

*Sermon on Galatians 1:1-5 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**The gospel reorients all of life by securing our past, present, and future.**

**Galatians 1:1–5** “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.” (ESV)

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Framework - the church going back to the future of grace.

Have you ever reached the point of awareness in life where you felt like you needed a new script? How many times this week alone?! When you realize things aren't working the way they should or you hoped. When there doesn't seem to be progress or breakthrough. When gains don't come. And you think, I need to shake it up, I need to live with a different approach, a new way of thinking, a new framework for life and flourishing.

Around our house we on occasion enjoy shows that have elements of archaeological adventure - uncovering lost cities, past civilizations. Where only LIDAR can show you what is under the canopy of trees!

There is one such show we have been watching as of late that has been driving me crazy. The same thing happens in every episode. It doesn't matter where the adventurer is, which continent, which treasure he is after... Each show has the hunt for the valuable lost thing, a dramatic moment where the camera shakes and danger is at hand, and it ends with the lost thing still out of reach. It's so bad you can see the signs of the impending doom scene every time. Frustrating!

This show needs a new script. It is stuck in an old pattern, a way of existence that (at least for this viewer) misses the mark!

But alas, it is not reality shows that we are here to look into today. But it might help us get the picture of what is so often at play in our lives.

This is our experience. Seemingly trapped by the same patterns over and over with the same results. Both physical and spiritual experiences. That's why we gather; because we have heard of and believed in another way - a way that flips the script and recalibrates all of life.

It's the gospel! The good news of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, and his invitation into the Kingdom of Heaven, his way of life.

It is what comes to the church in Galatia to give followers a new framework and it is what comes to us to do the same work today.

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We are embarking today on a new study for summer and fall in the book of Galatians. Likely Paul's first letter to the churches he helped plant.

Roman Galatia, Southern region of modern Turkey. It is in the early days of the church, probably 20 years after Jesus' ministry. Fully Roman in life experience. There is rampant idolatry. From household gods to more important deities in city centers. Even Caesar is worshiped as kyrios (lord).

There was an ingrained expectation that if you were part of the community, you worshiped the idols of that place or you endangered the whole should the god be disturbed by your lack of reverence. It would ruin families if you refused, it would ruin your job prospects... For everyone except Jews that is.

Rome had long before exempted Jews from mandatory idol worship so they could worship "their one true God" exclusively.

As the gospel has been going out from Jerusalem however, more than just Jews have come to believe in the Messiah. Gentiles, Romans, Greeks, those outside the covenant have been baptised and filled with the Spirit.

It was causing quite the stir as followers of Jesus rejected their old patterns of idolatry and served only Christ. But just as their family might reject them for their apostasy, Jewish believers would think they were sus because they didn't keep the traditions and pieces of the law.

Creates real tension (as mentioned last week) and the church is in need of a new framework for life together. For spiritual formation and worship.

To that end, Paul - the Pharisee-made-apostle by an encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road - writes to these churches with what is to anchor them and keep them steady in the treacherous seas of Roman culture.

He will prove his apostolic authority and recount how the kingdom is formed and how those that believe are to live with one another.

“We’re going to see Paul showing the young Christians in Galatia that their spiritual problem is not only caused by failing to live in obedience to God, but also by relying on obedience to Him. We’re going to see him telling them that all they need - all they could ever need - is the gospel of God’s unmerited favor to them through Christ’s life, death and resurrection. We’re going to hear him solving their issues not through telling them to “be better Christians”, but by calling them to live out the implications of the gospel.” Tim Keller

Because of Christ you can break old patterns, you can really have newness of life and be part of his kingdom. In his opening greeting Paul gives clues to this vital new framework. Living looking back, being kept in the present, and walking into the future together.

## **Looking Back**

To live this Christian life, to see things right, to rightly order life, we have to look back.

This doesn't sell well in our day, when people try to cover up the past or just ignore it. We want to keep the mountains of our lives in the rearview mirror out of sight.

