

A Gospel Greeting

Galatians 1:3-5

14/07/2024

Joshua Koura

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.com

Galatians Chapter 1:1-5 tells us, "Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead—and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Father in heaven, may this moment, this sermon, the response of Your people bring glory to You, O God. You are worthy, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of praise and adoration. So God, come to our aid, we pray, both preacher and people alike. Lord God, lift up our hearts in worship, arrest our attention. The things that are said in Your word would affect us at the very core of our being. We might leave this place renewed in our love for our Lord Jesus Christ, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We considered last time we looked at the book of Galatians, verse number one of this epistle, and we established that Paul's authority was an apostolic authority given to him as one who bore the office of an apostle, which was not conferred upon him by man or through men, but rather was a heavenly and divine call. And the ministry that he received, he received from the Lord. We saw the importance of how the apostolic authority is basically scriptural and how the only remedy for the Galatian churches would be submission to that authority. And we drew applications that helped us understand the importance of God's word in our lives and how the only remedy for our confusion and our problems being solved is only able through us coming to receive the authority of God's word.

And in verse number two, we see that this Apostle Paul, although he had apostolic authority, what he was saying, he was not saying in isolation, nor was he saying alone. In fact, this epistle is written, and it says in verse two, "and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia." Paul writes, if we could say, with the brethren in such a way that the brethren that were with him also recognized what he recognized as being from God. And therefore, well, they were also with one voice joining with Paul in this

letter to the Galatians. And although Paul will use the first personal pronoun "I" and "me" and things like that throughout the epistle, it helps us realize that Paul's message had been received by the brethren, and they together are basically saying to the churches of Galatia, "Receive the word of the Lord."

Now, Paul begins this epistle with a greeting, as he does all his epistles, but this epistle is unique. Paul's salutation and his greeting is different. A lot of them begin with a commendation to the church. Even the book of Corinthians, marked by so much correction, begins with commendation, and Paul commends them for certain things, and they become—they go behind in no spiritual gifts and of their abilities. But then he goes on to deal with the problems that were there. Other epistles begin with prayer, the book of Colossians, for example, or thanksgiving, like the book of Thessalonians, where he, you know, he thanks God, or the Philippians, so he thanks God upon every remembrance of them. But this epistle begins with a greeting that is a gospel greeting, and the issue at stake with regards to the churches of Galatia was the very gospel. And it's almost like Paul is so welled up with a desire to make the gospel clear that he greets them, and the greeting flows right into an exposition of the gospel. And we see that this shows that the gospel is of first importance to Paul, and the only thing that he really wants to know about these believers is that Jesus Christ and His gospel is being believed among them. And so immediately, he goes into the gospel.

Now, he begins with a common greeting, but that is also a gospel greeting, where it says, "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ." And if you notice there in your translation that there is no full stop, that runs all the way from verse number three to verse number five, and Paul is giving this gospel greeting, and it begins with the words "grace to you and peace." That's a common greeting, grace and peace, but it is not just common and empty or vain; it is common and theological, meaning what Paul is doing here is he is reminding the believers about the grace of God that brought them peace with God. He is reminding them that they are recipients of grace, and that grace has secured their peace with God. And he reminds them of that, but not only does it serve as a reminder, but it also, that kind of greeting also serves as a pronouncement of blessing. So he is saying to them, "Grace and peace to you." And so obviously, when he would say that, it would remind them of the grace that they had received and the peace that was theirs in Christ Jesus. But more than that, he is desiring that grace would extend to them and peace to them through our Lord Jesus Christ, through God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore, it served as a pronouncement of blessing, a kind of a desire that the grace of God will continue with you and that the peace of God will continue to bless you and guide you and comfort you and uphold you through

whatever it is that you would go through in life.

And so he begins with these words, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." And as I said before, this passage of scripture is one continuous sentence that Paul elaborates. Now, he continues this sentence on; he continues to unfold, if I could say, or to demonstrate that grace and that peace, or that grace that brought them peace. He says, "Yes, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," but it doesn't stop there, "who gave Himself for our sins." He wants them to understand and realize that the gospel of grace and peace, that greeting, should I say, of grace and peace, is a greeting that extends into the very heart of the gospel. And he goes on to unfold to them that grace that brought them peace, and he goes on to talk to them of the gospel of grace.

