

*Transcript offered below unedited*

Right.

Well, as people continue to join us, uh,  
since this is designed to be a, um, a lunchtime Bible study,  
I'm going to just quickly give us a printer,  
and then we're gonna jump in.

Yeah. And then we're gonna jump in.

Um, so one thing I'd love for you  
to have is your Bible handy.

This is one of those Bible studies where we're all going  
to jump in together  
and actually, you know, read it from the Good Book itself.

Um, I like us to have our Bibles handy for a few reasons,  
and to just say, if you are, if you're not muted,  
go ahead and mute yourself.

Although, dad, were you about to say hi.

Hi.

That's my dad. You can tell we have the same laugh, so

It's Great. Glad

you're here, dad. This is good. Okay.

Um, so you can, uh, everybody mute themselves  
as we pray the Lord be with you,

And also with you.

Let us pray. Holy

and gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift  
of this day, especially for the gift of Galatians,  
the book of freedom.

We ask that in all things.

Lord, you give us your Holy Spirit so  
that we may know the gifts of the free of freedom,  
and use them to your benefit being  
filled by the Holy Spirit.

All this we ask name of one God, father,  
son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Well, so good to have you all here.

As I said, get your Bibles out  
and turn them to Galatians right after second Corinthians.

Um, here's why I like us  
to actually read straight from our Bible instead  
of putting it on the screen.

One, I, I think it's important  
to actually take notes in your Bible.

I highly encourage everybody to go ahead  
and start making notes.

Um, I will sometimes put stickers in my Bible if I wanna be able to find something quickly.

And because when we read the Bible out loud to one another, you're gonna hear everybody has likely a different translation.

There's actually some goodness in that.

Um, it, it helps us notice how much subtlety there is in the way these things are translated.

Um, so that's, that's actually a good thing.

It's not a problem. It's a way to hear the word differently throughout the time together.

Galatians is a six chapter book, which is a perfect amount of time for Lent, because we can do one chapter a week, but it means that we'll have to be really dedicated.

There is a high likelihood that we might go a little bit beyond Lent given, uh, the depth of wisdom that Paul is bringing us to the letter of Galatians.

I'll try to keep it within lint, but you know, there might be a little bit more to go.

And then finally, just a word housekeeping here.

All of these will be recorded so that if you'd like

to watch them later, or if you have to miss a class,  
it will be right there with you.

Um, so with that, let's dive in to Galatians.

Now, Galatians may not be anybody's favorite  
book of the Bible yet.

It might be when we're done with this.

Does anybody love Galatians? Show of hands?

Is any, is this anybody's favorite book? All right.

We got Cynthia. Yes. Okay, good.

Then Cynthia, you're gonna, you're gonna be with me on this.

This is great. Um, I've actually come to appreciate the book

of Gala, uh, the letter of Galatians, um,

because of the depth that Paul brings to it of his self,

his soul, as well as his theology, I think, um, many

of us think of Paul as a deeply

theological character in Christianity.

Uh, many of you know that most

of the New Testament are Paul's letters,

but what I think we failed to realize about Paul is

that he's not just a theologian.

Uh, in fact, the way to read Paul is probably best first

as a, as a mystic, somebody who has had a

transformational experience that has changed the lens of  
how he sees everything in his life.

Uh, and we'll, we'll talk about that a lot in Galatians.

Um, so Galatians, I'm, I'm, I'm learning to love  
because of the way the mystic Paul comes out.

But two, for those of us who love Paul,  
for the Theo theologian that he is for the philosopher,  
he is, there's much to love.

And Galatians, it's almost like a condensed version  
of his magna opus.

The, the book of the letter to the Romans, uh, depending on  
how you date this letter, it could be one  
of his earliest letters or what most scholars,  
and what I tend to think, uh, alongside most scholars is  
that it's one of his later letters in Pat.

In fact, could have been right next to,  
um, right close to Rome.

The reason that the, the dating, though,  
could be disputed is who Paul is writing  
to in this letter itself.

Um, the region of Gaul is an area  
that if you have a map in your Bible,

it's worth looking at it, it encompasses a lot  
of the ancient world, um, that ancient near East into Asia,  
but it also includes a region that would have been known to,  
uh, what we call the Celts.

Uh, not that it went all the way up into Ireland  
and Britain, let's say, but the people who would later, um,  
really occupy the theological emphasis.

The, um, the missionary emphasis, if you will,  
into the Celtic lands.

This is, this is probably their letter written  
to the churches in Galatia.

Um, in fact, when you translate, uh, ga uh, like Galway,  
right, you know, it's, it's ket.

So that's, that's one of the reasons we have this, um,  
probably dated later because that's when they were using,  
uh, using a lot of that terminology for that period, for  
that, uh, land area.

But no matter when you date it, whether it's early  
or late, one

of the cool things about the letter is nobody disputes

that it is the, uh, it is absolutely one

that Paul wrote himself, not one just attributed to Paul,

but there's just no scholar out there

that's like, maybe not Galatians.

And I think it's because of how personal it is, um, to Paul.

