

Topical Message
God's Heart: The Gospel
Pastor Leitu

KAPONO: Would you join me in a word of prayer? Lord, thank You so much, Lord. Thank You for this time, Lord. Thank You for the victory that we have in You, Jesus. Lord, during this time, would You please empower us, Lord, during the holiday season, Lord?

May we not be ashamed to speak, to share, to say Your name, Lord. So many opportunities come about as we gather with family and friends, Lord. Let us not waste one precious moment. Thank you for this time together, Lord.

Would You bless Pastor Leitu, Lord, as he stands before us this evening, through Your strength, delivering this, Your word at Your church, Lord? Would You speak to us? We thank You so much for this time together. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

PASTOR LEITU: Amen. Amen and amen. Aloha!

[Congregation says, "Aloha!"]

Oh, you guys are still sleeping this afternoon. Aloha!

[Congregation says, "Aloha!"]

PASTOR LEITU: Amen. For you here, we want to welcome you to Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, and our Thursday night Bible study. I pray that you had a blessed Christmas. Amen. On behalf of Pastor JD Farag, Happy New Year!

[Congregation says, "Happy New Year!"]

PASTOR LEITU: I know it's Monday, but we start early. We have two services on Sundays, 8:30 and 10:45. Our 8:30 service is our Prophecy Update when Pastor JD comes back. Our 10:45 service we're going through the New Testament verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, line-by-line. We have our midweek study on Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. here in the Sanctuary.

On Thursday nights, we're going through the Old Testament. Pastor JD — except tonight — Pastor JD is on staycation, spending time with his family. Please keep him in prayer for strength for him and his family as well. Don't forget to pray for his wife, Kellie, who's on a bed of suffering as she's healing from cancer. Pastor JD will be back in the pulpit and leading us in prayer on January 9th at 7:00 p.m., which is a Tuesday here in the sanctuary. And we hope that you'll join us.

Tonight I'll be teaching in the Book of Galatians, which is the New Testament. We'll start in *Chapter 1:8*. I've titled this message, 'God's Heart: the Gospel.'

Before we start, let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we come before Your throne this evening, Lord. Thank You, Lord, for Your word. Lord, we love Your word. It teaches us. It corrects us. Lord, we are blessed by Your word, Lord.

And we thank You, Lord, for Your Son, Jesus. We never forget the cross Lord. And we always acknowledge our sin, Lord. And we're so sorry that You had to initiate the cross and send Your Son. And that Jesus, You had to give Your life and take all that pain and shame for us. We thank You that we're saved and we're heaven bound, Lord. We thank You, Holy Spirit, that You're in us leading and guiding our lives, Lord.

So we come before You tonight and ask that You will lead us. Speak to our hearts tonight by the power of Your Holy Spirit. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Last week we saw Paul the apostle defending his ministry. He's battling these Judaizers who are trying to discredit him. We also see the Judaizers question the legitimacy of the gospel. These Judaizers, they are Jews who converted to Judaism. They believed in Jesus but wanted to insert aspects of Judaism. They wanted the laws and traditions of Judaism to cross over. They wanted Judaism to be married with Christianity.

The Judaizers were false teachers, spreading a false gospel. Many of their own agendas — they had their own agendas to distort the truth. Yes, they believed in Jesus and converted to Christianity, but they had difficulty believing that Jesus could save. Yet they wrestled in their minds that Jesus was only enough. They couldn't wrap their mind around this simple truth. They believed in good works or mitzvahs, as the Jews would say, and good behavior. And that's how you're made right with God, and that's how you would enter heaven, in their minds.

The Jews' goal was to be a good person and to follow the rules. So the Judaizers pervert the gospel message with a lie. They stumbled many of the Galatian believers. New believers are leaving the church because of these men.

