

Introduction

Galatians 1:3 is where we are starting today. If you have a Bible, I want to invite you to go ahead and go there with me. If you don't have a Bible, that's alright; you can just follow along, as the words will be up on the screen here in just a few moments. We are starting the series today, "Freedom Story", and as the bumper video declared, we are talking about the freedom that comes in Christ. Starting next week, there will be some different stories that we will be sharing from within our church. I look forward to that, and I think it is going to be a lot of fun. But today we are just going to introduce the concept of the "Freedom Story," and so we are going to talk about how freedom comes only in Christ. I am excited to talk about that, so I look forward to it and I hope you do as well. I pray that God will use this to calibrate our hearts as we go into this year. I don't know about you, but there's always a hundred things that are pressing against me, so I know that I need to get my heart and my mind right and moving in the right direction. I pray that God's Word from Galatians will do so. Let's begin.

Galatians 1:3: *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."* That's sort of the introduction. Listen to the way he starts the letter: *"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..."* Not, "How are the kids?" (Laughter) Not, "I miss you." It's "You are jacking this up." (Laughter) Verse 7: *"...Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 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. 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. For I would have you know, brothers, that the Gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when He who had set me apart before I was born and who called me by His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days."*

What's this about? Why is Paul so upset? Why is he jumping in immediately? This is why: Paul believes he started a church and he grounded it in the Gospel of grace. He believes that immediately after he left, the people who were there in the church in Galatia, which is a region in the northern part of Turkey... he believes that those people abandoned the Gospel of grace, and he believes that now they are trying to do something else. He's mad about it. In fact, he's fighting mad about it, and he wants them to know that's not going to work.

So why should we care today? Well, first of all, we should care because the Gospel is the power of God. We need the Gospel. And then, number two, because I think we can fall prey, if we are not careful, to very subtle and very seductive false gospels. I want to talk to today about what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is. I want to talk today about what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not, and I want to talk about what the Gospel of Jesus Christ does. So let's start.

1. What the Gospel IS. (v. 4)

Paul, starting in verse 4, makes mention of the Gospel very briefly. He says this: "...the Lord Jesus Christ..." (verse 4) "...who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age." The Gospel: It is there to deliver us from our present evil age. The Gospel's heart is rescue. Every person in this room, whether we recognize it or not, needs to be rescued.

Let's pretend that you work in an office building, and let's pretend that this office building has many stories, and let's pretend for whatever reason you are working on the fifth floor. Okay? You get a phone call at your desk. You answer the phone and a voice says to you, "Your building's on fire. You've got to get out." You hang up the phone. You don't know who it was that called but you run out. Sure enough, the hallway is filled with flames. You close the door. No way out that way. So you go back into your office and you look around. You do what you've always wanted to do. You pick up your computer, and you throw it through the window. (Laughter) Right? And as it goes out through the window, then you make your way to the windowsill, and you sit there on the windowsill. You see a fire truck; it drives up. Firemen run out. They have their hose and now they're starting to spray down different parts of the building to put out the fire. Some of the firemen are running into the building to rescue people. They see you sitting there on the windowsill. They pull up the ladder truck, and a ladder goes up to the fifth floor. A fireman begins to climb up the ladder and meet you there. And then the fireman says to you, "Okay, come on; this way down to safety." And then you say, "You know, I think I'm going to be okay. Umm..." (Laughter) "...I'm kinda looking at this. I think you guys have this fire under control. I don't think it's going to make it into my office, so I'm just going to hang out here, and then as soon as you guys have the fire out, I'll just get back to work. Is that okay? Do you mind doing' that?" Now you hear that story and you think, "That's absolutely absurd." The funny part is that our world and, in fact, people in this room, exist who believe that they do not need to be rescued.

