

Text: Gal. 1:1-5

Title: "The true gospel"

Time: 2/3/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Last month CNN published a news story titled, "Ohio doctor accused of threatening to give Jewish patients wrong medication." For a few months in 2018, Dr. Laura Kollab was a first-year resident of osteopathic medicine at the Cleveland Clinic. She had a Twitter account that she used to post anti-Semitic tweets, and in one of those she said she would intentionally give a Jewish patient the wrong medicine, according to the news report. Clearly, that is not the kind of doctor you want care from at any hospital.

The Book of Galatians is about a similar problem that has existed in Christian churches since the beginning of Christianity. The local church is the God-designed hospital for the sin-sick soul, where patients can find salvation through the medicine of the true gospel. *Gospel* means *good news*. But just as soon as there were churches, there were also false brethren who corrupted the true gospel for a false gospel.

I say this is a problem from the very start of Christianity because it is the concern of Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians. The Galatian churches were ones he planted on his first missionary journey. This epistle he writes to them was very like the very first New Testament book authored by Paul. James may have authored his book earlier, but none of the others came before these. And so right from the start of church history, the true medicine of the gospel is being corrupted by something false (v. 6, "I marvel that you are so soon removed").

Now a question for our hearts as we begin our study of this letter this morning is this: “Do we find the Cleveland Clinic doctor’s false medicine or the respected religious leader’s false gospel more appalling?” Truth be told, we are shocked by the news story about the potential for false medicine at the Cleveland Clinic. We wonder how that could possibly be. But when it comes to false gospels, we have become somewhat accustomed and accepting of them in local churches.

That was not the case for the apostle Paul, and the Lord has given us this book of the Bible, I believe, to remind us of the importance and the fragility of the true gospel that saves a sinner. The book tells us that the true gospel demands saving faith, not saving works, and it says that the true gospel gives us a freedom to love and serve one another, not to love and serve our sinful flesh.

But before Paul points out the dangers of the false gospel and the details of the causes and effects of justification, he begins in our passage by reminding his readers of what the true gospel is. I want us to notice five things our passage says about the true gospel this morning.

I. The true gospel is preached by Paul, a true apostle (v. 1).

Illustration: It is fascinating how many professing Christians today there are who claim to follow the teachings of Jesus while disliking the teachings of Paul. One man whom I would call a friend, who is a member of the United Methodist Church in Milford, took that position in a conversation we had about this topic. He claimed to accept the Gospels as the inspired Word of God, but not the writings of Paul. In fact, whole essays have been written by conservative Bible scholars to demonstrate the fact that the teachings

of Jesus are the same as the teachings of Paul. Paul's gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Application: Now I say Christians like that are fascinating because what we find in the New Testament is that the problem of their unbelief is nothing new to Christendom. From the very start, the teachings of Paul were being brought into question and denied. Paul's answer to that unbelief is that the true gospel is preached by Paul, a true apostle.

He rightly claims not only that he is an apostle, but also that he is a certain kind of apostle – one who was not commissioned by men, but by God. To be commissioned not by men but by God for Paul is to be commissioned through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead (v. 1).

*Apostle* is a Greek word meaning *sent one*, and the idea comes from Judeo roots, where the *Saliah*, the Hebrew word meaning the same thing, was a messenger or envoy who carried the authority of the one who commissioned him and sent him out.

Our New Testament tells us about some apostles who were sent from and through men. 2 Cor. 8:23 speaks of the messengers (apostles) of the churches. Epaphroditus was the messenger (apostle) of the church of Philippi (Phil. 2:25). But that is not what Paul is talking about here. Here what he means is simply this – I am an apostle commissioned by Jesus Christ in the same way the other 11 apostles are. He means that what he is about to write to them is not to be set aside or rejected, because it is the Word of Jesus Christ for them.

Peter takes some knocks in this Galatian epistle, yet in spite of that he recognized the scriptural authority of a Pauline letter like this one (2 Pet. 3:15-16). To reject the writings of Paul is to do so unto your own destruction. John is mentioned in Galatians. Remember the warning Jesus gave at the end of His Revelation to John: do not add to or subtract from these words. To do so is to add plagues and subtract blessing from our lives.

So what is your response to Paul this morning? To the degree he is less than beloved by us, we have been influenced by the very problem Paul is having to face in Galatia. The true gospel is a gospel preached by Paul, a true apostle. We need to learn to love Paul, the beloved.

