



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 1: 1-5

Spring 2021

"Rescued"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. Well, this is a Sunday of introductions, and this is an introduction to the Book of Galatians. So we're going to look this morning at Galatians, chapter 1, verses 1 through 5,

¹ Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), ² and all the brethren 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 rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen.

Galatians 1: 1-5

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time together in the study of it. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, we do pray Your blessing upon us, as we study this introduction to this great epistle to the Galatians. And what a wonderful introduction it is. It's so full of doctrine and theology that is pertinent to everything Paul would write and argue in this

epistle. So he gives us a good introduction to it, and I pray that You would open our hearts to receive the ministry of this introduction—that the Spirit of God would open our hearts and that we would receive it and it would be applied to us and that You would guide and direct us in our thinking.

LORD, we pray that You'd build us up in the faith this morning, that You'd give us a great sense of Your greatness. One of the great themes, and maybe the central theme, maybe the overall riding theme of this book is Your sovereign grace and salvation. It's altogether Your work, and we get a sense of that clearly from this introduction. And so I pray LORD, that You would be magnified in our minds and hearts. There is nothing more practical in the Christian life than to have a great and glorious vision of You. And it can never become great enough and glorious enough. We'll spend all eternity gazing upon that, marveling over it, and it will only become greater and greater as our experience unfolds.

So give us that this morning, Father. Give us appreciation of who You are and what You've done through Your Son, who He is and what He's done for us, and also the danger of letting that slip away from us. So there's a cautionary note in all of this LORD, and I pray that You would bless us with that and those understandings.

Bless us LORD, in the material things of life as well. It's been a year now since this pandemic broke upon us. We're still in it. We still have something of a danger for us. I pray that you'd protect us, protect all of us. And I think particularly of those who are particularly vulnerable to it; protect them. Protect all of us.

Father, You know all of our needs and all of our griefs. And that's a very important attitude to have, that this life is short, it's brief. We have been redeemed from this evil age, as Paul tells us. And that's what this is. Our hope is not in this place. It's beyond, and we should long for that. And I pray that You would put that in our hearts, LORD, the desire to be with You and an understanding of the glorious hope we have. We have that because of Christ and we have Him because of the Gospel that we will consider this morning.

Bless our time of study this morning in these first verses of Galatians, and then throughout the weeks as we continue our studies in it. We pray these things, and Your blessing upon us, in Christ's name. Amen.

The Book of Galatians is a small book, only six chapters. You can read it in 20 minutes, yet it has an importance, as one writer said, "out of all proportion to its size." It's been called the 'Magna Carta' of spiritual liberty. We might call it the 'Declaration of Independence' of spiritual freedom. And it's recognized as being one of the single most significant influences in shaping the history of the church, as well as the history of the Western world.

Merrill Tenney, who was for many years a professor at Wheaton College, wrote that, "But for the Book of Galatians, Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely different." So we owe a lot to this little book. It addresses the most fundamental of issues—Salvation. Is it through keeping the law, or through faith in Christ? That's the issue.

Paul's answer is the answer of the patriarch Abraham and the prophet Habakkuk; "The just shall live by faith." (Hab 2:4). It's no wonder that the Book of Galatians became the cornerstone of the reformation. Martin Luther was especially fond of it. He called it his wife; "It is my own epistle. It is my Katie von Bora."

So the Book of Galatians is an important book. Every book of the Bible is, of course, but the Book of Galatians has an unusual place in history, and has had a remarkable influence. Its message is one of grace. And it is one we need continually to hear, for fear that we move away from it.

That's what the Galatian churches were doing. It's to them that the book was addressed in verse 3. These were the churches Paul had established on his first missionary journey with Barnabas, when they visited the southern area of modern day Turkey, then Asia Minor. The Romans referred to that area as the province of Galatia. It included the cities of Pisidian Antioch, (and that should be distinguished from Antioch,

the great city in Syria, where the first missionary journey began), as well as the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

There was a region to the north in the central plateau of Asia Minor that was also called Galatia, and was named after the Gauls who originally lived there. Paul did travel through that district on his second and third missionary journeys, but there's no mention of churches that were established there. It was to the southern Galatian churches Paul wrote his letter, which would make the Book of Galatians likely the first book that he wrote—perhaps in the year AD 48. The style of the book suggests that he wrote it quickly—and with urgency. He began with a brief introduction and then he gets right to the point—which we'll consider next week. Something very alarming had happened to those churches, and not too long after Paul had left the region and returned to Antioch. And it threatened the work that he began.

