



Galatians 1:11-24
Finding Freedom: Galatians
Just One Changed Life

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Every now and then, something will happen in our lives that sets us on a new course that is completely unexpected. Sometimes the new direction is challenging and difficult – like a tiny virus, or the death of a spouse or child. Other times, the change is good and exciting: a new job or a promotion at work; a new relationship; the announcement that part-time “in person school” will be starting in early February as our district leadership announced on Wednesday evening; winning the lottery; graduating from high school or college (not unexpected, usually!), and so many other things. These can all set us in a new direction.

This morning we continue the series in Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia, and we see today that Paul shares with them how some good news, the good news of Jesus in particular, has unexpectedly transformed his own life. So, let’s dive into today’s passage. **(Galatians 1:11-24)**

(Sermon graphic slide) Last week we started with the first 10 verses where Paul lets them know that he’s writing because he’s heard that they have gotten off-track in their faith. As Paul puts it in verses 6 and 7, they are “turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all.” So the basic gist of the letter is to address their waywardness and get them back on track with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And Paul uses that word, “gospel” 5 times in verses 6-9 that we read last week. He uses it again at the start of today’s passage before going into his own story of how the gospel of Jesus Christ impacted him and changed him.

I want to start with this word “gospel.” “Gospel” is one of those words that we use frequently in the Church, and every now and then we’ll come across it in a secular context – such as someone stating that something is “gospel truth” or something like that. **But “gospel” is a word that we sometimes use without thinking about it or maybe even knowing what it means.**

If you look up “gospel” in a dictionary (I think I turned to Oxford Dictionary), it will tell you that it means “The teaching of Jesus” or “the

recording of the teaching of Jesus” with secondary definitions of “a teaching that is true.” When the word is used in everyday language – like a newspaper article or something like that – it’s this second meaning that is usually intended – “a teaching that is true.”

“Gospel” is the English word used to translate the Greek word “euangelion,” [you-an-gel-ion] and it is used throughout the New Testament.

“Euanagelion” combines the adverb “eu” or “eus” which means “well” or “well done” with the word “angelos” which is “messenger” or “angel.” So, it’s “good message” or “good news” – which is what probably many of us know it to mean. The four biographies of Jesus are titled “The Gospels of Jesus” or “The Gospel of Jesus according to Matthew/Mark/Luke/John,” or “The Gospel According to Matthew/Mark/Luke/John.” They all have this word, “euangelion” in their title: It’s the “good news” about Jesus

Now, even though the word is used occasionally outside of the context of the church, most people probably think of it as a “church” word. Even the dictionary gives a “religious” definition as the first/primary one. **But this word wasn’t invented by the early Christians. It was an everyday word for them that existed prior to Jesus Christ.** For instance, if a young married couple in their day found out they were pregnant and they wanted to announce this “good news” to their relatives, this is the word they’d use (euangelion). It’s good news.

So: When Paul says that he wants them to know that the “gospel” he preached to them is not something that was made up, this is in everyday language for them. It helps us understand why he was telling them – in the passage we looked at last week – not to follow a “false gospel.” We associate the word with Jesus and so “false gospel” sounds like an impossibility, a contradiction. Dictionaries even define it that way, as I mentioned. So “false gospel” just doesn’t make sense. But “false good news” we can get our heads around...Fake good news. Good news that turns out it’s too good to be true. So “gospel” is not religious language. It’s just him saying, “hey, this good news, this good message: It’s for real. I’m not lying, it’s not made up. It’s

legit good news...and I got it straight from Jesus himself...there's no possibility of it having been made up."

Paul then gives them a brief synopsis of his faith journey, which he had undoubtedly told them previously when he first visited them and got the churches going. That journey is recorded for us in the book of Acts in chapters 13 and 14, which probably took place in A.D. 47-49. He visited the Galatian churches two other times as well, which are also recorded for us in Acts, and probably happened in 52 A.D. and then about 57 A.D. But he gives a re-cap of his faith journey here, which can also be found in Acts, in a couple different places: chapter 9 and 26.

