

THE GOSPEL

— ACCOURDING TO PAUL (NOT SMIT) —

DAILY DEVOTIONALS - WEEK 2

MONDAY

Paul regularly called himself an “apostle,” a term with a specific meaning for early Christians. Paul regularly identifies himself as an apostle or divinely appointed missionary (1 Corinthians 9:2; 15:9; Romans 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1). An apostle must be a witness to the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7-8); demonstrate signs of his apostleship (2 Corinthians 12:12); and prove himself through turning people to the faith (1 Corinthians 9:2). Paul’s path to that title was different, but he was sure that by

God’s grace he qualified.

- That was not just a matter of arguing pointlessly about titles or ranks. The Book of Acts makes it clear that the supreme test of an apostle is that he is a witness of the Resurrection. (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33). This is of intense importance. Faith, in the New Testament, is very seldom acquiescence in a creed; it is almost always trust in a person. Paul’s deepest loyalty was not to a document or organization, but to Jesus, his Lord and Saviour.

Who claims your deepest loyalty?

- As Paul met the living Jesus, it both upheld and upset his whole faith: It showed him that the God he had been right to serve, right to study, right to seek in prayer, had done what he always said he would. The God who had always promised to come and rescue his people had done so in person. In the person of Jesus.

What have you had to learn and unlearn after meeting Jesus?

read

Corinthians 9:1-5, 1

Corinthians 15:7-9

pray

Lord Jesus, no matter how it happens, meeting you is a life-changing experience. Thank you for meeting me in the ways I most needed and including me in your heavenly family. Amen.

TUESDAY

Paul wrote today's verses to two early Christian audiences in different places facing different ideas about how to live as Christians. False teachers were urging the Galatians to adopt circumcision as a "must" for salvation. Corinthian Christians lived in a wildly immoral city. To both groups, Paul said the central truth to remember was Jesus' crucifixion. As a gifted communicator Paul shaped many parts of each letter to the specific audience. But the cross was a vital centre point for both messages.

- People in Paul's day knew all too much about crucifixion.

Crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world as so horrible... that you didn't mention it in polite society. Paul mentioned it: "I didn't come preaching... like I was an expert in speech or wisdom," and the cross was important "so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1, 5). Wow - God's power worked even through crucifixion! In what areas of life could you trust God's power to defeat evil?

- Paul grew up in a Jewish tradition that strongly stressed "works of the Law" (behaviours, rituals, actions) to please God. Paul's Galatian audience was hearing that old traditions were crucial to salvation. Paul refocused them by reminding them, "Jesus Christ was put on display as crucified before your eyes!" (Galatians 3:1). What are you focused on - "works of the law" or God's power?

How can you rely on God's power as shown on the cross instead of your own personal effort?

read

1 Corinthians 2:2

Galatians 3:1

pray

Eternal God, what looked to humans like a horrible defeat was actually a way your power in Jesus opened the door of salvation for me (and all humans). Thank you! Help me see things from your perspective more and more often. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

After meeting Jesus, the apostle Paul became part of an already growing, thriving Christian community. He made such a vast contribution to that community's faith partly because he joined in the community's expressions of their shared faith in Jesus. Scholar J. R. Daniel Kirk said today's passage was "Probably an early Christian hymn. It uses language for humanity from Genesis 1 to describe the pre-existent Christ."

- It's a historical fact that Christians did not take centuries to begin speaking of Jesus as God. Scholar Larry Hurtado said, "In historical terms we may refer to a veritable 'big bang,' an explosively rapid and impressively substantial Christological [i.e., study of Christ's identity and significance] development in the earliest stage of the Christian movement." Paul likely heard Christians sing this reflective hymn. *What songs have helped shape your faith and sharing?*

- Scholar William Barclay wrote of verses 19-20, "The object of [Jesus'] coming was... to bridge the chasm between God and man...The initiative in reconciliation was with God...God's attitude to [people] was love, and it was never anything else." Paul didn't try to explain all the mysteries about Jesus' divinity. He just quoted this hymn stating it as a reality giving the early believers new life.

In what ways has following Jesus changed your life for the better?

read

Colossians 1:15-20

pray

Lord Jesus, Paul, and those early Christians, believed what the Apostles' Creed later said: "I believe in Jesus Christ, [God's] only Son, our Lord." I join them in that faith and loyalty. Amen..

