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No Other Gospel

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just thank you that we have your everlasting arms and we just thank you that you are the God who is above all gods, the God who has consented to become one of us, to live a perfect life and then die so that we could have a relationship with you. Father, how precious this gospel is. And Lord, this day as we begin another series, Father, we just again reiterate how thankful we are for this gospel. And so we pray this morning as we open up your book, as we look into it, we would have the privilege of the presence of your Holy Spirit, guide us, open our eyes, our ears, give us the ability to take in truth and to make it of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once a year, many of you know, Grace sends its leaders to a conference. And we either go to The Gospel Coalition or Together for the Gospel because both organizations are really committed to the same idea, and that is to build up leaders in local churches in their understanding of just what the gospel is and how best to preach it. And The Gospel Coalition meets on odd years, T4G meets

on the even years. And so this year Steve and I went to The Gospel Coalition conference entitled "No Other Gospel," as you see up there. The event really had two very different goals. The first goal was to broaden and deepen our understanding of the scripture and our ability to present it in a God glorifying way, and the second goal was to instruct and celebrate the fact that this year's meeting coincided with the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. I mean 500 years ago this year, Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis to the doors of a church in Wittenberg, Germany. And much of the conference dealt with the influence that the Reformation has had and still has on the church even to this day. There was about 8500 of us in Indianapolis for the conference. I don't know if you have that. You want to cue that up? I snuck a little video while we were doing worship just to give you kind of a sense or a flavor of what it was like. If you have that, that's just -- I don't know if you can see the size of that group but it was a sizeable group, and they -- we had teaching and worship. That was Steve and I in the upper corners there just kind of taking some quick video.

Anyway, so we got to listen to some incredible Bible teachers. We got to listen to John Piper, Tim Keller and others and they were expounding not only on the scripture but also some of the titans of the Reformation, men like Martin Luther and John Calvin and Zwingli

and others. And the scripture that was presented was perhaps the most appropriate one that could be for a year celebrating the Reformation. It was the book of Galatians. And the reason why the book of Galatians is so appropriate for the anniversary of the Reformation is because the Reformation itself centered not so much on indulgences and all the other things that popular history claims it was about but much more so it was about what the gospel really stands for. Martin Luther had no idea when he nailed that document on to that church door that he would start a revolution that would affect all of Europe and really all of the world because its effect was profoundly felt in reclaiming what the gospel is all about. And No Other Gospel sums up what the Reformation was really about and that also happens to be what the book of Galatians is about. So I want to spend the next few weeks or months, we don't know yet, expanding on what we were taught by these godly men who opened up that book for us. And with that said, let me just get right to it, that is *Galatians 1:1-5: Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Now, have you ever gotten a letter and you open the letter and you realize as you're starting to read it right from the very start you realize that the author would like nothing better than to throttle you? Now, it may not seem so to us but to the church of Galatia, it really did. You see word order is very important in the Greek language and if you look at any of Paul's other letters, you're usually going to find the phrase "grace and peace" right in his introduction. I mean you find that in Paul's letters to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians and the Thessalonians. Not so, not so in this letter. Instead we have an immediate -- instead of an immediate warm greeting, we have this formal declaration. He says "Paul, an apostle," and what followed those three words are Paul's bona fides, that is the authority that he has to unload on this church. You see, one of the things that Paul had to contend with in his ministry was the accusation that unlike other apostles, Paul really had no direct connection with the living Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul's famous conversion on the Damascus road occurred well after Christ had resurrected and ascended into heaven. And throughout all of his ministry, Paul had to contend with those who said he was not quite up to snuff as an apostle, because unlike all of the other apostles, Paul never interacted with Jesus while he was here on earth. All during Jesus's earthly ministry, Paul was elsewhere. And in fact the first time we hear of Paul, he is actively engaged in persecuting

those who are following the risen Christ. We learn in the book of Acts that Paul was miraculously converted while he was on the road to Damascus as he is seeking other Christians to persecute. *Acts 9:3* says: *As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."* Jesus directs Saul to a disciple named Ananias who is well aware that Saul is this murderous persecutor of the church, and so Ananias balks at ministering to him. Jesus says to Ananias: *"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."* So Jesus chose to use an enemy of the gospel to proclaim the gospel. And so for the rest of Paul's life he had to deal with those who doubted his conversion, his sincerity and most of all, his authority. And his answer to those critics who said he had never had contact with Christ was that on the contrary, he had direct and extensive contact with Jesus Christ. Paul insists that the gospel that he's been entrusted with came not from human beings but directly from the resurrected and ascended Jesus who was now using Paul to establish his church. This is what he says in *Galatians 1:11*: *But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according*

