

The Way to Life

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Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 00] chapter 3 verses 10 to 14. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse as it is written. Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God because the righteous will live by faith. The law is not based on faith. On the contrary it says the person who does these things will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written. Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. This is the word of the Lord.

Cool. Good evening St. Silas. What a joy to be with you guys this evening. My name is James. I'm on the staff team here and it's a well done for making it here through the rain. Give yourselves a pat on the back.

Well done everyone there. This is a great passage isn't it? I hope your hearts were warmed as you heard that read. It's got some tricky bits but hopefully you should be encouraged. I'm going to pray for us and then we're going to hear from God's word. So dear Father we come to you as people who are in desperate need. We need the offer of life that you give us. Please speak to us now so that we can see clearly that in your Son the curse of your judgment has been lifted and that we can be right with you simply by believing and hearing. Amen. Amen. There's a service outline there. Do look at that.

There's some helpful definitions of some tricky words if it helps to make it clearer for you at the bottom there. And I wonder do you feel cursed? I wonder have you ever felt cursed in life? Do you feel that your life is under a curse? Do you feel that you are at odds with God and his world? Do you feel dissatisfied with life? Do even the very best moments of life feel empty and dull and devoid of beauty and happiness? Do you feel that no matter what you do God has got it in for you and you can't make him happy and you can't be right with him? Well growing up in South Africa the curse business is big business.

[2 : 40] So we call witch doctors there we call them sangormas and you can always tell where the witch doctor is living because they're living in the biggest house wherever you go. And this is some of the things they promise. All troubled marriages will be fixed. All court cases will be fixed.

Lost lovers and friends will be restored. Bad luck? Don't worry about that. Bad debts. Whatever the curse is the witch doctor will fix. And as superstitious culture people would go to them to have their problems and their curses fixed. And we might joke about it. It seems a bit jokey but I wonder if there's a bit of this in Glasgow too this evening. You see as people have given up on religion and given up on Jesus it's not that they have gone to believe in nothing but that they've gone to believe in everything. They've gone to believe everything and become very superstitious. So I was chatting to a friend about this and they were saying how they went on a Christian retreat in Scotland and they're walking down the street with a bunch of their friends and a friendly local started chatting to them.

And when the local found out that they were on a Christian retreat he offered them a cheery curse as you would. He was against the gospel and he was very superstitious. And this evening we're back in Paul's letter to the Galatians and we may have read this language of curse and blessing and law and all those bits there and wondered what on earth what's going on here? What is the relevance of this passage to me? But it's a passage that is incredibly relevant to us as it speaks about something that we all might feel of being under a curse of being at odds with God and at odds with his world. And this passage is going to tell us how the reason for that curse and more importantly how we can be at be right with God and have that curse lifted. We can have total confidence and assurance as we go to him. We can be alive for the first time.

We can find out what it is to live life. Just look down at verse 11 in your reading. See what he says there? Paul writes, the righteous will live. Verse 12, the person who does these things, they will live by them.

It's an offer of life. And the context of Galatians is that Paul, the apostle, he met the risen Lord Jesus.

[5 : 22] He's writing to a church in an area called Galatia in what is southern Turkey today. And he and his message of good news about Jesus, the gospel, is being under attack from false teachers. And what they were saying that Paul's gospel, his gospel of being right with God simply by faith alone is not enough.

These teachers were saying it's a Diet Coke gospel. And what you really want is you want the real thing and you must rather listen to them rather than Paul. And they were saying you are saved, yes, by faith in Jesus. But to that you must add works of the law. And that is the religious things that those people of those days did to be right with God. The things that the Jewish people did to be right with God.

And so in the first half of chapter 3 of Galatians we see two sets of people. Two sets who live according to two different gospels. So last week we looked at those of the law. Those people who followed the law. And that came up in verse 7 and verse 9. And they place their confidence, yes, in Jesus, but also in the things they do. The works of the law. Do those and then you'll be right with God. And in this passage tonight we see a different set of people introduced. And that is those of faith who are simply right with God on the basis of their faith, their trust and belief in Jesus. They hear the gospel and they believe the gospel. And so what we're going to do is we're going to look at these two groups of people tonight and our points on the sheet there. So the first point there is the end of those of the law. Those who are of the law. The curse remains on them.

We see this point very clearly in verse 10. It's very clear, isn't it? That's why it's slightly shocking. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. And the curse here is not some voodoo spell.

[7 : 42] It's not a superstitious belief like we might see in Glasgow. But it's a good God's settled anger at those who have rejected him by not listening to and obeying his laws as he has set them out in the books, in the book of the law, in the Old Testament. And so verse 10 he goes on, as it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. The curse here, it's carefully measured and pronounced. It's clearly warned against in the Old Testament, in the scriptures. Paul quotes from the law, from the very beginning of the Bible, from the first five books of the law. And he quotes from that law and he says that the consequences of disobedience of God's law are that we come under his curse. But likewise, if on the other hand we keep on going and obey the law perfectly, then we will be blessed.

