

Christ in Galatians

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, as Leanne just said, we've just returned from a long service leave, five weeks we had, which was a wonderful time of rest and rejuvenation, and we went on a long car trip. We did a little over 5,000 Ks in the five weeks.

We went all the way up to the Whitsundays, and that was fantastic time.

Unfortunately, on the first day of the trip, it would seem as I look back, I developed a DVT, a deep vein thrombosis, which is not a good thing, a clot in your leg, in my calf, actually. And I didn't know about it for two weeks.

I was doing all sorts of things that you wouldn't do if you did know. But I got two weeks in, and I thought, this pain in my left calf is sufficiently bad. I have to go to see a doctor.

So I went to a doctor and had an ultrasound, and you know, it's off-putting, isn't it, when they say, there's a clot there. And it goes down to your foot.

And so also, when I found that out, I was struck by the reality that one of our loved ones had died of a Pullman reemboism. And so that night wasn't a great night. That night, I thought, whoa, I could die at any minute here.

This clot could move to my lungs or my brain. I started, I had a bit of a panic attack on that first night. Leanne said, why are you breathing so heavily?

I'm like, I'm not meaning to breathe heavily. But I was. And it was hard to control it.

But it was a bit of a panic attack. And I was singing to myself, that song that we sing, Teach Me to Number My Days. I really was, I was like, Lord.

But don't you reckon it's true? You live your life knowing it will end at some point. But certain times, seasons come about where you're acutely aware that I won't live forever.

In fact, this might be my last day. And that song we sing, which comes from Scripture, Teach Me to Number My Days, is a good idea to think about. What does a DVT have to do with Galatians?

That's the question. Well, in the Letter of Galatians, the one that Paul masterfully wrote to that church, it was in Turkey, in the north of that part of the world, Asia Minor.

He made it very clear that there is a life to be around for a Christian on the other side of death. You actually need to die to live, to follow Jesus. It's common, as I just mentioned, to get a little freaked out about death.

And when you've got a problem that might result in death, it is disconcerting. But I just want to use that as an illustrative pointer to the fact that we all have to become comfortable with death.

We need to die to ourselves to find the life that Christ has for us. And that's really what this incredible book, Galatians, is all about. Christ our life.

Christ our life. It's the message of the letter to the Galatian Christians. We are in a series that's two years long, called the Christ in Scripture Project.

We are aiming to study every book of the Bible over a two year period. And we're now in some of the letters of the Apostle Paul. What do we know about Paul?

He was a very significant human being, wasn't he? Maybe, I'd put it to you, maybe the second most significant person to ever live outside of Jesus. He gave an enormous contribution to the spreading of the Gospel in the first century.

He wrote almost half the letters of the New Testament. Who is he? Born Saul of Tarsus.

He's a unique individual, a unique pedigree, a Jew, but also a Roman citizen, a highly trained Pharisee. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures back to front and was passionately committed to the traditions of his people.

He was at the start a staunch opponent to Christianity because he saw this movement as a dangerous distortion of Judaism. And he opposed the church and actually brought death, persecution to the point of death to many believers.

Everything changed when he met Jesus, the risen Jesus, on the road to Damascus. Completely changed. He was called to this task of taking the gospel to the gentiles.

And for the rest of his life, he did that. He proclaimed the gospel all over the known world.

He established Christian communities in major cities, trained leaders, endured imprisonment, beatings, rejection, opposition, shipwreck and hardship, and yet continued preaching, despite immense personal cost. He was a pastor at heart, wasn't he?

He was a pastor at heart, and he wrote letters to churches that he planted, and he addressed real deep problems, division, immorality, suffering, false teaching, racial tension and spiritual pride.

Anywhere there was confusion about the gospel, he would try to bring clarity.

And this book, this letter, Galatians, is probably one of the first letters he wrote, and maybe his most passionate, where he just is so keen to let them know there is nothing to add to Jesus. Amen?

Christ plus nothing is the gospel, because there were people, there were Jewish teachers saying that circumcision is still a good thing, to add. And there are some other Jewish traditions to add to the gospel.

