

## Gospel Greetings

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**Bible Text:** Galatians 1:3-5  
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Our Scripture lesson this evening comes from Galatians 1:1-5. Our text will be verses 3 to 5. Let's hear the reading of God's word. Galatians 1:1,

1 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 so that he might set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 glory is his into the ages of the ages. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, we come to you as those whose strength is in you and we pray that tonight as your word says, Yahweh will give grace and glory. If you do not give glory tonight, we pray you will at least give grace to us in your word and sustain your people. On their living Savior we pray. Amen.*

I don't want to scare you but a week ago, last Sunday night, we had gone three blocks from our home and I said to my wife, "I don't know if I used deodorant." You know what that's like. There's something that is so habitual and so routine that you don't have any conscious memory that you do it because you do it all the time. And it's after your shower and you're ready to put on your clean t-shirt that you lubricate, but it's just such a matter of course that you don't think about it and you can't remember if you did it.

Well, I apologize if any of you were injured from that but sometimes we approach the epistles that way, and especially the first part of the epistles where you have these sometimes we tend to think, routine formulas and so on and we tend to skip over them a little bit. We think why don't we get to the first paragraph because this is sort of the same in all the epistles, at least Paul's epistles and so on. No, it's not. Don't do that because it may seem routine but the apostle is a little edgy here, especially in Galatians. He's already beginning to make his argument and he's combating people that think that Paul is a sub-apostle, "You're not quite up to the Jerusalem apostles," and so he's countering that at the very beginning and then he's also countering the Jesus plus heresy that some of the

Galatians seemed to be swallowing, that is, Jesus in himself in his person and work is not enough. There has to be more. You have to add more. You have to supplement Jesus. Jesus is okay as far as he goes, but we have to have Jesus plus, and so he was going to counter that and you notice that in verses 3 to 5, you have something missing that's often in place in other epistles and that's a note of thanksgiving and a commendation to the church and so. And that's missing here because Paul, I don't know about South Carolinians, I haven't figure you all out yet, but I know that Paul's not like a deep South Southerner like a Mississippian because he doesn't say, "Bless your hearts," if he can't mean it, and they need a little boot in the backside. So he's not going to give thanksgiving or commendation. That's missing here.

He jumps right in but what he wants you to see is that you must realize what you've been given in the genuine Gospel, and he sets that before you already. He says, "I want you to see, first of all, the bounty of the Gospel." Verse 3, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice there that you have the source of that grace and peace and you notice that Paul says it comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He puts the Lord Jesus Christ on the same plane or level as God the Father. There is an equality there. He's very subtly and, well, not so subtly, just obviously assuming the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not a full development of the doctrine of the Trinity but these are the running works of what will become the doctrine of the Trinity. There is just an automatic assumption that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is on the same level of deity and honor and glory as the Father is.

But then there's also the matter of the order here. You notice that grace comes first, then peace. Grace is received and then peace is enjoyed, but peace is always the outflow or the result of grace. Grace first, then peace. Well, what I want you especially to see is what we might call the continuity of grace and peace, that is, that he assumes that grace and peace still overflow to Christ's people. It's not as if you say, "Oh, I'm already a Christian. I've had grace and peace and that's it and so on. I'm beyond that." No, no, he assumes by saying this, by as it were a kind of a prayer, grace to you and peace, he's assuming that grace and peace are still abundantly available and still abundantly needed by Christ's people. They are still operating. They are still overflowing.

That's always the case, isn't it? We have a lavish Savior. You remember what John says in his Gospel in John 1:16? Well, you remember 1:14, don't you? "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us and we beheld his glory, glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," and then you have a little parenthesis in verse 15 about John the Baptist, then in verse 16, picks up connecting with that phrase "full of grace and truth because out of his fullness, we all have received even grace on top of grace." That's your Savior. He overflows in his gifting to his people and this is the bounty of the Gospel.

This is what's going on, though, when he says "grace." What can we make of that? Well, grace, in one way, can be summed up and centered in all that the Lord Jesus does and is. Remember 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty

might become rich." That's grace and grace always has that unmerited element to it, doesn't it? You remember Romans 11:6, there is a remnant in Israel according to the election of grace and if it's of grace, it's no longer of works etc. Grace and works, human effort, are opposed to each other so there is an unmeritedness about grace. Grace is what I get, what I don't deserve and there's always that element in New Testament grace.