to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. And then down to verse 15, he said: But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Now Paul knows that his past is going to continue to haunt his present and he addresses it directly by saying in verse 13: *For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.* Now it's easy for us here in the 21st century to gloss over Paul's statement here, but there's a principle that's at work here that we all need to understand and it goes back to the principle we speak of over and over again in Romans 8:28. It was Paul who said: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.* Well, here's the principle. The principle is that God's sovereignty is so great, it is so extensive that he can take every single event in the life of those who love him, in the lives of

those who are called according to his purpose and use those events for good. What God is saying here is that every single event in the life of his chosen ones, the good events, the bad events, the absolutely awful events, they're all going to have a certain telemetry, they're going to have a certain goal, a certain direction, a certain target and that goal direction or target will always produce God's definition of what is good. And Paul's ministry is a case in point. You see, when God says "all things," he really means "all things." And in Paul's case it meant conduct that could only be described as monstrous, as awful beyond measure, and yet God claims that he's able to squeeze good even out of the terrible circumstances that Paul was involved in. What Paul did toward the Christians of his day is much more akin to what ISIS does than to somebody who simply stumbled. Because Paul, like ISIS, went out of his way to attack and to destroy Christianity and Christians. Paul readily confessed to brutalizing Christians up to and including taking their lives. I mean he started with Stephen, if you remember. Stephen became the first martyr of the church when he castigated the Sanhedrin for its unbelief. And instead of repenting, the crowd just flew into a rage and they drove Stephen outside of the city and then took up stones to stone him. *Acts 7:58* says: *And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen. Now Saul was consenting to*

his death. You see, according to Jewish laws, it's the witnesses who must cast the first stone. And these witnesses were so anxious to butcher Stephen that they were looking for a place to take off their outer cloak so they wouldn't be restricted as they sailed their lethal devices. And up steps Paul formerly known as Saul who's only happy to provide this service. Acts 3 goes to on to say that this was just the beginning of Saul's activism. Verse 3 says: As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Paul himself confesses in Acts 26, he says: This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

So Paul freely admits that at one time he witnessed and encouraged mob incited murder against Christians, that he was personally responsible for imprisoning them, even compelling other Christians to blaspheme. And that even when he went abroad to foreign cities, he was there to track down any who would proclaim Christ as Lord. Kind of sounds like what ISIS is doing today. And yet Paul makes this astounding statement in his introduction to the Galatians. He

says this in verse 15, he says: *It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.* I want you to consider the implications of what Paul is saying there. When you read that and you fully think it through, it's going to hit you like a ton of bricks. See, Paul says that God separated him not from the time that he came to his senses but from his mother's womb. In other words all of the time that Saul was destroying or wreaking havoc on the church, terrorizing and killing Christians, he was still under God's sovereign control. Now for some that's a source of great comfort. For others it's a horror. Where was God when his chosen servant Paul was aiding and abetting in the butchering of Stephen? Where was God when Paul was yanking Christians out of their homes and sending them off to prison? Where was he when he forced them to blaspheme and consented to their murders? I mean this is not just an ancient question. This is a question that Christians are asking today in the 21st century about our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. How is it that God appears to sit idly by while his children are systematically getting slaughtered? I mean it's a question that's even more pressing today when all these different varieties of the prosperity gospel insists that coming to Jesus is a ticket to a life that works, a life of prosperity, a life of joy, a life of ease. Explain that to the believers who were blown to pieces just a few

weeks ago as they worshiped at a Palm service, Palm Sunday service in Egypt? Explain that to the believers who were kidnapped and raped in Aleppo or crucified in Syria. God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life. You know, it sounds kind of hollow and very, very Western when your love for Christ brings instead of success unspeakable torment. Where is God when his enemies seem to triumph? Well, the Bible is full of sincere believers asking that very question, asking why God allows bad things to happen to good people. The psalmist in Psalm 44 simply cannot understand why Israel is suffering so many setbacks militarily when she's at a time when she is following God, she's seeking to do what is right. And listen to what the psalmist says. He says: *In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever. Selah. But You have cast us off and put us to shame, and You do not go out with our armies. You make us turn back from the enemy, and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. You have given us up like sheep intended for food, and have scattered us among the nations. You sell your people for next to nothing and are not enriched by selling them. You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to those around us. You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of the head among the peoples. My dishonor is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me. Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, because of the enemy and the avenger. All this has come upon us; but we have*

