

“The Rescue”
Galatians 1:1-5

Introduction:

1. Today we begin to hear God tell us another part of the story of his glory in Jesus Christ. What we have in Galatians is not basically a narrative of events, though there is some of that. Instead, it comes in the form of a letter. The letter comes from one of God’s chief storytellers or spokesmen, because there are some who are twisting the story to turn it from being a message of God’s glory to a boasting in human glory. Since God does everything to the praise of his glory (Eph 1:6, 12, 14), he is rather angry toward those twisting the story and toward those who are content to listen to such perverse tales. For this reason and the good of his people, the Holy Spirit directs Paul to write this letter.

2. Why do we need to listen to this letter? To know more clearly and fully how the gospel of Christ sets us free. Its message is about how God in Christ sets people free. Are you in bondage? This letter is for you. Are you living like you’re in bondage, even while you claim to be free? What do I mean by that? Hmm, I could mention the bondage of addictive sins or the bondage of the inability to give and receive love or to express other positive qualities of true godliness. Should I? As Paul writes this letter, he knows that the message of rescue has been twisted, and so his readers are falling away from freedom in Christ into bondage. What signs of bondage are you trying to hide this morning? We desperately need to listen to this letter!

3. Before we begin, I want to say a few words about our method of presentation. This will not be a verse by verse exposition of Galatians, but expository thoughts on paragraphs or sections of the letter. Going verse by verse is fine for small groups, but in our larger meeting, we need to go at a faster pace and to see the bigger picture.

Exposition: Catching the tone of the letter

I. Total God-centeredness

A. We see this in Paul’s view of his function in Christ’s new covenant people.

1. He denies that his function as an apostle in the church had anything to do with human agency, whether a group (the twelve apostles) or an individual (like Ananias or Barnabas).

2. He asserts that he received his gift through the direct agency of Jesus Christ and God the Father. He served as an apostle by the act of God. This is very important to this whole letter.

Paul is not inviting those who disagree with him to a dialogue or discussion. He will not ask, “What do you think the gospel is?” or “How do you feel about this?” Instead, he speaks with God’s authority to protect the story of his glory in Christ.

Illustration: How do fire companies act to put out house fires? They use a lot of water, don’t they? What if there was a fire company that wanted to try its own approach. Suppose that they say, “We agree that you need lots of liquid to extinguish a fire. But using water is so out of date when any liquid will do. So, we’re

going to pump a lot of gasoline onto the next house fire we're called to." You say, "That story is ridiculous." Yes, it is. But it is also ridiculous to suppose a way of salvation that fuels human pride that is destructive to any relationship with God (Jn 4:6). Paul states that he is personally commissioned by God to keep the story free from human pride.

B. We see this in the way he asks for God's blessing on his readers.

1. The apostle begins the letter, as he will do in every following NT letter, with a prayer for grace and peace. Grace is God's unmerited favor and help toward those who deserve wrath. Peace is the fullness of blessing that flows from being in a right relationship with God. This is a pattern of what we should always be praying for one another.

2. But notice that Paul cannot speak of grace and peace without talking about their source. They come from both the Father and the Son. In this way Paul puts a godly outlook in at the start. What people need most comes from God, not from human achievement.

Apply: We ought to observe the honor that is given to Jesus Christ. He is put on the same level as God as the source of both spiritual gifts and blessing. To be God-centered is to be Christ-centered. We cannot know God apart from Christ (cf. Jn 14:6). As God's appointed spokesman, Paul makes this very clear. Some religious people talk a lot about God, but they have little to say about the Lord Jesus Christ. However, God the Father gains glory through his Son (cf. Jn 5:23). So then, the tone of the letter is thoroughly Christ-structured. How much does your God-talk talk about Jesus Christ?

II. Basic gospel foundation

Comment: In this letter the apostle writes to believers who know the good news of Jesus but who are wandering away from that good news. This is an ongoing problem. People can intellectually know the gospel, and yet fail to experience the transformation that the gospel produces. God intends it to transform our entire outlook. Beginning from his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul knew in his experience what such a transformation meant. He knows that the Christian life is a journey on the path of transformation.