But there's more than that. I told you before, I think, you know, you go to 2 Corinthians 12 and about verse 9 and you remember in that context Paul was praying for something for the Lord to do, to remove that thing he called "the thorn in the flesh," and he prayed three separate times that the Lord would take it away and then Jesus answered him and said to him, basically, no. And he said this, "My grace is all you need for my power is most fully displayed when my people are weak." But you see how he defines his grace there, in terms of his power. So is his grace always unmerited? Oh yes, it is, but grace is also Christ's power that flows to his weak and wobbly people to sustain them. Grace to you and it continues to flow and it's still available.

What about peace? What's that? Well, Romans 5:1, "Having therefore been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace is primarily peace with God, reconciliation and a right relationship with him. That's peace, but that too is something that's not just a one shot deal, if you want to put it that way. You remember Jesus' words in John 14, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Not as the world gives do I give to you." That's not, at least it must mean, one thing that must mean is that it's not a passing affair; it's not some temporary matter. It's something that's ongoing and continuous and it continues to hold and keep you.

So here you have these gifts and you must realize that this is not something, in other words, the bounty of the Gospel and the giftedness of God does not dry up at your conversion. Grace and peace go on. You have such riches and you must take them and you must use them. You must realize that your God is a fountain of living waters and so you go to him and you take those gifts again and again as he gives them to you in the bounty of the Gospel.

It was Don Acock of Louisiana who told a story of a fellow who had been reared in the city and bought a farm and several milk cows. He was in the feed store one day and he complained that his best cow had gone dry and so the proprietor said, "Well, aren't you feeding her right?" He said, "Well, I'm feeding her what you give me to feed her." He said, "Well, are you milking her every day?" "Well," he said, "just about. If I need 6 or 8 ounces of milk for breakfast, I go out and get it. If I don't need any, I don't get it, I just let her save it up." And the feed store owner had to explain to him that with a cow's milk, you take all that's there.

Don't think that there's some constricted element in God's grace and peace. You take all. There is an abundance of it. It overflows. That's the whole marvel of this is the whole assumption that these gifts are continuous. Christians need them and you have ongoing riches. I'm filthy rich of grace and I have peace, what more can I want? You have grace

that sustains you continuously in your weariness and you have peace that settles you even in your storms. That's the bounty of the Gospel.

Well, secondly, Paul wants you to see the wonder of the Gospel. You see it in verse 4, "who gave himself for our sins." That's the wonder of the Gospel. You notice how Paul is, you notice at the end of verse 3 that he refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and it's as if when he mentions the Lord Jesus Christ, he just can't stop himself. He has to add something else. The very mention of the Lord Jesus makes him want to say something more in adoration or gratitude about him. It just spills over. So we have grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins. That's the wonder of the Gospel.

I want you to look at that word especially, "himself." There is a certain awe, I suppose, a response we ought to have to that kind of self-giving. Churchill in his book, "Their Finest Hour," talks about the sacrifice of life in the British Empire. He wasn't trying to diminish the American contribution, but this small island nation of Great Britain and, of course, the Dominions and the Commonwealth and the Colonies, the loss of life in order to stop the Nazi menace amounted to 412,240 and he said he mentioned that in order that the shedding of such precious blood would command the reverence of the English speaking people. There is something about sacrifice like that that ought to bring kind of an awe and a proper reverence and Paul says here, "Jesus, he gave himself for our sins."

Now, you notice sometimes here he talks about us and so on. You remember that Paul also in the passage many of you probably quote and memorize, Galatians 2:20, that Paul also speaks of this in individual terms when he says, "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." This orders people, yes, there is a sense in which you say it individually, and this is the marvel of it, isn't it?

I think, I may be wrong, but I think what you have here in the first part of verse 4 really flows out of a promise in the Old Testament in Genesis 17:7. I know what you may think. "Oh, Davis, you've got Old Testamentitis. It's no wonder you think that and so on." But I remember speaking to you a few weeks ago from Genesis 17:7 and you may remember we said there is nothing quite like that in all of Scripture when the God of the Bible says to his servant, Abraham, "I will be God to you and to your seed after you." And what does that mean? When the living God says, "I will be God to you," that means practically everything. It means that he's saying at least this, "I will be everything that God should be to you. I will be everything that God can be to you. I will be everything that God must be to you." And it seems to me that this flows out of that, that in the fullness of time the God of heaven and earth says to us, "And now I must be the God, the one who gives himself for your sins. That's the kind of God I must be to you." In any case, you sense that a response to this ought to bring the goosebumps to your spine and gratitude to your heart. He gave himself.

