Luke 8 v 2) and why would his resurrection have meant so much to her (see also John 20 v 10-19)?
2. What do you think it means that Jesus 'appeared in a different form' (v 12) and what light does this shed on the story of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24 v 13-35)?
3. Based on all you have learned in the series on Galatians and the post-resurrection accounts, what is the good news that Jesus commanded the disciples to preach to all creation (v 15-16)?
4. What was the purpose of the accompanying signs (v 17-18) and can you identify any places in the New Testament (not including the Gospels) where these signs are seen?

Application:

1. This passage clearly tells of the explosive and expansive growth of the church. Why is it not credible that such an impact could have happened without the resurrection of Jesus? In other words, to what extent is this remarkable growth evidence of the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus?

2. Should we expect to see the accompanying signs mentioned in this passage today? Do you have any modern examples to share? How might this affect or shape the way we do mission today?

Pray:

- Thank God for the growth of the church, both then and now.
- Pray for God's power to be evident in our mission today.
- Pray for courage to share the Gospel.

Sermon Notes: