

Part 3: My Pleasure

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It's easy for us to be suspicious of those who seem all too eager to help us.

I remember one year when my son and I went to a theme park together. He had a free ticket, and I was going to buy one at the gate. But as I approached the gate a woman approached me and said, would you like a free ticket? I looked at her suspiciously, and cautiously said, "What do you mean?" She told me that she had purchased a number of tickets earlier in the year, and that she wasn't going to be able to use all of them. So, she had come all the way down there that morning just to see if anyone wanted her ticket that day. I waited for the catch. She didn't offer one.

So, we cautiously approached the gate. I guarded my child and my wallet, wondering if this was a ploy to distract me and steal something from me. And then, it happened. She swiped her card, and I got in. That's it. That's the end of the story.

It's a unique story, because there was nothing terrible about it. It was one woman, who wanted to do something gracious for a total stranger and without any gain for herself—she paid for my ticket.

For each story like that, there's a dozen of those who would otherwise take advantage of us. Those who seem too eager to serve us are often doing so with false motives to gain something for themselves. What's in it for them? It is the question we are always asking.

When we go to Chick-Fil-A, and they give us our drink, and we say, "You're welcome," and they say, "My pleasure," we wonder if they really mean it. Is it really your pleasure? Or do you just have to say that to keep your job? What really is your pleasure?

That's the very question that Paul's critics have been using to lead the churches he planted in Galatia away from Paul's gospel. These false teachers have been promoting a gospel that sounds similar to the one Paul preached but is light on one thing: grace. The false teachers say: "Believe in Jesus plus do some more stuff." Paul's message was "believe in Jesus!" His critics rightfully say, "Of course Paul would say that. That's what people want to hear. He's just trying to get people on his side to prove he's one of, or better than those other apostles. But don't listen to him—he doesn't care about you—he's in this only for his own pleasure."

That's the title of our sermon this morning: "My pleasure." Today, Paul shares two events in his own biography to validate his genuine salvation as a work of God, and his ministry as a genuine ministry. In other words, he says, "My pleasure, let me tell you about my pleasure." And his answer is our main point this morning: **The gospel is God's good pleasure.**

Paul isn't changing the gospel to suit man's pleasure. Instead, the gospel is God's good pleasure that changes us forever. Paul's justification of his own ministry shows the way God's pleasure changes us in three ways: God's pleasure **Saves us in Christ, Frees us in Christ**, and lastly **Sends us with Christ.**

Paul begins this passage by addressing some of those rumors the false teachers were spreading: **Galatians 1:10**, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

These false teachers know the very human tendency we all have to be people pleasers. Some of us want to use others to please ourselves, and some of us want to please others so that they please us. Paul is simultaneously being accused of both. And to a degree he affirms that at one point he *did* live that way.

He said, "If I were *still* trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." What a profound statement for all of us! If we find our greatest pleasure in the pleasure of men—we will never be servants of Christ.

So how is it that a people who are so fixated on man's praise and man's pleasure can be freed to serve Christ? Well, Paul's going to show us by sharing with us his own story. This is our first point this morning: God's pleasure **Saves us in Christ**.

Paul and his critics both acknowledge the universal deliverance all of us place on man's affirmation and pleasure. We want our bosses to see our work, so we can get a raise, so we can buy what we need to have a happy life. We want to look good enough, so we can find a spouse, who can please us relationally so that we can feel loved. And because we think that way—the gospel is the last thing we want.

Why? The gospel doesn't affirm how good you look or how productive you are. The gospel tells us that underneath our good works is a heart that stinks. It's sick with sin, it's limited, it's conflicted, and if we are honest most of our life is spent trying to keep man's eyes on our outside performance in order to keep them from seeing our true heart.

Paul's biography embodies this experience. **Galatians 1:11-14**, "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers."

Paul makes the case that his gospel is not man's gospel, nor was it taught to him by man. He justifies this with two proofs. Proof #1—his heart was against the gospel.

Paul found what pleased him. What pleased Paul, what made Paul happy, what Paul was exceedingly good at, was hating Jesus and killing Christians. Paul had made up his mind, he had found his joy, and he loved it. He didn't like the idea of the gospel—he hated it.

Proof #2—even if he was open to the idea of the gospel, no one shared it with him. Paul didn't grow up attending church. His parents didn't teach him about Jesus. Paul was surrounded by an echo chamber of voices and teachings of Judaism, and a Judaism directly opposed to everything Jesus claimed to be. He didn't want anything new, he wasn't looking for anything new. People were pleased with Paul, people were impressed with Paul, Paul's mind was made up and his life was good.

I wonder if you've encountered people like Paul? Maybe you've shared the gospel with them countless times and yet each time you do they seem more and more closed off to it. Maybe you feel like Paul. You're here and you're here because in a weird way—you like hearing about Jesus and picking apart all the things that you find are offensive, outrageous and outdated.

And if salvation were up to us finding the gospel pleasing—then none of us would see it as our pleasure. It is as the prophet Isaiah says, “No one seeks God.”

But while the gospel is not the pleasure of sinners, it is the very pleasure of God to save sinners. Paul’s whole life changed in one profound moment. **Galatians 1:15-17**, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”

The hope of the gospel is not that we might please God enough that he would save us. The hope of the gospel is that it pleases God to save those who hate him.

This is why our church is named Sovereign Hope. God’s sovereignty, not man’s sensibility, is what Paul points to here. He says that this God, set him apart before he was born. This God called him by grace. This God revealed something to him.

And while the circumstances of Paul’s conversion are unique—the process is ordinary. Peter writes to Christians calling them, “elect exiles.” He praises God because according to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope. When that same Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ in Matthew 16, Jesus responded to him and said, “Blessed are you Simon bar Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven.”

This doctrine of God’s sovereignty in salvation is often seen to us as offensive, cold, academic, and heartless. But what’s unique about this passage is the grammar stresses God’s rich affection. In Greek, often times authors change the order of the sentence in order to make their emphasis clear. By the rules of English grammar this word doesn’t show up till later in the verse 16. But by the rules of Paul’s heartfelt emphasis, it is the opening verb he uses in the Greek. What is that verb? “Pleased.”

Who was pleased? Pleased was the one who set him apart, pleased was the one who called him by grace. Salvation is the pleasure of God because there’s nothing in us that would find God pleasing.

We run from God, we have displeased God, you on your own cannot please him. Richard Baxter once wrote of the dialogue he would have with God upon his salvation. He said, “What, me Lord? Me, the unworthy neglecter of your grace who so slighted your love? Should I have this glory? Should I be let in?” And he answered his own questions saying, “But love will have it so.”

The only way any of us ever come to know and be saved by the gospel is when God looks at us and says, “My pleasure.”

And how does he reveal his pleasure to us? With the same content that saved Paul, **Galatians 1:16**, by revealing his son to us.

God’s pleasure is to save us, and his means by bringing us into that salvation is by opening our eyes to our great sin, and Christ’s great sacrifice. The gospel changed Paul, but it didn’t make much of Paul. Paul’s whole life was now to make much of the Christ who saved him. The gospel saved Paul, but it didn’t praise Paul. Remember what Paul said back in verse 13? People only knew him as the murderer who was now a missionary and “they glorified God because of me.”

The gospel is the pleasure of man only because the gospel is the pleasure of God for the praise of God.

Remember, Paul always believed in God's predestining and electing love. That's what a Jew would think. But they would think that love was revealed by the law. The big shift is not that God saves, but how God saves. The revelation of salvation is in Christ and Christ alone.

This is our next point: God's pleasure **Frees us in Christ**.

Here, Paul transitions into how his gospel was both affirmed and vindicated before influential believers in Jerusalem. Before I read this passage, I want you to pay attention to how many times Paul talks about how people looked. He talks of many influential looking people—and remember he's being accused of wanting to be a people pleaser.

But whatever Paul believed about Jesus—it finally freed him from what people thought. He submitted himself to examination, even though he didn't need it, because he knew the truth he had in Jesus. He firmly stood up against people who challenged him, he didn't compromise and try to make everyone happy with him. Instead, knowing what truly brings us pleasure—Paul surrendered his own rights and his own freedoms so that we might know the freedom that comes only in Jesus Christ.

Notice what follows: **Galatians 2:1-5**, "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you."

Here, the issue at the heart of Paul's letter is finally addressed with clarity. The false teachers in Galatia were arguing that in order for Gentiles to truly be converted to Christianity they had to believe in Jesus and they had to take on the Jewish customs of the Old Testament Law. Central to that was the circumcision of male converts.

Now, Paul at times did submit himself to Jewish customs. Timothy, who was an uncircumcised Gentile did accept circumcision. Both of them did so under no obligation. Why? Because they were free in Christ to do so. Timothy knew circumcision didn't save him—he just wanted to be with the Jews he wanted to preach Christ to.

But the tension that comes up in this Jerusalem story is that Paul brought Titus, an uncircumcised Greek Christian, with him and they did not require him to be circumcised. Why is that? Paul gives two reasons.

Reason #1: The influential Apostles in Jerusalem agreed with Paul and Titus that free grace by faith in Jesus alone freed him from the law. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone was vindicated by the Apostles.

Paul humbled himself, though he didn't need to. He went to Jerusalem, though he didn't need to. And was affirmed by the Apostles, though he didn't need to. He got what he wanted did he not? If he just wanted his own affirmation before men he could have dipped out and avoided this confrontation that followed but he didn't? Why?

Reason #2: Because Paul knew walking away meant freedom for him—but slavery for you. Paul stayed, and Paul put up with more conflict and tension because false brothers remained in Jerusalem with a desire to cause others to fall away from Christ back into slavery.