And you'll hear his actual voice coming out of it.

There's a moment where he's like, I'm so mad.

Look how large my, my writing is.

He's just, he's very emotive in it.

The other, the other reason that I think we, uh,

hold onto this letter is all of Paul's baptismal theology,

all of his understanding about, um, the freedom of Christ.

Uh, it can be found in this letter,

not just Romans, but this one as well.

It was Martin Luther's favorite letter, uh, of, of Paul's,

because of how deep it goes,

theo theologically into this freedom.

And I think importantly, for those of us

who are reading it today, given our current circumstances,

um, it's been nicknamed the Book of Freedom.

Uh, and so a lot of the, uh, confessing church that was,

was very much, um, coming out

of the j German tradition in World War ii.

They looked to the Book of Galatians as their kind

of bedrock for what they thought it meant  
to be a Christian living out the life of Christ.  
One of the reasons for that will be when we  
get to chapter five.

So spoiler alert, chapter five has the fruit of the Spirit,  
one of the things that Galatian is best known for.

Um, in it, Paul basically uses, uh, the, the gifts  
of the Holy Spirit as a way of knowing  
if you are following Christ or not.

It's, it's almost like if you are following Christ,  
you will see these things in your life.

And he uses a word that is, uh, kind of incredible to us.

It's you, you've heard of orthodoxy, you know,  
the right way of thinking.

You've heard of orthopraxy, right?

You know, this, the right sort of prayer practices  
that you should be doing in the world.

Early on in Galatians, Paul uses ortho potty, like  
as in podiatrist, right?

Like, po die, right? And this is right walking.

So that it's a, it's,

it symbolizes the wisdom tradition in the Bible

that it's not just enough to know something.

It's not just enough to feel something.

You actually have to walk the walk, so to speak. You know?

And in the wisdom tradition, the Bible always likes to say, you know, like, knowledge is one thing.

That's the the thing you can learn,

but you're not really wise until you put it into practice.

So we can see Paul really aligning himself with his youths of the ortho potty here, uh, as, as a way of helping us dive in to what it really means to live a life of freedom.

One last bit of introduction.

What do we mean by freedom in the book of Galatians?

Um, you know, we are living in a world right now, and we're, we're trying to think about what it means to be truly free.

What does it mean for everybody to be truly free?

And Paul was dealing with that, right?

As the very beginning of Christianity.

His audience is, uh, as obviously the churches of Galatia, but they are dealing with a very specific problem.

They have a group of people, um,

that Paul doesn't give us a lot of details about,

but he's really mad about them.

He's mad. He gives us plenty of details of his, his anger, uh, who have come into these churches to try to tell them that they have to start, um, practicing, uh, a type of Christianity beholden to the rules of Judaism.

We're gonna unpack that a lot, uh, as we talk here.

But for our purposes, for introduction, why this makes him so mad is that he is trying to describe to the, to the Christians that this is a faith that's not interested in just, let's call it accounting faithfulness.

That if you do enough good things, you will somehow earn your way into heaven.

Paul is not, does not want us to believe that that is what, um, Christianity is all about.

That we've been created for something much, much grander now that we have been released of that accounting mindset.

And so throughout this letter, he wants Christians to realize that, um, when they don't see their own freedom is actually the occasion when we will likely sin the most.

Why? Because we have free will.

But if we trick ourselves into thinking we are not free in

Christ, then we will feel beholden of,  
of all the things out there in the world  
that we think are controlling us, right,  
the the rules we have to follow to be perfect,  
even though we can never be perfect.

Um, a God who says, you're only as good  
as the last good thing you did.

Um, or even more insidious, um, a sort of theology  
that says, some people are good  
and some people are bad, right?

You know, like that, that becomes very clearly something  
that Paul rejects outright in this, this book, um,  
over and over again.

So the freedom Paul is calling us to,  
and it really is nicknamed the book of freedom, um, is  
to imagine a world where, yes, we have free will,  
but what does it look like when we align  
that free will with God's will?

He tells us under no uncertain terms that Christians  
actually have the ability to marry their will.

With God's will.

We actually can work alongside God, which most of us,

I don't think actually take as our charge day in, day out.

When he gets to his theology of baptism, he'll tell us that we are baptized into Christ as though our, our little nameplate could say, hello, my name is Christ.

That's how seriously we are to take this.

Uh, and he really just, just does not hold back.

So within this book, as I said, there are six chapters.

It's outlined it with the introduction,

um, the introduction.

Paul is gonna do a lot of describing why he's mad

and who he is now, that,

that may sound boring when we first get to it

or a little offputting,

but what I'm gonna help us do is to read it through the eyes

of a mystic, because then it kind of, to me at least,

it changes the, the tone quite a bit.

Chapters three through, uh, this is

where he really talks about the just

justification through faith.

Already. You can probably hear Martin Luther

saying, Ooh, I love this book.

Right? So we have, we have Martin Luther's,

uh, heartbeat right there.