Paul had labored hard there. He and Barnabas moved through the province city by city, entering synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in Christ. And all along the way, they met opposition. Some crowds shouted them down. Other crowds ran them out of town. In Lystra Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead.

It had been a hard ministry, but the LORD blessed it. All along the way, Gentiles who had been born into darkness turned from paganism to the light of the Gospel. All along the way, in each of those Asian cities, small churches were established. Paul and Barnabas revisited each of them on their way home, “strengthening the souls of the disciples”, Luke wrote in Acts 14:22, “encouraging them to continue in the faith”, to persevere—so important.

Not long after returning home, Paul learned that they were not continuing in the faith, but forsaking it. A group of agitators known as Judaizers had come into the region shortly after Paul left and taught the Galatians the Law in an attempt to draw them into the Jewish religious system. They claimed to be Christians. They claimed to represent the apostles in Jerusalem. But they preached a completely different gospel from the one Paul preached. They taught that it is necessary to undergo the rite of circumcision in order to be saved. Faith in Christ is not enough—a person had to also keep the Law.

Paul preached the Gospel of faith alone, in Christ alone. That was the message that the Galatians had heard originally. That was the message that they had believed. So this new message of 'faith plus works' caused great confusion in these young churches. And being relatively young and inexperienced in the faith, they were swayed by these false teachers; who not only denied the Gospel that Paul preached, but denied that Paul was himself a real apostle.

Since Paul wasn't among the original 12, they claimed that he wasn't a genuine apostle, so that he had no real authority for what he said—there was no authority, not the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem, behind the message that he preached.

Well, it was persuasive, these men who came to Galatia. And the Galatians began to believe what they said, began to move away from the faith, from the truth, from what they had originally been taught by the apostle. And they began putting themselves under the obligations of the Law of Moses.

The message of the Judaizers has an appeal to men, has an appeal to human nature—to add a work of our own to the work of Christ, so that we can take some credit for our acceptance with God. That is why the Book of Galatians is so important—and was so important to Luther. The professing church of his day, the established church was teaching a gospel of faith plus works—faith plus ceremonies. It was sacerdotalism. That's a big word, but it's an important word, and what it means is 'salvation by sacrament'. And that was so common in Luther's day.

We face it today, as well, even within the Protestant pale, we have that. Whenever someone or a group or a denomination says that, 'faith alone is not enough; baptism is necessary.' Well this will always be an issue because the Gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is always under attack. And the attack is often very subtle—very clever. It was in Paul's day.

The Judaizers, as far as we know, didn't deny Christ, didn't deny His deity. They didn't deny His bodily resurrection from the dead. They didn't deny the need to believe in Him. I don't doubt that they came in saying, "It's so important that you believe in Him as the Son of God, and as the Savior." They were just adding one ceremony to all of

that—one work of man which, in fact, had been commanded under the Old Covenant. But Paul said, ‘That one thing—that one rite of circumcision—destroys grace.’ And with it we lose the Gospel altogether.

So, when word got back to Paul in Antioch, he immediately answered the churches with this brief letter which is urgent, has that sense of urgency about it. In fact almost a sense of anger in his appeal to them to turn from the brink of apostasy. And I want to underline that. They were on the brink of it. They had not yet fallen into apostasy, but that was the place that they were—on the brink of denying the faith.

And so Paul wrote to them and he wrote to them in a kind of heated way. He didn't mince his words. He called the Judaizers “accursed”. He called the Galatians “foolish” and “bewitched”. His concern was like that of a parent for his or her child who was under the spell of a seducer. He responded quickly—he responded persuasively.

The main point that he makes to the Galatians, (which is the central theme of the letter), is that justification is by faith alone. We have acceptance with God, we have His robes of righteousness, as it were, through faith alone.

And he develops that theme in three parts. He develops the theme that salvation is altogether the work of God, and not our work at all: In chapters 1 and 2 where he defends his apostleship; in chapters 3 and 4, where he defends his Gospel; and then in chapters 5 and 6 where he defends the Christian life.

His apostleship is apart from men. Salvation is apart from works. The Christian life is apart from the Law.

Put positively, he was chosen an apostle by Christ; salvation is through faith; and the Christian walk is by the Holy Spirit. —It's all a free gift—it is all of grace. Grace is the keynote to Galatians.

And Paul begins the letter on that subject with a prayer for God's grace and peace. That's in the middle of the introduction in verse 3.