So Paul kept sharing the gospel, and Galatians were getting saved. People believed in Jesus for the salvation of their souls. They learned the truth of how God would save them. There was a joy and peace that came over them. People put their faith in the Savior, and their lives were changed. Their outlook utterly changed as God was now on their throne. They learned to let go and to trust God for everything in their lives.

Galatians Chapter 1:8-9 tells us, **“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.”**

Paul the Apostle is bold, and he used a strong language. It needed to be, as those opposing him were causing much harm in the church. Paul warns them that it's not him they're fighting, but they're confronting God, that there's a curse on those who stumble God's people.

Still, their issue with Paul continued, and they're leading people away from Jesus to a false belief. It's a belief system that can't save or give anyone eternal life. It's a crime in heaven that will have dire consequences. Not even the angels in heaven dared to do what these Judaizers were doing. And so Jesus foretells the future condition in Scripture.

He tells us in *Matthew Chapter 24:10-13*; he says, **“And many will turn away from Me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. [Verse 12] Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”**

Paul the apostle: He had a great love for his Jewish brothers. Though so many rejected Jesus, Paul will keep trying. Paul's heart and love for his fellow Jews was deep. He would sacrifice and give his life to see them saved. Paul knew the consequences of inserting error into God's gospel. His fellow Jews were trying to add to God's word. He sees the Galatians being led astray, and it hurts his heart. It hurts him because his Jewish brothers are stumbling them, guys that he went to — guys that he went to college with, guys that he grew up with, guys that he went to synagogue with.

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We see Paul's heart for his Jewish brothers in *Romans*, the *Book of Romans Chapter 9:2-5*, **“My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed— cut off from Christ!— if that would save them.”**

You know, the Galatian church was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Paul's love for the Galatians moved him to speak out, to speak out the truth to his Jewish brethren: Your actions, you Judaizers, my fellow brethren, will bring a curse from the Lord upon you.

And as you look back at the Old Testament scriptures, salvation from the beginning has always been by faith. The Lord revealed it to us with Abraham in the Old Testament. God tells Abraham that he will be a blessing to all nations. His faith and salvation was a catalyst for the world to be saved.

In *Genesis Chapter 12:1-3* tells us, **“Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse those who curse you; and in you [Abraham or Abram] all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

The blessed are all those throughout history who believe, many of us here in this room and many of you online. So many people have been saved the same way by faith, by believing.

We see that three chapters later in *Genesis Chapter 15:2-6*. Moses tells us, **“But Abram replied, 'O Sovereign Lord, what good are all Your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since You've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.'**

Then He brought him outside [God, bringing Abraham outside] and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He [God] accounted it to him for righteousness.”

Abraham believed in the Lord, and so he was accounted righteous. The Hebrew word for "righteousness" means "rightly clothed," clothed. Abraham was rightly clothed with God's righteousness, not his own. At that point, he was saved by God's imputed righteousness. "Impute" means "to give," "to send over to.”

So God imputes His righteousness unto Abraham, and then Abraham is saved, the same thing as with Jesus. Jesus imputes His righteousness when we put our faith in Him, and we're saved. At that point, he was saved by God's imputed righteousness. He became the father of those throughout history who believed. That includes believers in the Old Testament period, and that includes us in our day and future believers.

But now false teachers are leading people from the truth. They come with their deceptive doctrines. The Lord takes this seriously. And Paul relays God's message to these Judaizers, to his fellow brethren, fellow Jews. You will be accursed, he tells them.

2 Corinthians Chapter 11:13-15 tells us, **“These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves**

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as servants of righteousness. In the end, they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve."

So Paul in Corinth dealt with the same issues as he was dealing with in Galatia. Again, Judaizers and false prophets followed Paul everywhere he went. Some were frauds who were in ministry just for the money. God knows and He sees, and their day is coming.

2 Peter Chapter 2:1-3 tells us, **"But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil teachings and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. In their greed, they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed."**

You know, here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe— I can't even speak English. We here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, we never talk about money. The only time that we talk about money is we're in a place in Scripture where God talks about money. And if you know we teach verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book through the entirety of God's word. And so we only come, and we only speak about money when we're in that place in God's word where He wants us to speak. But it seemed that I had permission from the Lord to share tonight about money.

I wanted to share with you that Paul realized — that Paul had a great heart for God, how Paul always wanted to please the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't in ministry for money, as people would gossip. I also wanted to share Pastor JD's heart about money. We don't take an offering here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, as many of you know.

Paul was a man with a great calling from God. He truly loved our Lord. He truly cared for the people that he ministered to and that he led. He never wanted money from people that he had served. He never wanted money to be an issue for people. Money wasn't a high priority in Paul's ministry nor his life. Instead, he worked at tentmaking wherever he went.

In Acts Chapter 18:1-3, **"Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was."**

He wanted never — speaking of Paul — to be an accusation against him, that there would be no complaint against his ministry. He already experienced that kind of ministry as a Pharisee. He saw the greed that existed even in God's temple. He didn't want money to be a stumbling block for God's people.

So wherever he went, he would work with his hands, making tents. He simply wanted to the people to grow in the things of God. He wanted people to see the love and grace of Jesus Christ. He wanted people to see the kindness of God.

His prayer: That they would come to repentance. "Repentance," meaning "turn," turning from the way you are living, turn to God that He would change his life — change your life. His prayer was that they would come to repentance, and he especially wanted them saved.

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Paul wanted these things because he loved the Lord, and it was always in his heart to please God. He wanted people to see the Lord and surrender to Him. He didn't depend on man or the world for what he wanted for his provisions because he knew that God would always provide for him. Tentmaking was hard labor, and he worked with his hands.

But he also worked hard in the study of God's Word. He didn't want to make money from God's people. He loved God and people, and would not plead, or plea, or make a plea, or ask for money. In that, he could rest because he knew that he was a true servant of God.

I sat in service Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe 20 years ago. I had my money in my pocket. It was in my pocket because I was going to give it as an offering. I didn't hear the announcement that JD made about the Agape Box. I had no idea what an Agape Box was. I was waiting for the offering plate to be passed around. It was my first time at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, and the offering plate never came. I learned the next week where to put my offerings. And it was in a little metal, eight inch by six box called the Agape Box.

In 20 years here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, we have never asked for money. You will never hear Pastor JD ask for money in church, not from the pulpit, nor from the radio or TV ads that he's on. On KLHT Radio or Kalo TV, not once has he asked anyone for money. At the end of the radio programs and at the end of the TV programs, you will never hear us speaking about "Please support our ministry." That little Agape Box has been a blessing to our fellowship for all these years. Now we have two on the back walls, and that's where you can worship the Lord with your giving.

We've given free CDs, free DVDs to everyone who've asked. We never charged for Bibles or tracks that we give out. We never charge anything that the people have needed. We never charged for the exemption letters that we sent out. We've helped many who have come upon hard times. We're a giving church because you are a giving people and you online as well. You're a giving people because you honor God who gives. We're so grateful for your love and your kindness and generosity. And so on behalf of Pastor JD, thank you.

People see the money drives at other places of worship. Many of them have — many of — many of us have been to churches where money is top priority. The offering plate is passed around two or three times during the service. Each week, the pastor employs the church to give. People start to think that religion is all about money. They see too often the fleecing of God's people.

Paul didn't want money to turn people away from God. He didn't want any appearance of evil in his ministry. He honored the Lord and cared what God thought. Pastor JD wanted it that way from the beginning here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe. Like Paul, he didn't want money to be a stumbling block.

For you online, we still don't take an offering here in this church. There's nothing wrong with it, but we've never done it. And God has provided above and beyond anything that we could have imagined. We just trusted the Lord to provide for this ministry. God has honored that, and He has provided. Not only has He provided, but He has also blessed this ministry. I know that He will continue. I know that we will continue to honor God here in this place.