And then, uh, chapters five through six

Um, this is where he clarifies the nature of Christianity,  
and this is where we get that beautiful, beautiful fruit  
of the spirit, um, discord.

And then he ends with some very forceful statements,  
just like he begins.

So that's gonna be the shape of our letter.

Um, the, the last thing I'll say as we vision into this  
mystic, uh, letter is that Paul is a very practical mystic.

Um, he uses the term in Greek for what he saw in his vision,  
um, as, uh, as an, uh, apocalypse.

He uses the word apocalypse.

Um, in fact, he says it's a revelation,  
which is the same word in Greek.

And everything that happened to him afterwards is  
that unveiling that happens in apocalypse  
apocalyptic moments where we can see the world in a  
very, very different way.

So, some have argued  
that Galatians should actually be considered apocalyptic  
literature, like that's

how much his vision informs his theology in this letter.

I'm gonna pause there. Any questions

before we start to dive in?

I'd lo I love questions, by the way.

Please, please ask as we go,

Hillary, what, what does apocalypse mean?

Yeah, great question.

And because it's gonna really, especially chapter one,

we're gonna hear a lot about it.

Apocalypse really does mean unveiling.

We've come to think of it in, that's the Greek translation.

We've come to think of it as, um, something scary

that somebody saw somewhere and wrote it down in the Bible.

That's typically what we tend to think of it,

or an apocalyptic religion that thinks the end

of days is coming when a, you know, in, in like, uh,

days when a comet hits the earth, that sort of thing.

The, the reason it tends to get linked with that is

because the visions are often full

of unexplainable.

Um, e tell us like visions, like it's

as though we get to mark time, the way God marks time

by having a vision of something larger than our brains can likely contain as, as finite creatures.

And that is often incredibly scary.

Like, think of when you learned how big the universe was, that it kind of blows your mind a little bit, doesn't it?

At least it still, at least it does.

Me, uh, an apocalypse is actually kind

of neutral in its tone,

even though it can seem very scary at times.

But if you read, let's take the classic one revelation so-called, because it's the Greek word apocalypse.

When we read revelation, yes, we hear some of the terrifying bits of, um, of the, the entirety of creation, the destructive side, if you will.

But we also hear some of the most beautiful pastoral images of the entire Christian faith held up as well.

Most of our favorite hymns, a lot of our church imagery,

I imagery of Christ sitting on his throne, all of that comes from the book of Revelation.

So we have to hold intention, the, um, the creative and destructive forces that we see in the vision that actually work throughout all of creation itself, right?

Creation, we, we don't get, uh,  
we don't get resurrection without death, right?  
Like there is, there is both things held in an apocalyptic  
vision, but we get scared of it  
because we're finite creatures  
and God's revealing more to us than we can normally handle.  
So our brains kind of go, whoa, what is that?  
Did that help with that question answer? Yeah.  
Any other questions or thoughts or comments? Okay.  
I recently re-read, um, a book, uh, by Stephen Charleston,  
who is a Native American bishop  
and elder, uh, Chi Chi tau, uh, elder, um,  
and was a dean of an Episcopal seminary.  
And he wrote in his book, ladder to the Light,  
which is a book about  
how Native Americans understand  
apocalyptic living, if you will.  
He writes this, we are made for freedom.  
We're not made for resignation.  
Passive acceptance is not the code written into our spirit.  
If it were true as a species,  
we would have vanished long ago.

Instead, for millennia, we have shaken off the temptation  
to simply accept reality  
and the demand that we bend the knee,  
and we have stood up to struggle against the odds  
to change the situation and to find an answer and a healing.

Those Steve dives are the energy we call hope.

Those active forces are what we determine  
what determine our future.

We're not be for resignation, but for freedom.

When I read that, I'm like, wow.

He just basically summed up the letter  
of Galatians perfectly.

We're not made to give ourselves back over  
to the forces in this world that would just demand us, um,  
roll over and follow a set of rules.

We're actually asked to use our free will in such a way  
that creates new hope, creates new pathways,  
and ones we may not have ever seen coming.

So that's the end of the introduction.

Let's turn to the book of Galatians itself.

Would anybody like to read?

They could just go off, off their mute, um,

and read chapter one, verse one through

Sure. Yeah. Thank you. Marjorie.

Chapter one, verses one through Let's do

One through

You foolish Galatians. Am I in the right place?

Start with chapter one, verse one.

I thought I was in chapter one.

I'm in the wrong place on my Bible. Okay,

Here I go. Okay,

Paul, an apostles sent neither by human commission,

nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ

and God the Father who raised him from the dead,

and all the members of God's family who are with me,

to the churches of Galatia grace to you in peace from God,

our father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself

for our sins to set us free from our present evil age

according to the will of our God

and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting,

the one who called you in the grace of Christ

and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another gospel,

but there are some who are confusing you

and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim

to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaim to you, let

that one be a cursed, as we have said before.

So now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel

contrary to what you received, let that one be a cursed.

Am I now seeking human approval or God's approval?

Or am I trying to please people?

