



# The Grace-Gospel

Sermon – Aiden Sibrava

Galatians 1:1-10

*8 May 2022 – 8am & 10am / 15 May 2022: 8:30am & 6pm*

Have you ever wondered why, apart from the glorified Jesus in Revelation, we never get a depiction of what Jesus looked like in his earthly ministry?

One of the things that I *love* about that is that it means that when you go to an African church, and you look at the stained glass depictions of Jesus, you see African Jesus. When you go to a Chinese church, and you look at the stained glass depictions of Jesus, you see Chinese Jesus. Indian churches have Indian Jesus and British churches have British Jesus. Although... can he *really* be British if his teeth are straight? (Sorry!) Anyway, my point is, I kind of like it, right? Because it means that people have said, Jesus is like *me*. He became one of us in order to redeem us. I wonder if that was intentional in the mind of God, or if it's just a happy accident?

But do you ever wonder *why* the Gospels don't describe his appearance? I mean it's not like they don't have the time. Even a few lines would give you the general idea. You know... *dark hair, piercing blue eyes, wry smile and an air of mystery*. But we don't even get that! Why?

I've got a few suggestions for you, right—see what you think about this...

Firstly, the identification of Jesus as God probably means that the Old Testament laws against graven images and idols were automatically extended to Jesus. Many times in the Old Testament

but particularly in the 10 Commandments, God's people are prohibited from making any kind of representation of God by which you could say, this bull, or this statue, or this geometrical abstract somehow looks like God. In a world where representation was very closely tied to 'being' (to speak to the King's messenger was to speak to the king), making a representation of 'God' carries two risks.

One: It reduces God to the depiction of God. *Heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool.* How is some piece of carved dead wood supposed to reflect Ha'Shem, the Name above all Names?

And the other risk is false worship - that we might believe the image somehow stands in proxy for God, and worship it instead of God himself *who does not dwell in houses made by human hands.*

So because of this, the people were banned from making images... and I reckon that that *might* have carried over to Jesus by default, as he is God incarnate. And so we don't get a description of what he looked like in the Gospels.

Second proposal... Maybe it's true that God wants Christ to be a Jesus for all of us... African, Chinese, Indian. He belongs to each and every one of us as the Saviour of all humankind—at least, of all who trust in him. And so perhaps for that reason, we're never given a description or a 'mental image' of what the man, Jesus, looked like. Because the image God sovereignly wants us to have is that Christ is like us—whoever we are.

But I think this third one, the one that leads us into thinking about Galatians today, is probably most significant. And that is that God

is known. *How?* Through his Word. First and foremost, we encounter God as a speaking God.

Remember the drama of creation - the Lord spoke, and it came to be. He commanded and it stood firm (Ps. 33:9). In Isaiah (55:11) he says that his Word will not go out from him without achieving everything for which he has purposed it—whether for salvation or condemnation. In John 1, Jesus is spoken of as the Word - the *logos*.

And since God is a speaking God, I'm sure that it's no accident that God gave us a book - the Bible. Filled with his *words*. And our primary personal experience of God's ministry in our lives is by his Spirit, who—as well as being our comforter—reminds us of the things that Christ *said* (John 14:26). God is a God who *speaks*; indeed, he is made *known* through his speech. So the Gospels give us what God wants us to know of Christ - not a picture, not even a sketch but an account of his deeds and his *words*. Because God is a speaking God. Christ comes to us as the Word made flesh.

Now because God is a speaking God, that should make sense, then, of why the Bible's sanctions on false prophecy are so dire. False prophecy is when you say, *This is what God says...* and God has not spoken. They've spoken as though with the voice of God but they have spoken falsely. And when God is a God who is known by what he has said, you can see why that is so offensive. So in Deuteronomy 13, Israel is commanded that the false prophet is to be put to death. In Jeremiah 5, God says...

*A lion from the forest shall strike them down; a wolf from the desert shall devastate the false prophets.*

And in Ezekiel 13, God himself stands personally opposed to the false prophets, whether they are men or women. And the

descriptions of his wrath are *vivid*. So we see false prophets are opposed by God's people, by the very created order and by God himself.

Which brings us to Galatians. I hope you have it open in front of you.

Because the Galatians, you see, have a false prophecy problem. And while we often imagine that prophecy has some fantastical elements (revealing secrets, foretelling the future) in reality the prophetic act is any speech which claims to reveal God's mind to God's people. So it can even entail commentary on what has been achieved in the past, including what was achieved at the Cross of Christ. We must walk humbly when we seek to declare the mind of God. And indeed, *preachers* ought to stand and tremble at the mighty task that is before them.

In the Galatian church, the clarity of the Gospel has been marred by false teachers who insist on justification through adherence to the Jewish law—Paul will refer to this often throughout the letter. Since this insistence on DIY-justification undermines God's declaration of the Gospel of Grace (that is, it is a kind of false prophecy) Paul rightly calls it 'accursed' in verse 9 of our passage today.

The truth is, Christ is the one who gave himself for our sins, in order to rescue us from the power of Satan, sin and death.