But the word invites us to regularly look back, yes to see the mess we have made of things, but all the more to see what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

To the One who was raised from the dead, who gave himself for our sins and to deliver us from this present evil age. Looking back, staying grounded in the finished work of the cross. That the perfectly obedient, untainted by sin, Jesus gave his life in our place, making us right before the God we are prone to disregard, and to free us from everything of our past that kept us from him.

Forgiveness proclaimed in his name, and his name alone as there is no way to the Father except through the Son.

When we hear someone described as "living in the past" it is usually used negatively, but by greeting the churches with the reminder of what has been done Paul is suggesting that Christians live in the past of the finished work of Jesus for us. The good news of Jesus as the basis of all of life for us.

It de-scandalizes our lives, our history. Whether hidden or reveal, because of what Jesus did in the past, your whole life is covered, condemnation free.

"...the gospel is the A to Z of the Christian life. It is not only the way to enter the kingdom; it is the way to live as part of the kingdom. It is the way Christ transforms people, churches and communities." Tim Keller

He greets them back to grace and peace from God by way of Jesus. The grace and peace we need!

We will see the steady reminder that this grace is all of Christ. Even in Paul's declaration that he is not an apostle by the vote of men but through Jesus. We learn to say the same, that we have life and salvation and hope through Jesus alone.

*As we sang last week:*

"To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus

For my life is wholly bound to His  
Oh how strange and divine, I can sing, "All is mine"  
Yet not I, but through Christ in me"  
This past work that changes our present and future, was all by the will of God.  
Your salvation, your new life is on purpose. "According to the will of our God and  
Father..."

"There is no indication of any other motivation or cause for Christ's mission except the will of God. There is nothing in us which merits it. Salvation is sheer grace... That is why the only one who gets "glory for ever" is God alone. If we contributed to our rescue... if we had rescued ourselves... or if God had seen something deserving of rescue, or useful for His plan, in us... or even if we had simply called out for rescue based on our own reasoning and understanding... then we could pat ourselves on the back for the part we played in saving ourselves. But the biblical gospel - Paul's gospel - is clear that salvation, from first to last, is God's doing. It is His calling; His plan; His action; His work. And so it is He who deserves all the glory, for all time." Tim Keller

To live kingdom lives we must own the work of Jesus for us. Our past sin is dealt with, but what's more, that moment of "it is finished" handles sin once and for all past, present, and future. Until that day that the curse is fully and finally removed in the renewal of all things.

This is what the Galatian churches needed. Where division barged in, as teachers demanded Gentiles be circumcised and follow tradition and the Mosaic law if they would be real Christians. Even when they were willing, the message comes that it is not their work that saves them. Humbling the self-righteous.

This is what they need when they struggle under the weight of lingering sin and idolatry. To hear that their peace is found in Jesus and his sacrifice. Freeing those bound to the old way of life.

"No doubt they also found themselves frustrated and fatigued with the same thing we often find frustrating and fatiguing: the continuing presence of sin in our lives... Is there a way to break free from this sin that so easily entangles? Paul's answer is a resounding yes! There is. But it's not the path of the Law; it's the cross of Christ. Deliverance from sin and from "the present evil age" comes

only one way; indeed, grace itself comes only one way: through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Todd Wilson

Here is an invitation to settle our past, turning to Jesus who gives himself for us, to redeem us and form us into a people for his glory.

In the looking back, being anchored in the gospel of Jesus, we find our deliverance for today, our present help in our time of need.

### **Kept in the Present**

The hint here is a strong one, because Paul casts the past work of Christ not as something worthwhile if you can keep it, or that you can cash in when you visit the pearly gates, but as something vital for your present experience.

**Galatians 1:3–4** “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,” (ESV)

The gospel compels the body of Christ to freedom now - while everything around us rages - we are kept, delivered, not bound by this age.