Let me tell you the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel is this. It's that every single person needs to be rescued. The Gospel declares that every single person is a sinner. Let me put it back in the fire analogy. The Bible says that every single person in this room is an arsonist. You started the fire in your own life. You have been setting Creation on fire from the moment that you were born. You were born into a family and a race of arsonists. You have been destroying and setting fire to relationships, to people, to situations, and to your spiritual life from the moment that you drew your first breath. You are an arsonist at heart, and that is what you will always be, left to your own devices. You are burning Creation down. The Gospel is this: God wants to turn you from an arsonist into a fireman. What? I mean, He doesn't want to arrest you and throw you in jail, even though you're burning five-story buildings down. No; He wants to rescue you, redeem you, and allow you to be on His team to put out the fire. Imagine, as we're considering this absurd situation, that one of the firemen, the way that they put out the fire is they run into the building and then they say, "Everyone's out. But the only way that this fire will stop will be if the building collapses on Me, and my blood is the liquid that extinguishes the flames." Now that seems ridiculous to us, but that is the truth of the cross. It is that you were broken, you were sin, and under God's judgment, every single person was. This is what we deserve. We deserve to be crushed. We deserve to be punished. But instead of those things... the cross. So God places His Son on the cross, and all of the sin, from all the way from the beginning of time to all the way to the end of time, all of sin was placed upon His Son, and in that moment He bore every single sin. And so the sin that separated us from God... punished. But not on you... on Him. And then three days later He rose again from the dead. Why? To declare that death and hell are now dead, and Jesus is the first-born of the Resurrection. What does that mean? That means that those who have faith in Christ will one day be the second-, third-, fourth-, fifth-, sixth-, and on and on and on, born into the Resurrection; and

we will also be resurrected and with a complete and whole and glorified body will reign with Him forever and ever. Now... that's the Good News; that's the Gospel.

This is the funny part. Some of us are kind of like, "Yeah, okay..." You see, some of us believe that the Gospel is actually good advice not good news. Right? Do you know what good advice is? Good advice is people tell you things and you're like, "Well, I could take it or leave it." Good advice is, "Hey; before you fry your chicken, you might try soaking it in buttermilk overnight." That's good advice. Right? Good advice is, "Before you get married, it's good to go into marriage with both eyes wide open, but then after you get married, close one eye." (Laughter) That's good advice. Good news is different than good advice because good news is a proclamation which evokes a response in and of itself. In other words, when you hear good news, you know what to do. "Blue Bell is on sale at Kroger." That is good news. You know what to do. Run-D.M.C. is getting back together and performing in a reunion tour. You know what to do. I don't have to tell you. (Laughter) The Gospel is good news: "Repent; for the Kingdom of God is at hand." You know what to do. What? Turn in faith to Christ and be saved. But many of us in this room... many of us in this room... we don't believe that the Gospel is good news; we think it's just good advice.

Why should you believe me? The Scripture says that you need to be rescued. You know in your own heart that you do. I mean... let's be honest. You put on a pretty good show when you come to church. You bathe... you smell good... (Laughter) You put on your nice clothes. You even smile. If we could see you in the car before you got to church.... (Laughter) Uhh huh... Yeah... we know. (Laughter) You weren't singing praise songs whenever that happened. But this is the thing: We know that we all need to be rescued, but the funny thing is that we try to pretend like we don't. We know that we do, and that is what the Gospel is. This is what I want you to hear. If you come to our church, I want you to understand this. Every single person that is a Christian in this room has at one point recognized their brokenness and their need for Jesus. Every single one. And in fact, if you are here today as a guest or as a visitor, our prayer is that you will recognize your need for the Gospel of grace as well, because it is good news. And I know that you don't believe it, but it is good news to declare: "You need to be rescued." Too many churchgoers have taken the coming of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, and His resurrection as if it was a laundry tip rather than the cosmic reality that it truly, truly is. You have affronted a Holy God. You've been burning down Creation since the day that you were born, and your punishment now is death. The only way the fire can be put out is through the blood of Jesus Christ. The only way that your life can be repaired... the only way that that gnawing sense of emptiness... the only way that that sense of dissatisfaction with your life will ever be fulfilled is when you rest completely in the satisfaction of knowing that God has rescued you, that He has adopted you, that He has cleansed you, and now you can stand in freedom, fully and completely loved and fully and completely known. That is the only way. You will never know freedom apart from being able to rest, that God has made you who He wants you to be, that you have been saved and that you are loved. God pursued you. His Son died for you. His Son rose for you. That is the Gospel. But here's the funny thing. A lot of churchgoers keep trying to change it.