not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way; but You have severely broken us in the place of jackals, and covered us with the shadow of death. If we had forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a foreign god, would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Now if that last phrase sounds a bit familiar, it's because the apostle Paul quoted the very same phrase to reiterate the very same sentiment in the New Testament. Paul in Romans 8 is in the middle of explaining that nothing can separate us from the love of God and in the middle of it he jarringly reminds us that sometimes the "all things that work together for good" include things that are not good at all. In *Romans 8:35*, he says: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."* Now to me that seems like a spiritual non sequitur. That doesn't make any sense. He's reveling in the love that God has for us and that we can never ever shake that love. And he says God loves me and by the way, we're counted as sheep to be slaughtered. It begs for an explanation.

We know that the very first sheep to be slaughtered in the New Testament was Stephen. And we know that Stephen's death introduces us to Paul as persecutor. And we know that Stephen's death was a dreadful event for Stephen and for those who loved him, but it was a pivotal event that resulted in the church being scattered and dispersed throughout all of the Middle East. And we in the 21st century, we can look back at that event with clinical detachment and say it was the best thing that could have ever happened to the church and the church couldn't have spread without it. Those who had to experience it at ground level could hardly be expected to agree. But understand how God perceived Stephen's death. You see, Stephen at the moment of his death, at the moment that the stones are raining down upon him, he has a vision of heaven itself and this is what he says in *Acts 7:54*. It says: *But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* Now, those of us who are on earth can only see this as a monstrous, unjustified murder of an innocent man by an enraged crowd. That's the reality of those of us who are earthbound, those of us who are here in the flesh in this temporary existence that we call life. But there is another reality that is far greater than that of earth. And Stephen at the end of his life gets a tiny little glimpse of it. Stephen describes heaven itself and the risen Lord Jesus himself standing to honor and receive him into the kingdom. Look what Stephen says.

He says in verse 56, he says: "*Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!*" So God gives us a glimpse of how Stephen is welcomed into heaven. Earth saw it as disastrous but heaven saw it as glorious. And Paul's intentions for Stephen were undoubtedly evil but God superintended those intentions for good. I mean as part of the great irony that the very same Paul who was responsible in some way for Stephen's death is now in the book of Galatians the very one responsible for seeing that the gospel that Stephen died for stays strong in the face of an unrelenting assault from all sides by the enemy of our souls.

And so this takes me back to the question I raised at the beginning. How could God allow Paul the freedom to participate in the death of Stephen? I mean if Paul was truly set apart from his mother's womb, then God had to have actively allowed his chosen servant the freedom to wreak havoc on his own sheep. How could that be? I mean I thought a kingdom divided against itself must fall. How could God allow his own sheep to be slaughtered by someone he's going to raise up as a shepherd? Well, let me answer that question with another question. How could God allow his own Son is to be slaughtered on our behalf? How could God sit idly by while the apple of his eye is stripped and mocked and flogged and crucified? Jews even tells us a story to illustrate how God felt seeing his Son treated this way. It's in *Luke 20:9-19*. It says

this, this is Jesus, said: *Then he began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed."* Okay. So if you don't know, Jesus is referring to the prophets that God repeatedly sent to Israel. He says in verse 11: *"Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out."* What Jesus is referring to is that time and again Israel strayed and God sent prophets to bring them back and they were beaten, they were shamed and they were cast out. Then at verse 13 Jesus says: *"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' But when the vinedressers saw him, and they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him."*

You're probably going to ask what kind of a father would send his son to a people so vicious? I mean why would he even take the risk? Well, we know for a fact that God was not anticipating a risk. We know he was embracing a certainty. These people were

going to slaughter his son, and the vicious people that he was sending his son to was us. We can certainly make the case that there was nothing in the universe that was more precious to God than his only begotten son and yet he restrained his hand as we wicked ones killed him. I mean any of us who have children can't begin to think of what we would go through if we had to watch what God had to watch happen to his own child. Couple that with the fact that God is omnipotent, that he has the means and the ability to not only save his son but to utterly annihilate all those who would dare lay a finger on him. You know that wasn't God's plan. You see, if anyone knows what it's like to suffer through a present agony in order to produce a future good, it's God. I mean there are other scriptures that speak to God being willing to withstand extraordinary degrees of personal pain and suffering in order to accomplish a greater goal for the kingdom. *Romans 8:32* says: *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* And we add to God's willingness to suffer the death of his own Son, Christ's own statement in scripture that he saw Paul's attacks on Christians as a direct and personal attack on himself. In *Acts 9* Jesus appears to Paul in a blinding light, and he says: *Then he, that's Paul, fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*