Verse 3-4 is so clear on the Gospel, on how we are saved. Who does the saving? I know you know the answer, but pretend that you don't, and listen for a moment as we read verse 3-5. *Paul says*, to the churches in Galatia:

*<sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you [—from whom?—] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Where do grace and peace come from? From me? From you? From Paul? No. From God. From Christ.

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins [—not for an earthly kingdom, not for a royal crown, but for our sins; and why?—] to rescue us from the present evil age [—because we deserved it? Because we convinced him? **No!**—he gave himself for our sins] according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

So who redeemed you? Who rescued you? *Not a rhetorical question... Who was it? Jesus!*

From where do grace and peace come? *Jesus and God the Father!*

Was Christ given for our merit, our deserving, and because we're so darn good looking? *No!*

What was he given for? *Our sin.*

Christ was given for sinners. He is the saviour of sinners like you and like me.

Hallelujah and amen! The joy of the gospel sets us free from our self-doubt and fear. Doesn't it? ... doesn't it? Well it does if we remember what Jesus said. If we remember God's word to us:

*For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life!*

But the Galatian church has a problem. False teachers presume to speak the mind of God; Paul says that they twist the Gospel into something ugly—something accursed. Look at verse 6. Paul says...

*<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in **the grace of Christ** and are turning to a*

*different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!<sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*

He means what he says.

You see, the Galatians had accepted the gospel of Jesus. The declaration that he is Lord and Saviour of those who trust in him, and indeed he calls us to come to him in faith, in trust, knowing that we are justified through *his death and resurrection*, and that *in him* we have salvation.

To those who believe, it is a gospel of grace (*charis*); it is a gift we receive through what he has achieved. I'll say that again slowly - it is a gift we receive through what he has achieved. That's what Paul said in verse 3-5, right?

But false teachers have come in and they've twisted it... they've perverted it. And Paul says, *let them be accursed*. He is furious. And what they're teaching is that if you want to be properly Christian, you have to be Jewish... you have to follow the law and the symbol of the law which is circumcision. Paul is so angry about this getting in the way of the gospel of **grace** that, in 5:12, he says that he wishes that those who insist on the law and on circumcision would go all the way and just cut their whole manhood off.

Because, Paul says, the law cannot help you. It cannot save you. Because *who* is the saviour? (Again... not a rhetorical question.)  
*Christ!*

Paul writes in 3:24 that the law is a 'tutor' that leads us to Christ. Because when you read the Old Testament law you learn of God's standard and, if you have any sense at all, you immediately notice how far we fall short. And you see that our only option is to throw ourselves upon God's mercy and grace... hoping for his forgiveness. And, joy of joys, it is ours in Christ! *Not in what we do or don't do*. In this letter, we see that to trust in our own action is to fail to trust in Christ and so it alienates us from Christ.

Frankly, you'd be *better* to be emasculated than to be alienated from Jesus and his saving work. Remember Jesus' words about it being better to enter life crippled or maimed or blind than to be cast into hell. And yet, thankfully, we're not called to be any of those things! We don't have to be crippled or maimed or blind or emasculated in order to be saved; we simply have to trust in Christ in whom alone is our salvation.

*That's Paul's whole point!* It is a gospel of **grace**. It's God's gift to us. There's an acronym that's worth knowing, if you are the note-taking kind... it goes grace, G. R. A. C. E.: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That's what we have. God's Riches At Christ's Expense. He paid the price and was raised for our justification, so that all who believe in his Name will be saved. He is for all of us whether we're African, Chinese, Indian... whether our teeth are straight or not. He is our saviour if only we will trust in his finished work.

We resist the false teachers. We say "no" to any notion of self-righteousness or self-justification. For if we could justify ourselves, why is Christ given? We say "no" to any notion of the Law being able to save. For if the Law could save, why did the Word become flesh? We say "yes" to the grace of God; *for in him we live, and move, and have our being* (Acts 17:28).

So what does this mean for the non-Christian?

It means there is a Saviour... and it's not you! And thank God for that, because you'd be hopeless at it. *Really!* God's law of holiness says *you shall not lie* and *you shall not steal*. Have you ever lied or stolen? Then you've broken his law and you stand condemned. There's eight other commandments in just the big 10. And if you're somehow still confident, the Pharisees identified 613 laws in the Old Testament, total. How confident are you feeling now? No, you've got no chance. It's as though the word 'guilty' is scrawled all across our faces the second we look in God's mirror of holiness. But... *when we trust in Jesus and what he has done for us...* we receive grace, and peace, and salvation in him. We stand in him! And when we look in God's mirror, we see Christ looking back... And the only thing written on our foreheads is, 'forgiven'. So ... *trust in Jesus!*

And what does this mean if you're here and you are Christian?

It means, Christian, you must hold firm to the Gospel, the sweetness of the good news of the salvation that is ours through Christ Jesus. It means you must resist any notion of self-righteousness or of self-justification. It is anathema to the salvation that we have in Christ, which we receive as a gift. Grace is when we receive God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

We don't have a polaroid of what Jesus looked like: we have what he wants us to have - the sweet news of our salvation, won at a Roman cross when Christ died for sinners like you and like me. *Hallelujah!*