Whenever I was a kid, I don't know if you guys remember this... Do you y'all remember New Coke? (Laughter) Alright. My grandmother had a mild obsession with Coca-Cola. By mild, I mean that when you opened her refrigerator (she had a side-by-side) and the entire inside door was filled with Coke. So, she just always kept it completely stocked. The day that they announced "New Coke," she was less than pleased. She's like, "I've been drinking this my whole life. This is all I've got; I need this." Do you know what she did? She went out and she hoarded Coca-Cola. (Laughter) It's kind of weird when you think about it, but she went out and she bought as much as she could. She brought it in; she stacked it high. She was like, "Look; if they're going to stop making this, I've just got to have as much of it as I can." Now you

know the story of that. That didn't end up turning out to be the case, but this is the thing about that. I think that many of us don't realize this, but what happens is we get the Gospel of grace and it's so beautiful and so true, but then something happens inside of us and we think, "We need to make a change to this. We need to spice it up a little bit. We need to get something a little new."

Did you ever become addicted to an artificial sweetener? I mean, there was a time in my life when I was trying to lose some weight and we were having Sweet 'N Low and Splenda and Stevia and ... I don't know whatever else was out... Equal... and all that kind of stuff, using it in different things. Do you know what's funny? It's no matter how much artificial sweetener you place in something, it does not taste the same as sugar. But here's the funny thing. I could eat enough of it and then whenever I would have actual sugar, do you know what I would say? I would say, "That tastes too sweet." I think that many of us have ended up hearing the Gospel of grace and it was sweet and we stored it up and we stockpiled it and we brought it into our lives and we loved it, but somewhere along the way we started getting an artificial Gospel. And now whenever we hear the sweetness of grace, we even think, "That's too good to be true. It's too sweet." Paul says it... in fact, this is where he gets hacked off. He says in verse 6, *"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."* You are deserting Him. Who is the "Him" to whom Paul is referring? It's not Paul... third person there, right? He doesn't not say, "I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting me, who called you into the Gospel through the grace of Christ." Who calls us into grace? God. When you turn your back on grace alone as the Gospel of God, when you turn your back on that, you are in effect turning your back on God. Now that may be crazy to say to you, but that is, nevertheless, what the Bible says. He is astonished that you were turning your back on the Gospel.

Whenever you were in that fiery building, remember that weird phone call that you got? You didn't know who it came from? Guess what? It came from God. You are not smart enough to know that you need to be rescued. You are not smart enough to figure it out on your own. You have nothing in you that would do that. Only one thing has brought you to a place where you sense your need for repair, and that thing is the calling love of the Father. The Father is the One who calls. The Father is the One who redeems. The Father is the One who saves. The Father is the One who raised Jesus from the dead. The Father does all the saving. This is what Paul wants you to understand. "God has done all the work. Why do you keep trying to change it?"

2. What the Gospel ISN'T. (vv. 6-7)

What are the false gospels of our age? What about the false gospel of morality? You know... "If I just don't get drunk, if I just don't smoke, if I don't cheat on my spouse, if I don't cuss too much... I'll probably be all right." Many of us have bought into the lie that if we do more good than bad, at the end of our life, God will take those things and weigh them out. If we have more good than bad weighed out, then we'll be accepted into heaven. There's only one problem with that. It's nowhere to be found in the pages of Scripture. It is not true. It is a lie. Do not believe it. Student ministries for years, I believe, failed teenagers. Do you know why? Because, basically this is what they said: They said, "If you don't get drunk, don't do drugs, and you don't get your girlfriend pregnant and then you graduate from high school, you are a success." Listen. We are shooting way too low if that's our measure of success. Do you know what we want? We want disciples of Jesus Christ, but they cannot have that unless they have the grace of Christ. We're shooting way too low if we say that is what we want as a church. Listen. I want more than good citizens to come out of Houston Northwest. I want dangerous disciples of grace. Now listen. I need you to understand that morality is an extension and a response of God's grace in my life. It is not what gets me God's grace. If I can earn God's grace through being moral enough, it ain't grace.