II. The true gospel desires grace and peace for local churches (vv. 2-3).

Application: I believe that the brethren mentioned here are members of the local church in Antioch. I take the position that Paul writes Galatians after planting these churches on his first missionary journey from that local church. It was that church that had sent him out. Having been sent out, Paul and Barnabas planted local churches. This letter, like we saw with the book of Revelation again last week, is a letter addressed to local churches. New Testament Christianity is local-church Christianity. Do not try to be a Christian without faithfulness to a good local church.

Application2: Every church needs two things to be a good local church – grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Is that what we are looking for as we gather this morning? Do we see our need as a church for God's grace and God's peace? Do we see how they are only found by us in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? Church needs to be about our need for these things from

Him. Having those, we will be a healthy church. Lacking them, we are wasting our time.

III. The true gospel is news about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 4a, 1).

Illustration: Last week I happened by a Roman Catholic convent in Manchester called, "Sisters of the Presentation of Mary." I had no idea what the Roman Catholic doctrine of the presentation of Mary is, so I looked it up at Francis-media.org. It was explained there that it is a doctrine that says that Mary was presented at the temple just like Jesus was in the Gospels. The website also had this to say about the doctrine: "Though it cannot be proven historically, Mary's presentation has an important theological purpose. It continues the impact of the feasts of the Immaculate Conception and of the birth of Mary. It emphasizes that the holiness conferred on Mary from the beginning of her life on earth continued through her early childhood and beyond."

Application: Well, there is a lot that is false about false gospels, and as we read of Paul's advocacy of the true gospel in Galatians, we will read nothing of the sinner's need for a sinless Mary. But I refer to what the website says for a different reason. Did you catch that first phrase, "Though it cannot be proven historically, Mary's presentation has an important theological purpose"?

The true gospel is accurate news about two historical events. Things that cannot be proven historically are never important theologically. The gospel is important theologically, because what it tells us is true can be proven historically. Paul speaks of two historical events that happened twenty years prior to his writing when he preached the true gospel:

(1) First – that Jesus Christ, who is in the category of God rather than man in this context, gave Himself for our sins on the cross of Calvary, a mount whose name meant, “The Skull.” He did so on Passover Day in AD 31, a Wednesday.

(2) And then second – after three days God raised Jesus from the dead on Sunday morning, in spite of the best efforts of the authorities to keep that from happening.

To share the gospel with someone is to share this content. It is belief in that historical person and work that saves. That is the news that is the power of God unto salvation to every who believes. It is true that God loves us, but that is not the true gospel. It is true that people should come to church, but that is not the true gospel. The true gospel is that He loved us while we were yet sinners, and that Christ died for our sins willingly in that love, and that all of this truth about the meaning of His death was confirmed when he arose from the grave.

So when was the last time we really shared the gospel with someone? When was the last time we challenged them to trust this history?

IV. The true gospel delivers from the present evil age (v. 4b).

Illustration: Crain Britton, *Ideas and Men: The Story of Western Thought*, discusses the “Origins of the Modern Mind” (p. 202): “Men have always lived in “modern” times but they have not always been so much impressed with the fact. . . This awareness of a shared newness, of a way of life different from that of one’s forebears – and by 1700 awareness of a way of life felt by many to be much better than that of

their forebears – this is in itself one of the clearest marks of our modern culture.”

Application: When Paul says that the true gospel delivers us from the present evil *world*, he uses the word for *age*. He does the same in Rom. 12:2 – “Be not conformed to this *age*.” The true gospel message Paul preached comes to us from a time before the change in western thought that convinced people that being modern is better than being ancient.

Nothing in what we read from Paul about the true gospel indicates that it is something that has to be adapted to modern culture to be authentic or relevant. In fact, the true gospel delivers us from the present evil age and makes us citizens of a kingdom whose age is yet to come. The desire to make the gospel conform to modern-day culture is wrong. It misses the whole purpose of the gospel, which is to rescue sinners out of this age and to prepare them for the age to come. We should expect the gospel of Christ to make moderns and post-moderns pilgrims in this age.

V. The true gospel brings eternal glory to God (v. 5).

Illustration: There has been a lot of celebration of Patriot football glory this weekend. A bag of cookies I bought at Market Basket had a token of that glory in them – a ring depicting a Patriot’s football helmet.

Application: The point of the gospel is to make us tokens of God’s glory. It is God’s power unto salvation. It is His way and work of saving people. It exists to bring Him great glory forever and ever.

If we are saved this morning, it is not merely so that we can be glorified someday, although we certainly will be. It is so that God can be glorified today and every day unto all eternity. Has the true gospel made you a God-glorifying person?

Conclusion: Have you been saved by the true gospel? Paul will make very clear in the passages to come that counterfeits are deadly.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*