



Sermon Growth Guide

September 4, 2022
Keep Freedom Free



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Freedom - Keep Freedom Free

Galatians 2:1-10

Key Verse: : Galatians 2:4

“This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.”

Big Idea: We are bound by love for God and love for neighbor, and this frees us to make a bigger difference in the world than we ever imagined.

Foundations

As we come to this passage, Paul gives us a play-by-play of something that happened. He tells of how he went up to Jerusalem to meet with “pillars of the faith.” Paul went because a group of people were adding to the gospel, which of course is no gospel at all. These false brothers, or false believers, were saying yes you may enter our community, but first you must pay. We all have false brothers. We have all been false brothers.

But Jesus spilled a river of blood so that what is true of Him now becomes true of us. The good news that we are justified: literally, declared righteous, which rich Old Testament language that means we are in a right relationship with God. And we have received forgiveness, entering life in the family of God, entering the river or story of salvation, being transformed by God’s grace, living as a new creation.

We can see the personal redemptive activity of God within human history to shape His eternal purposes. In the receiving the free gift of grace Christ bought for us, we are now free to give our lives away.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Galatians 2:1-10.

Why is adding works to the gospel such a big deal to Paul?

What does “remembering the poor” have to do with freedom?

Applying God’s Word

False brothers seek to earn, but Paul is eager to serve. Where are you trying to earn the belonging we all crave? Beneath the cross of Jesus you belong, you are free to live and to love as you were made to all along. You are free to serve. Where in your life can you spend some attention cultivating eagerness instead of earning?

Witnessing God’s Word

Paul is eager to serve the poor. Host a discussion on how you have seen the Spirit cultivate eagerness. What might eagerness to serve the poor look like in your day-to-day life?

This river theme that goes with our **Freedom** series is so fun. The first week there were all these wooden fish in the river in the plaza and you could see the toddlers leave with pockets overflowing with these little wooden figures.

Hopefully they didn't clog any of your washing machines. And great video with the river that I'm ready to jump into. It's fun. Especially on Labor Day, there are rivers to wade in and float. Or I suppose you raft the rivers here, you don't float the rivers like in Texas, or however it works here in our mountainous rivers.

But all this river imagery makes me think of Mary. During Advent in a few months there will be a place to learn about a humble Mary, but this river image keeps me thinking of the song, "Proud Mary." Do you know the song? I'm most familiar with Tina Turner's version. You know the one, it starts slow and gets fast.

She "left a good job down in the city, Workin' for the man every night and day. We are rolling in the river. Big wheel keep on turnin' Proud Mary keep on burnin'. Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river." That is a proud Mary song, but Scripture holds a humble Mary song in the beginning of Luke.

You might be thinking, what does proud or humble Mary have to do with Galatians? Some of what happens in this letter we hold in our hands, in this letter written to the church in Galatia, is detailed in the Book of Acts, and Luke and Acts are meant to be one account. So, looking back to Luke/Acts can give us insight into Galatians. With me so far? The beginning of Luke can tell us something about this letter we read together. Listen to the story:

Luke opens with our humble Mary who has just found out she is pregnant with the Savior: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent

away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." (Luke 1:47-48; 51-55 ESV)

And Mary continues,

"...If you come down to the river bet you gonna find some people who live. You don't have to worry 'cause you have no money. People on the river are happy to give. Big wheel keep on turnin'. We're rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river."

Wait I'm getting Marys' songs mixed up. But I share these two Mary songs with you because I want to talk about the river. I want to talk about rollin' in the river as it hits the same cadence and flow of our humble Mary.

Mary's Song at the beginning of the New Testament tells of the continuation of Old Testament promises and introduces the work of the Spirit into the establishment of the early church. Now here's our river language: she sings of the promise that flowed from the garden and is flowing to the Eternal City, we are rolling on that river, friends. The river of God's salvation history. And there is freedom in this river.

You see, like Mary, God's salvation history is exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote Galatians. God has always been running after us with His freedom and anything short of that is slavery. The issue at hand for Paul, circumcision, but it can be anything we try to add to the gospel. But Paul will have none of it. Listen carefully.

Galatians 2:1-10: "Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a



Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

“As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.”