There's a false gospel of family heritage. My grandfather was a pastor. My uncle was a deacon. My father was an elder in the church. I don't care if your grandma started the church, if you haven't responded to Jesus Christ, you're going to hell. That's just the truth. Right? But here's the thing: It's that many of us believe "I'm American, so I'm Christian; my family is Christian so I'm Christian." No. Every person must be held accountable, individually. There are parents in this church right now heartbroken because their children have wandered away from Jesus Christ. Listen. The false gospels are real.

Here's another one. The false Aladdin gospel. "You know, I just pray, rub the lamp, and the Bentley's start falling from the sky." Right? (Laughter) What's funny is, "Oh Yeah, I know that's not real." Yeah... But you know what? You don't ask for Bentley's, you just ask for health. You don't ask for Bentley's, you just say, "God, just bless me at my job." Or, "Lord, just make sure that my kids turn out okay." Listen to me. Just because you get cancer or things don't go your way does not mean that God is not still God. He is not your butler. He is the heavenly Father. This is the thing: We have convinced ourselves that if bad things happen to us, then therefore God must not be real. No; that's not the Gospel. The Gospel is that in spite of living in a fallen, sinful, broken world where I could get cancer, my marriage may have struggles, my job may completely and totally stink... in the midst of all those circumstances, God can still be redemptive. That is the Gospel.

What's another false gospel? What about the false gospel of "Jesus is just one option. If that's good for you, that's fine; but you know for me, I'm going to follow something else." That's the gospel of pluralism. That's the gospel of believing that I can get to God through some other way. Some people say, "Well, you know, as long as I'm just a loving person, that's an extension of the Gospel. As long as I'm kind and I treat people with love, then that really shows what's happening to me." Listen to me. You can be a loving person who stands up and believes in all sorts of social justice causes... you want to defend the poor and stand up for the homeless and make sure that orphans have care and all that kind of stuff... but if your heart has not been transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you're still condemned. You can never live a good enough life that God will be impressed with you. We've said it before and we'll say it again: "You will never do anything to make God love you more or anything to make God love you less, once you're in the grace of Christ. But if you are outside the grace of Christ, you will never do anything to earn God's favor. You can never do enough religious activity to impress Him. They are, as Paul says, 'filthy rags.' You've got nothing apart from the grace of Jesus Christ." So why does God make it that way? Because the truth of the matter is that if we begin to believe that our effort can somehow draw us closer to God and earn God's favor more, then we add to the Gospel. It becomes "grace plus" and "grace plus" is not grace. It is something else. It is our own human effort.

The false gospel that the Galatians were falling prey to is the false gospel of religion. There was a group of people within their community called the Judaizers. The Judaizers told them, "Hey, it's good that you've received the Gospel of Jesus. We're excited about that, but do you know what you need to do now? Now you need to make sure that your kids get circumcised, and you need to make sure that you start obeying these Jewish feasts, and you need to make sure that you dress in this particular way and eat these certain foods. If you don't do those things, then you're not really a Christian because Christianity was a community born out of the Jewish community." And so people began to fall prey to that. That's why Paul is so mad. He says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa.... You listen to me. You don't do religious activities to earn favor with God." There's a false gospel of religion in Texas in our century. There are people in this room right now that believe that if they don't go to church, God is going to get them. The Bible says this: "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" How much condemnation? Zero. There is no condemnation. So here's the thing. Some people in this room think, "If I don't go to church then I won't get

that promotion." I hate to tell you this. You going to church has zero to do with that promotion. Now, I know what you're thinking. "Now, hold on a second here. Why would I go to church in the first place then?" Ahh... Because you are responding to God out of grateful joy. You are saying "Thank you." You are not afraid that He is going to get you. There is a big difference. Let me draw it out for you.

