

0298

Part of a new age

Galatians 1:1-5

Sunday, September 4, 2022

Text

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer

Introduction

On a January afternoon in 2003, a father and his son walked through a local park in the city of Twin Lakes, Wisconsin. Twin Lakes sits on the border of Illinois and Wisconsin. As you'd expect for a day in the middle of January, it was cold. The temperatures were well below freezing.

To that point in the season, there had been relatively little snowfall and so the nearby sledding hill, which was often frequented by local children, sat empty. That fact perhaps made it all the more unlikely that a father and his son would be in the right place at the right time.

As they were walking, they came to an outdoor porta potty where they felt like they heard something. It was a whimpering or whining sound. To what must have been their absolute shock, when they opened the door, wrapped in a canvas bag, they found a baby boy.

All alone in that bathroom, exposed to the cold, there was no way the child would have survived if he hadn't been found.

Because of sin, the whole world is in a desperate situation which will bring death and from which we cannot save ourselves. And just like that baby boy who was found in that Wisconsin bathroom, we too can only know salvation through the intervention of a father. And a son.

We're beginning in the Book of Galatians this morning. The most important theme that Paul will communicate in this letter is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we see that even from the opening verses of this letter.

Bridge

The main idea I want to focus on in today's passage is that the world is dead in sin but the gospel promises us another world.

And we'll be looking at the passage today in three parts.

1. The defense of the gospel
2. The substance of the gospel
3. The response to the gospel

With that, we'll jump into our passage this morning.

1. The defense of the gospel

I'm going to begin with two questions for you to consider.

First. Who is Jesus?

Second. Who is Paul?

For the first question: who is Jesus?

That's the most important question that anyone can answer. Is he a good teacher? Is he a good philosopher? Is he a good idea? Is he a good role

model? Is he a good man? Or is he the Lord who died for your sins? And the Son of God? And the king of kings?

But who is Paul?

While not as important to know Paul as it is to know Jesus, how you view Paul matters, and here's why. Because how you understand Paul actually points to how you will understand Jesus.

A history of Pauline heresy

When Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, we don't know every single detail of background information but one thing seems pretty clear.

There were people undermining Paul to the churches in Galatia.

Who is Paul?

He is an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Apostles were people who had personally seen the risen Lord in the early church and who were commissioned to lead the church.

1 Corinthians 12 lists offices in the early church::

God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

The apostles are listed first in that list for a reason. They were the authority.

We also see this in Ephesians 4:11-12:

he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

In the Book of Acts, after the ascension of the risen Jesus, and with Judas out of the picture, the first thing the apostles do is appoint another apostle: Matthias.

The Apostle Stephen dies in Acts 7 and we see Paul later become an apostle. After that, we never see apostles being replaced. And again, as people who had witnessed the risen Jesus, and given the unique role of the apostles in the early church, I would argue that the office of Apostle died out in the age of the original apostles.

So as I said a moment ago, there were people who were undermining Paul and his apostolic authority.

People still do that to Paul.

Many liberal Christians undermine Paul's writings as just his opinion and not scripture and therefore not authoritative.

Paul was one Christian giving his views on the scriptures and that's no more inherently significant than any other Christian.

But that's why the answer to my second question matters so much. Who is Paul?

Is he just some guy who has some thoughts about Jesus? Or is he a man who personally saw the risen Lord Jesus and was personally called by Jesus to be an apostle?

Two radically different views of who Paul is.

Story: Galatians Bible study story

I was once part of a Bible study in Galatians with a church back in Ohio. I didn't attend the church but I had a friend who was a pastor and he was trying to start a ministry for young professionals and so I participated.

And in Galatians, there are some places where Paul gets pretty heated. For good reason. People were trying to preach a false gospel to these churches.

And I'll never forget when we got to chapter 3, where Paul begins by saying:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?

And so people in the group basically thought that Paul was being too mean.

He wasn't if you believe that Galatians' is God's Word!

What you think about Paul matters to what you think about the rest of the New Testament.

So again, I ask you: who is he?

I believe that he's called to be an apostle and that this was affirmed by the confirmation of the other apostles, by the history of the church, by the fact that the early church viewed his writings to have had apostolic authority, by the account of him having been a witness to the risen Jesus and the radical conversion he had from a persecutor of the church to a man who became a martyr for the church, and because of the signs and wonders the Lord enabled him to perform during his ministry.