He is saying, no, nothing can add to what Christ has accomplished. Christ is our life. And this is a wonderful verse that really sums up the whole book of Galatians.

I'd say it's really my favourite verse in the whole Bible. It's been the most impacting verse for me, for all sorts of reasons, I won't go into. But Paul writes, I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2.20. Christ, our life, the old life has gone.

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live. You know that Christianity is not so much about self-improvement, is it? Then maybe sometimes we might think, some preachers do a lot of their preaching from self-improvement books.

So you might be forgiven for thinking. Christianity is about becoming nicer, stronger, more rounded people. But that's not what Paul says.

He doesn't say, I have improved myself with Christ. Does he? What does he say?

I have been crucified with Christ. The gospel is far more than self-improvement, isn't it? It's actually at its core about death and resurrection.

To die to the old foundation of our identity that we might receive, what Christ has achieved for us, a new identity found in him. I have been crucified with Christ. Now, I think it would be a challenge to find a more jargon-like saying.

It's Christianese, isn't it? It preaches well, it sounds great. I have been crucified with Christ.

Amazing stuff, but what does that mean? I have been crucified with Christ. He can't mean literally.

He wasn't there on the cross or next to Jesus, but he's saying that through faith, Christ's death has become Paul's death.

The old Paul was defined by religious achievement, confidence in his own righteousness, status and reputation, obedience to the law as the basis of acceptance to God, hostility towards those he believed were wrong.

So for Paul, what has been crucified? The self, the self that says, I will prove myself. I will justify myself.

I will make myself acceptable to God. I will establish my worth through success, morality or approval.

Curiously, Tim Keller, the great preacher who's gone home to glory from New York, said the problem of self-sufficiency is equally found in both the religious and the irreligious.

We have a lot of people in the room that would probably say, I'm not religious, I'm into relationship with Jesus. But we are religious. But there are others, maybe less so in this room, that they would call themselves irreligious.

Tim Keller says, they're both very similar. Irreligious pride says, I don't need God, I will live as I choose, I am my own authority. Religious pride says, God should accept and bless me because I have obeyed, served and lived better than others.

Well, both have at their heart a confidence in the self. The irreligious person, Keller says, loses sight of the law and holiness of God. While the religious person loses sight of the love and grace of God.

In the end, they both lose the gospel. The irreligious person says, I don't need God because I am free. The religious person says, I don't need grace because I am good.

Both remain at the center. Irreligion says, I am my own Lord. Religion says, I am my own Saviour.

The gospel says, Jesus is both. The self that is crucified is both. And I think this is a really important line.

The self that rebels against God, that's the one that has to be crucified. And also the self that tries to impress God. What have you built your identity around?

The gospel says, it all needs to come to the foot of the cross. We need to let it die and allow our full hope to be in Christ plus nothing. Christ, our life.

Paul says, the old life has died. I'm not trusting in anything that I've done. Christ now lives in me.

I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Now, this is the ultimate hope of the whole Bible, the promise of Ezekiel 36, where the Lord said, I will give you a new heart to his people Israel. I'll put a new spirit in you.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. That's what I'm going to do. That's my whole project with humanity.

I'll put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. God was always planning to come and fill his people with his spirit. Now, this is what happened in the tabernacle in the Old Testament.

God came and filled a space. And then in John chapter 1, it says, God came and filled a human being that he tabernacled among us. God in the tabernacle of Jesus.

But that was all pointing towards Pentecost, where the Spirit of God would come, Christ himself by his Spirit, and live in a believing person's heart. That's what Pentecost is all about.

And Christianity has been called, because of this, the with God life. The with God life. Christianity has been called co-managing the world with Christ.

How does that sit with you? We are called to co-manage the world with Christ. How could that possibly happen?

Because Christ lives in me. Hallelujah. Christ is in me.

He wants to live through me and through us. And this is what makes Christian transformation possible. Christ is in us by his Spirit.

Again, curiously, this doesn't mean that we are to be passive. You would think it could be. I die and I just sort of let the Spirit live through me.

It's not what Paul says. Paul says that he worked, preached, traveled, suffered, served with extraordinary energy. But he understood that the source of his life was no longer himself.