For churches in Galatia this is the promise that brings peace as their age is a nasty one of violence, division, uncertainty, exposure. For churches today, if we have eyes to see it we aren't all that far off from these Roman outposts.

As the gospel framework for life unfolds, we can't miss that this letter is about the unity of the body, of who is in and who is out. It is a pattern of life together.

As it's been said, “the gospel - the message that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope - creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth, for obedience, for love...” and for community growth, obedience and love.

This is the church in the world but not of it. Living by different standards, with different priorities and with the grace of forgiveness not merely kept for a few but available to all. It is living in response to our permanent yet ongoing deliverance.

It is noticeable because our relationship to the old ways of life is significantly changed. We don't succumb to political or cultural expression in the same way.

And we are alive to the way of Jesus and his kingdom. The way of grace and peace.

Kingdom priorities reign as we have a new Lord. No longer Caesar but Jesus Christ. Radical for the Roman world, radical for our present experience.

"Jesus' death delivers Jews and Gentiles from this present evil age through his invasion of the current cosmos. The current cosmos is enslaved to sin and the demonic forces of evil, from which Jesus delivers us by removing us from one lordship to another, to the lordship of sin, evil, and the law to the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit. This deliverance was God's will." Jarvis Williams

We live for new things as individuals and we live for new things as a body of believers. Differents can come together where tradition and the law said otherwise the gospel speaks a better word of forgiveness, new identity, and new family. The church finds in the kingdom something more valuable than power or pedigree. The power of God for salvation.

Hope in the gospel carries us through. This might mean being exported from the age, but more so it means that we can trust that we are kept because of the finished work of the past, Jesus won't discard us but quite oppositely forms us from our salvation in the midst of the age, delivered from its burden, from its values, and deceit.

Friends, like weary Galatians, have hope in the midst of this age. That you are held by Christ and his Spirit. Being transformed, and formed into something glorious, as fellow members of his kingdom.

And it is with this hope that we step toward what is still to come.

**Walking into the Future**

Deliverance is leading somewhere. There is a horizon over the present age. And we see it in just the faintest hint from Paul that actually powers the past and present along the way.

**Galatians 1:3–5** *“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.”* (ESV)

Glory to God forever and ever. It seems like such a churchy phrase but there is eternity before us and because of the finished work of the past and spiritual empowerment of the present, the church is to live expectant and with longing for that glorious day when the glory of God will be all that matters.

To that age when God’s dwelling place will be with us in the heavens and earth remade.

This truth gives us the steel of the framework for life that we need. It shapes how we worship. It shapes how we fellowship. Because we are God’s and it is his glory that goes on forever. This is grace and peace. Secured by Jesus for us on the cross, intertwined with every fiber of our being by the work of the Spirit in us.

Because there is a future - like the Galatians we can take the direct language that is to come. The correction for living in old patterns. The reorientation of our lives by the dynamite of the gospel.

As we go brothers and sisters, look up, see the horizon, together. Remind each other of it. To the destination of our salvation, our renewal, and the Kingdom’s full expression. And allow that hope to shape how we live now.

**The gospel reorients all of life by securing our past, present, and future.**

The script of humanity changed when the sky darkened and Jesus gave himself for our sins.

The script of humanity changed when the tomb was found empty. The script changed when the resurrected Jesus ascended to the Father’s side in Heaven.



Because that is true we trust his promise to return and make all things new. We can live from his finished work, for his glory and our good.

“Galatians never tires of saying to us: the message of grace still stands; the fountain of grace still flows; the way back to grace couldn’t be easier - all it takes is a heartfelt “Amen,” uttered in response to all that God has done for us in Christ.” Todd Wilson

Surrender the old ways. Jesus gave himself to bring us into a new day, today.

Live secure in Him. He keeps you and delivers you, frees you from evil.

And together, let’s lean into the future, with big dreams and boldness that leads to God’s glory.

In Christ, life isn’t what we expect anymore - this gospel brings the reorientation of life and all things, everything turning to Christ.

May it be so with us.