In a nutshell: Paul, who used to be known as Saul (I'll call him Paul throughout today's message), **was a man on a mission to eradicate the people who continued to proclaim the name of Jesus.** He started in Jerusalem but he even takes his persecution out beyond Jerusalem as he makes a journey from there to Damascus, which was about 140 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem. It was a major gateway in terms of trade and commerce. If the Christian faith took root there in Damascus, it could very easily spread far and wide. So off to Damascus Saul (Paul) goes, in a strategic move to rid the world of these terrible people who are following Jesus.

And on his way, Paul has an encounter with Jesus that brings about a 180-degree turn in his life. A blinding light flashes and knocks him to the ground. When he gets his wits gathered together around him, he can't see, and he hears this voice calling out to him. "Why are you persecuting me?" Paul's response is "Persecuting you? What do you mean? Who are you?" And the reply back is, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." And from there, Paul realizes that he's doing the wrong thing by persecuting Jesus' followers, and instead joins the cause.

Now, I know this experience of Paul's is pretty wild – a flash of light, temporary blindness, and Jesus speaking to him from the heavens. We've probably all heard of people who said that God spoke to them, or made his presence known in a really unusual way like this. And to be honest, I'm

oftentimes a bit skeptical of these kinds of things if I don't know the person...or especially if I read about them or hear of them second-hand. But, as I mentioned in a sermon a few months ago, I asked some people to pray for my back one time, which I'd injured and wasn't getting better... And the thing that was about as bizarre as Paul's experience is feeling muscles or ligaments or tendons moving in my lower back as they prayed. (And I'm not given to imagining these kinds of things!) Something moved, I know that, and my back felt significantly better. So I know God can move in ways that to us seem odd or even beyond belief...like it's a made-up fake news...a false gospel.

But whatever happened to Paul...and however uncertain any of us might be about what happened: **There is no question about the directional change in Paul's life. He went from being the greatest persecutor of the early Church to being *the* pivotal person in the spread and growth of the Church.** It's an absolute 180-degree turn-around. No one...I mean, no one...not Paul himself, not any Christian, not any Pharisee, not his mom, not his dad (if they were still alive at that point)...not his pet chihuahua...*no one* saw this change in him coming.

So he reminds them about that, with the point being here that he didn't make up this good news about Jesus, and he didn't learn it from another human being. **In other words, there's no possibility of human fabrication of what he taught them about Jesus: He heard it straight from the resurrected Jesus himself.** It was the last thing he was expecting. And then he went and spent some three years on his own wrestling with what it means that the gospel of Jesus is true. He probably sat down with his Jewish Bible – what you and I call the Old Testament – and worked out what it means that the good news of Jesus – God incarnate as a man, crucified, buried, and resurrected...he worked out what all of that means, before meeting with other Jewish Jesus-followers and working out together the impact of Jesus on their faith.

So, there are three takeaways for us from this passage I want to highlight. **First, God can and will use your life to shine the light of Christ and bring others into a relationship with Jesus.** Just one changed life – like yours and

mine – can help another person be changed by the power of God as well. And perhaps the most powerful way to do that is to be honest with others about your journey of faith – including the rocky parts. Let's say you have a friend who is struggling with something: alcohol, or pornography, or credit card debt, or anger, or difficulties in their marriage – perhaps because of some of these other things – or who knows what else – pride, a lack of compassion for others, bitterness in relationships, loss of a loved one, or loss of a job. The list could go on.

And maybe you've been through a similarly difficult season of life, or an entire outlook on life you once had that is similar. It doesn't have to be *exactly* the same...but you once had your own struggles and even if you aren't perfect now, Jesus has undoubtedly transformed you and helped you move past something.

