

Sermon: The Cross and Salvation

Text: Galatians 1:3-5

Gary L. Wackler

February 22, 2009

Introduction: Before we come to Easter's empty tomb, we must pass through Good Friday. Before we receive salvation there must be a cross. Less than twenty years after Jesus' death and resurrection there is misunderstanding in the churches about what it means to come to faith and be saved. In the context of tremendous prejudice between Jew and Gentile, the church is born.

Fred Craddock tells the story:

"First little church I served was in the eastern Tennessee hills, not too far from Oak Ridge. When Oak Ridge began to boom with the atomic energy, that little bitty town became a booming city over night. Every hill and every valley and every shady grove had recreational vehicles and trucks and things like that. People came in from everywhere and pitched tents, lived in wagons. Hard hats from everywhere, with their families and children paddling around in the mud in those trailer parks, lived in everything temporarily to work. Our church was not far away. We had a beautiful little church--white frame building, one hundred and twelve years old. The church had an organ in the corner, which one of the young fellows had to pump while Ms. Lois played it. Boy, she could play the songs just as slow as anybody.

The organ was a little slow. The church had beautifully decorated chimneys, kerosene lamps all around the walls, and every pew in this little church was hewn, hand hewn, from a giant poplar tree. After church one Sunday morning I asked the leaders to stay. I said to them, "Now we need to launch a calling campaign and an invitational campaign in all those trailer parks to invite those people to church."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think they'd fit in here," one of them said. "They're just here temporarily, just construction people. They'll be leaving pretty soon."

"Well, we ought to invite them, make them feel at home," I said.

We argued about it, time ran out, and we said we'd vote next Sunday.

Next Sunday, we all sat down after the service. "I move," said one of them, "I move that in order to be a member of this church, you must own property in the county."

Someone else said, “I second that.” It passed. I voted against it, but they reminded me that I was just a kid preacher and I didn’t have a vote. It passed. When we moved back to these parts, I took my wife to see that little church, because I had told her that painful, painful story. The roads have changed. The interstate goes through that part of the country, so I had a hard time finding it, but I finally did. I found the state road, the county road, and the little gravel road. Then there, back among the pines, was that building shining white. It was different. The parking lot was full--motorcycles and trucks and cars packed in there. And out front, a great big sign: *Barbecue, all you can eat*. It’s a restaurant, so we went inside. The pews are against a wall. They have electric lights now, and the organ pushed over in the corner. There are all these aluminum and plastic tables, and people sitting there eating barbecued pork and chicken and ribs--all kinds of people. Parthians and Medes and Edomites and dwellers of Mesopotamia, all kinds of people. I said to Nettie, “It’s a good thing this is not still a church, otherwise these people couldn’t be in here.” - Craddock Stories, pp. 28-29

Paul writes to the churches in Galatia:

Galatians 1:3-5 (NIV) ³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

Paul is on a mission from God to establish his credentials and straighten up some bad theology that had crept into the churches in Galatia. This is Paul’s *first* letter to any church. Here the struggle between law and freedom is addressed. Paul tells them:

I. God Has a Gift for You (v. 3).

A. Grace

Grace is the means by which these Galatians and “every” Christian is called and invited into the Kingdom by God. God is the source of this wonderful gift. Like any true gift, grace is free. It is unmerited, undeserved favor from God.

“Grace is something you can never get but can only be given. There’s no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or good looks or bring about your own birth.”

- *Wishful Thinking* by Frederick Buechner, pp. 38-39

A unique feature of the Christian faith is the teaching that people are saved by grace. Grace is a product of love.

Another gift from God is:

B. Peace

Just like grace, peace is also the result of Jesus' substitutionary death. Peace is not the absence of trouble because I have seen people in dire straits and they were at peace because they had faith in God. Peace is the presence of love.

The concept of peace has its roots in Jewish thought and the word *shalom*. It is a sense of well-being and God's love and care. It is a relational feeling knowing that you are following God's plan for your life.

Peace comes from God.

Romans 5:1 (NIV) ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Peace comes in our relationships with people.