He says in 1 Corinthians 15, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God that was with me. So, how do you go with understanding Christ lives in you? It's a hard one.

As I was preparing this message, I thought I was struck by this verse in 1992. It's been a powerful, transformative truth that has affected me regularly for 30 something years.

But as I was preparing it this week in this sermon, I didn't understand it. I was just trying to work out what does it mean that Christ lives in me. I feel like I'm in control of this body.

I feel like it's hard to truly believe that Christ is controlling my life all the time. But that's what Paul says is meant to be happening. Personally, I feel like this truth, Christ lives in me, is something that I don't want to overthink.

Is it okay to say that? Don't overthink it, Christ lives in me. But receive it, amen.

By faith, receive it as truth. You know, there's mystery at the heart of Christianity. How a human being could be fully God and man, that is a mystery.

How Christ could live in me, the hope of glory, as Colossians says, that is a profound mystery. Of course, how a sinful person could put faith in Christ. And it's God, but it's also us responding.

That's a mystery. Why some people get healed and some don't, it's a mystery. Why suffering and evil?

It's a mystery. I think mysteries everywhere. Don't overthink this, Christ lives in me.

But don't underthink it. Don't under believe it. Surrender.

As I reflected on it, two words came to me. What does it mean for me over many years to know that Christ lives in me? And there were two words, learned, surrender.

What do you reckon? Learned, surrender. To learn to daily, moment by moment, give over the course of my life to Christ and say, I don't understand how it works that you're living in me, but I want you to live in me.

I want to learn what it is to surrender my will, that you might let your will be done inside of me. Learned, surrender. The old life has died, Christ now lives in me.

And just when we were getting caught up in the esoteric spiritual wonders of Christianity, I've been crucified spiritually with Christ and now he's living in me. Paul dives straight into super practical stuff.

Point number three is the life that I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God. The life that I now live. This is a daily, moment by moment expression of faith.

Paul says, the life that I now live. How do you live your life? You remember it in kairos moments, I think.

You remember it in significant moments, but you live it moment by moment, day by day, hour by hour. Paul says, the life I live, I live by faith.

When I was struck by this verse, I was at Bible college in 1992 and a guy called Jerry Bridges came, just was a guy from Navigators in the United States and he was an army chaplain at times.

Anyway, he was a guest speaker and I just happened to go along to this talk and it just had a huge impact on me, really did. And he talked about Galatians 2.20 and back in 1992, I guess the political correctness wasn't so strong.

So please don't let this offend you. But he said, you've got to learn how to preach the gospel to yourself like a good old time African-American preacher.

And by saying that there's elocution, there's rhythm, there's dynamism, there's sort of a power, an inspiration. And he said, you've got to learn how to do that. You need someone to preach the gospel to you.

And sometimes they're not there. So it's got to be you. You got to learn how to preach the gospel to yourself because Galatians says there is freedom in the gospel.

In Galatians chapter 3 verse 1, Paul gets pretty fired up. He says, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish after beginning by means of the Spirit?

Are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh, adding the Jewish religious customs? The churches in Galatia had stopped preaching the gospel to themselves, it would seem.

And then Paul says in chapter 5, it's for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Because if you add to the gospel, it doesn't give you freedom, it leads you to slavery.

And the weird thing is it's all grace, but it takes effort to remain in that grace.

Galatians 5.13 says, You, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather serve one another humbly in love, for the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command. Love your neighbour as yourself.

So it's all grace to the Galatian Christians. It's all grace. But it's grace expressing itself in love and service and humility.

It reminds me of Jesus in his great Sermon on the Mount. He says so much truth. And at the end of it, what does he say in Chapter 7?

In the end of Chapter 7, he says, if you don't put this into practice, it's not just receiving it all being done by God. You've got to put it into practice.

If you don't put the truths I teach into practice, your life's going to come down with a great crash.

So there's this dynamism between the grace of God and the effort fuelled by that grace that allows us to appropriate the freedom Christ has won for us.

Paul says, so I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh, for the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.

We have to choose day by day the life that I now live, the way that Jesus guides us to take and not the flesh. And to do that, Paul says, you need the gospel in your life daily.