First though, in the typical letter writing style of his day, Paul begins with his name, and the name of those to whom he was writing, and an expression of good will.

He begins, "Paul, an apostle." And in doing that he immediately answers the challenge to his authority and the credibility of the Gospel that he preached.

Strictly speaking, an apostle is 'one who is sent'. But here it means more than that. It refers to the spiritual gift of a particular group of men, authorized to preach the Gospel and lay the foundation of the church.

In Ephesians 2 verse 20, the apostles and prophets are called, "the foundation" of the church, "...Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." Paul begins by saying he's one of those apostles. He was not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. This is what the Judaizers, these heretics, had denied. In order to undermine Paul's ministry and gain acceptance for their message they alleged that Paul was not an apostle. He had no authority—he's a renegade.

But Paul claimed full apostolic authority, derived not from men, not even from the apostles in Jerusalem—he received his apostleship directly from Christ and from God the Father. And significantly—for Paul's authority and what he says about salvation in verse 4—he places Christ and the Father on equal terms by joining the two of them with one preposition. He was sent "through, (*the preposition 'through'*), Jesus Christ and God the Father." (vs1). In other words, 'through both of them equally'. So that statement alone has significance for understanding who is Jesus Christ.

And Paul's talking about who he is; he's an apostle, and a genuine apostle. But in saying that he's making the point that Christ is equal with the Father. They are distinct persons in the godhead, but they are of the same essence. They are equal in power and glory as the one God. Christ is God the Son. That is the source of Paul's authority, the Triune God. Authority that was given to him at his conversion. His authority as an apostle was real, and equal with that authority of the 12 in Jerusalem. Now that's how he begins the letter: Without apology, he is a true apostle, sent by the Father and the Son. Therefore he is someone to hear and follow.

Then he sends greetings to them from all the brethren who were with him, probably fellow workers and missionaries, like Barnabas and the leaders in the church at

Antioch. But the effect of the greeting is significant because it shows that Paul was not alone in his beliefs—in his claim to be an apostle and in the conviction that his Gospel is pure and true. The brethren were behind him.

The apostles were, too, as Paul will demonstrate later in this first portion of the book—but here, it's the brethren; Christians, the church, that stood with Paul. So he had not introduced a new Gospel to the Galatians. He proclaimed what the church universally agreed was the Gospel. He had all of the church behind him in what he is saying, about his apostleship and about his Gospel. It is the Good News of salvation.

He gives the essentials of that Gospel in the final verses of his greeting. First by saluting the Galatians in verse 3, with two important words. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the LORD Jesus Christ." And again, you have one preposition, that word 'from', joining both of these persons together, showing that this comes from both the Father and the Son. —They are equal with one another.

Now these words, 'grace' and 'truth', very important words, are found in many of Paul's greetings. It's almost like a formula. But they're not stated in a formulaic way, they are very appropriate, very appropriate to what he is saying here, because God's grace was under attack, and the Galatians' peace was threatened. Grace is God's unconditional and undeserved favor, His undeserved goodwill towards sinners. Grace is a gift and it was supremely demonstrated in the cross of Christ, in the work of redemption that Christ accomplished.

'Peace' is a Hebrew greeting, *shalom*. And essentially it is not so much a lack of war or the absence of war and hostility, it essentially is a positive term speaking of a state of 'wholeness' and 'well-being'. That means being in a state of peace with God, essentially. And based on that state of being at peace with God, we are at peace with one another—peace with man and then peace within ourselves. Now the two of these are connected.

One of the commentators put it this way, "Grace and peace are related to each other as root and fruit, or cause and effect." So we lose peace when we depart from

grace. When people exchange divine grace for human merit and seek to obtain God's approval by personal works of righteousness, peace suffers.

It is impossible to have personal peace when we believe that our acceptance with God is based on our personal performance. —Because it is impossible to know when we have enough good works; when we have performed well enough; when we are eternally secure. If our relationship with God is based on our performance, even partially based on our performance, then we can never have certainty about that. Because we can never know if we've done enough, and we can never know if what we've done is perfect, (and we can know it's not!). So it robs a person of peace when they lose a sense of the grace of God. That was the problem in the Galatian churches.

Later, in chapter 5 verse 4, Paul tells them, "...you have fallen from grace." Now what he did not mean by that is, 'they have lost their salvation'. One cannot lose his or her salvation. He didn't mean that they had fallen from God's hand, but that they had fallen from the principle of grace by which God deals with us—and they'd fallen into legalism. So, when he wrote to them they lacked peace. And that is what he wished for them. As a parent for his or her child, he prayed that they would have both "grace and peace".