Your friend/co-worker/classmate might only know you now as a person who doesn't seem to have those struggles, or certainly not to the degree that they are struggling with them, and have no idea that you used to have a problem with anger or jealousy or whatever it is. Maybe they met you after you became a Christian. And usually, we want to cover up our past and pretend like it never happened, and present ourselves to the world as the new creation, almost as though there never was an old creation. I get it. I don't like acknowledging my own past indiscretions, habits, hurts, behaviors, and so forth. I don't even want to admit that the Seahawks lost yesterday – and that's not even because of anything I've done, and is insignificant in the grand scheme of life.

But Paul shows us a better and more powerful way to share our faith journey: And that is to include the ugly parts. Don't be afraid of the past, or sharing it, because when we do share our past and how it contrasts with who we are today, it does two things. **First, it lets the other person know we're in the same boat with them, that they're not alone.** We've walked that same path. We know what they're experiencing. It breaks down walls between people to admit the difficult, sad, and sinful parts of our lives. It levels the playing field of the relationship, and helps them see you as approachable and relatable. It opens doors to relationship.

And second of all, we can share that we've made it through that season of life and are a "new creation" because of the transformative power of God. It's a way to give God all the glory, to shine the light of Christ, to point people not to ourselves, but to our heavenly father who loves us and to Jesus his son who died for us and the Holy Spirit that dwells in us and strengthens us. Paul models that for us, and he even notes that people praised God because of his life that was turned around by Jesus. People were drawn to Jesus because of him, and it starts with not being afraid of sharing his former way of life, because it helps others grow in relationship with Jesus.

Second, we learn from this passage that we are never too far removed from the will of God to get on track with Jesus. Paul's life is a prime example of this, and so we won't spend much more time on his story...but I do want you to consider your own life in regards to his turnaround. This is a guy who was out to completely eradicate Christianity from the face of the earth. It was his life mission. And yet, Jesus turned him completely around and Paul went on to be arguably the greatest church planter and evangelist ever.

Probably most people here this morning or watching online who *aren't* already Jesus followers probably *also* aren't out persecuting the church the way Paul did. You're not hauling Christians off to jail or seeking for them to lose their lives because of their faith. But even if you're not that diametrically and vehemently opposed to Jesus, the fact remains: If you aren't following Jesus, then you're not going to be transformed by him or saved by him. Jesus himself says in Matthew 12:30 (and says similar things in a lot of other places), "If you're not with me, you're against me" (Jesus, in Matthew 12:30).

But Jesus welcomes you with open arms if you'll open your heart and your life to him. He has the power to transform your life and give you abundant, joyful life. He welcomes people who are broken, downhearted, the prideful, wealthy, the poor, successful, people who have failed, the popular, lonely, sick, healthy, men and women, young and old, married, single...none of that matters – Including how far from Jesus you are or think you are. The

fact is, you're always just a prayer away: you can bring him your pain and grief and sin and pride and lay it at the cross and ask him to make you new. And that's good news: Jesus welcomes you in, no matter who you are.

And then lastly, the whole point that Paul is making here in this section is that this gospel message, this “good news” message, is not made up. He didn't make it up, nor did anyone else. He got it straight from Jesus himself. Sometimes things in life seem too good to be true, and usually it turns out that they aren't true. But with Jesus, he is true. His love and grace and forgiveness can completely transform a life and take a person from the road that leads to despair, death, and destruction and put them on a whole new path that leads to abundant and joyful life – here and now and in the life to come. That's what Jesus does, and it's not a fabrication. That's the gospel truth. That's the Good News, the “euangelion”.

So, no matter where you are on the journey of life and faith, you can know that others have been there, too. And many of us have met Jesus in the darkest and most challenging times of life, and discovered his transformative power that has lifted us up and out, and given us hope and purpose and a transformed life. Oftentimes, it has come when it was least expected, and to people, like Paul, we never would have thought could be transformed by Jesus. But that's how Jesus works. **I hope you know this power of Jesus in your life; and if you do, that you'd let it flow through you into the lives of others.** Just one life changed by Jesus is all it takes, in order to change the life of one other person. I hope and pray that would be you, today, because Jesus really is the gospel truth. Let's pray...Amen.