And in verse number four, he teaches us, or explains to them, or at least what we can learn from that, is the nature of the gospel is truly gracious. The nature of the gospel is truly gracious. Look at me at verse number four, where it says, "who gave Himself for our sins." And here, what we have is the first three words in this phrase is "who gave Himself." There's nothing more gracious than understanding that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself graciously, voluntarily, sacrificed Himself for our redemption. Probably in your minds right now, you're thinking like I'm thinking of John chapter number 10, verses 15 and 18. He says, "I lay down My life for the sheep." He says, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." Or Philipians chapter 2, verses 7 to 8, "He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The gospel is a gospel of grace. The nature of that gospel is a gospel of grace. And Paul reminds us here that that nature, the gracious nature of the gospel, is partly due to the fact that our Savior voluntarily and willingly gave Himself for our sins. He was not under compulsion that was contrary to His will. He did all things that pleased the Father, but it also was His will to please the Father, and it also was His will to redeem us from our sins. There was a harmony there, a unity there. And this voluntary sacrifice shows us that the gospel is fundamentally gracious. We have a Savior who gave Himself. He voluntarily laid down His life. He said, "No one takes it from Me." Jesus Christ was not crucified because the Romans caught Him, because the Jews cornered Him. He was delivered by the determinant foreknowledge and counsel of God, and part of that counsel of God, He Himself voluntarily submitted to, in obedience to His Father, as a voluntary freewill offering for the sins of His people. No compulsion against His will. The graciousness in the nature of the gospel.

But also, we see here another phrase that points to the gracious nature of this gospel, and that is that His sacrifice was "for our sins." And when we hear the word "for" in scripture, it is important for us to understand that when He gives Himself "for," it means that He gives Himself on behalf of, or in the stead of, or for the sake of our sins. And simply what that means is that Jesus Christ's sacrifice was not only voluntary, but it was substitutionary, meaning that He took our place. There was a substitution, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." There was a swapping of places. We deserve to die the death that the thieves died alongside our Lord. He died the death of a criminal. He died the death of a sinner, even though He Himself knew no sin. And the gospel that Paul is reminding the Galatian Church of Galatia of is helping them understand that this gospel is not only gracious in that it was voluntary, but it was gracious in that Christ Himself took our place. He stood where we would have stood, were we to receive the wrath of God against our sin. The punishment that was owing to us fell upon Him. He stood in our place. He bore our sins, as the scripture says, in His body upon the cross. And that word "for our sins" rings with Old Testament sacrifice. It reminds us of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, to which points to Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. It reminds us of the one who would come to bring the sacrifice. They would come and lay their hands upon the head of the lamb or upon the head of the goat, upon the bull, and they would confess their sins, or the priest in the day of atonement would confess the sins of the people, and then that goat, that bull, or that lamb would be slain. And the whole picture that was established from the Old Testament, which Christ Jesus Himself fulfilled, was one of substitutionary sacrifice. There were lambs and bulls and goats that were dying daily for the sins of the people. And when Paul says, "He gave Himself for our sins," he's essentially drawing upon all that imagery, that there is one whose blood bore our sins, that our sins were transferred to Him, that He died like that lamb in the place of the offerer, the sinner, so that the wrath of God would pass from the one who sinned and would fall on the innocent, spotless Lamb.

When Paul says, "He gave Himself for our sins," he's reminding the churches of Galatia that this gospel is fundamentally gracious, not only in the voluntary nature of the death of Jesus Christ, but more than that and beyond that, that He stood in the place of sinners, graciously sacrificed by the hands of sinners, for sinners. Yes, for murderers, for adulterers, for prostitutes, for the proud, for the self-righteous, for the violent, for the angry, for the bitter, for those who mocked and scorned His name. He died in the place of the unrighteous. He died in the place of those who rejected Him. He bore their sins. He bore our wrath that was owing to us. And this is grace.

In Galatians chapter 2:21, you can see why Paul says what he says here

when you think of what I've just been saying. He says, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Well, Paul's saying, "He gave Himself for our sins," and if you think that your righteousness is going to come by your obedience to the law, then why did He die on the cross? He died for nothing. If our salvation could be secured by our own good works, by our own deeds, by our own obedience, then why did He die? Paul's saying, if you hold to a gospel that doesn't understand that He gave Himself for our sins as a sufficient, voluntary, complete sacrifice, and you think that you can get to heaven by your own goodness, or by your own works, or by your own obedience, then you are essentially saying that what Jesus did, Christ did on that cross, was empty, it was vain, it was essentially good for nothing.