But both come to us in only one way—through the only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. —And that must be understood. So Paul speaks of it in verse 3&4. Grace and peace come from "God our Father and Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sin so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."

What that means very simply is, 'Salvation is God's work, not ours'. The Father planned it, the Son executed it. It is an accomplished fact, and there is absolutely nothing that we can add to it. It is finished. We can only receive it. That's Paul's point.

But he develops it in terms of the Father's and the Son's role in our salvation by showing that God is the author of it and Christ is the basis of it, the one who carried out this plan of God. First it all happened according to the will of our God and Father. Salvation is according to God's eternal plan.

Paul states that in other passages—and in various ways. For example, in Ephesians, chapter 1, in verse 4 he speaks of God's choice of us "...before the foundation of the world...", before we'd done anything good or bad. Before the foundation of the world He chose us. It's an eternal plan that He had.

But the name 'God' also denotes power. It denotes omnipotence. He's all powerful. And that means His will cannot be frustrated, His plan cannot fail.

But He's also designated here as our Father. And that suggests the disposition of His love.

Mark (*Newman*) was speaking of Luke and the emphasis in his theology, (and what you see throughout it), is the love of God in all that takes place in the Gospel of Luke. And that's behind everything in this Book of Galatians, too. Everything that the LORD did is an expression of love, an act of love, the disposition of the love of a Father for His children. And that's expressed in Paul's concern for these Galatians, as well.

Well that's what lies behind the plan and the work of salvation. It is the infinite, irresistible love of God the Father, who willed to make us, willed to make those Galatians, His children. He cannot be frustrated in doing that. So to carry out His plan and accomplish our salvation the Father sent His Son, whom Paul says, "...gave Himself for our sins." (vs4). He sacrificed Himself for us because of our sins. He became our substitute in judgment so that He could suffer the penalty of death in our place—suffer it so that we would escape it.

Now that's how Paul explains the LORD's death later in chapter 3 verse 13, "Christ," he said, "redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us..." That is, by becoming a curse in our place, the curse of death for sin fell upon Him, rather than on us. And He did that, Paul said, to "rescue us". And He didn't fail.

J. B. Lightfoot, who wrote one of the classic commentaries on the Book of Galatians called this word "rescue" or "deliver" the keynote of the epistle. John Stott wrote, "Christianity is, in fact, a rescue religion." That's what the Book of Galatians is about, "rescue". Which refers to 'rescue from danger'.

And that's how Luke uses this word in the Book of Acts. He writes of God rescuing Joseph from his affliction in jail, and of Israel being delivered from slavery in Egypt, and Paul being rescued from a mob. The Father sent His Son into this world on a rescue mission to save the helpless. And the danger from which He saved us is stated here as being "this present evil age." (vs4).

Now, is that how you would describe this world in which we live, this present age of history, as "evil"? Well, I think some would. But many of us wouldn't. Oh, we'd agree with what Paul has to say, but as we think about "this evil age", as Paul describes it, we're somewhat enamored of it. Not so much we want to be separated from it, as we want to be established in it. And maybe, the truth be known, that is true of some of us in particular. We don't want to be rescued from it. We want, as I said, to be established in it, to have the nice things that it offers—all the glittery stuff that the world sets forth as being the essence of it and enjoy it.

Well, we don't always see the present age in the light that which the apostle describes it here. There is much about it, as I say, that's attractive. And it has an appeal to us, it has an allure to us; and I think I mention that periodically in the lessons that I give you—maybe it's because it's such an alluring thing to me. But Paul saw it differently. He saw through it. He saw it at its core—and it is evil, (and you can 'Amen' to that!).

Paul was no ascetic, let me say that, when he described this world as evil. He was no austere, self-denying monk who believed that pleasure and the things of this world are bad, and we should avoid them, and divest ourselves of all of that. Not at all. In fact, Paul condemned that very attitude and those who teach it. He said to the Colossians, in Colossians chapter 2 verse 21, he referred to this teaching as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." Paul denied that. He rejected that theology. Paul wasn't like that. God's creation is good—and it's to be enjoyed.

But what drives the world's system (and that's really what Paul was describing here, not God's creation), but this system that drives the world, the spirit of this age, what some have referred to as the "godless zeitgeist" —what drives it is evil, because it's under the influence of an evil spiritual being. In 2 Corinthians 4 verse 4, Paul wrote of

“the god of this world”, who has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving. Why is it that this world is so appealing and why do people want to invest their lives in it and their goals around it? It is because they've been blinded—deceived. They cannot see the reality which lies behind it, which Paul unveils for us here.