There is an understanding that Xenophon told a story of a certain Armenian prince. You notice I said Armenian, it's not Arminian. We're not talking theology here, we're being

ethnic, Armenian. And there was a certain Armenian prince and his queen whom Cyrus, king of Persia, took captive and so on. And Cyrus then asked this Armenian prince if he desired the restoration of his liberty, his kingdom and his queen and the prince answered and said, "As for my liberty and my kingdom, I value them not, but if my blood would redeem my wife, I would cheerfully give it." Well, Cyrus was a rather generous king anyway, he restored all three to him and so the prince asked his queen what she thought of Cyrus as a person and she said, "I really did not observe him. My mind was so occupied with the man who offered to give his life for my ransom that I could think of no other."

Isn't that the kind of response you should have to one who gave himself for our sins? "My mind is so occupied with the one who gave himself for my ransom that I can think of no other." That's the wonder of the Gospel.

Thirdly, Paul wants us to see the liberty of the Gospel. You notice he goes on in the middle of verse 4, "who gave himself for sins so that he might set us free from the present evil age." In other words, to give us liberty. Now, that's strange language. We don't think of ourselves as being bound or imprisoned or in bondage to an age, the present evil age. You don't need to turn there but you might want to make a mental note of Ephesians 2:2 because you have the same kind of language and let me read it to you. That's where Paul says, refers to his Ephesian readers as having once been "dead in trespasses and sins," and then he goes on, "in which you once walked," I'm going to translate it literally, "according to," or in line with, "the age of this world." You won't find that in most of your translations but I'm trying to get you to see that this whole idea of an age, in line with the age of this world, in line with the ruler of "the authority of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

If you pick that apart, you see that Paul is saying, "Not only were you dead, not only is there deadness in your trespasses and sins, but there is dominance that's going on. You are in bondage to the age of this world." Well, what does that mean? Well, it sounds strange maybe to us but he fleshes it out. It means that you're going in lockstep to it and it means that you are in lockstep and under the power of the ruler of the authority of the air. In other words, his infernal satanic majesty. You are in, whatever this means is, it's you are in bondage.

Now, that's one of the things that we need to understand, that this whole matter of sin is not just a matter that we're held under the guilt of sin, but we're held in the grip of sin. We are helpless outside of Christ. We are helpless, we are slaves and Paul is saying here that Jesus when he gave himself for our sins, he did that so that he might set us free from the present evil age. That's why Paul says the Gospel is the power of God in Romans 1:16. It's not advice on how to be moral. It's not instruction in how to be nice. It's not showing you how to succeed by turning religious. It's power. It sets you free from the grip.

I don't know if you've ever felt the grip of helplessness and bondage. I remember a time when I was probably about 10 years old, I was trying to learn to ride a 26" two-wheeler

bike and my dad was trying to teach me and his method was, I suppose like most dads, you get the kid on the bike, you start him off and you pedal and you're going on your own until you fall off and that's what we did.

But I had a problem. I did okay on the straightaway after he got me going but if I had to make any move in terms of a turn of the handlebars, I would fall off. I couldn't turn. I don't know why. I just couldn't do it. So this one Wednesday night, it was before prayer meeting at church and after supper that he decided that we could do some bike practice and so he got me on the driveway and he said he was going to get me started. I said, "Pop," the driveway was perpendicular to the highway and I said, "Pop, I can't turn." I would be going straight out after about 200 feet into the road and you know that strange detachment that fathers have, they don't really hear the angst of their children and so on. I don't know, but you don't ask questions, at least I didn't, you just do that because your father knows best, apparently even if you're scared. I don't know, it only struck me later, maybe he had a life insurance policy on me and he was the beneficiary or something. I thought of that in my adult years.

But in any case, he got me started and I knew it would happen. I got to the end of the driveway and I was supposed to turn and go down the sidewalk in front of Lawrence Brown's house and so on. I couldn't do it. It's as if I were chained. I knew what I had to do. I couldn't do it. I went straight down the apron of the driveway right out on the highway, smack into a passing Plymouth.

It's not that you don't know it, but you're bound and what Paul is saying is that you are in slavery in your sin but Jesus in giving himself, did that to set you free from that bondage. It's emancipation from bondage. That's the Gospel work. It's the liberty of the Gospel and that liberty comes out sometimes in very common but beautiful scenarios, doesn't it, when you see Christ working like this.