If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant

of Christ for, I want you to know brothers

and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed

by me is not a human origin for,

I did not receive it from a human source,

nor was I taught it,

but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Perfect. Thank you.

And if you were reading it in the Greek,

it would be an apocalypse of Jesus Christ.

Right? Okay. What do you hear in this first bit?

Marjorie is a beautiful reader,

but she didn't yell at screaming.

You know, she didn't read it screaming,  
which Paul probably is. Do you, do you kinda shaking  
His finger in writing? Yeah,  
Exactly. Yeah. Can  
you hear it? Yeah.  
When he says, I'm astonished, that sort of gets it. Yeah.  
I, yes, he is astonished,  
and he won't stop being astonished even six chapters in.  
What else does somebody hear?  
Please? Harry, go ahead. You're, you're muted,  
Harry, you, you go ahead and find it,  
and then if anybody else has something  
in the meantime, honey, I got it. I got it. You got  
It? Oh, what does he hear?  
He hears there's a false  
gospel being promoted.  
Exactly right. See, Paul doesn't bury the lead.  
Does he hear? He's like, here's the issue,  
I'm mad, I'm coming in hot.  
This is Paul. So you're all pointing  
to the exactly the right things, right in the beginning.  
Paul does a few things off the bat.

One, he calls himself an apostle.

That's a really important

and very particular title one, um, that we can kind

of gloss over, but,

but it wouldn't be glossed over in his time.

Um, an apostle is somebody who is sent with full authority,

different than a disciple, right?

Like we're all disciples and apostles

because we have been baptized

and sent forth to do God's will.

But if you were just studying with a rabbi, you would not

yet be an apostle

unless you had kind of been given his blessing, his mantle,

so to speak, right?

So, um, uh, nope, no problem. Thank you. Thanks for coming.

Um, so we hear Paul claiming to be an apostle.

Isn't this quite the claim?

He was not one of the was he?

He was not there at the crucifixion.

In fact, what we know about Paul's life is that he

and he'll tell us, don't worry, he's getting to it.

He spent a lot of time being a Hebrew amongst Hebrews is one

of his own phrases about himself.

Um, somebody who studied under the best rabbis, somebody who was zealous for the law.

And when we first meet Paul, we know, uh, in the, in the book of Acts

that Paul is actually persecuting Christians.

So what an interesting claim to call yourself an apostle.

Why do you think Paul is, is so intent on one, claiming the mantle, and two,

where do you think he gets the kaons to do it?

What are your thoughts on that?

Oh, ELL you're talking, but I you are also off mute, but I, we can't hear you.

Maybe you're not plugged in. Okay. Come back though.

We'd love to hear it. Anybody else? Yes, Ann, please.

You are muted and you're muted.

There we go. Yeah, there, it's, um, well,

he says it right at the end that he received the, this revelation of Jesus Christ.

Bingo. Exactly right.

He tells us himself that it's because he saw Jesus.

He was, he was, the veil was taken from him.

And as you probably know, in his great story, um, his, his,  
uh, road to Damascus moment when he is,  
the veils are stripped from his eyes.

Um, he gets to see Jesus, where Jesus gives him a charge.

Now, at that time, when Jesus gives him this charge,  
he doesn't just say, Hey, buddy,  
my Paul, you're doing great.

Keep doing it. Jesus does something very particular,  
something that we would call in the tradition, a rebuke.

You know, he says to Paul, why are you,  
why are you persecuting me?

And then gives Paul the charge to go  
and, uh, change his ways,  
and instead he becomes the greatest, um,  
theologian Christianity has ever known.

But what we don't often hear about are the, is the time  
where Paul has the revelation,  
and then when he starts writing, there's a long time  
between those two things.

Some people say over a decade that Paul spent, um, just kind  
of getting used to being a  
Christian, learning what it meant.

Um, there's a time he'll tell us that he goes to Tarsus for probably to visit his family and be like, I'm sorry, I've been gone for several years.

Um, by the way, I'm now a Christian. Can you imagine?

I mean, I, my dad's here, dad,

could you imagine if I came back from college

and I'm like, Hey, I threw away my college education.

I'm not gonna be a priest. I just decided to like, you know, do something completely different.

That'd be rough, right?

Like, that would be a hard thing to hear as a parent.

He has to do that with his whole community from top to bottom.

And he spends his time tent making and learning the Christian faith.

So what we have now is a Paul who has spent time with his apocalyptic vision and has turned over it for, for a long time at this point, decades, probably at this point in his life.

If we're dating Galatians later, that's why I choose to fall in the camp of dating Galatians later, because this sounds like somebody

who didn't just have an apocalyptic vision yesterday.

This sounds like somebody who has sat with it.

And for those who, um, know the mystic path, the kind

of threefold, classic mystic path, you know

that when you have some sort of an illuminated vision, um,

your teachers typically tell you to sit on it

for a little bit, like, to, to digest it

before you start talking to people about it, so

that you don't get too many other people's viewpoints on it,

or too many other people telling you you're crazy.

So we have Paul here saying,

not only have I had this vision, but I'm so convinced of it.