And I think that'll hopefully give some more background and meaning to these first verse of chapter 1.

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

Paul wrote 13 letters in the New Testament. All of them begin with his first name. That was a standard letter writing practice at the time. It's important to understand that these are letters.

When we write a letter, or send a note, or write an email, or even a text message, there are certain communication protocols that are common and expected.

If someone writes a text and starts it: “Dear Josh,” and gives you a several paragraph discourse and then says “Sincerely, John,” you’re going to think that doesn’t really fit for a text message.

You write an email and you typically begin with the name of the person or people you’re sending it to and then sign your name at the end.

In these ancient letters, you would start by naming the sender. It’s the first thing the reader sees.

Next, as we’ve already discussed, Paul will affirm his apostolic authority. In nine of his 13 letters, Paul mentions his apostolic office in his opening.

But there are a couple of unique things about Galatians.

First, Paul doesn’t defend his apostolic authority in his other letters as fervently as in Galatians. He usually takes it as a given that the readers will accept that fact.

In Galatians, he says he’s an apostle: **not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead**

Paul is an apostle because of a divine calling. It’s not because he says so, it’s not ultimately because the other apostles say so.

In the second half of chapter 1, Paul will again give an extended version of his early actions after coming to faith and a long defense of his apostolic ministry. There is no section in Paul’s letters where he goes into such great detail to explain why he is authentically an apostle.

And here’s why it matters so much in this letter.

When people are downplaying Paul’s authority, his writing, his teaching, then it makes it easy to also downplay his message.

Paul talks so much about being an apostle, not because he’s insecure.

Paul isn’t being vain.

It matters that they know, and that we know he's an apostle of Jesus Christ because Paul has the message of the truth about Jesus Christ, that he is the Lord who has died for us and that God reconciles sinful people to Jesus because of Christ and Christ alone.

And so Paul so fervently defends his apostolic authority because he needs to defend the gospel itself.

And he will be pointing to the gospel even from this first verse. **not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—**

Jesus has been raised from the dead and he has led to a paradigm shift in human history and in salvation history. Everything changes because of the cross and because we have a risen Lord.

And Paul will point to that gospel. Because that's what this letter is truly about.

In verse 2, Paul says:

**² and all the brothers who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia:**

All the brothers.

Paul includes his associates in the opening salutation. We don't know exactly who was with him when he wrote Galatians. But notice that he does not call them apostles. He calls them brothers, while Paul is an apostle.

And then he addresses his letter to the churches in Galatia. As we've discussed the last couple of weeks, this was the region to which Paul had traveled during his first missionary journey. He shared the gospel, many people came to faith, but there were also very many who were hostile to the gospel. In writing to the Galatians, there were people who sought to dilute or distort the true gospel and so Paul writes as a defense of the gospel.

We come to our second point.

2. The substance of the gospel

Verse 3:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

The mention of grace and peace is standard in Paul's opening greetings. He mentions grace and peace at the beginning of all of his letters.

Those two words are packed with theological meaning.

Grace is the unmerited favor of God that he grants to us because of the gospel. Grace is a gift. It's something that we cannot earn or deserve.

And because of grace, there is peace made with God. The ordering matters. It is grace and then, because of grace, there is peace.

That grace and peace does not come from ourselves, but as Paul says, the source of it is **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

In three verses, Paul has pointed both to the resurrection from the dead of Jesus and now he points to the Lordship of Jesus. For Christians reading this letter today, it can be easy to take these facts for granted, to read over them pretty quickly. But Paul is making important statements about Jesus, especially when we remember that people were undermining the gospel to these Galatian churches. But really, it's just as important for us to remember what Paul is saying here because there are people in our own time and in our own society who undermine and distort the gospel.

Today, people so often will acknowledge that Jesus really existed but then totally disregard the reality of who he is. So many people love a few moral teachings of Jesus here or there but get real quiet when the exclusivity of Christ gets mentioned.

It's really easy to be a cultural Christian. But are you a Christ-centered Christian?

And Paul will say much more about Jesus in verse 4.

Now when I read this next verse, I want you to ask yourself this question:
“Is this what I truly believe?”

Because Paul is pointing to the gospel.

Talking about Jesus, he says:

⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

There are three significant things which Paul reveals in this verse.

Jesus gave himself for our sins.

Jesus gives himself for our sins.

This is something that Jesus himself talks about during his ministry.