Paul is not merely reporting, he is building. He is trying to help us see something. Something has happened, something specific and important about salvation. Paul, who was made blind when confronted with the reality of Jesus, who when he believed the scales fell from his eyes, this person is inviting us to see something this morning.

We see Paul went up to Jerusalem. So we have our setting. What else do we see?

We see Paul is telling the story. We see he had two travel buddies, and one of them is not Jewish. We see Paul is with Peter (that's who Cephas is), James and John. Are they in John's house? Does John even have a house? Is it in the market? Well, we know it's private. Is it on a hill like the ones Jesus taught on? Is it in a synagogue? I don't know. It's not there.

We see Paul in Jerusalem here but early in Acts we saw Paul who was then Saul in Jerusalem at the stoning of Stephen.

Stephen gives a speech before the Sanhedrin, before the Jewish authorities, and tells of God's river of salvation, the big-picture plans of God, of how from the beginning God's great rescue plan for us to find freedom in life in him, and then the mob who was there reacted this way:

“At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.”
(Acts 7:57-58)

In our text here in Galatians we see Paul going back to where his plans were meant for evil when he was Saul. When he was Saul, he was in Jerusalem as a spy to freedom in Christ, and now as Paul, we see him go up again up to Jerusalem, because he knows the danger of spies.

This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. (Galatians 2:4)

You've seen in past weeks how when Paul met Jesus, Paul goes immediately to preach this gospel to the Gentiles. He went to share the good news with the Gentiles about this God who created the world and Paul shared about humanities great need for Jesus. We know that Paul preached to the Gentiles how the law was meant for our good, but we can't keep it. So what good is it to us? It condemns us.

And so in the fullness of time, God left his throne and entered into our river of time and lived the life we couldn't. He paid the cost of our sin, He won for us freedom found in Him. He spilled a river of blood so that what is true of Him



now becomes true of us. Good news that we are justified: literally, declared righteous, rich OT language, in right relationship with Him. And we have received forgiveness, entering life in the family of God, entering the river or story of salvation, being transformed by God's grace, living as a new creation.

But we see a group of false brothers have said, well, we have a slight variation.

"Yes Paul, that's great. And. And let's not forget about circumcision, the external sign of keeping of the law." And of course, Paul says, this is no minor variation. Jesus plus anything is completely other, a no-message, a lie about God.

We all have false brothers because of our broken world. We all have people that come to mind when we say false brothers—people spying on your freedom. And we have probably been those false brothers at times. We have a place in our souls where we still see the cracks from our broken state—where we seek control, seek to make the rules, seek to be zealous for the traditions of our fathers. We hand-craft our own idols in our heart.

And because of the idols in our heart, we can miss the heartbeat of Christianity. We are born false brothers. Like the brother in the prodigal son story who turns up his nose at the feast thrown for the prodigal brother welcomed home. "He hasn't done anything but squandered your money. What did he do to earn this feast?"

You see, God is after total freedom. We've done nothing to earn the feast. That's the whole point. He paid for it all. It's a great reversal.

When we trust in Jesus. Oh, the firm, true, free, generous arms of Jesus—what is true of Him becomes true of us. He is God the Son who is our brother, in whom we find true freedom. So much so as Paul later writes letters from prison, he says true freedom is found in Jesus

Christ. In Jesus broken hierarchies of belonging, human constructs of place, our fallen ways of not being able to see Jesus in the person right before us, can all be undone. We can live between the banks of loving God and loving neighbor in God's grand story of reversal. In His kingdom ways on this freedom river. We're rollin.

You can't earn it. You can't pay for it. To know that is a gift. The autocorrect grammar on my computer kept wanting me to take out the word "free" because free gift is redundant. Even Microsoft Word knows that.

Even Mary gets it and she's 12. This from the pregnant-out-of-wedlock Mary, a young Jewish girl who would culturally be on the fringes because of her gender, economic status, and now pregnant, knows the good news of salvation is not just for Jews, not just for a certain class, not just for a certain race, not just for a certain gender, it is good news for all people.

She knows the river better than we do. Great reversals, reversing effects of the fall and living as we were always meant to in union with God and each other is part of our freedom river. If we don't get this piece, we won't understand why Paul is so mad.