Can you understand why Paul says that it is of grace, it is not of works, otherwise grace is no more grace? "He gave Himself for our sins." The power of that thought should drive us to rest solely our faith in that crucified Lamb. But Paul goes on to show not only that the nature of the gospel is gracious, but more than that, he goes on to show in verse number four that the power of the gospel is gracious. Look what he says in verse number four, "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world." You know, it's not just grace for me; it is grace that reaches even to me, is what Paul is saying here. It is not that just He gave Himself for our sins as a gracious act which reflects the beauty and wonder of the gospel, but more than that, he says this grace reaches to those sinners for whom He died. It is grace that reaches to us and it comes to us in these words, "who gave Himself for our sins," in order that, for the purpose that, "He might deliver us."

You see, the death of Jesus Christ was not just to display grace in the act itself, but rather that that grace would invade the hearts of sinners and change the lives of sinners and rescue the lives of sinners in real time, even to this present hour, from the bondage of sin. It is grace that not only is for us but reaches to us, and this comes through in the word "deliver." "Gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us." When you hear the word "deliver," you cannot help but think of a rescue. Delivering—you don't deliver those who need no deliverance. You don't deliver those who are free. You deliver those who are in trouble. You deliver those who are in bondage. You see, the word "deliver" or "rescue" or "salvation" has the presuppositions behind it that teach us of the reality of man's bondage and enslavement to sin, here described as the present evil age, the present evil world, where the sinful nature of man corresponds to the sinful system of the world, governed by the god of this world, little 'g' god of this world, Satan, who has blinded the minds of those who believe not.

And what Paul is simply saying here is that there is one who is a rescuer

from that bondage of sin that has a grip on us through this present evil age. And the gospel is a gospel of grace, but it presupposes our bondage. And if one does not see themselves as bound in sin, they will never understand deliverance. Read to us this morning from John chapter number eight, that those Jews which believed on Him, Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, then will you be My disciples indeed," or truly My disciples, "and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." You know what they said to Him? "Free? We've never been a slave to anyone. We're Abraham's descendants. How can you say we will be made free?" Now, get this: they believed on Him, but they believed in vain because they never saw that they were slaves to sin. They felt that Abraham would contribute to their rescue because they belong to his physical line. They did not realize that there is no father, no mother, no hereditary, no lineage, no name, no works, no obedience that can deliver from sin, but Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus says, "What do you mean? He who commits sin is a slave to sin." He says, "Don't fool yourself. Do you sin? Then no matter if you're Abraham's child, and no matter if you're the child of a preacher, no matter if you're the child of a godly father or mother, if you are one who sins, you are enslaved to sin. And if you are enslaved to sin, you are in need of rescue, freedom from this bondage of sin." Now, without digressing too much, but it amazes me how many people come to Jesus for many other reasons rather than for deliverance from sin. There are those who want Jesus to deliver them from their circumstances or from maybe their confusion, and they want to take up a religion because it will help give them some comfort or some consolation. But what the Bible is saying here is clear, that unless you see yourself as fundamentally enslaved to sin, then you will understand your need for deliverance through the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why the gospel always begins with the holiness of God and the sin of mankind. When we preach Jesus to people, we do them a disservice if we do not tell them of their sin and of their need for rescue, because the cross was not just a good idea or some kind action done by someone. It's much more than that. He died and gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver. And unless we see that we are in need of deliverance, there will be no beauty in the cross that we should behold Him, crucified for us.

So many people want Jesus as a nice friend, you know, someone who makes the sacrifice like that. It was more than just a sacrifice; it was a sacrifice for our sins. And it's important for us to realize, as the high priest prophesied without realizing it, "It is expedient that one should die for the sins of the people." It's necessary that one should die for the sins of the people. And the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled that, and He delivers us from this present evil age.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in His messianic mission, if we could say, in Isa-

iah 61:1, says this: He was sent "to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." He offers deliverance to the captives. He frees the captives. He frees from prison those who are bound—bound in what? Fast bound in sin and nature's night, as the Wesleys write. That's our condition: fast bound in sin and nature's night, no hope, as it were, in darkness, separated from the life of God. He said, "But Thine I diffused a quickening ray, and I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." Deliverance—proclaiming liberty to the captives, opening of the prison to those who were bound.