Mark 10:45:

the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

That is sacrificial language¹. And we’ve talked about this Biblical theme of sacrifice before. Sacrifice points to a cost of forgiveness. In the Old Testament, you couldn’t just sacrifice any old thing. It had to be animals without blemish. It was literally costly. It was also an act of faith to trust that the Lord would still provide, even when you had made the sacrifice.

It points to God’s requirement for holiness and necessity of atonement. Most significantly, the sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to a greater sacrifice that is fulfilled in Christ.

Hebrews 10:12-14 says:

when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his

¹ Timothy George, [Galatians](#), vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 86.

enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

I could not pay the cost for my sins. You could not pay the cost for your sins. We could not make it right. But Jesus could. On the cross.

Some hear that message and are offended by it. They don't think that they need Jesus. They think "I never asked him to die for me," why is that necessary? Why couldn't a gracious God just forgive us?

Because in a righteous savior going to the cross, being sacrificed for our sins, Jesus is showing us just how costly our sin is.

And this is a point to which Paul will build up in Galatians. Chapter 3, verse 13, Paul says:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"

Now again, some will be repulsed by that message.

But even among those who believe that Jesus died to forgive sinners, people have different views of how to respond to that.

Some treat that as a justification or license to sin. "We're forgiven. Love, love, love. Jesus is love. He loves you."

The problem is that too many people want salvation without the savior.

Jesus gave himself for our sins.

To deliver us

The text continues:

To deliver us from the present evil age.

The Greek word that translated as “deliver” here can also mean “rescue.” I think that’s perhaps a more helpful way of reading this verse. English Bible translations are somewhat evenly split on “deliver” vs “rescue” here.

At the cross, Jesus has rescued us. We were helpless and dead in sin.

Illustration: Roller Coaster

I read a story this about a rollercoaster that got stuck at an amusement park in California in 2016. 21 riders were trapped 148 feet up in the air².

The ride could not be lowered. Fire Crews were called and got a ladder.

Guess what?

The ladder wasn’t tall enough!

Rescue crews had to go into the ride with a harness. One by one, they took out each passenger and had to manually lower them the 148 feet to the ground.

They rescued them. Those people were not saving themselves. They weren’t getting down by themselves. Without a rescuer, they were hopeless.

We were hopeless at the height of our sins when Jesus came to our rescue.

But as I said, many want the salvation without the savior.

Present evil age

Now there are many things which Jesus rescues us from. The wrath of God, the penalty of our sins, but he also has rescued us, as the text says, from the present evil age.

The present evil age is the state of the fallen world.

Jewish theology had the idea of two ages where there would be a new age that would be greater than the present age. This idea gets picked up in the

² <https://abc7.com/knotts-berry-farm-ride-stuck-sky-cabin-rescue/1679992/>

New Testament. Jesus makes several references to a distinction between ages.

In one sense, that new age has already been realized because of the cross. In Christ, we are forgiven, we have Spiritual blessings, we have an inheritance through Jesus. What's more, we have a reason for hope. And we have a citizenship which is in heaven.

But we still live in a world where there is still sin as people who have a dual citizenship.

Illustration: pregnancy

I think of when Kari was pregnant with Robbie. In one sense, you're already preparing for parenthood. Especially for the mother. You're already having to make different lifestyle choices for the health of the baby. You're making different decisions on spending, you're thinking about the future.

It's a time between two ages. There's the period where you have no kids and the period where you have one, but in the pregnancy, there's some overlap between the two times.

In Christ, we live in a period of overlap between the old and the new.

Where we are in a world that is fallen but with a new identity in Christ. Where we live in a world where there is sin, but where we have the hope of the gospel. Where we live in a world where there is still death but where we've been given the Holy Spirit. Where we still struggle with our own sins but where we have grace and peace.

When we want the salvation without the savior, we cheapen what Jesus has done. It's not merely a matter of forgiveness so that we can just keep on sinning, but it's a rescue from a world of sin.

Do you look at the gospel as a rescue mission?

For the people trapped in the roller coaster, the rescue crew did not go up there to save them so they could stay on the ride. It was so that they could get out.

The world is dead in sin but the gospel promises us another world.

Jesus has given himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, the last part of verse 4 says:

according to the will of our God and Father

It was the divine plan from all of eternity.

It was the divine rescue that was the only way to rescue a sinful world from the present evil age.