It has shaped my life into the life of apostleship.

I am now sent with authority, a delegate, um,

in the Jewish, in, uh, word.

This word would be shalyah, a delicate

or commissioned somebody by a congregation

with a specific purpose.

Um, they're not speaking with their own authority,

but with the community's authority.

And in this case, Paul is claiming it as Jesus's authority.

You'll hear in a moment that that claim

to apostleship wasn't a guarantee that the rest  
of the apostles the other, well, less than  
but the, the, the, the other guys that were still left, um,  
did, it wasn't clear if they were going  
to accept his claim or not.

I'm not sure that would've stopped Paul anyway.

But spoiler alert, he does get their stamp of approval.

Okay? The other thing I want us to notice here is  
how fast he turns from his salutation  
into the heart of the matter.

Normally, when you read Paul, you get this very  
long flowing salutation, grace to you, peace unto you.  
Here is the, you know, tip of the hat to those who I know.

There, here is a little bit  
of theological thing I'm gonna put in this blessing.

We get almost none of that.

We get Paul being like, hi, it's Paul.

I'm gonna say a quick prayer. Ah, men, let's get to it.

That's different than anywhere else in Paul's letters.

Like he is, he's hot coming in hot.

Anybody else wanna say anything about this part  
before we, uh, change

to the next, we're gonna read the next bit.

Any other thoughts from this?

Well, Hillary, um, there's something, uh, in my translation where, um, what was read said that, that Christ gave himself to free us in my translation it's rescue, which is interesting difference.

I don't know what you could say to that.

Absolutely. Just one quick word about translations in general.

Um, none of us, uh, unless you are reading it straight out of a dead sea scroll, none of us are reading our Bibles in the, the way they were presented.

And even then, you know, there's translators who, like Paul would send one letter and then people would write the letter over and over again.

So every time we are reading a translation, we are also reading an interpretation, right?

You know, that the choices that translators make, um, really help us to kind of shape where we might be, um, theologically landing.

This is why I love that we read these in different translations together for this very reason.

You may hear something in somebody else's translation that either opens it up for you or you're like, oh, that's not my theology.

And that's important to note.

The idea here of freedom and, um, uh, salvation being interwoven together, um, is not a surprise that the translators will make that choice.

In fact, in many of our Bibles, you might see in Galatians, it switches a little bit back and forth.

That's often because Paul is trying to weave a very, uh, complex theological argument that is based off of the rhetoric tool of imagining you're in a courtroom.

He does this a ton in Romans, but he does a little bit here in the, in the court system of his time.

Um, you would be, uh, justified not because the, um, because of whether or not you did the thing, but because the court has deemed you justified, right?

So in Paul's view, here it is God who decides whether

or not we are saved.

If we are free, or if we are justified,

he'll use that word a lot.

But the good news, it goes, it's even better than that

because God has already said, we're justified

because he's given us Christ, right?

So the fact that is that in Christ,

we have the judge sitting in the judgment seat

who also sits in our seat, right?

So the good news is that we've been saved from a system

that would keep us bound up in the are we good

or are we bad mindset, right?

So we are freed from that.

So that's why Paul's translations tend to get a little,

this word here, this word there, it's trying to capture

a much long, larger system that we are just kind

of dabbling in as people from, from a modern era.

So thank you for that question.

Any other thoughts or questions? Yes, Harriet?

Yes. Yes. Use that key word justified.

Do you wanna define it for us?

Sure thing. Why not?

Um, it especially

'cause it is going to become up over and over again.

So justification, um, just as to get us, we'll do more

of this in chapter two, so it'll give us a brief thing.

But the way Paul talks about this is, um, to be justified is

to be, as I said, declared in the right

and placed in right relationship to God, right?

It's this legalistic term that Israel, um,

prophetic literature and a lot of the Psalms

and also a lot of the apocalyptic literature

talk a lot about saying that, that in other,

before Christ, we would've had

to work our way to justification.

You know, if we lived a certain way, if we,

if we absolutely lived the laws a certain way, um,

or if we participated in the temple sacrificial

system in a certain way.

Here he's trying to make a declaration, um,

that we're not just acquitted from guilt,

but that we're also brought into God's ultimate action

of power setting all things, right?

So in Paul's view, justification isn't just about whether

or not you're going to hell.

Justification is about bringing all  
of creation back into right relationship with God,  
even though it so often doesn't sit in  
right relationship with God.

So we'll get more of this in chapter two.

Marjorie, please. I

Had a funny experience when I was typing on my old  
electric typewriter where it talked about justifying the  
margins, and I had a sudden insight  
that when everything is lined up, that's justification.

So that gave me a spiritual experience.

I like that. It's like God has lined up all  
of creation in Christ for us to be in the right way.

Now we, Paul will keep saying we have the freedom  
to reject the justification,

but we, why would we like, his whole point is like,  
why would you reject this Galatians?

Why so mad? He's so mad in this guys.

Okay, let's keep going.