I remember reading in Martyn Lloyd Jones' biography about a time in the congregation in Wales that he first served, and there was a little lad who came to school one day and he said to his teacher, "We had a dinner today, Miss. We had gravy, potatoes, meat and cabbage and rice pudding." And then the secret came out, he said, "My father's been converted." So what happened? Oh, he just meant that when his father got paid on Friday evening, that he didn't go to the pub and drink himself silly and spend his wages, but his wages came home to his wife and to his children and there was food on the table which is all a silent witness to the fact of the liberty of the Gospel, that someone had been set free from the present evil age and there are any number of you who know what that's like either dramatically or quietly.

Now, notice one more matter, notice that Paul wants you to see the sovereignty of the Gospel. The sovereignty of the Gospel. "So that he might set us free from the present evil age in line with the will of our God and Father." That is, that was God's plan. That's what God wanted to do. That's sovereignty. This was God's will that it worked this way. God wanted to do this. We don't usually see it that way in the process of our coming to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, however, that happens in our case. We come but we're not

usually conscious of what's behind it. We often come to understand and see and think about that later, sort of like me thinking about my dad maybe having an insurance policy and that sort of thing. But you reflect on it later and you look back and you say, "That was planned. That wasn't an accident. It's according to the will of our God and Father."

Take a for instance, an illustration that didn't really happen, okay? So we're into fantasy a little bit but it could happen, okay? Let's say you have a young girl who is a college co-ed and she notices that when she goes out to her car, let's say she goes out in the morning about 8 o'clock or a little before 8 because she gets in her car and she drives across town to a place where she works for a couple of hours before she comes back for her classes on campus. Alright? And let's say that she happens to notice there is a kind of a fine looking fellow that comes down the sidewalk, walking on campus to apparently his first class right about the time when she's leaving. And she tries to say hello to him or in some way get his attention, but he's always in his coffee cup or something. Sometimes he kind of grunts at her but he just doesn't notice her. There's just nothing there. It's a most frustrating thing and she'd kind of like to get his attention.

So finally, you know, something happens and they are able to get together. They form a friendship and a relationship and eventually they get engaged. And they're home on a vacation to, let's say, her family and some of her relatives, siblings and others, ask them as they're having dessert around the table, "How was it that you all got together?" etc. And so he says, "Oh, it was just kind of accidental. It was like this, I was coming down the walk going to my class one day and I happened to notice this girl standing beside me. There was a flat tire on her car and there was the jack out and the lug wrench was out and so on, but she just looked helpless and so on. And I happened to notice her and I said, 'Hey, can I give you a hand?' She said, 'Oh, that would be wonderful if you would.' So I took ten minutes, I was a little late to class, but I took ten minutes and I changed her tire and I got the nuts on there and so on, and she was so grateful that she said to me, 'Look, if you don't want to take any pay, let me at least pay for lunch. Can we have maybe lunch together just as a little thank you and so on? Maybe we can go and have a hamburger and a peach milkshake or something like that?' So we did and then we got to talking over that and then a friendship developed and here we are." It was just kind of a bump along thing.

And she says, "Oh, that's a bunch of rubbish. I happened to be frustrated because you never paid any attention and you didn't know that I existed and you said I was a very attractive girl when you finally noticed me, but I would have never known that. And you kept going by and I would see you day after day and you wouldn't pay squat of attention to me so finally at 5 o'clock one morning, I slipped out of my room and I went down and I let the air out of my front right tire. Then about quarter to 8, I went down there and I got the jack and the lug wrench out and so on, and then I stood there looking forlorn and so on. And finally you noticed me."

In other words, it was planned. It wasn't just an accident. Now, I know you can corrupt that illustration and so on, but the point that Paul I think is making here is this deliverance that Jesus has given you is not a fluke. This was planned. This is according to the will of our God and Father. There is a sovereignty at work here.

We've got the Lord's Supper here so perhaps we could make the same kind of application here. I don't know what Reverend Lauton will do with the words of institution and what section of the Scripture he'll use for that. One that we often use is the one from 1 Corinthians 11:23 and following, isn't it? "The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread," etc. It's referring apparently to Judas, at least that seems to be the way most take it and that Greek verb there, betrayed, is a verb that means "handing over or to hand over." So literally it reads, "The Lord Jesus in the night in which he was being handed over, took bread." But you know that there are some other places where that same verb is used, like in Romans 8:32. You have the same Greek verb, don't you? "He who did not hold back his very own Son but handed him over for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" So is Judas handing Jesus over in 1 Corinthians 11? Yeah, well, that may well be what's meant there, but there was a handing over that was before and above and around that of Judas. As Octavius Winslow said many years ago, "Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas for money, not Pilate for fear, not the Jews for envy, but the Father for love." According to the will of our God and Father. Amen.