Now God hasn't lost His sovereignty over the world or over this world's system. The devil rules, but he rules under God's authority and power. But it is the devil who inspires this age and its way of life. And this way of life is dominated by sin, by the desire to be autonomous, to go our own way, to make our own lives, to not be under the authority of our Creator. And that's very attractive.

This world is very attractive, as I said, because it promises pleasure, it promises fulfillment, and it promises so much. Now that's this present age, and what it offers, great promises—freedom, fulfillment, pleasure—but it never delivers. That's the deception. It promises much, it delivers very little to nothing. Sin always leads to slavery and death. It's all very subtle and very convincing.

This is what we have been rescued from, this great deception—this great, destructive system; from the control of the powers that dominate this age—from a world that is doomed; a way of life that leads to enslavement and death. Christ rescued us from that.

And in its place He has given us the hope of heaven, the world to come, eternal life, and new life in the present. And we don't just wait for the glories to come for God has blessed us richly in this very moment. —We have new natures, we have new hearts, we have been born again and are new creatures in Christ, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit who literally dwells within us. What a blessing that is! And He's in us permanently. We've been “sealed”, Paul tells the Ephesians in chapter 4 verse 30, “unto the day of redemption”. We can't be taken from Him.

So we are now free from this present evil age. We still live in it, and we're not to try to escape from it. We are to remain in it. We are to be in the world, but we're not to be of the world. And we have the power to resist it. We have the power to challenge it, and to some degree, we have the power to change it. We can shine as lights in the midst

of the darkness, radiate the truth of God in our lives and through the giving of the Gospel—representing it and speaking about it.

The Law of Moses could not do that. It could not change us. It cannot change the world. I can condemn the world, it can condemn the sinner, but it can't change the sinner. It can bring death—but it cannot give life. It wasn't intended to do that. It was given to expose sin. And for that is it a great blessing—it's the revelation of God. But it can't take away sin. That's not the fault of the Law, it's the fault of ourselves. But for that reason, because we're unable to save ourselves, God sent His Son into the world to save us. And He did it. He said the work is "finished"; He accomplished redemption for His people.

For that reason, Paul concludes his greeting to the Galatians with a doxology, a word of praise to God, "...to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen." (vs5). And you can be certain of that. The glory will be to God forever. Now that is an awful lot of doctrine, a good bit of doctrine packed into one small passage. The deity of Christ in verse 2. We could add to that, really, because the first two persons of the Trinity are mentioned—they have the Trinity indicated in verse 2. Grace and peace in verse 3, the atonement in verse 4. And then *sole de gloria* in verse 5.

But all of this was succinctly stated in anticipation of the main contents of the letter, which are about these doctrines, about the free gift of life and liberty in Jesus Christ. We don't need works of the Law for our salvation. We don't need ceremonies or circumcision or baptism or priests to bring us to God—Christ is all we need. He is the all-sufficient Savior. He rescued us from this evil age at the cross, where He paid for our sins, and where he accomplished salvation. We can't add anything to that. That's the point of the Book of Galatians. All we can do is receive it as a free give by faith.

That's what Paul preached to the Galatians originally, and what he had to remind them of again. We all need that. We all need constant reminding of this fact of the grace

of God, and the all-sufficient grace of God and His atonement. That's what the Book of Galatians does for us.

Well maybe there's someone here who is hearing for the first time that salvation is a gift—a complete gift. Not based on what you do, things you can do, the ways in which you act. That's all important, and we come to that, too. Our obedience as children of God is very important, essential, but doesn't lead you to Christ. Perhaps you've been under the illusion that you're saved through the good things that you can do. You can earn it. No. It can only be gratefully received.

And if that's so, I would ask you, have you received it? Have you believed in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who died for sinners? If not, look to Him. Believe in Him. The moment you do, you will receive from Him full forgiveness; you will receive the righteousness of Christ; you'll be clothed in His righteousness and have eternal life.

May God help you to do that, help all of us to rejoice and live in the grace of God. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us, and thank You for this great epistle of Galatians that sets forth so clearly and so powerfully Your grace—the clarity of the Gospel. The sinner is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Teach us that. Confirm that in our hearts in the weeks that come. We thank You for Christ, for His death for us.

We pray now that You would bless us as we move to the LORD's Supper, and remember that death, that sacrifice, He made in our place. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)