Um, I would like somebody to read, uh, chapter one  
verses

and then we're gonna take it all the way to, to, um,

verses through

Would somebody be willing to read that? Thank you, Ann.

Please do. Oh,

I think you might be muted, my friend.

Okay, great. Alright.

Um, you have heard no doubt of my earlier life in Judaism,

I was violently persecuting the church of God

and was trying to destroy it.

I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people

of the same age, for I was far more zealous

for the traditions of my ancestors.

But when God who had set me apart before I was born

and called me through his grace, was pleased

to reveal his son to me so that I might proclaim him

among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being,

nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already

apostles before me.

But I went away at once India into Arabia,

and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I did go up to Jerusalem

to visit Cephas and stayed with him days.

But I did not see any other apostle except

James, the Lord's brother.

And what I am writing to you before God, I do not lie.

Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cecilia

and I was still unknown by sight to the churches

of Judea that are in Christ.

They only heard it and said, the one

who formally was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith

he wants, tried to destroy,

and they glorified God because of me. Okay,

Thank you very much.

Mm-hmm. What do you all hear in this section?

Uh, what strikes me is, uh, Paul was chosen

before he was even born.

Yes. Sort of like in the beginning was the word, is

that too farfetched?

A comparison? And since he was chosen,

before he was born, what does that do to free will?

Hmm. Okay, now we're getting to the heart of a a,

a Lutheran like question.

Thank you. Let me take the first part of your question.

Um, notice how Paul starts by naming himself as Paul.

This is the name that Jesus calls him. Right?

You know, now we know that Paul actually had two names.

Saul, this is his Roman name,

and Paul, the Paul, the, the name that he is, he claims

after Jesus basically names him this way on the road.

Why is that important? Um, for anybody who might be familiar

with like Native American vision quests, um,

or naming ceremonies or indeed our own baptism.

We know that names hold a tremendous amount of power, right?

Within ourselves and, and, uh, to identify who we are.

And the Native American understanding of a naming ceremony,

um, you typically go on a vision quest

and then the elder of the community, um, speaks

with you afterwards, consults the ancestors

and then finds your spirit name

that you will then have for the rest of your life.

It's a naming moment in our baptism, we have this moment

where we say, name this, this person before God, right?

It's because there's this point where we have to decide

who we want to be and who God has called us

to be from the very beginning, right?

We hear this in Jesus' own baptism.

This is my son with whom I'm well pleased, right?

You know, this, this idea

that when we have a moment like Paul has had,

when the world is transformed for us, we are born anew.

Paul very much had this experience, um,

when he was on the road to Damascus, um, while he was there,

he was, he was about to try to crucify uh,

to persecute, um, Christians.

In fact, we first hear of Paul in the book of Acts

where he is there at the stoning of Steven, um, one of the,

the, the martyr, uh, the martyr ship story.

He's there holding the coats of everybody.

So it's a pretty kind of bleak portrayal of

how deep Paul is into this.

He's like, here, guys, don't even let your coats get dirty.

Let me hold this for you. At that point though, he starts

to, um, in a zealous sort of way, start to go off into,

um, persecution.

And he says his, in his own words,

I was taken up into the high heavens, the third heaven.

That is a Jewish phrase in Jewish mystic prayer life.

Um, if an, if any of you have ever done any reading in

Paul into this topic, you'll know that the way the Jewish,  
uh, mystical side of the faith encouraged people  
to pray was, again, not much, not just an academic pursuit,  
but to actually elevate your soul to the place  
where it would come in contact with the throne room of God.

This is why in so many parts of the Bible, we hear visions  
of the heavenly throne room that kind of look alike.

This is the, the, the third heaven we hear, um,  
Isaiah seeing the throne room of God where the,  
the creatures are around the throne room  
saying, holy, holy, holy.

This is why we see in Daniel, holy, holy, holy.

Uh, this is why we see in the book

of Revelation the throne room

with the four creatures around the throne, right?

They're all similar, not because they read the same book,  
but because they're having a mystic experience that is to,  
is actually connected to one another.

It's a through line throughout the Bible.

Paul, in this place of, uh,

achieving the third heaven prayer sees Jesus, right?

So he, he has the same through line mystical experience, uh,

and in doing so, is given a new name, one  
that he now claims here for the rest of his life.

So that's important. What you're pointing is to your second  
question about free will.

Nowhere does Paul describe free will, um,  
as, let me rephrase that.

The doctrine of pre, uh, pre-doc of, of, uh, pre  
of ordination of like where you're going, right?

Um, the idea of, uh, knowing that you're either going,  
you're predestined for heaven  
or hell, that's a much more modern interpretation.

We really start to see that  
around the time of the reformation.

Um, when people start to read Paul with a lens of trying  
to figure out like who's in, who's out,  
there's a real reason why that starts  
to happen in that timeframe.

It's around the time in the enlightenment when the  
scientific, uh, revolution starts to happen when there's a,  
um, emphasis on empirical data  
and everything is starting to be graded against the lens  
of whether or not this can be proven by science.