But what's important to note here is that disobedience to God's law is a disobedience, not simply to his law, but who he is. It's a disobedience to God. You cannot separate God's law out from who he is. What he says is who he is. You can't separate them out. If you say no to the one, you say no to him. If you break the one, you're rejecting the one who spoke those laws.

And so, well, you might sit there and thinking, well, all this business of law, what is this to me tonight in Glasgow? Well, we might not listen to an old set of laws in the Old Testament, but we do have God's creation around us. You might go up to the highlands and you see it's beautiful and it speaks of a good God who made the world. You might see a beautiful sunrise, a beautiful mountain.

You might also have a conscience, a conscience that points you on how to live in a way that is right, that is pleasing. And you might set up your own definition of what it is to be right in your own conscience. You might think, that's who I am and I'm going to live according to my conscience and that's the way that I'm right. And when we fail to do those things, then in effect, we're breaking a law to ourselves. And so what Paul is saying here is that if you try to be God, to try to be right with God on the basis of the things you do, whether those religious laws, the things that the Old Testament people were required to do, or on the basis of your own conscience, or if you simply say no to God, if you look at his creation and say, I can't be bothered, then you're under a curse. Even if you do it in the very smallest of fashions. It's like maybe you get a job and you get given the work contract and it's got all the hours and everything, and you try your best to do everything in the contract. But if you break one little iota in that contract, you're out, you're fired. You're under a curse. You've lost your job. If you don't keep every single bit of that contract, then you'll be fired and you'll lose your job.

And Paul says that even if we break the smallest rule, you've broken all of it, everything written in it.

Every jot, every iota, every dot of the pen. And I think sometimes when it comes to living God's way, we think so long as we're making the attempt, then God will accept us. So long as we make the effort, then God will do the rest. And the people that God does not accept are really those who aren't bothered at all. The ones who are obviously out. Those are the ones that God are against. Those are the ones on whom God's curse rests. But Paul says here that if you try and be right with God on the basis of your own efforts, then it doesn't matter whether you've made an attempt or not. The question is, have you kept those efforts perfectly? Have you kept God's law perfectly? Have you obeyed your conscience perfectly? Have you acted on what little you might know about God from his creation about you perfectly? And when we don't, we break God's law, even the smallest thing.

So think about, you go home and you know there's something you should be doing, something good, but you're sitting on the couch and it's comfortable and you press play to another, you just let the Netflix episode roll over to the next episode and the next one, whatever the show is. Friends, I don't know what your favorite show is. Or we think about when we know we should phone our parents, but we don't, and we only phone our parents when we want to get money from them, because it's the end of the month. Or we think of that person who pulls out in traffic in front of us as we're driving and we inwardly shout, moron, that's a bad thing to do, then we know that's a wrong thing to do.

[13:11] And so we break God's law when we do that. We think about when we leave that teabag on the counter in our flat at home. That annoys our flatmates. It's not a loving thing to do. We are under God's curse for doing that. Those are silly examples, but they are true nonetheless. Then we break God's law. And so Paul, he rightfully comes to his conclusion in verse 11. Just look what he says.

It's clear as black and white. Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God. Clearly, obviously, beyond dispute. It's beyond question. It's as clear as day. You can't be justified. You can't be, literally, you can't be rightified. You can't be right with God by relying on your own efforts, on your own good works, your own listening to your conscience, or trying to do the right thing, or keeping God's laws perfectly. Every standard we set up for ourselves, we fail at. I wonder, put up your hand if you made a New Year's resolution this year. It's just me, right? So maybe, first, so I made this New Year's resolution. I was going to do a four-mile run out past the vet school. I lived near the vet school, around the vet school, back through Dawes Home Park.

First of January, brilliant. Second of January, I walked halfway, and then I walked back. And the third of January, I slept in. And that was my New Year's resolution done completely. But then Paul says, that's the very point of it. You will not keep the law. Even the Old Testament, even the Old Testament, even the law thinks that you won't do it. You can't be right with God by what you do. And so he quotes from the prophets, which are sometimes included in the law, to make this point, to give the law's opinion of your ability to do that. So just look down there, verse 11 there. The righteous will live by faith. Those who are right with God will live by faith. And having just said that those of the law who try to be right by keeping the law will live under a curse, now he says that those who are right with God, those ones, they will live simply by faith. And live here, he means they will be given life.