He said, the gospel teaches us of a power outside of us that must come to us in order to save us. It does not teach us of an ability to save ourselves. We are dependent on the saving work of another, of a rescuer, namely the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There is no hope for us to be free from the power of this present evil age until and until we come face to face with our Redeemer, the one who saves. You see, from the fall of Adam until the second coming of Christ, we will be and are in this age, this present—by the Bible calls evil age—an age of, if we could say, dominated by the power of Satan. The Bible teaches us that he's the god of this age. The Bible teaches us that demons, having forsaken—Paul loved this present world. With the word "world" there is the word "age," as it is here in our text as well. And in Romans chapter 12, verse 2, Paul says to the believers, he says, "Don't be conformed to this world," not the cosmos, as it were, but this evil age, what is represented by the powers of darkness that govern the hearts and minds of men and women in this age. "Don't be conformed to it. Don't pattern your thinking and your life and your behavior after it." The present evil age is a powerful, if we could say, time period where the evil of sin and Satan rule in the hearts of men and women, contrary to the commandments and the Word and the law of God. Hence, we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Bring, Lord, the power of that age to come in all its fullness to us now, that we might see the glory of Messiah, who shall—whose righteousness shall cover the earth from sea to sea, as it were, and spread throughout all the earth.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself delivers us from this present evil age by the power of the cross. The beauty of this is, "He gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age." What that simply means is that the age to come, the power of the age to come, has, if we could say, dawned or has broken forth in the age of darkness through the power of the gospel. Don't underestimate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When He lay in the tomb, and on the third day, on the first day of the week, when He arose from the dead, we could say that a power of the new age was released in its glory, and the power of the resurrection life came to man, rescued man, delivered man.

And so, the Bible teaches us, although that we are dead in sin before our conversion, we are made alive in Him by the power of His resurrection, that He, by His very own power, rescues us from the present evil age. He delivers us. He, as it were, takes us out of the present evil age, not physically—we're still here; the world has not yet been patterned, as it were, after the power of that new age to which we is to come in its fullness—but what we see here is the breaking forth of that power in the lives of those who have been delivered, and they have in them a power which is the resurrection power of Jesus, to walk in this age of darkness and in evil, in the power of a new life that they have received through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is how He delivers us. He doesn't do it by removal, but as John chapter 17, verse 15, says, as Jesus prayed for His disciples, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." His prayer is that we would not be taken out of the world, but that we will be preserved from the power of the evil one in the world. At the power of preservation, and it is resurrection power given to us. This is why Paul could say in Colossians 1:13 that we've been delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love. This is the gracious power that causes us to live, the power of the age to come, in the age of darkness.

And I love how Thomas Shriner puts it. He says it this way: "Believers have been granted grace to live the life of the age to come in the midst of this present age." Isn't that beautiful? In one sense, we represent a power of new life, and we represent an eschatological hope of the time to come, where all things shall be made new. Hence, why we can say, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away; behold, the new has come." And this is the grace of God that reaches to us, not only for us but reaches to us through the death of Jesus Christ.

And you can see how fundamentally gracious the gospel is. Verse four and five says, "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present age," listen these words, "according to the will of God and our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." He delivered us from this present evil age according to the will of the God of all grace. This is the will of God our Father. But understand this, it was not only the will of God our Father. We should read this text in this way: "He gave Himself for our sins according to the will of God our Father." We should read the text also like this: "that He might deliver us from our—from this present evil age according to the will of God our Father." And we must understand that the grace of God that has been secured for us at Calvary's mountain, that has reached even to us in the deliverance from our sin, was planned before the ages ever were by the Father, and the Son entered in, in obedience to

the will of the Father, and He Himself set His heart in harmony with that will to secure our redemption and to deliver us from our sins.

The beautiful thing is, what Paul's saying here, that what I'm telling you right now is all of the God of grace, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who communicates that grace to us, who communicates that peace to us, have worked out our salvation. Salvation was not our will, our plan, our design, our strength, our ambition. Paul roots it in the reality that there was a God who, before time was, planned our salvation, and in lovingkindness, He came to accomplish it. And so, what Paul is saying, "Do you understand, O churches of Galatia, that from beginning to end, it is the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit that has come to your rescue? And why ever would you look anywhere else for salvation but to God? How could you ever fathom that you could save yourself? Do you not see that He gave Himself? Do you not see that He gave Himself for our sins? Do you not see that He gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us? This is grace-full. This is grace-free grace that reaches us."

And no wonder Paul says in verse number five, "to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." His heart is beaming with the glory of God. "God, You deserve all the praise." His heart's welling up with thanksgiving. The grace and the peace is, in one sense, being renewed in his heart, being communicated to him afresh by the Spirit, and he says, "to Him be glory forever and ever. Amen." Forever and ever, because the salvation that He gives is forever and ever.