So you start to see everything theologically,  
take a systematic look at scripture  
and saying, okay, it either, it's either kind  
of like this way or that way.

And the words of Paul tend to get put in the,  
by the reformers in the literal sense  
of God knows everything.

And so God knows you're going to heaven  
or hell instead of God's omnipotence being one thing, um,  
that's somehow, uh, not married to God's gift of free will.

In point of fact, what Paul is going  
to argue a lot in Galatians is  
that our free will is an invitation  
to deep relationship by God.

That there, there can be no relationship if we are forced  
and predestined, so to speak, to only make one decision.

And the reason this is important is  
because this Paul flushes this out more in Romans,  
but it might be worth for us to say this here.

His view of hell, um, is not one that, uh, is tied  
to a permanence finitude.

By that I mean there's nothing that is, uh,

infinite except God.

He says not powers or principalities

or even our own sin, if you will.

So there's nothing that can outlast the love of God,

which means even our own terrible choices

will not outlast the love of God.

That that doesn't mean

that Paul doesn't say there isn't a hell.

He uses it to say essentially there is a hell.

But we, it probably stands o uh, completely empty

because there has to be a choice to not want to be, um,

to be in relationship for us to be able to make a choice.

But that choice is never closed to us.

Does that help with the predestination piece?

I know I went a little bit down a rabbit hole with it,

but it's it's likely to come up again in Galatians.

Yeah. Harriet, do I see your hand?

Did? Yes, you did.

Um, I think that your original question is on just reading

that Anne read was something of, of

how does Paul establish his bonafides or fis?

And I, I did hear something, um, on then

after he, um, was set apart by,  
by God, he then retreated into a wilderness,  
which I had not seen before.

He goes away, nor did I, I didn't confer  
with any human being, nor did I go to Jerusalem.

So he's gone to a wilderness.

And then later he established that yes, he is one  
of the boys because he goes and he spends days with Peter  
and also with Jesus' brother.

Absolutely. Thank you for highlighting it.

Who else spent some time in the desert?

If you, if anybody was in church this Sunday,  
you just heard it, right?

You know Jesus. Of course, yes.

The Israelites, like, there's so, like, this is, this is  
what it looks like to be set on a, a mystical quest, right  
to you do spend some time in the wilder wilderness.

Now, often that meant the literal wilderness in the Bible,  
you would go outside and you would sit somewhere  
for a long amount of time.

And again, in indigenous tradition, this still happens.

This is the vision quest model.

Not normally days, that's a lot longer.

But Paul follows Christ's call

basically out into the wilderness.

And importantly, this is not punishment, right?

When we hear Jesus's story

of being sent into the wilderness, he's sent there by virtue

of his baptism, by the Holy Spirit to be tempted

by the devil, right?

Like, that's the reason he's there.

That's actually the point.

It's not like, oops, I was out in the desert and surprised.

Here comes the, here comes the temptation.

It's, it's, he's there to learn about what his identity is,

who he's going to be as the Messiah, how he's going

to claim it and live it.

Um, and to actually use his, his free will

to combine his with God's will.

I think that's what Paul's doing out here too.

Um, his wilderness may not have just been literal.

Many of ours are more metaphorical.

You know, we've all spent some time when

wandering in the, in the desert.

It could be days, it could be years.

But that wandering is

to help strip away the extemporaneous stuff to get

to the real core of who we are as human beings.

So Paul is, and he says it, he's set apart,

that's like being sent away by the spirit, right?

There is a, a baptism of, of sorts that he has

and this vision of Christ.

Any other thoughts on that? We, we have time to read?

Just maybe a, a whisper more.

Okay. Not seeing any hands.

Um, I wonder if somebody would read verses one through

and then we'll, we'll be able to pick

that up beautifully next week.

Verse one through

Maybe somebody who hasn't spoken yet. Yes, Phyllis, please.

Oh, sorry, you're muted.

Sorry. Of chapter two. Yes, thank you. One

Through

Then after years, I went up again to Jerusalem

with Barnabas taking Titus along with me.

I went up in response to a revelation.

Then I laid before them, though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders, the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain.

But even Titus who was with me was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek, but because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus so that they might enslave us.

We did not submit to them even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.

And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders, what they actually were makes no difference to me.

God shows no partiality.

Those leaders contributed nothing to me.

On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised, for he who worked through Peter, making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles.

And when Jesus, when James and CFUs

and John, who were acknowledged pillars,  
recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave  
to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship agreeing  
that we should go to the gentiles  
and they to the circumcised.

They asked only one thing that we remember the poor,  
which was actually what I was eager to do.

Thank you. Thank you. What do you all hear in this?

And then we'll pack it a bit and then be done for the day.

There was, there's a conflict whether should you become a  
Jew before you can become a Christian.

Absolutely right. Here's Paul describing what happens  
to him after that time in the desert.

He goes to Jerusalem.

Now, this account is recalled in Acts chapter one  
through through a very different lens.

Uh, you recall that, that Luke is writing acts  
and Paul presents this here as like, so I went there  
and it was perfectly acceptable  
and I, I bested them in this, this argument.