I mean Jesus was clearly saying harm the flesh of my children and you are directly attacking me. Nevertheless Jesus also directly told us in *Matthew 5:10*: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"

Understand something. When he can, the enemy is going to attack our flesh as he does in the Middle East. But when he can't, he will attack our spirit as he does in the West. Understand that the gospel is under assault everywhere it is proclaimed. I mean the attack in the West looks very different from the attack in the East but never doubt that the attack is on and that it is now in full swing. I suggested to you before that all of us in the West have been profoundly affected by the prosperity gospel. It's amazing, I had a conversation with somebody at the -- in fact I was having lunch with somebody at the conference and he was a missionary from Mexico and he was a missionary to Swaziland, and he was just saying how the prosperity gospel has just overwhelmed Africa. And he said what has happened is people in the small villages, they take the name "witch doctor," and they basically cross it out and they put the word "pastor" over it, and they offer the exact same thing that

the prosperity gospel offers, and they said, you know, for an extra fifty cents I'll give you a Bible verse on top of the curse that they're doing. This is what the people have to put up with. So we are surrounded -- they are surrounded, we are surrounded, just so you know what this false gospel claims, let me give you the Wikipedia definition: "Prosperity theology (sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success) is a religious belief among some Christians, who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth. Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: If humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity. The doctrine emphasizes the importance of personal empowerment, proposing that it is God's will for his people to be happy. The atonement (reconciliation with God) is interpreted to include the alleviation of sickness and poverty, which are viewed as curses to be broken by faith. This is believed to be achieved through donations of money, visualization, and positive confession."

Now in case you're wondering who the folks are that practice it, let me just give you a list of some of the most popular prosperity preachers. It includes Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn,

T.D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Fred Price, Kenneth Copeland, Robert Tilton, Eddie Long, Juanita Bynum and Paul Crouch. Now you may be thinking, I don't listen to any of those folks and I very rarely watch TV, and so how does this even apply to me? Let me tell you how. See, there's this subtle effect that this gospel has as it percolates down into the Christian community. You see, many sincere believers now think that there's a very simple formula to living the Christian life and it comes much more from the prosperity gospel than it comes from the real gospel and it goes like this: I accept Christ. I try to live a good life. And God responds by giving me a life of at least health and peace. And at most, prosperity and blessings. Now you may think, well, I'm nowhere near that kind of thinking but it may well be because life in general is going fairly well for you. You see, it's how we respond when things begin to turn sour, when things don't go as planned that will tell us whether or not we really believe God owes us a certain level of comfort. That's not the message that the Bible gives at all. In fact God takes great pains to warn us that as believers, we are in a war. It's a war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and as in any war, there are strategies that are taken by the high command that we are not privy to. And sometimes, maybe more often than not, they may appear to be at odds with our notion of what being a Christian is supposed to be, particularly when we're surrounded by a gospel that says come

to Jesus and all of your troubles are going to end. That's not at all what God promised us. In fact he says in *1 Peter 4:12*:
Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

See, the Bible does proclaim that God loves us and that he does have a perfect plan for each of our lives, but the good and the perfect are by his definition and not ours. And God's definition of what is good is really very simple, it is conformity to the image of his Son. God is determined to take each and every one of us and use every bit of our life experiences to shape and mold us into the image of Jesus Christ, who by the way was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. And God's promise to all of his children is not that we're going to have a carefree, trouble free life of health and peace but that we are going to have a life of meaning, a life of joy, one that connects us to the eternal and give gives us the strength, the grace, the peace, the power, and the wisdom to not only survive everything that the enemy can throw at us but to triumph over it in Christ. That's the gospel that Paul is so jealous to protect.

After Paul gives his bona fides in the introduction to the letter, he then proceeds by saying: *Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.* What jumps out at this -- of this paragraph is that phrase: *If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.* Literally let him be sent to hell if it's a man or an angel. And those are pretty strong words indeed. And we're going to see as we look in the book of Galatians that Paul is not at all averse to proclaiming in the strongest of terms what the gospel is and what God thinks of those who twist and pervert that gospel to their own ends.