"O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you would think that you can begin in the Spirit and be made perfect through the flesh?" That is not glory to God forever and ever. But "to Him be glory forever and ever," meaning that God, from beginning to end, is the God of grace. And if He is the God of grace, and our salvation is truly gracious, then there is no way that any of us can boast in it, apart from boasting in God, apart from being as Paul, and glorifying God. The plan was His, the gift was His, the work was His. The sin was ours. This is the gracious God who has secured our redemption, and it should lead us to such doxology, to such praise, to such glorying in this God of grace.

The question comes to you this morning: Have you tasted and experienced this salvation? Have you experienced the power to which I now tell you? I'm not asking if you believe that the sacrifice was voluntary; most people don't have a real problem believing that it was voluntary. Neither do many people have a problem believing it's substitutionary, although some people do. But perhaps most of us here today have no problem with the words, "He gave Himself for our sins." But the question that comes to us is, has that grace reached you? Have you been delivered from this present evil age? I'm

not asking if you know Him to be a rescuer; I'm asking, do you know Him to be your Savior, the one who rescued you? Are you in the condition of Paul at this very hour, as you hear these words, glorying in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, "Thank you for delivering me. Thank you for saving me"? Can you glorify Him forever and ever because of the grace that has reached to you? Or do you have a knowledge of such but have not tasted of its power?

You see, the distinctive mark of the true gospel is that it's a gospel that saves. You see, anyone, any gospel can make the outside of the cup clean. Any gospel can align us to certain customs or certain traditions. Any kind of gospel can cause us to join a church, to be part of a community, or to be part of a fellowship. But only the true gospel can give sinners a new heart. Only the true gospel can raise the dead and give life to those who are perishing. Any gospel may give you a sense of assurance. Any gospel may give you superficial and temporary happiness. Any gospel may give you superficial peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you," but He says, "not as the world gives." So the world has a kind of peace, but it's not like His. Any gospel and any gospel may give you some form of outward conformity or laws by which you pattern your life after, but only the gospel of the grace of God can truly save and deliver and rescue one from the clutches of this present evil age.

You see, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not teach us of reformation; it teaches us of transformation. That there is a metamorphosis, a change, an entire change of the inner man, of the person. They become partakers of the divine nature, and they enter into a new life and new power that they haven't known before. They become new creatures in Christ. The chains of sin are broken. Yes, they may sin, but they cannot sin the way they used to sin because of the grace of a mighty God that keeps them. They know a power that is in them that they never knew before, driving them, moving them, pushing them, moving them on to holiness, to walk the pilgrim way. They're not satisfied with mere prepositions and understanding of certain doctrines. They have the new life and power in them. They know that there is something moving them, changing them, transforming them, that they cannot live in sin any longer. It's a power, my friends. Have you seen the gospel as a power? "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." And that power may reach you at this hour if you believe.

You say that my sin is heavy; you don't understand the depth of my corruption. I tell you now that Jesus shall rescue you from any kind of sin. What sin did He not die for? What sin does His blood not have power to save? He can cleanse you from all unrighteousness at this very moment if you would but believe in His name. The grace of Jesus Christ reaches to

the darkest, most corrupted, most vile hearts and makes them new. A new heart He gives; He takes out the hard heart, the stony heart, and puts in a heart of flesh that causes men and women to feel after God. No longer cold, lifeless religion, but shaped by a power of a new life.

This is the beauty and wonder of the gospel. Jesus Christ did not come just to give Himself for our sins; He came to deliver us by that cross, that we might walk in the power of a new life in the midst of the darkness of bondage in this world. Paul said that he was commissioned to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Will you come to Jesus as a slave of sin? Will you come to Jesus not as one who thinks you are free, but as one who knows that you need Him? Will you believe on Jesus Christ and repent and turn to Him? And dear brothers and sisters, are we living in the power of that new life? Oh, I know I've been delivered. Pray, Lord, may that power live through me. May I yield myself more fully to it, that I might walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, that His fruit may be manifest in my life, that I might demonstrate the power of the new age to come in this world of darkness and sin.

Why would you let sin have dominion over you? You're not under the law, but you are under grace. To Him that says, "My heart has no desire to stay where doubts arise and fears dismay; though some may dwell where these abound, my prayer, my aim, is higher ground. Lord, lift me up and let me stand, by faith on heaven's tableland, a higher plane than I have found; Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Dear Christian, do you know that the power of the new age lives in you? The new age of Christ's kingdom lives in you, and that power can cause you to walk in a way of victory. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof." You've been delivered from the present evil age.

Let us pray.