It had to be a divine plan because sinful people could not create our own perfect future. We could not create a new age where we overcome disease and death, let alone sin. Because we continue to sin and the world is fallen, but we have a savior who has overcome the world. And he did that by giving himself for our sins.

The world is dead in sin but the gospel promises us another world. We come to our third point. This third point will be very brief.

3. The response to the gospel

Verse 5. After Paul has talked about Jesus rescuing us according to the will of God the Father, Paul says:

⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

To know the gospel, to know the forgiveness which is found in Christ is meant to cause a response of praise.

Now if you don't believe in the gospel. If you don't believe that Jesus has died for your sins. If you are not born again in Christ, then there is no reason for you to join in this response of praise.

Praise and giving glory to God follows from knowing you're forgiven.

And the more we're aware of our sin, the more heartfelt the praise. And the more we look to the cross, the more we can praise. And the more that we appreciate that we had been in need of rescue, the greater our praise.

to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Conclusion

Jesus died to rescue us from the present evil age.

But as Christians, so often we go through life and we look no different from the rest of the world.

As I've said, we're living in the overlap of two ages. Though the world is fallen, Christians are living in the world as those who have been rescued.

But I'll use myself as an example. So often, I feel like I'm living much more in the present age than the new age.

So often, I feel like stresses and worries steal my joy, when there should be a joy in Christ that stress cannot overcome.

So often, I can struggle to love my neighbor as myself. There are a million reasons, a million excuses we can find to be unloving. After all, there are lots of people we cross paths with who are hard to love. But that's the heart of the present age, not the new age. We have a savior who loved us, even in our sins. We have a savior who knows us at our worst. And yet, he still loves us. Yet we can always make justifications in our hearts to look down on someone, or feel superior, or feel contempt for another, or to judge people.

So often, I let little annoyances get to me. Something breaking, having to wait on the phone with customer service, an unforeseen change in my schedule get me annoyed or in a bad mood. Is it a sin? Not necessarily. But when we do that, which age are we acting like we're living in? The present or the new?

So often, we lose perspective; or perhaps, never had it. The present evil age is our default. It's what we were all born into and what all remain in

without Christ. It's familiar and comfortable. Like a person who moves from another region or another country, it's like an accent that we never lose.

And sadly, so often, for so many Christians, we follow the ways of the world when we're invited to follow something far greater.

In “The Magician's Nephew” from the Chronicles of Narnia series, C.S. Lewis gives a fantastical description of experiencing Narnia.

Lewis says:

“Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in harmony with it, but far higher up the scale: cold, tingling, silvery voices. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. They didn't come out gently one by one, as they do on a summer evening. One moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of light leaped out—single stars, constellations, and planets, brighter and bigger than any in our world. There were no clouds. The new stars and the new voices began at exactly the same time.

If you had seen and heard it, as Digory did, you would have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves which were singing, and that it was the first voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.

“Glory be!” said the Cabby. “I'd have been a better man all my life if I'd known there were things like this.”

The Chronicles of Narnia are a work of fiction, but I think there's a powerful insight in that observation. How do we live when we look to the things that God has planned for us, the things Jesus has promised us, and the things he is preparing for us?

When someone wins a major lottery, depending on the state, they don't necessarily get a check the next day. It can take up to several weeks to get the payment.

But imagine you knew you were going to have millions of dollars in a few weeks. You'd be living differently, even though you didn't yet have the money.

Through Christ, there are infinite blessings and riches. Some of them we enjoy now but they are a foretaste of what we will enjoy at the end of the age. But in knowing the good things that Jesus has for us, that can - and should - impact how we live, even today.

Again, while we're in the overlap of the two ages, we'll never fully escape this present evil age on this side of heaven. But so often, we live and look like we're more focused on this age than what is to come.

How do we do it?

It's certainly not like we just flip a switch ourselves. But I'll say this. It's a matter of where we look: are we mainly just looking at what's around us or are we loving the Lord with all of our mind?

It's what we think about. Are we constantly focused on the stresses of life, on our hobbies, on ourselves, or are we constantly reminding ourselves of God's promises and blessings he has made to us.

It's in the things we value. Do we just care about the American dream? About our comfort? About our stuff? Or do we value eternal things. Jesus said **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).**

It's a challenge. It's a struggle between the two ages, because we are not yet perfect in Christ. But the more we are mindful of the things of God, the more we remind ourselves that we were not made for this age, the more closely we walk with Christ and follow the Lord, the more we will live in the overlap on earth as it is in heaven.