Did you see that? **Galatians 2:4-5**, They were false brothers (psuedo-adelphos), they were secretly brought in, they slipped in, they spied out and they did so with a purpose. What was the purpose? To bring us back into slavery.

Paul could have left vindicated and untarnished. But he stayed. Why? Because these false brothers had one thing in their crosshairs: “the freedom we have in Christ.”

These men knew that if the Gentiles could follow Jesus without circumcision—the fruit of freedom in Christ, then their own circumcision meant nothing and they were therefore enslaved. But instead of turning to Christ to receive that salvation, they attempted instead to strong arm others into affirming their own understanding of salvation.

Misery loves company. The world is fine with you following Jesus as long as you aren’t free from what they think saves them. Worship Jesus but spend your money on what we spend our money on. Believe in Jesus but don’t live so differently that I feel weird around you.

When that happens, we all lapse back into people pleasing. The world, your friends, your co-workers try to call you back into “true freedom,” which for them is always life without Christ. But in doing so, they serve only themselves. But Paul stands his ground and takes his licks not for his freedom, not for his joy, but for yours.

“To them we did not yield even from a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” Because salvation is the center of the Father’s affection, Jesus must be at the center of the church’s attention. Paul would not allow himself to be justified in his faith while other believers might be tempted to fall away from the justification we have in Christ and Christ alone.

Salvation in Christ is like Teflon from the grease and grime of worldly salvation. If we really believe Jesus saves, we use other things but we put no hope for satisfaction or salvation in those other things. My question for you might be, where might you be lapsing into slavery? Claiming Christ by faith, but claiming freedom in something else.

Also, to my fellow church members, I would have you see fellow believers with the same care Paul did here. He knew that even believers are able to be influenced into moments of slavery. Behind the sins and the pleasures of your fellow members is what they really believe they have in Jesus. Are you willing to give up some of your schedule, your relational capital, your free time and your comfort to help others believe and stand in that freedom? Paul had freedom in Christ to say, but when it came to helping the church stand doctrinally, and live freely in Christ he counted everything as loss and said, “My Pleasure” to helping others stand in him.

God’s pleasure is what saved Paul. God’s pleasure in Christ is what freed the Christians to stand firm in the faith that saved them. And it’s God’s pleasure in Christ which holds the promise to save others too—and that leads us to our final point this morning: God’s pleasure **Sends Us With Christ**.

Look at this: **Galatians 2:7-10**, “On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he

who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."

The influential men in Jerusalem not only affirmed the content of Paul's message—but they affirmed the legitimacy of Paul's evangelistic ministry.

What qualifies men for ministry? What makes someone worth listening to? Is it how influential they seem? Is it their ability to work a room and draw a crowd? Is it their level of training?

Well, we see that answered immediately in our text don't we? As soon as they heard Paul had the right message, they affirmed his apostolic ministry. Paul was an outsider, he came from a background of murdering Christians, and yet so quickly these men say, "Yeah, you're good." Why? Well, remember what Paul said in verse 6? **Galatians 2:6**, "What they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality."

Paul is here talking about the Apostles. And he says, "What they were makes no difference." Why does he say that? Because these Apostles were lowly tradesmen and fishermen. If anyone should have been seen as able to affirm or address matters of theology it should have been the theologically trained Paul.

But neither Paul's background of murder nor the other Apostle's background of the mundane meant anything. Why? Because God saved them. And Jesus made them Apostles. That's the word Paul used in verse 7. Jesus taught it to them. Jesus filled them with the Holy Spirit. And what these men recognized is that Paul had been entrusted by the same Jesus with the same gospel, and that unique call was the mark of an Apostle. And for us today, that same gospel is the mark of any gospel minister.

Ministry lies inside a message. And that message moves us towards others. If Jesus saved murdering Paul, he can save you. If Jesus saved reactive Peter, he can save you. If Jesus saved his unbelieving brother James, he can save you.

If you wonder if you are able to communicate the gospel that saves—look at what saved you! You're not calling them to believe anything other than what you believed!

If you wonder if your gospel message might be able to save others---look at what saved you! You were not more deserving nor more "righteous" than others. You were saved because it was God's pleasure to reveal to you Christ through someone else's faithful evangelism. And if God saved you with the message of Christ, he'll save others. Why? Because it's God's pleasure.

And when we have received God's pleasure, our pleasures change. We make it our pleasure to help others stand in the freedom we have in Christ because all we have is Christ. We make it our pleasure to help those who have never seen Christ see Christ, because it is our pleasure to love others by seeking their eternal joy and eternal good.

The world might find you weird as you live this way. They might wonder why you're willing to get up early and drive to a theme park only to freely give away something at no benefit to yourself. And when that tension rises up we say, "My pleasure."