Pastor Chuck Smith, who I loved so very much, who I saw before he had passed away, he used to do 'How to Walk Conferences' here. And I loved him; he's the one who started the Calvary Chapel movement back in the '60s. He had this saying. He said, "Where God guides, God provides." As the Lord has guided Pastor JD's steps, He's also provided every need that the Lord willed for us to have.

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I love this passage in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. Solomon's the writer. Chapter 5:13-20 tells us, **"There is another serious problem I have seen under the sun. Hoarding riches harms the saver. Money is put into risky investments that turn sour, and everything is lost. In the end, there is nothing left to pass on to one's children.**

We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us. And this, too, is a very serious problem. People leave this world no better off than when they came. All their hard work is for nothing— like working for the wind. Throughout their lives, they live under a cloud— frustrated, discouraged, and angry.

[But then Solomon writes in verse 18] **Even so, I have noticed one thing, at least, that is good. It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life. And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life— this is indeed a gift from God. [Verse 20] God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past."**

You know, I just completed reading the *Book of Acts*. And yes, he was deceived, speaking of Paul, as a young Pharisee in Judaism before he got saved. But he was healed from his blindness, and he found Jesus. But there were so many verses in the *Book of Acts* — I just completed the *Book of Acts* today. There were so many verses that brought tears to my eyes because to see Paul's devotion to God and the beatings that he took at the hands of his brethren, his fellow Jews, men that he had even served with, served God with.

Everywhere he went good things started to happen to Paul. People were getting saved. And then he would start teaching them. But then the Judaizers would come in, stir up trouble. Judaizers challenged Paul, not only in Galatia but many other cities. They taught the destructive doctrine that could not save. They wanted to add to Judaism to the Gospel — they wanted to add to the Gospel — excuse me.

And many were in ministry just for profit. Many sought power and status in this newly formed church. But the Lord knows their true intentions, and He will repay them, and they will be accursed. *Galatians Chapter 1:10* tells us, **"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."**

Again, the critics of the Apostle Paul were getting louder. Paul, you're not qualified to be an apostle. Condemning him for the preaching, they said he was a false preacher preaching a false doctrine. They were calling him a man-pleaser. The New Living translation reads *verse 10* this way, **"Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant."**

Again, Paul's reply is strong and direct. I'm not serving the Lord to please people, especially those who oppose Jesus and the Gospel. I'm serving the Lord so people would accept Jesus and be saved. By believing and accepting Him, they would come into a relationship with God. I am a servant who loves my Lord, Paul would say. He also loved people. Paul would only try to please the people — Paul would not only try to please the people so that they would be saved. And that was his only intention.

1 Corinthians Chapter 10:33 tells us, **"I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. So I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved."**

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You know, Pastor JD, he adopted the name "pulpit-pounding Palestinian."

[Laughter]

You should have seen him in the old days. Over the years, I've seen the passion and the fire he possesses. He's aged, but the fire is still there. But he's mellowed out some. We all know of his boldness in sharing the Prophecy Updates. If he were a man-pleaser, most of those Updates would not air.

But God has used him in a very special way. As a result of his boldness and not fearing man, the online and local ministry is growing deep and wide, deep in the truth of God's word. People are growing deeper in their understanding of God, especially of God's word concerning prophecy.

More people attend our fellowship and watch online because God is leading them and bringing them. He brings them to a place where His word is rightly taught verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book. People are growing to love the Lord more and more. They're growing, and their understanding more about Him. Him. The Scriptures are expounded and explained, and they grow. God will bless those who rightly divide and rightly teach His word. So we continue to honor the Lord by teaching His word here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe.

Paul would write to the Thessalonian church in *Chapter 2:1-13*. **"You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. You know how badly we were treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare His Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know.**

[Paul would say] **And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! As for human praise, we never sought it from you or anyone else. [Verse 7 tells us] As apostles of Christ, we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.**

Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you. You yourselves are our witnesses— and so is God— that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers.