It's a little more qualified in Acts. Paul.

Paul doesn't quite give the, like he maybe didn't,

there's another argument that he's gonna re recreate  
with Paul in, uh, with Peter in a moment.

And you get the sense that these two guys maybe  
batted heads a lot.

Um, and so Paul doesn't quite give the whole meat  
of it here, but he gives us the salient D point details.

Just as you're saying. The main issue here is circumcision.

Circumcision. Why does he keep talking about circumcision?

Um, as you very astutely said,

it's not just about circumcision, circumcision,

it's about whether or not you have to be, um, converted

to Judaism before you become a Christian.

That was their first major crisis point in Christianity.

The, in the early church.

Do you have to become Jewish first?

It's a, in almost certainly the right theological question

because that's

how every Christian first came into

the Christian faith, right?

Everybody was Jewish first, including Jesus.

Jesus was always Jewish, right?

There was no Christianity for Jesus, right?

So the, i the idea that you would have  
to then become Jewish is important  
and you would think of all people  
who would say you should become Jewish first.  
Paul would probably be first on that list, right?  
Because again, he was a gentile among,  
or a a Hebrew amongst Hebrews.  
Like he was the perfect follower of the law.  
These things mattered to him, not  
as just an intellectual exercise,  
but as something that he based his entire world  
cosmic view on.  
And yet Paul, through this vision, has  
so suddenly seen a different view  
that he now becomes the great argue arguer for  
that there should be nothing that stops us from being able  
to be, become a Christian.  
Now we're, we're gonna get way more into this next week.  
'cause this is the, this is one of the chief arguments  
for his entire piece.  
But lest we think it's silly  
that he keeps talking about circumcision, I ask you

what have been some of the modern fights

that Christians have been fighting about?

Is it not things like human sexuality?

Is it not things exactly along those lines, right?

Not much has changed, right?

We're still talking about human beings and, and,

and their, I guess I'll say private parts, right?

You know, like the, the, the pieces of us that are Yes,

please, Marjorie, go ahead.

We about to say, well, but the, the point of the

Circumcision was that that was a covenant

with God, correct?

And that, so I could imagine that it would be really

difficult to reconcile that.

So this is the point, and,

and when he talks about this both here

and in Romans, what he wants

to say is he's not giving up on the covenant.

This is Paul's genius.

Like he is one of the greatest theologians,

maybe the greatest that's ever walked the face of the earth.

Because in the covenant that God establishes with Abraham,

the sign of it is circumcision.

That's how you know you are grafted into it.

My theology teacher in, um, seminary used

to say, it's like a light switch.

It's on or off circumcision.

Uh, and, and that's why he, you know, we use it as the,

the marker here of whether

or not you are grafted into this covenant.

Paul will say it's not about any one action that you do.

So here's the justification by faith, right?

It's not even the act of circumcision

that will make you a part of the covenant or not.

You can't actually do it.

God does it, and God has chosen to do it.

So he brings Titus to this, this little soiree with the, uh,

the apostles in Jerusalem, Titus, who is a Greek,

and who has importantly not been circumcised.

How awkward is this for Titus

to have everybody constantly be like, Hey,

come in here Titus, let's talk,

let's talk about your circumcision

or uncircumcision all over again.

Like, I really feel for Titus in all of this,

but Paul brought your pants.

Exactly. Do you know? I'm sure that's part of it.

And what Paul does though, is he makes them decide.

He's like, here's Titus.

You imagine Titus is pretty amazing of a human being.

Like you hear him talked about all over Paul's letter

as like being really wonderful.

And they're like, and he's like, so what are you gonna do?

You gonna tell this guy? He can't be Christian?

Tell it to his face. And so Paul forces the hands of the,

of the apostles here to really say,

are we free in Christ or not?

Are we free in Christ or not?

Are are we, are we loved by God as we are?

Or do we have to do something ourselves to earn God's love?

And that's, that's the heart of Galatians Paul, of course,

answers God.

God has already grafted us into the freedom of the spirit

with or we without our actions, our actions

and our good actions that flow next

come from the spirit rather than us telling the spirit.

So Paul really wants us to have that emphasis. Okay?

That's a great place for us to stop today.

Um, since it's a lunchtime hour, we're trying

to do these a little under an hour.

Anybody need one last question or final word?

How was this for everybody?

Was this what you were hoping for?

I just, I just say quickly as a legal argument.

It's just such a vivid persuasive case.

He's, he's making, if I'm on the jury here

and I've heard the false teachers case, now I'm realizing,

oh boy, I need to pay attention to this.

Right? You're so right David, that it's the drama

that Paul works up with this.

He's always visual, he's always a motive.

Even when he's joyful in Philippians. Paul is not boring.

And you're right David, he forces us to use our heads here.

And then our hearts like, really, what,

what are we gonna say about Jesus?

And what are we gonna say about the

freedom we have in the spirit?

Well said, David. Okay, thank you all so much.

I'm looking forward to next week, chapter two. God bless.