Ephesians 2:14-18 (NIV) ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Throughout the N.T., grace and peace are seen coming from both God (**2:21; Phil. 4:7**) and Christ (**1:6; Col. 3:15**). God and Christ are seen as equals, yet God is seen as the Giver and:

II. The Gift Is Jesus (v. 4a).

Jesus' life was:

A. Freely given

The idea of Jesus giving himself is the same as the giving of his life.

Mark 10:45 (NIV) ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

It is a wonderful position to be in - doing what God also wants. Yet God never violates free will. To be on the same track and to think "What would Jesus Do?": that is what is needed.

Jesus was not interested in position and power, but love and service. Jesus *freely* chose the path of self-sacrifice rather than self-preservation. He was not forced or coerced into anything he did not plan to do. He wants the same heart for his followers.

Titus 2:11-14 (NIV) ¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Jesus did what he did:

B. For our sins

A person can die because of his own sin.

A person can die because of another’s sin.

How should anyone feel when he realizes he caused someone to die?

But only Jesus’ death for sin could (out of love) provide forgiveness and eternal life. He took our place. He took our punishment. Jesus took our side.

In some judgmental moment we might say about someone: “They got what they deserved, but with Jesus, He got what *we* deserved.

Romans 5:6-8 (NIV) ⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

III. Why This Gift (vv. 4b-5)?

A. God wants this for us (v. 4c).

John 3:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

This has been God’s plan all along.

Titus 1:2 (NIV) ²a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,

Hebrews 13:20 (NIV) ²⁰May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

Galatians 1:4 (NIV) ⁴who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

B. God has the power to deliver us (v. 4b).

The purpose of Jesus' death was to rescue us/spare us the humiliation and consequences of our sins. We cannot save ourselves. Something, really - Someone heroic is needed.

The word translated "rescue" in **verse 4** in the NIV is rendered "deliver" in the KJV. The Greek word is only found here in all of Paul's writings (1-8 times in the NT). This was an important word to Paul. He heard Jesus use it on the road to Damascus. Jesus said to Paul (Saul at the time):

Acts 26:17 (NIV) ¹⁷I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

So this was not only a word of assurance, but one of commission. Jesus' purpose would become Paul's, and must also become ours: to help deliver others out of this present evil age.

"Paul's (αιων πονηρος [evil age]) is an age dominated by an ethically evil power--one which, far from being 'according to the will of our God and Father', is totally opposed to it." - NIGTC, p. 76, -F. F. Bruce

This is different from a choice of menu selections or between living in Ohio or Pennsylvania. This choice, that everyone must make, is between good and evil, life and death, spending eternity with God or separated from his presence.

Q. When does this deliverance happen?

A. Some are waiting on a future event, and to some extent that is true. But we can remove ourselves from this evil age by not going along with all its sin and corruption now, and live a life focused on God and his will. We can do this with the Spirit's help.

We need to be not so attached to this world (**I Cor. 7:31**). It is not that we cannot enjoy our lives here - but *here* is not our home!

Our main purpose, as God's creation, is to offer up to him praise (**Ephesians 1:12-14**) while keeping a proper perspective on where we are and where we are going!

Psalm 84:4-5 (NIV) ⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. *Selah* ⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.

Our salvation is a gift from God.

C. The gift provides glory for the Father (v. 5).

“The eternal result of Jesus’ death is that God will be glorified forever. Grace comes from God; glory is due to God.” - Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 340

What a wonderful exchange: we are saved from this world, and we praise God forever. So what starts in Paul’s letter with a salutation and blessing ends in doxology. Not only is God - Jesus’ father, but He is ours as well.

Glory is not just a declaration, but a summons for men and women, boys and girls, to join in praise and conduct their lives accordingly.

Always live in a way that honors God!

Conclusion: This letter to the Galatians begins with grace (1:3), and Paul’s last words are also about grace (6:18). In fact, verses 3-4 could just as easily be considered a blessing. And isn’t that what everyone wants: to be loved, cared for, thought about - without condition? In a world that still is struggling with legalism and exclusion, grace is the solution. The Church needs to tell everyone they can - what it takes to be rescued from this “present evil age.” It takes faith in Jesus!

Both at the beginning (v. 5) and the end (6:18) of the letter to the Galatians we agree with Paul and leave each other with the same doxology.

Galatians 6:18 (NIV) ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.