Let's say that there is a family that has an abusive father, and every day whenever he gets home from work he demands that dinner is on the table and the house is spotless, and if the house is not spotless and dinner is not on the table, then he is going to let people know about it. He is going to start slapping them around. He is going to yell at people, and he's going to make sure that he gets his way. Guess what? After a week or two, it doesn't take long... too much slapping around or yelling before... Guess What? ...When he comes home, the house is spotless, the kids are behaving, and dinner is on the table. What's the motivation? Fear. That is not the Gospel. Too many of us in this room are viewing God as an abusive father. If I don't do what God asks me to do, He's going to get me. *"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* We've said it before and I'll say it again. All of the punishment of sin back in the past and all of the punishment of the sin out there in the future... every single bit of it was compacted onto the cross. He became sin who knew no sin. All of it has been dealt on Jesus Christ. All of it. So I know what you're thinking. "Now wait a minute. If all of the punishment is out there, what about the bad stuff that happens to me?" Ahhh... I'm glad you asked.

There are basically three reasons why bad things happen to us. Right?

1. Satan is out to get us. He attacks us.
2. We live in a sinful, broken, fallen world and bad things happen.
3. God is allowing things to happen to us so that He can discipline us.

And really, when you get right down to it, #1 and # 2, because of Romans 8:28 which says that God can use all circumstances for those who have been called according to His purpose and love Him, and God uses all those things for good. Guess what? Even when Satan attacks and those things are real, and even when bad things happen because we live in a sinful, fallen, broken world... even #1 and #2 can be turned into #3: Things that God uses to discipline us, to grow us into Jesus Christ.

I stand before my kids all the time. They get tired of hearing this. Do you know what I tell them? I have two boys. I say, "I have one job for you. This is my job as a father. My job is to help you become a man. That's my job. And if you don't become a man, then I have failed as a father." So sometimes I take them outside and I say, "Okay, we're going to do some work." They rarely greet me with "Yeah! Work!" Right? (Laughter) But whenever I do that, they say, "Why do I have to do this?" I say, "Because one day, sucker, you're going to have a wife and some kids..." (Laughter) "...and listen to me, when you do that, you're going to know how to work, so you're going to learn how to work right now." And sometimes I tell them, "Yeah, I know that your grandma sent you twenty dollars in the mail. Guess what? You're going to give two of them to Jesus." And they're going to say, "Wait a minute. That was a gift to me." "Yeah... but guess where she got it? She got it from God in the first place, so you're going to give it back to Him." And they say, "Ahhh, man!" "But if I don't teach you how to give when you're getting twenty dollars, what's going to happen when you're getting two thousand?" Do you think that they're going to give? No way. If I don't teach my children how to be a man now, then it will be a long, hard, painful road for them much later. Guess what? Ephesians says this very, very clearly. "We are to grow up into the head who is Christ." Let me break that down for you in plain English. God says, "My job is to make you look like Jesus. I will use whatever tools are at my disposal to make you look like Jesus. If that means that I have to take away your

house and all your money to make you depend on Me more so that you will look like Jesus, then I will take it because... Guess what? It was mine in the first place." If He says, "I will take your health and you will be frail from now until the day you die, whether that's next week or next year or next century, it doesn't matter. I will do that because I want more than anything, not for you to be happy, not for you to be famous, but for you to look like Jesus. So I will use whatever tools I have at My disposal." Ahh... So this is the Gospel. I am not being gotten by God when I don't go to church. What is happening? I might be being disciplined. I might be being grown into the likeness of Jesus Christ. But here's the thing. If you are coming to church out of a motivation of fear or guilt, you don't get the Gospel. Why do we come to church then? Let me tell you why: To say "Thank you." We say, "Man, You rescued me. My house was on fire. You brought me out. You put out the fire of my life with the cross. Your blood atoned for my sin. I deserved punishment but You gave me life. I deserved death but You gave me the promise of a resurrection. I deserved death and hell, but instead You give me an eternity with You." Now that is worth saying "Thank you" for. That's good news.