Now, I tried to find an example of African American preachers preach a gospel. And so I found this and I recorded it because when I try to speak it out, I get too emotional doing this sort of stuff.

So I've just recorded it for two and a half minutes. Let this be an example of the gospel flowing over you. So could you play that?

Thank you, Jenna. The Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That means the problem is not just around us, the problem is in us.

Sin has touched the mind, wounded the heart, twisted the will, and stained the hands. Sin has left every one of us guilty before a holy God. You can dress it up, but it's still sin.

You can educate it, but it's still sin. You can excuse it, but it's still sin. You can hide it from your neighbours, from your family, from the church, but you can't hide it from God.

And the wages of sin is death. That's the bad news. We were lost and couldn't find our way home.

We were bound and couldn't break our own chains. We were guilty and couldn't clear our own name. We were dead and dead people can't raise themselves.

But we thank God that the Bible doesn't stop with what we have done. The Bible tells us what God has done. Can I hear somebody say, but God, but God, we were sinners, but God.

We were enemies, but God. We were far away, but God. We were without hope and without God in the world, but God who is rich in mercy because of his great love for us, made us alive with Christ.

God didn't wait for us to climb up to him. He came down to us. They marched him up a hill called Calvary.

They put nails in his hands. They put nails in his feet. They pressed a crown of thorns upon his head.

They lifted him between earth and heaven. Friday night he was in the tomb. All day Saturday he was in the tomb.

Saturday night he was in the tomb. The disciples were frightened. The authorities were celebrating.

The soldiers were standing guard. But early, early, early Sunday morning, before the sun had fully risen, the earth began to shake. The stone rolled away.

Death lost its grip. The grave lost its victory. And Jesus got up.

He got up with all power in his hands. Power to save. Power to forgive.

Power to cleanse. Power to heal the broken heart. Power to break the chains.

Power to give a new beginning. Power to carry you through death and bring you safely home. Come with your burdens.

Come with your failures. Come with your questions. Come with your wounds.

Come with your guilt. Come just as you are, but don't expect to remain as you are. For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has gone, the new has come. Christ has died. Christ is risen.

Christ will come again. And everyone who believes it, say Amen. Amen.

You've got to learn how to preach the gospel to yourself, hey? Because the gospel is inspiring. If it's just a cerebral thing, it's just trying to understand it, excuse me.

It's just so mysterious. It can get you caught up. But I think the gospel speaks to the heart and just let the truth flow over you.

And we need to do that. We need to keep preaching it to ourselves. The life that I now live, I live by faith in the one who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 5 says, the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. We are loved in the gospel. We began this service with Ben saying that, do you know that you're loved?

Is it interesting that Paul says, Christ loves him? He doesn't say, not us, it's personal, who loved me and gave himself for me. We are loved and that's at the core of the gospel.

Christ plus nothing equals salvation. When we live in this love and we walk step by step with the Spirit, amazing stuff happens. It's again a mystery.

We're putting effort in, but it's the Spirit by God's grace through Jesus that does Galatians 5:22. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things, there is no law. The Bible says this fruit will emerge out of your life. You don't stick it on with sticky tape, do you?

You don't grab the fruit and stick it on. Just keep preaching the gospel to yourself. Keep trusting in the grace of God.

Keep learning about the love God has for you and allow that love to produce the fruit of the Spirit in you. And in so doing, you find freedom. We are loved.

Paul finishes again by reminding us that all the fruit is linked to us getting out of the way.

Verse 24, Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The secret is letting Christ live through us, learned, surrender. So teach me to number my days. Are you doing that?

Have you numbered your days? Well, we don't know the numbers. There's a number at the start and then a dash, and then you don't know when you've done your dash.

But God does.

Teach me to number my days is just to say, God, I know you've got that last number, and I'm going to trust you, and I'm going to keep, while the days tick by in my life, I'm going to keep giving my life over to you because you know how to live this

life so much better than me. Christ, our life. Christ, our life. Can we say that together?

Christ, our life. A life that has died, I've been crucified with Christ. A life that is indwelt.

I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. A life that depends. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith.

A life that is deeply loved, who loved me and gave himself for me.