They'll be given blessings. They'll be blessed. They'll have life to the full. In John's gospel, some of the students looked at it. John 17, verse 3, Jesus gives a definition of life. And he calls it eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they will know the only true God and Jesus Christ who is sent. And secondly, by life there, he means that living by faith will be their rule of life, the thing that they'll do naturally, instinctively, day by day. Rather than lots of little rules, they'll live by one rule, simply trust and obedience. Trust in God. When things go wrong in their exams, they'll trust Jesus. When they don't get the job they want, they'll trust Jesus. When they crash their car, they will trust Jesus. When they have a terrible relationship breakdown, they will trust Jesus.

By faith, by simply having ears to hear and a heart to believe, by knowing that Jesus loves them and died for them. And by believing that. So I wonder if you're like me, you've got two sets of friends.

[16:54] You've got some friends who are incredibly, they love rules and they make rules for everything. But it doesn't make them be any more relaxed in life. They just get more anxious about those little rules.

Everything seems to be a slog to keep those rules. Then other friends will face the most horrendous circumstances in life, most horrendous hardships.

But because they trust Jesus, they simply endure. And you might talk about those stories later of trusting Jesus in hard times.

And then he clarifies, just in case you missed the point, that living by law and living by faith, that those people of law and those of faith, they are polar opposites.

You can't mix them at all. So just look down at verse 12 there. He says, the law is not based on faith, in case you missed this. On the contrary, it says, the person who does these things will live by them.

[17 : 56] And the problem for the Galatians is that they were saying, yes, they were trying to mix those things. They were saying, yes, you're right by faith in Jesus' death, but not entirely.

That is, a person needs to add onto their faith, their faith in Jesus, the works of the law to be right with God, the good things that they do.

But Paul says, no. Trying to be right with God by faith, plus your own efforts, or self-righteously, is absolutely impossible.

It's like trying to mix oil and water. It's simply not going to happen ever. And I think this is something that lots of us here tonight might struggle with.

I gather the Galatians are a lot like us, very respectable. They may have, you might be someone here tonight who's grown up in a Christian household. And that's a great blessing, something to be rejoiced in.

[18 : 58] And you really pride yourself on your record of obedience that you've kept, and your good standards, and your good morals. Or you might pride yourself on your your preciseness in using the Bible.

You might think I'm a very good Bible handler, and that's the thing that I'm placing my confidence in. Or you might place your confidence in your privileged and good education.

I've got a great education, top education, and that's where my confidence is. And you might be like the Galatians. You say, yes, you need faith to be a Christian, but if you really want to be a victorious Christian, then you must do what I do and add onto your faith these excellent virtues that I have, these great track records that I have.

And the upshot of this is that when you try to do that, you crush yourself when you can't meet your own standards. And you're riddled with anxiety in trying to meet those standards and the standards of your friends around you.

It becomes crushing. And what's more is you exclude others from becoming Christians because you believe that the gospel is faith plus meeting your standards rather simply than by hearing and believing in Jesus.

[20 : 24] And so just to make it absolutely clear, Paul nails his clear points right in the middle of those two clauses there. He flags it up. The righteous, those who are right with God, will live by faith.

They will live by faith alone. Well, to understand how this is and why this is, we are now going to go and look at those of faith, the second group of people that he looks at in this section.

And this is our second point of the sheet. The end of those of faith, the cursed removed. And what we see here is that the curse remains because we are unable to receive the blessings through obedience.

And instead, we bring on a curse on ourselves through our own disobedience to God. We don't live the way that God wants us to. And so to be right with God, we need to have that curse taken away from us.

So just look down at verse 13, what he says there. It's very important. Just look. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. And redeem there, it's simply an old-fashioned word that means to buy back, to pay the price that the penalty demands, to rescue at a cross.

[21 : 41] So maybe if you've driven and you've got a speeding ticket recently and you can redeem your good driving record by doing a speed awareness course and you won't get the points on your license.

It's as if you never spared. Or maybe at times are hard, it's the end of the month and you take your precious jewelry down to the local goldsmith or pawn shop and you give them your jewelry and they give you your money and the start of the next month, you can go back and you can go buy back

those heirlooms that you wanted for a set price.

But how does Christ redeem us from the curse? Well, verse 13, look there. By becoming a curse for us. And the key word there is for us.

For us. That is, in our place, on our behalf. Christ, even though He was perfect, Jesus, and always lived a perfect life, in perfect relationship with God His Father, He took our place and in doing so, He took the curse that was rightfully ours and He removed that curse by becoming a curse for us. He became a curse for us. I recently read this news article about, it's quite a sad story actually, about a girl called Rebecca. Rebecca Townsend.

[23 : 05] There's a picture of her. She made a bucket list. Some of us make bucket lists. And number one was go to Spain. She grew up in America. Number two was kiss someone in the rain. And that's the kind of thing that you might put on a bucket list.