So here's the question: What is the gospel? I mean if I stuck a

microphone in your face right now and I asked you that simple four-word question: What is the gospel? What would you say? Greg Gilbert has written an excellent little book. We have a couple of them downstairs. Let me know if you want, I'd like to order a whole bunch of them. I think everybody should read his excellent little book. It's titled -- surprise, surprise -- "*What Is The Gospel*" and in it, this is what he says. He says: Ask any hundred self professed evangelical Christians what the good news of Jesus is, and you are likely to get about 60 different answers. Listen to evangelical preaching, read evangelical books, log onto evangelical websites and you will find one description after another of the gospel, many of them mutually exclusive." And then he lists nine different versions, definitions of the gospel from the many that he has received. And the one thing that is clear is that clarity about the gospel is what is sorely missing. And what I like about this little book is it goes right to the source of what the gospel is and that is the Bible. And as he says, you can sum up the gospel with four words: God, man, Christ, response. Just think GMC, you know, it's a car. God, man, Christ, response. God is our righteous creator, he is perfect, he is holy. Man is fallen, he is imperfect, he is incapable of getting right with God on his own power. Christ is God in the flesh, fully God, and fully man. Having lived a perfect life, he now offers up his righteousness in exchange for our sin through His sacrificial death

on the cross. And response. Our response is faith and repentance. Jesus says it best. He says in *Mark 1:15*: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*" Paul says it as well in *Acts 20*, he says: *I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Well, what is faith? Well Gilbert puts it this way: "Trusting that God will substitute Jesus's record for ours and therefore declare us to be righteous." He goes on to say: "Faith is turning to Jesus and relying on him for salvation. Repentance is the flip side of that coin. It is turning away from sin, hating it and resolving by God's strength to forsake it, even as we turn to him in faith." It's about as simple as you can make the gospel, and yet we just cannot resist altering it or tweaking it or turning it on its head. You know, the person who says I've accepted Jesus as savior but not yet as Lord, that's somebody who completely misunderstands the gospel. To accept Jesus is to accept him as Savior and Lord. I mean again as Gilbert puts it, he says: "To have faith in Jesus is, at its core, to believe that he really is who he says he is. The crucified and risen king who has conquered death and sin, and who has the power to save. Now how could a

person believe all that, trust in it, and rely on it, and yet at the same time say, 'but I don't acknowledge that you are king over me'? That doesn't make any sense." I mean the gospel is not complicated and it makes perfect sense. It's God, man, Christ, response. And our response, our response, repentance and faith, that is a gift from God. Paul tells Timothy in *2 Timothy 2:24*: *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, that they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

So here's the big question for us this morning. It's a question we all have to ask ourselves: Have I come to my senses? I mean the most important question you will ever ask yourself is have I responded with faith and repentance to the claims of the gospel? We all read this past week of that tragic suicide of Aaron Hernandez, the football player who was convicted of murder, and one of the things that the press pointed out, as macabre as it was, was that just before he hanged himself in his cell, he opened up his Bible to John 3:16 and then he took a Sharpie and he wrote "John 3:16" on his forehead. I have no idea where Aaron Hernandez is today, but I think his desperate attempts at getting right with God

are far more a reflection of what people think the gospel is than what God had revealed it as. The gospel is not magic. It is not a universal get out of jail free card and it is not a formula for worldly success. It is an invitation to leave this life of sin and slavery and embrace an eternal future in Christ that begins the moment you accept God's greatest gift.

Let me just conclude this morning with Gilbert's words. He says this, he says: "When you stand before God at the judgment, I wonder what you plan to do or say in order to convince him to count you righteous and admit you to all the blessings of his kingdom? What good deed or godly attitude will you pull out of your pocket to impress him? Will you pull out your church attendance? Your family life? Your spotless thought life? The fact that you haven't done anything really heinous in your own eyes? I wonder what you'll hold up before him while saying, 'God, on account of this, justify me!' I tell you what every Christian whose faith in Christ alone will do, by God's grace. They will simply and quietly point to Jesus. And this will be their plea: 'Oh God, do not look for any righteousness in my own life. Look at your Son. Count me righteous not because of anything I've done or anything I am, but because of Him. He lived the life I should've lived. He died the death that I deserve. I have renounced all other trusts and my plea is in him alone. Justify me, O God, because of Jesus.'" Let's

pray.

Father God, I do thank you for the great and grand love that you have for us, a love that is so profound that it stretches to even including the warnings that Paul 2,000 years ago wrote for us today. Father, give us the ability to understand how precious this gospel is, how easy it is to tweak it, to turn it aside, to turn it upside down. Father, give us the ability as we learn more and more about this gospel, the desire to share it, the real gospel and to pray also for the power of your Holy Spirit to make it of lasting value and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.