THURSDAY

Christians treasured Jesus' words before anyone wrote a "gospel." 1 Corinthians 11 was the earliest written account of the Lord's Supper—Paul wrote that letter 15-20 years before any of the four gospels. The apostle quoted Jesus' teachings in 1 Corinthians 9:14 and Acts 20:35.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-17, 25, 40 he carefully distinguished a specific command Jesus gave from his sense of what Jesus would want in another case. Paul (and the Christians he taught) knew and valued much of Jesus' teaching.

- Thanks to Paul, we hear Jesus' words at communion services just as early Christians in Corinth did: "do this to remember me" and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." Jesus pointed to Jeremiah's promise (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34). He meant, as scholar William Barclay translated it, "This cup is the new covenant, and it cost my blood." How can you join the earliest Christians in worshiping Jesus, recalling and honouring the price he paid to offer you grace and forgiveness?

- Paul quoted Jesus, who quoted Jeremiah, who linked God "engraving" God's instructions on our hearts (an echo of the stone tablets on which God engraved the 10 Commandments—cf. Exodus 31:18) with God mercifully forgiving our sins. That long chain of God's people bore witness to how God's mercy changes how God's people live.

How has your gratitude for God's forgiving mercy in Jesus moved you toward living as God wants you to live?

read

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

pray

Lord Jesus, you don't want a casual, come-and-go connection with me. You shed your blood to invite me into an enduring covenant. Help me to wholeheartedly accept. Amen.

FRIDAY

Paul used the image of God “adopting” you for salvation. You might have been on a course leading to eternal darkness, but God took you safely into heaven’s family. In that life, the physical pains Paul faced (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:7-10) gave his words a very personal meaning: “We always carry Jesus’ death around in our bodies so that Jesus’ life can also be seen in our bodies.”

- Slavery was legal in the Roman Empire and was the backdrop for the word “redeem.” Freeing a slave took “redeeming” them (i.e., buying them out of slavery). Imagine a slave owner telling a slave, “I’m redeeming you by adopting you. You’re now a full family member, not a slave.” Do you tend to live more as God’s “slave,” fearful and frustrated, or as God’s adopted, beloved daughter or son? How can you more fully accept your adoption, your complete “belonging” in God’s family?

- Scholar William Barclay said in Paul’s teaching about following Jesus, “He offered them no easy way. He acted on the principle that Jesus had come ‘not to make life easy but to make men [and women] great.’” Does it seem to you that following Jesus today may be somewhat easier and safer than it was in Paul’s day? In what ways is it as true as ever that entering God’s kingdom involves being willing to pass through “many troubles”?

read

Galatians 4:3-7

2 Corinthians 4:8-11

pray

Dear Jesus, unlike my occasional shortsightedness, you looked beyond the obvious and visible. Give me your eyes to see, however dimly, the glory of eternity, and to live in that light. Amen.

SATURDAY

History says the city of Philippi was full of retired Roman military men. If you asked most of them to name a great leader, they'd have named Alexander the Great, the Greek general who conquered nearly all the known world, or the Roman Emperor Augustus who used force to end a civil war in the empire and bring a type of "peace" by suppressing any who disagreed with him. But Paul quoted an early Christian hymn built on the belief, as scholar N. T. Wright put it, that "[Jesus] was the reality, and Alexander and Augustus were the caricature. [Jesus] is what true global sovereignty looked like." Paul used the hymn's beautiful lyrics to urge the Philippians to be like Jesus (the Christ = "anointed one" in Greek), a vastly different kind of king. Instead of using his position to gain things for himself, Christ used it to give to others.

- Jesus "did not consider being equal with God something to exploit" (verse 6). Wright asked, "Who arrogantly grasped at the chance to be 'like God, knowing good and evil'? Why, Adam in Genesis 3." Jesus, who was God, showed "what it really meant to be divine...the true meaning of who God is. He is the God of self-giving love." Paul urged the Philippians to "adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus." Are you willing to even think about adopting that attitude? Verse 7 then said Jesus "emptied himself." In Greek grammar, the "himself" meant "'he was glad to..., ' or 'he was willing to give up all he had.'" And "emptied" didn't mean Jesus stopped being God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Because he was God, he didn't have an ego need for any "rank of dignity and glory." He took "the form of a slave," and died on a cross. Would you value Jesus more if he'd strutted around asking, "Do you know who I am?" and seeking applause? Why or why not?

read

Philippians 2:5-11

pray

Lord Jesus, I call you Lord, not despite your humble, serving life and death, but because of it. As I worship you, send your Spirit to grow more of your self-giving love in my heart. Amen.