And then number three, she put on it, save someone's life. And that's exactly what she did. A bus was coming down the street and her friend Benjamin was in the road.

And she pushed Benjamin out the way and took the full impact of the bus. But in doing so, she lost her life doing that. Very young, barely out of her teens.

And it's not a perfect example. But she took the impact for her friend Benjamin. And the reason that Jesus has become a curse for us, we see in His manner of death, the way that He died.

So just look at verse 13. It continues there. Cursed is everyone who hung on a pole. And a pole, there could be a tree or it could be a cross.

[24 : 11] And Paul quotes here from the Old Testament to prove from the way that Jesus died that He had become a curse for us. You see, being hung on a pole or a tree in the Old Testament was a manner of execution reserved for the worst of people, the worst of criminals.

We don't execute people in Scotland today. But by saying that He died on a cross was like saying He had gone to the electric chair.

He had suffered a lethal injection. And it was a sign that you were judged by men and by God. You were under a curse.

You were a bad person who'd got your ends, your just desserts. It was the right punishment for a terrible crime you had committed.

And the punishment was death. And only death could wipe away the record of that crime. And so Jesus, even though He was completely innocent, He dies on the cross and becomes cursed for us in our place.

[25 : 23] But to what end does Christ remove the curse? What is the purpose of Christ removing the curse? Well, Christ redeems us. He rescues us to be blessed.

And the first thing that we see is that Christ removes the curse that we might be blessed. That's a good thing. Verse 14, He redeemed us in order, the reason for, that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

Paul couldn't be absolutely clear here. A Gentile here is anyone who is non-Jewish. Jesus died that the blessing given to Abraham, that you could be right with God simply by believing God.

You could have relationship with God. and that that blessing would come to all people all over the world. It was a death for all people everywhere.

And the point of the gospel is that God has sent His Son to die and to lift that curse and to bring blessing to all people of whatever background they are, wherever they're from.

[26 : 35] And we shouldn't hinder that in any way. That's fantastic news. We've got folk from all over the world here today. And that's brilliant. Jesus died for you. That's the reason that He redeemed us from the curse.

All you need is ears to hear and a heart to trust and you can be right with God. And the second reason that we see is that Christ redeems us that we might be spirit-filled.

Christ redeems us to be spirit-filled. And this is where Paul's argument is going to land that though we cannot be right with God through obedience to the law, in chapter 5, verse 5, we looked at this last week, for through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope, the right standing before God that we want.

But through the Spirit, by faith in Christ, Jesus is a redeeming death on the cross for us. We can be right with God. And so Christ rescues us, He redeems us that we might be filled with the Spirit.

That is, the third person of the Trinity, God's Holy Spirit comes and lives within us so that we can approach God with perfect confidence and perfect assurance.

[27 : 54] And we don't need to be wondering whether we've met the standard, whether we have to do something else. We can know that we're right with God because God lives within us by His Spirit.

And Jesus' perfect record becomes our record. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus' life through His Spirit within us.

Well, as we come into land, this passage really couldn't be any clearer. Before us, there are two paths represented by two groups of people, those of the law and those of the faith.

And which path might you take? Which path would you take? Which people are you a part of? Will you try to be like those of the law? You are trying to be right with God on the basis of your own efforts and abilities to be right with God on how you've lived your life?

or will you be like those of faith who trust in Jesus and His redeeming death entirely to be right with God? And in doing so, have the curse removed and have God's Spirit living within them.

[29 : 12] Open to everyone wherever they are throughout the world. All you need is ears to hear and a heart to believe. And you can be right with God and enjoy intimate relationship with Him.

I've got two friends. One friend called Johnny. And Johnny was a big, big lad. And he was a bad man. He was a really bad person. I knew it.

Johnny knew it. And Johnny knew I was a Christian and he'd regularly say to me, I'm a bad man. I need a rescue. I'm not a fixer job.

I need to be rescued. But I have another friend and that's called Frank. And Frank would say, I'm not so bad. I have a good job. I listen to podcasts.

If more people in the world were like me, then the world would be a better place. And Paul says, you don't need more people like you.

[30 : 09] You need a rescue. You need to be like Johnny and put your hands up and admit that you need a rescue. If you are ever going to be right with God at all.

Let me close in a word of prayer. So Father, we thank you so much that we can be right with you simply by hearing the gospel, simply by having ears to hear and a heart to trust.

Please help us not to add on to the gospel anything that we might want to, anything that we might pride ourselves in. Let us give thanks for those things, but let us not take pride in them, Father.

Let us boast and rejoice in Jesus always. Let us live lives of faith always. Let us trust in him more and more each day.

In Jesus' name. Amen.