And you know that we treated each other, each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For He called you to share in His Kingdom and His glory.

Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received His message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God— which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe."

I want to encourage us today in our walk with the Lord. Don't let the fear of man be a snare or a trap for you in your life. Trust God and know that He'll be pleased when we step out.

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Proverbs Chapter 29:25, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe."

I want to share a short story. I shared with you last week that I was a longshoreman. And there was a drug problem on the waterfront. So they were sending — we had a group of us on the waterfront called Stevedores for Christ. We were men that got saved, and we had a small group of us on the waterfront that was sharing the Gospel wherever we went.

People were getting saved, not many, but then they brought in this drug rehab program. And they were saying on the news, proclaiming that this drug rehab program was actually helping these men, when it actually was us. The Lord's men, us, we as Christians, were sharing the gospel, and men's lives were changing. And so I went and spoke in front of the leadership with these people from the media there.

And my stomach was hurting. I was, I was nervous, and I was in fear. But the Lord by the power of His Holy Spirit gave me strength, and I shared. And after that my stomach hurt like nothing I ever felt before in my life. But the message came across. It was Jesus that were helping these men, not the drug rehab programs.

Galatians Chapter 1:11-12 tells us, **"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."**

Paul reminds the Galatians that this gospel is good news. It's good news because it didn't originate in the mind of man. Man had not taught him what he's teaching these Galatians. It was revealed to him by Jesus Christ. Jesus had brought this to him: first at Paul's salvation, then as he grew in the things of God, he remembered that all he had learned in Judaism, all the things that Gamaliel had taught him.

Paul now had a better understanding of God than his teacher, Gamaliel. Paul, his student, saw the true light of Jesus Christ. Gamaliel was still stuck on works salvation in Judaism. Paul's eyes were opened in what God was planning all along. He was born-again. The Holy Spirit was illuminating the truth to his life, his mind, and he realizes that Jesus is the Messiah. Just as God had His plan for creation, He had one for salvation. Jesus, His son, was involved in both.

John 1:1-5 tells us, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."**

In *John Chapter 1:1-3*, we see Father and Jesus were the givers of life. *Verse 4* describes Jesus as bringing light to mankind. We know that light is the light of salvation to mankind. He did this when He gave His life for us on the cross.

In *John Chapter 11:25-26*, Jesus said to her, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"**

In *John Chapter 8:12*, **"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.' "**

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The light of Jesus brings light to man — the light of Jesus brings light to mankind. But the true light is the light of salvation to those who follow Him.

Verse 5 tells us that the darkness cannot comprehend this light. The Judaizers were in darkness, and they couldn't understand grace. Grace was too hard for the legalistic mind to understand. To them, salvation was something needed to be worked for. It was something that had to be earned, not freely given. The Judaizers were doing the devil's work. They thought they were helping God out. They pulled people away from grace, back to a dead religion, back to formality, rituals, traditions, and a spiritual prison.

Paul's conversion sent a mighty powerful message. Many would be shocked at his transformation. Christians and non-believing Jews were astounded that this once persecutor of God's church was now a member or a follower of Jesus Christ. But it was God's plan for him all along and before he was born.

In *verse 13*, Paul describes his life before he met Jesus. *Verse 13 of Galatians Chapter 1*, **“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I [Paul] persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.”**

Paul, a zealous Pharisee and leader in Judaism, he went to Jerusalem hunting Christians. He believed that Jesus was a false teacher and an imposter. He thought that the followers belonged to a cult. He searched for followers of “The Way” to put them in prison. He also — he was also present at the killing of Christians as well.

We remember Stephen, the first martyr in the church. Stephen rebuked the same leaders who crucified Jesus. He criticized them for being exactly like their fathers before. They killed the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and many more prophets who spoke truth to the people of their idolatry and their sin. He even put the Savior Jesus Christ to death.

Luke was a doctor who wrote the *Books of Luke and Acts*. Luke also traveled with Paul. In the *Book of Acts*, he writes an account of Stephen, who was a mighty believer. This is Stephen just before the Jews stoned him, We see Saul just before his conversion and name changed to Paul.

Luke writes of what Stephen said in *Acts Chapter 7:51*. **“You stubborn people! [Stephen said, as he's speaking to the Jewish leaders] You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One— the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels.”**

So the Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand.

And he told them, **“Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!” Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him [At Stephen] and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit.”**

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[In verse 60 he says] He fell to his knees, shouting, 'Lord, don't charge them with this sin!' And with that, he died."

We learn in Acts that Stephen's accusers lied about him. Unjustly and wrongly accused, Stephen is murdered. Accusers laid their clothes at the feet of Saul. By laying their clothes at the feet of Saul, they received his approval. Saul is a young leader in Israel, and he allowed this stoning. He gave them the thumbs up for Stephen's death. Saul would later change his name to Paul. He was the Saul that was knocked off his high horse in the *Book of Acts*.

Paul had a salvation encounter with Jesus, and his life changed. Paul would later write one third of the New Testament Bible. But until then, he kept persecuting the church. He would seek the High Priests' permission to go to Damascus, where he would hunt more Christians and persecute them.

And we see that in the *Book of Acts*. But before Paul's — before Saul's conversion and name change to Paul, he must have had thoughts about these Christians. Their zeal and their love for God was unlike anything he experienced in Judaism. Many of the Christians that he arrested were bold. They weren't afraid. There was a boldness in these men even in the face of death.

He heard Stephen recall Israel's great history that we just read. Paul recognizes that Stephen knows that he's about to die, yet he's bold, and he continues his dialog against these evil rulers. Paul knew the Jews fabricated a lie about Stephen.

He hears Stephen's plea to God not to punish these evil men. Stephen doesn't want these men charged with his death. Paul also heard talk that Jesus did the same thing on the cross. And yet right before their deaths, Jesus and Stephen both ask God to forgive their executioners.

Jesus cried out in Luke, *Luke Chapter 23:34*, "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' And they divided His garments and cast lots."

These men were successful in their plot to murder Stephen, but we know their time of judgment will come unless they repent. For God sees and hates what evil men do. But God worked all things out for Stephen and Paul's good. Stephen is in heaven. And Paul wrote one third of the New Testament. Paul is now with the Lord as well. God works all things out for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. Amen.

***Galatians Chapter 1:14* tells us, "And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers."**

We know from last week that Paul studied under Gamaliel. Gamaliel was a rabbi and a Hebrew scholar. He was one of the most influential teachers in Judaism. Paul had it made as a Pharisee and a teacher in Israel. He could live with all the comforts that the world could offer him. He was respected. He was young, and he was one day headed to be a high priest. He was intelligent, and he was a ferocious reader.

Besides his dramatic — Aramaic language, excuse me, he spoke Greek, but he also spoke Hebrew. You know, there are so many man-made rules that bound men instead of setting them free to worship God in Judaism. You know, the best definition I ever heard of legalism is it's a set of rules that man made up that God never intended. In their relationship with Jesus, the Galatians were set free, set free from these legalistic, man-made rules, rules that didn't come from God.

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Believers were growing in the love and the grace of God. And Paul, he understands what these believers are experiencing. His heart breaks for them. He knows the Galatians and the Jews are doing — what they're doing, it can't save them. They're leaving the good news, and now they're headed for sad news.

In *Galatians Chapter 1:15-17*, and we'll end, **“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.”**

In *Galatians Chapter 1:1*, Paul knew that he was called to be an apostle. Now in *verse 16* he writes that God called him to reveal Jesus, that God would appoint Paul to preach to the Gentiles because the Gentiles despised God — the Gentiles — or the Jews despised the Gentiles, anyone who wasn't Jewish.

Abraham was at one time a Gentile himself. We should remember that before he was saved in *Genesis Chapter 15*, he was unsaved like the Gentiles. But Paul, now a convert to Christianity, is overwhelmed. He had a lot of questions in his mind, and he wanted answers. One moment he's a card-carrying tormentor of Christians; the next he's humbled and he's surrender to "The Way." He's surrendered to Jesus. The Holy Spirit came in Paul and saved him. And he felt it, and now he's born-again. And he's learning the truth. The truth of the Scriptures are finally making sense to him. Jesus is the Messiah.

I can relate to Paul and his conversion. Same thing happened to me. The scales fell from my eyes. 23 years ago my friend led me in a prayer to receive Jesus. My eyes were closed, but I felt the Holy Spirit's presence. I didn't know He came in to seal me, but I know that now today. Being sealed by the Holy Spirit means that you're under new ownership. You belong to God now.

I opened my eyes, and there was another light in that room after that prayer. It was bright, and there was another feeling that I had in me. I carried this weight of guilt around for so long. That's because of my sin. As I opened my eyes and I saw the light, that weight was gone. At that moment, I felt like I was already in heaven. I walked outside, and the sky was bluer, and the trees were greener, and my life has never been the same. I'm no longer an alcoholic. Today makes 23 years sober.

Although Paul has a new outlook on life and ministry, he's giving up a lot to convert to this new Christianity. He could have rested and lived the rest of his life in a lie, but that wasn't the character or makeup of Paul. He understood what would happen to him if he converted to Christianity. He would suffer at the hands of his brethren, the Pharisees. He would surely endure the same beatings that he himself had inflicted on so many people. He knew that he may even lose his life following Jesus. And he did.

God was calling, and there was no turning back from this calling. There's no turning back to the religion that he once admired. He sees that what he had learned in Judaism was only a part, only a part of what God was planning by sending His Son. But there's another part he's not seeing. He's not seeing the entirety of God's plan. God loves the world, even the Gentiles, not only the Jews. It's all coming together for him, and he wants to learn more.

So God sends him to Arabia to focus on His Son, Jesus, to recount all the scriptures of the Torah and other writings. He's a brilliant thinker. The Old Testament is before him, and God is revealing him the New Testament to him. He sees now that Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture. He's at peace in

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his mind, and he's amazed day after day as he's studying God's word and what Jesus is revealing to him, these truths. Paul sees and realizes what we do, what we know and realize, that God is good and so is Jesus Christ.

In *John 14:6*, **“Jesus said, I'm the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

I pray that if you're here in the sanctuary or listening online and you don't know Jesus and you're not saved, don't wait because the Bible tells us the time is soon. Time is short. Pastor JD called out to Jesus and asked Him to save him. No one shared the ABCs with Pastor JD. He just cried out and said, "Jesus, I don't want to go to hell."

If you're not saved and you want to be, just call out to Jesus. He'll hear you. Your life will change in ways you never could have imagined. You'll never be the same. For me, I'm still amazed daily. 23 years ago, an alcoholic, but today I'm a pastor. Only God! Amen! Let this year be truly a happy and blessed year for you. May God richly bless you.

Why don't we stand? Kaponono? Let's stand and let's pray.

Father in heaven, I come before Your throne today to thank You, Lord, for Your love and Your kindness. Lord, we never forget Jesus, Lord. We're sorry, Lord, that You had to initiate the cross because of our sin. People say that the Romans killed Jesus, the Jews killed Jesus, but it was us. It was our sin. So I come before You to thank You, Father. Thank You, Jesus.

Forgive us, Jesus, that You had to go through so much pain and shame on that cross. We come before You to acknowledge and to let You know that we love You with all our hearts and all our minds and all our soul. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit who's in us who believe and who leads and guides us daily in this life.

I pray for those who are going through hard times today, that you will look up and you will focus on Jesus. If you're being blessed today, God bless you. Amen. But if not, you're going through struggle, look to Jesus. I pray these things, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.