If you are drowning... This was in our book this week, if any of you bought that book, "Galatians For You" by Tim Keller. If you are drowning, what do you want people to throw you? A manual on how to swim... or a rope? You want a rope. What's funny is that many of us are drowning in our own lives, and we are frantically trying to do enough religious activity so that we can tread water. Uh, uh. It ain't going to work like that. You're doomed if you rely on your own behavior. This is the thing. You're like, "Man, I thought that religious activity was good." Yeah, it's good if you're hearing the Gospel and you respond to the Gospel, but if you think that just showing up at church is going to give you a free pass at the end of your life, you don't understand what this is.

Whenever I was a kid, preachers had a saying: They said, "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sleeping in the garage makes you a car." Right? (Laughter) This is what they were trying to say: "Just because you come here and you hear the words, I will guarantee you there are people that have gone to church their whole life, but they have never received grace. They've been trying to impress God over and over and over. Now, you're probably saying, "Man, I think I've got it. You keep saying the Gospel over and over. Yeah... Jesus died for my sins." Let me tell you something. Do you know what else is funny? Do you want to know one of the reasons why people attempt to abandon the Gospel? Because they think that that's just like step one, and then they can leave it behind. No, no, no. I want you to hear me. The Gospel is not arithmetic and then everything else builds up to astrophysics. The Gospel is astrophysics. It's only when I begin to realize that the deep things of God are when I meditate on the fact that God has graced me, and then I tease out those implications into the rest of my life. The deep things of God are when I take the reality that I've been graced and I go, "What does that mean about my own insecurities?" And I take the Gospel of grace and I apply those to my parenting, to my marriage, to my friendships, to my work. That's when the deep things of God begin to emerge... whenever I begin to understand the character of God that has perfected and saved me... The deep things of God come when I take the Gospel and I apply them to every other aspect of my life. So whenever the Bible exhorts us to go on to the deeper things, what they are saying is, "I shouldn't have to tell you over and over that Jesus Christ has saved you through grace alone, by faith." But you don't stop there. Then you take that truth, that Gospel, and you apply it to every single facet of your life.

So what happens if I abandon that? Well, this is the crazy part. Look at verses 8 and 9. Paul says, "...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." Verse 9: "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." The word "accursed" there literally is the Greek word "anathema." I am going to say a word that might make some of you a little bit uncomfortable,

but I have to say it in order that you understand the seriousness of this moment. Paul says this, "If you abandon the Gospel of grace which is really no gospel at all, you are 'anathema.'" The literal translation: "You are damned..." Whoa "...as in to hell, because there is no other Gospel." If you start to think that you can do enough religious stuff to make God love you... Why do you think Jesus said in Matthew 7:22, "On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord. Did we not prophesy in your Name and drive out demons in your Name? And I will say to them, 'Away from Me; I never knew you.'" What's His point? I don't care if you led Bible study every Tuesday morning. I don't care if you came to elder-led prayer. I don't care if you were always in church. I don't care if you stayed for both services. "If you didn't receive the grace of Christ and you were trying to impress Me with your religious activity, away from me, I never knew you." Why do you think that people are surprised? "Like man, I went to church every week." "Great." Perfect attendance pins don't count on Judgment Day. What matters is the grace that flows from the cross.

