

Jesus and His Work

Galatians 1:4-5

Last week it was the blessing. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And remember, it was a blessing with authority. This was not just any letter, but one written by the apostle of Jesus, a man whose authority did not come from men—thus the origin of Paul’s authority did not rest with men. His authority did not come through men—so the means by which he was given the office of apostle wasn’t a man either. God had chosen him. God had called him to be an apostle. It was all about God. God the Son, Jesus Christ. And God the Father, who raised him from the dead. Those two persons of the trinity mentioned personally, which is why I made reference last week to the Trinity, though the Holy Spirit isn’t mentioned explicitly here in this text. This was a work of God, and Paul writes to testify about that great work.

So the blessing is the blessing of grace. We are the recipients of grace, which is the gift of God by which our sins are forgiven. You are saved by grace, through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. And, therefore, we have the blessing of peace. Peace with God. Reconciliation. We are loved by God, restored to the fellowship with him that was lost in the Garden of Eden when Adam fell into sin.

Today the focus is upon how that grace and peace was actually accomplished. How that grace of God is expressed. How that peace with God is brought about. How you, as a sinner, can know that you have peace with God. And we come back to that most personal question addressed by the gospel, “How can you be made right with God?” I want you to feel that question today, and to feel the implications of that question. It is not just theoretical. So personal. So practical. You who have sinned,

you who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, how can you be made right with God?

And so Paul gets at the heart of the gospel. He writes an important letter to this church that was troubled by the dangers of legalism, the dangers of teachers telling new converts that to become a Christian you had to become a Jew. They were telling Christians that they were still obligated to the Jewish ceremonial laws, that they were required to do something themselves, they were required to accomplish something themselves of their own effort and by their own merit. Those false teachers were called Judaizers. And Paul would silence them in no uncertain terms. When it came to the issue of Jewish circumcision, he would wish those false teachers to go all the way, as it were. Don’t just settle for the foreskin. Thus he would to say,

Gal. 5:12 “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”

Now, that’s really not a nice thing to say, but the point is obvious. This is a huge matter of utmost importance. And to make his point, Paul has to lay the foundation of the plain message of the gospel. So what is the gospel? What is the doctrinal foundation of the gospel in terms of what Jesus actually did? Simple answer, “he gave himself for our sins,” from verse 4.

One of the most delightful things that children do is to give their own testimony of faith with their innocency and simplicity. And when you ask children about what they believe, they will usually say, “Jesus died for my sins.” And that is such a wonderful statement of theological precision! So if the question is asked,

I. WHAT DID JESUS ACCOMPLISH?

The answer is, Jesus did for my sins. It is the simple profession of faith of a very young child. And it is the foundation of Paul's letter to the Galatians, he "gave himself for our sins."

So what does that mean? And why is that so important?

Let me go back to the Garden of Eden. Remember that covenant relationship which God had established with creatures. The focus of his requirement for obedience was the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil. And the threat was clear, the curse of the covenant was clear, "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die." Or more succinctly, "The wages of sin is death."

The curse of the covenant is death. The penalty required for breaking the covenant was the curse of death. Eternal death. Separation from God, which is spiritual death. And physical death. So the curse was pronounced,

Gen. 3:19 "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Death, the curse of death. In biblical language, the shedding of blood. So what did Jesus do?

A. He endured the curse your sins deserved.

He died. He shed his own blood. And he did so as a substitute. He gave himself for our sins. To satisfy the curse demanded by the covenant contract.

He lifted a burden that we could pay only with our own death. There is so much in Scripture to present this doctrine to us. Let me read one of the more familiar, for your encouragement. For

your confidence.

Is. 53:3 "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

There are two key ideas in all of this, very much related. One is ransom.

Mat. 20:28 "...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Greek word, *lutron*, refers to the price paid to free a slave. And that's what Jesus did. He paid the penalty for our release. And he didn't pay the ransom to Satan, but to God the Father. He paid the Father's price, for our release was from the judgment of God himself.

1 Tim. 2:5 "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, 7 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Or as Peter puts it,

1 Peter 2:24 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

That's why it was so necessary, for "all we like sheep have gone astray." So the gospel is not a message that begins with the goodness of man, giving a basically good man some good moral instructions about how to be better in his goodness.

For none of us have any goodness upon which to base our hope for eternal life.

Rom. 3:10 "...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

The first key idea is ransom. The second is the idea of a substitute. The big word used for that is vicarious. You might hear of the vicarious atonement, which simply means that a substitute paid the ransom that you owed. Jesus gave himself for our sins. Jesus endured the curse your sins deserved.

Then notice the purpose of all of that. In our culture, this is often missed. We think of that substitutionary ransom as a life insurance policy. Or maybe a football helmet. It will protect you, so you can keep on doing whatever you want. You can keep lining up on the line of scrimmage against the other team because you are wearing pads and a helmet. You're protected.

In the spiritual realm, you can keep on living however you want. But notice how Paul ends verse 4. Jesus "gave himself for our sins" for a purpose. Namely, deliverance. Redemption. It was a rescue mission.

v.4

Now, what does that mean? If "deliver" means "to rescue," then what are we being rescued from? Paul says, "The present evil age." So how is this age "evil"? What is the meaning of that

phrase? Let me give you my understanding of that.