You see, the river is flowing toward freedom, slowly changing the landscape until the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. And change is hard.

Change is hard for all of us. But change, transformation, is part of that river life.

And Paul has false brothers who argue for the traditions of their fathers to win the day. False brothers who say, to enter the river you must observe a certain aspect of the law.

This is why Paul is so cranky. False brothers are saying it will cost you. You may enter but first you must pay. Have you been listening to the false brother in you? Do you still try and earn it?



Paul is astonished. We are astonished at how astonished Paul is. It's because these false brothers are adding to the gospel. There is Jesus, and. Trust in Jesus, and. And, and, and BUT we know if we add anything to the gospel, it's not the gospel. If you add anything to the gospel, it's not the gospel. You add to it, and you are no longer flowing in the free river of salvation, you are taking a walk somewhere else. Paul says the gospel is at stake:

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. (Galatians 2:5)

Jesus flips tables in the temple, He says keep freedom free. Paul writes a searing letter, I am astonished, he says keep freedom free. The river flows on through time, the Spirit at work to keep freedom free. We have Martin Luther nailing the 95 theses on the door saying, keep freedom free. We have the Black Church singing, keep freedom free. A friend at a seminary in the South was physically blocked by a male student saying what are you even doing here? She whispers a response: To learn about Jesus, same as you. In her whisper the Spirit shouts, keep freedom free. To the poor in spirit in our city, the city with the highest suicide rate in the nation, does this freedom make us eager to be a vessel of the Spirit who says, keep freedom free?

Because once you taste this freedom we're rollin' in the river, an eagerness for the freedom found in Jesus births desire for more freedom—co-creators again as intended in the garden, co-creators with an ear for eternity. We see the personal redemptive activity of God within human history to shape His eternal purposes and we become eager to keep freedom free.

James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me... All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor,

the very thing I had been eager to do all along. (Galatians 2:9-10)

You see false brothers seek to earn, but Paul here is eager. Are we earning or are you eager? Are we trying to earn the belonging we crave? Earning produces scarcity thinking. It makes us blind to the needs literally, right in front of us. Are you earning? Or, knowing beneath the cross of Jesus you belong, you are free to live and to love as you were made to all along.

Paul says I am eager. Eager. These banks of loving God and loving neighbor birth an eagerness for that river of salvation not just for me, myself, and I, but for total Shalom. What's shalom? Let's use our senses. We've talked about hearing the river, about what we see in the text, and Lisa Sharon Harper says, "Shalom is what the kingdom of God smells like." And it smells like being made whole together.

If you don't know where to start with living in the banks of loving God and loving neighbor on our freedom river, Paul gives us a first step. Paul says, I came with such confidence in free grace that I came to see if I had run in vain, to see if I was wrong. He models an openness to wonder aloud, where am I wrong?

I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. (Galatians 2:2)

Asking, "where am I wrong?" helps us see. Not just in our thinking, but in our living—our lived theology. Asking, "where am I wrong," means we are paying attention. And let the space after that question be filled with a prayer formed within the banks of the river. Humility and repentance birthed by the Spirit are the fertile space for the Kingdom—made fertile by this freedom water. Fertile ground to imagine access to that freedom for others. That freedom river makes us not only eager to smell shalom, but our river water also



makes us eager for others to taste that freedom personally, in relationship, and seek it structurally. It births a prophetic imagination. It's the way of the river.

People on the river are happy to give
Big wheel keep on turnin'
Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river.

And what a great comfort it is to know that in our brokenness and our idols, in our scheming and bad speculations, in our good intentions with our less-than "meh" results, the river flows on as God shapes our stories according to His purposes.

We are invited to travel light in taking the journey beyond price, beyond costs, into bearing witness to the world as it is and as it should be. But heed not the false brother in you or in me. The false brother who sneaks in and says you still must earn it, that voice seeks to make you a slave. And if that false brother feels loud to you today, listen for the river. For the salvation story that stretches back from a garden and flows through our lives and into the Eternal City. Listen not to the false brother. Our true brother, Jesus, has paid the price to set you free. Where He is, we are free! And as we gather at the table today, we have done nothing to earn the meal. That is the whole point. By God's Spirit let us taste of that great gathering feast to come.



Freedom