3. This is what the Gospel DOES. (v. 13/ v. 23)

So Paul then, in verse 13, says this: "...You have heard of my former life in Judaism; how I persecuted the Church of God violently and tried to destroy it." My former life. Paul was the most religious guy that you could find. In fact, he says later in the passage that his zealotry was allowing him to pass people older than him. In other words, he was climbing through the ranks of people older than him. He was jumping up getting promotions in the religious community. And guess what? He realizes all of that was trash; it didn't matter at all. It didn't impress God in the least. He says, "That was my former life." I wonder how many "former lives" are in this room right now. I wonder how many people are still living in the life that ought to be your "former life." How many of us are saying right now, "If only I could get a husband, then I would be happy." "If only I could get a wife, then I could really, really know fulfillment." "Man, if only I could get that promotion at work, then things would be really good." "Man, if only I could get a little bit bigger house, then everything would be set." "If I just had a little more money..." Listen to me. The dissatisfaction that you are experiencing has nothing to do with the stuff that you don't have. It has everything to do with the condition of your heart because you are hungering and longing for the grace of God. And until you get to the moment where you say, "Jesus is enough," you cannot leave your "former life" behind. What happened to Paul? Jesus revealed Himself to Paul directly, and when that happened he said, "I don't need all this stuff." How many of us are ready to reach a point where we say, "Jesus is enough for me"? Let me put it to you as a question. I will ask you this. When is Jesus going to be enough for you? Or are you just going to keep running around after everything else? When will you say, "God, the fact that You have saved me, delivered me, redeemed me, rescued me... that is transformative and that now means that I treat people differently. I forgive. I love. I overlook offense. I bear the burden of my sister or my brother. I treat people with kindness and with grace whenever they frustrate the tar out of me. I love people genuinely because I have been first genuinely loved and known by God." Only then are you exploring the deep things of God. You see, what the Gospel does is it changes the way that you live. Have you ever noticed if you just try to be nice, eventually you get tired of it? People are jerks. (Laughter) "I don't have time for this nonsense." (Laughter) Right? But what if you have truly been saved, if you truly understand the weight of your sin and the fact that you've been rescued? Ahh... Then guess what? Then you understand you can just rest in the freedom that comes from grace. The Bible says that God is not an abusive Father but He is a loving Father. Let's think about that abusive father situation again, but let's not turn into a loving father. What if instead of being afraid you just say, "Man, the second that dad gets home, here at our house we are trying to get everything ready because we want to spend as much time as possible with him, face-to-face, just sitting there enjoying his presence." What a different motivation is that? You see, that's what the Gospel does. The Gospel makes you recognize grace, and so therefore you want to savor and enjoy the presence of God. Some of you, whenever we sing these songs... It says, "When I think of the cross and I delight." Delight?

Why? Because you delight in Him. Some of us are too busy following Jesus so that Jesus will give us things instead of following Jesus to get Jesus. When you get Jesus... when He is the gift, then it all changes.

So today, I want to lay this before you. Some of us need to respond and say "Yes" to Jesus for the first time. We've been trying to get stuff, not Jesus. Jesus is the gift. You may never be rich. You may never have all the things that you've wanted, but you get Him and He's enough. Some of us today need to stop trying to pretend and play the religion game and instead say, "I come to church and study God's Word and grow in my knowledge of the Gospel, so that I can apply the Gospel to all areas of my life, not just be religious." We need to rest in His grace. We need to say "Yes."

Let's all bow our heads together. I want to pray for you. If you say right now, "Hey, do you know what I need? I need to receive the grace of Jesus Christ for the very first time. I have never said 'Yes' to the Gospel. Today I have been following a false gospel. I have been doing religion and I've been doing all that other stuff." If today you say, "But I know what I need. I need Jesus. I need to say 'Yes' to Him, and today is my day." I just want to pray for you. Would you just raise your hand if that's you, I want to pray for you right now. Anybody out there say, "I need Jesus Christ"? There's two right there. Who else? There's another one back there. Who else? There's another one; there's another one. Who else? Raise those hands... There's two more... three more, four more. Over there; good. Okay. Anybody else? You can put your hands down. This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to pray over you right now, and this is what's going to happen. In a second, there's going to be a chance to respond. I want you to just come up here and pray with somebody. They are going to tell you what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

"Father, I pray for these who have raised their hands, and God I pray that they come and they say 'Yes' to You. They leave behind a false gospel, and they say 'Yes' to Jesus Christ. God, I pray that You would give them the courage; don't let them be afraid, don't let them try and think they don't need to go but God that today is their day."

Alright. How many of you... heads still bowed and eyes still closed... how many of you say, "You know what? I know the Gospel of grace, but I've been doing something else. I've been resting in my own power." How many of you would raise your hands and say that's where you're at today? Alright... I see some hands. Who else? Good... I want to pray for you. Anybody else?

"Father, I pray for these who have raised their hands and God that they would say 'Yes' to You, that they would repent of their own effort, and they would say 'Yes' to what it is that You want to do... the implications of Your Gospel in all of life. God, I pray that we would never tire of it. Father, make us your women, your men, your people, children and students, all aligned for grace. God, I pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen."