

Jesus First – Gal 1:1-5

Gal 1:1-5; It's the start of a new ministry year, and as you can see from the banners, it comes with a new theme and a new study (**Intro**)
Jesus first, Jesus last, Jesus always; Meaning that he should be the all-consuming passion of our lives, start to finish and everywhere in between
That's our theme for the year

- Our study, comes from the book of Galatians; And though it's a short and often overlooked book of the NT, its importance cannot be overstated
Not only does it cover a host of topics – from the OT Law to walking by the Spirit . . . But it deals with the most fundamental truth in all the Bible – the basis of our salvation; What it is and what it isn't; And how our lives should *reflect* it
It's an important book
- In fact, Galatians is so foundational to a proper understanding of our faith, that it was said to be the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation
That time in the 1500's when **Martin Luther**, among others, began to question many of the practices and beliefs of the Catholic Church; Saying they had no basis in the Bible

And central to his convictions in that respect, was the book of Galatians
Where he first found, and became convinced of, the free grace of God, received by faith
Saying at the beginning (**quote**) of his famous lectures on Galatians:
“I embrace only . . . the righteousness of Christ . . . which we do not perform but receive, which we do not have but accept, when God the Father grants it to us through Jesus Christ.”

That's about as good a summary of Galatians as you'll find*****
And as we unfold its pages, we're also going to find that it addresses issues that the early church grappled with for the 1st time, and we grapple with *all* the time
It's a new year, a new theme, and a new study; And I can't wait to get at it; Gal 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.*

When we write a letter or email, we say “Dear So-and-So,” then say what we want, and then end it with “Sincerely” or “Love,” and our name
But in the first century Greek world, they did all that up front; “This is me, writing to you, grace and peace”
So instead of waiting until the *end* to find out the author, we find him in the very first word – *Paul*; He wrote it; Not only b/c he *identifies* himself as such . . .
But b/c of the intensely personal nature of the content; Pretty standard for the 1st century; Pretty normal

What's *not* so normal, is his tone; Instead of just saying, “Paul, to the churches of Galatia, grace and peace” – he inserts some qualifiers
Like he's responding to some unjust criticism, that warrants a response

B/c more than just tarnishing his reputation, the criticism undermines his message
So Paul responds with some qualifiers in his greeting here, that serve to *bolster our trust* in what he says; That's the point of these first few verses

We can trust Paul's words (v1-2)

We can count on the fact that he *knows* the truth, and *speaks* the truth
And gives us 4 reasons for doing so; The first of which, is that . . .

1. He was an apostle

That's how he identified himself in the first 3 words; *Paul, an apostle* he says
Which, in early Greek use, referred to an authorized representative; Like an ambassador
But in the 79 uses of the New Testament, it's used to denote an official spokesman for *Jesus*; Someone who preaches the gospel and spreads the Word, on his behalf
Someone, according to Acts 1, who was an *eyewitness* of Christ's ministry, and was *chosen* by Christ

Those are the 2 main criteria for being an apostle – you have to *see* Jesus with your own eyes, and be *chosen* by him in some observable, definitive way
So when you hear of somebody in our day using the title “Apostle So-and-So” – you know they're unbiblical; And chances are that's only the *tip* of the iceberg

- But for Paul, the title applies
B/c he witnessed the ministry of Jesus personally, even though he was opposed to it . . .
And he was chosen by Jesus in a definitive, observable way – to preach the gospel

The point being, we can trust his words, his message – here and throughout the New Testament – b/c he was legit; He was a legitimate apostle

2. His calling was divine

Notice the next phrase; *Paul, an apostle* [he says]—*not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father*
Paul's like, “Dude, my apostleship and authority did not *originate* with some Joe-Schmoe on the internet;” It wasn't from men he says

Nor was it through men – where somebody acted as God's *agent*, or the agent of a man-made institution, to *confer* the title on him; It wasn't like that

It was *through Jesus Christ and God the Father*; It was divine; Of the Lord
Originating in the mind and will of God the Father, and implemented by God the Son
Not to mention the fact that he wrote under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit
Which means we can *trust* his words; We can *trust* his message

3. His patron was powerful

Patron, as in his sponsor, his backer; Referring to God
Paul wasn't an apostle from men or through men, *but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead* (1); Him, referring to Jesus
God the Father raised Jesus from the dead
And Paul includes this phrase I think, to remind us of the power and authority of the one who chose *him*; The one who *put* him in this role

IOW his patron, his sponsor, is the one powerful enough to raise somebody from the dead
– Almighty God; Which means, we can trust what he *says* on his behalf

4. He was supported by people with **nothing** to gain

Paul was not only extending a greeting from himself, but from all those who were w/ him
V2 – *Paul, an apostle . . . [v2] and all the brothers who are with me*
It was the 1st century way of saying – “This is from all of us, to all of you”

And in so doing, Paul was citing yet another reason we can trust his words
B/c he was surrounded by people who were in a position, to see any issues or detect any fraud; People who were free to leave him if they wanted
People who had nothing to gain by sticking with him
They weren’t paid, they weren’t pampered, and they weren’t given positions of power

In fact, they had everything to *lose* by being around him; Including their lives
Which means we can trust his words, just like they did
That’s the *first* thought that Paul conveys here

2nd, is that . . .

This **applies** to us (v2b-3)

Far from just a history lesson, far from just facts to make us smart – these things actually apply to our lives

And I say that, b/c of who he addresses the letter *to*; Namely, *the churches of Galatia* (2b)
Referring to the churches he established on his first missionary journey, a few years earlier (**Map 13**, ESV Study Bible)

Somewhere around 46-47AD, Paul left Antioch (Syria) with Barnabas, and traveled to Cyprus; Then, they went into modern day Turkey . . .
And started churches in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe; All in the region of Galatia; A Roman state at the time
Hence, “*the churches of Galatia*”; They were original audience*****

- And the reason it applies to *us*, is b/c:
 - (A) We too are a church
 - (B) We live in the same age
 - (C) We’re under the same covenant

We are a group of believers just like there were – who worship, walk, and work for Christ just like they did; Gathering for worship, uniting for the gospel, & living for the Lord
We’re doing the same things they did

The only difference, is time and place; And that *makes* no difference, b/c we live in the same age; On the same side of the cross
And we’re under the same covenant – the New Covenant; Where salvation is no longer found in God’s promised word, but in his Living Word – Jesus

All of which means, that the message of Galatians applies just as much to us as it did to them; So we don’t have the luxury of ignoring it . . .
Or failing to conform our lives and thinking to it; It applies

- Including, thank the Lord, the blessing of grace and peace that Paul extends
[3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ he says
That too applies to us

Grace, referring to God’s unmerited favor; Not just in the *moment* of salvation, but every moment thereafter
When God applies the fullness of his grace to your life, it applies the *moment* you’re saved, and every moment thereafter; It applies

And so does *peace*; Referring to the presence of harmony – harmony with God and harmony with others; Paul wants *them* to have it, and God wants *you* to have it
So I can say the same – *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*; It applies; B/c he’s still pouring it out

And . . .

It starts with the **gospel** (v4-5)

That’s the 3rd thought that Paul lays out here; V4-5
[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.
As in, enough said; *Amen*
And what precedes it, is none other than the *gospel*, in 5 parts

Starting with the fact that **Jesus died**

Or as Paul says it – *he gave himself*; He inserted himself into the world of our sin, and gave up his *own* life, so that we wouldn’t have to
The gospel starts, with *Jesus first*; You didn’t love him first, he loved you; You didn’t die, he did

- And talk about grace – he *gave himself for our sins* it says
IOW Jesus died, as our substitute, to atone for our sins – pay the price for our sins; A price God *requires* in his perfect justice and holiness
He cannot, and will not, overlook sin; Not forever; Somebody has to pay
And Jesus did; *For us*

Which allows *God*, to forgive us; No longer holding our sins against us, if we ask; If we confess; That’s the gospel; The good news of Jesus
That he died, for your sins and mine, so that we could be *forgiven* of our sin

- But it doesn’t stop there; Look at the next phrase; Jesus *gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age*
He died in *our* place, for *our* sins, **to deliver us from evil**
To rescue us from the powers of darkness, and the sin of our day, our age
Sin that holds us in bondage, and *begs* for a Savior; Someone to deliver us from the world in which we live, both externally *and* internally; Saving us from ourselves
Sin and its consequences, beg for a Savior to deliver us

- And Jesus is the one; Not as some afterthought, or plan B, but **according to God’s will**
V4 – [Jesus] *gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father*

The what and how of the gospel is no accident; And neither was the fact that he *chose* you
– you – before the foundations of the earth
Which ought to drop every single one of us to our knees in awe and wonder
That God would so chose, to save *us*, from what we *deserve*, by the sacrifice of his own
Son; In his infinite mercy, and grace, and foreknowledge . . .
It’s all according to his will

- Which makes the last part a no-brainer; That it’s all **for God’s glory** as well
Jesus 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.

The ultimate purpose of the gospel, the ultimate reason God extended it, was to magnify his greatness; His glory; Our salvation, important as it is, is secondary
Primary, is that God is *exalted*; Primary, is that he is worshipped; Primary, is that he is praised; Starting right now, and never ending; Forever and ever (**Summary**)

- The message of Galatians that we can trust and apply to our lives, starts with the gospel;
The Good News of Jesus Christ (**Summary**)
The question is, have you embraced it? Have you put Jesus first in *your* life?
By confessing your sin, declaring your belief, and living his way; Have you?

If not, now’s the time; God is still pouring out his grace; He’s still granting peace
But you have to receive it; And I want to give you a chance to do so right now

Pray – If you’ve never embraced the gospel, I’m going to lead you in a prayer; Just call out to the Lord in the quietness of your heart, right where you sit
“God, I confess that I’m a sinner – I’ve done *wrong* things, and haven’t done the right things; I confess”
“And I *believe* that Jesus is the Savior I need; That he died for me, and my sins, in my place; I believe”
“So will you forgive me, God? Will you come into my life to save me and deliver me?”
“I commit right now, to live your way, from now on”
“I confess my sin, God; I’m declaring my belief; And I want to live for you”

While we continue in prayer, if you just prayed with me will you raise your hand and look at me?
I just want to acknowledge you, and rejoice with you in your salvation
Is there anyone?

Prayer – Lord, would you bless and keep each and every person who just received your gospel? Would you build them up in the fellowship of our church? Would you give them great joy in believing? Fill them with your Spirit, and give them a hunger for your Word; We praise you for saving them, and give you the glory forever and ever