Evil is a moral word, a word that describes a moral quality, a negative moral quality. And a period of time is not measured by moral standards. A person is evil, not a day. Technically, mankind is evil, not an age or a generation. But the age, the generation in which we live, is characterized by the curse which God inflicted against evil, and that is what I believe that phrase means. The age in which we live is evil because, throughout this age, we live under the curse of God. This present age is described as evil because it is cursed.

That curse included these words,

Gen. 3:17 "...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field."

This present age is evil because there are thorns and thistles in your garden. This present age is evil because there are diseases that afflict you, be it Crohn's Disease or fibromyalgia. This present age is evil because when you grow old, you get arthritis and cataracts, you get high cholesterol and dementia. This present age is evil because if you go out in the sun too long you will get sunburn, and if you do it too often, you might get skin cancer.

This present age is evil because we live under the condemnation of sorrow, of suffering, and ultimately of death. Even the creation groans. So this present age is evil because a monster storm can develop in the ocean and threaten havoc and destruction upon a whole swath of our eastern seaboard. There are hurricanes and floods and fires and droughts.

So what did Jesus do?

B. He rescues you from the curse of this age.

Not so that you can indulge in all the pleasures this world has to offer, but to rescue you from that world which is so filled with trouble and sorrow.

v.4a

Too many people today think that God simply wants to make them happy in the midst of this evil age, that God simply wants to meet all their needs and give them all the prosperity this world has to offer. But that misses the whole point of redemption. Redemption refers to a rescue. God rescues us out of this present evil age. He delivers you out of this age.

And we begin to experience that even now! We have already transferred our membership. Turn ahead with me to,
Col. 1:13-14 (p.1251)

There is a direct, personal application that comes out of all of that. And it is given in the words Paul wrote in,

Rom. 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

This present age is evil. This world is evil, cursed by God because of the sinfulness of man. So you, Christian, you who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, you whose sins are forgiven, don't conform yourself to the pattern of this present evil age! But be transformed. Changed. Different. And the biblical word for that is “holy.” Set apart from the world. And that is where all the applications of the law come into the life of a Christian. Be holy, God says, as I am holy. Not conformed to this present evil age, for Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present

evil age.”

Next question, “Why?” Why did he do it?

II. WHY DID JESUS COME TO THE EARTH IN THE FLESH?

If you keep reading in verse 4, the answer is obvious, isn't it? The words are clear.

A. He came to do his father's will.

This deliverance, this rescue mission, was the Father's idea.

How horrible are the accounts we have read in the news media this week about the Sept. 11 attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya. How horrible it is to hear reports that as the attack was underway, three requests for assistance were given by CIA agents in a so-called safe house near the embassy. Three times came requests for a rescue mission, and three times it was denied. The order was to stand down. And the implication is that such an order came from the very top of the chain of command in our military.

Beloved, God the Father didn't command his son to stand down. When a rescue mission was called for, when the time for that rescue mission was at hand, the Father's orders were clear. And the Son's obedience was complete. The rescue mission was accomplished. Jesus came to do his father's will. And he completed that work perfectly. With one overarching goal in mind.

B. He came to bring glory to his father.

v.5

Here are two persons of the trinity interacting with each other, in their own distinctive persons. The Father and the Son. The Father determining and accomplishing his own perfect will. And the Son, doing his father's will for his Father's own glory. Amen. So shall it be!

Here, of course, is where Jesus the Son becomes our example, our prototype. Jesus the Son, the perfect man, shows us in his own life what life is all about. He who gave himself for our sins, an act we can never imitate or repeat, shows us the motivation that should very much be the motivation of our own hearts every day of our Christian lives.

This was that motivation of our Lord, “to whom be the glory forever and ever.” And so, people of God, consider your own motivation. Is this your motive? In all things? In every thing you do? To God be the glory forever and ever. Not me. Not my glory. Not to my benefit or my advancement. Not for my comfort or my satisfaction. Not for my enjoyment or for the fulfillment of my needs. This, and this alone, comes to you from Jesus as the very pattern for your own life, that you might live out your life in this evil age in order to accomplish the will of your Father in heaven. And that you might do so in order to exalt and proclaim his glory.

That’s where obedience to the law comes in. That’s where discipline and self-control come in. That’s where exhortations and applications in my sermons come in. That you might live the whole of your life in order to accomplish God’s own purpose for your life. So gone is your own self-will. Gone is your own pursuit of autonomy and freedom. Gone are your own goals and objectives.

Every one of them replaced by those of Jesus,
John 4:34 “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

Thankfully, Jesus accomplished that work. Thankfully, Jesus gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.” Thankfully, in Jesus there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Now, people of God, with that gratitude, imitate Jesus in his

motivation. In your schoolwork, children, in your employments, in your household labors, in your marriage, in your relationship with your parents, within this church as members who belong to one another, this is the goal and standard, that in all things and in every way, God would receive the glory forever and ever.

No exceptions. Nothing held back. Can you say that of yourself? Can you honestly stand before the Lord and declare your love and faithfulness to him with those words? That in all things he would receive the glory forever and ever. Can you confess honestly that those words define your heart? Is there nothing left in the pursuit of your own glory?

No part of your life reserved for your own control. Nothing left in your heart that would yearn for your own glory and your own exaltation. This motive alone, that your life would be lived in reference to God alone,

Rom. 11:36 “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”