A. The crucifixion of Christ

1. This was a definite, sacrificial act. The Lord Jesus gave himself to accomplish the rescue or salvation of his people. His sacrificial act ends the old age and initiates a new age.

2. The reason he had to give himself to rescue us was "for our sins". As we will see, those who are twisting the good news try to add to it conformity to the law. Paul recalls his readers to what is more basic. We are sinners and need forgiveness of our sins, in order to be in a right relationship with God. This does not happen through keeping rituals or rules, but through Christ's sacrifice that secures the forgiveness of sins.

B. The resurrection of Christ – Why does this truth matter? [cf. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, pp. 80-85, his emphasis]

1. “The resurrection of Jesus assures us of *God’s forgiveness*.” Most people are guilt-driven and guilt-ravaged. Christ died to secure forgiveness for all who trust in him, and his resurrection is proof that God has accepted that sacrifice. The sins of believers across the world and time were placed on him, and the resurrection proclaims, “Paid in full!” Why can we say this? Because God raised Jesus from the dead!

2. “The resurrection of Jesus assures us of *God’s power*.” Is God really able to change people who seem determined to destroy others and themselves? Is he able to make people with no interest in God into passionate worshipers of God? Is he able to help us in our time of need? The resurrection joyfully shouts, “Yes, God is able!”

3. “The resurrection of Jesus assures us of *God’s ultimate victory*.” What a dreary life most people are trapped in! They believe that human life is only some kind of evolutionary slime that lacks any meaning, purpose or destiny. Watch their shows that coldly tell of the ultimate extinction of humanity. I counter, if you really believe this, then why should you care? Why be concerned about the environment or health care or violence or anything else that you tell us to care about? You cannot provide one logical reason why we all should not just party and get stoned and loot and destroy one another before something else gets us anyway. But since Jesus is raised and is Lord, life matters! Yes, your life matters! You have eternal significance!

III. Radical outlook at life – The believer views his/her life...

A. Within the context of a gospel community

1. Paul knows his place in the church (new covenant assembly). He is an apostle (sent one) who speaks with Christ’s all authority (cf. Mt 10:40; 28:18). Yet he also speaks for the other brothers (by new birth and adoption). The teaching of adult sonship becomes very important later in this letter. When Christ saves us, we are not isolated individuals but members of God’s family, and therefore, we are brothers and sisters. This is our identity.

2. Paul writes to congregations or assemblies in the area of Galatia. The local assemblies became networked together as part of the church planting mission of Barnabas and Saul (Ac 13-14). We find this idea of networked congregations in a couple other places (Gal 1:22; 2 Cor 9:2; Col 4:13). Paul addresses several local congregations together. The early church grew as one congregation in an area produced new gatherings of Christ followers. Paul’s team or another team would launch a church in an important city along a trade route, and from that base church, other new gospel communities would form. This works on local and regional levels.

B. Within the context of rescue – a Christ follower is someone rescued from “this present evil age”. At least two kinds of rescue occur at the same time.

1. We are rescued from sin (refusal to love God, rejection of God, and rebellion against God). Sin and guilt are two characteristics of this age. We come short of God’s glory and step over his boundaries and incur true guilt, and so are liable for judgment by God. Yet because of the cross

of Christ, God forgives those who change their mind and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and rescues us from sin, guilt, and eternal punishment (hell). So then, we ought to look at ourselves as rescued people. This is our identity.

2. We are rescued from the life structure of this present evil age. We no longer live according to the law (including its rules and rituals) but according to a vital relationship with the living God. We live in the new way of the Spirit, who constantly mediates Christ's presence and lordship to us. This is our identity.

Apply: When we know Christ, we know that we are on a path of radical transformation from this age with its thoughts and opinions to the goodness of God's word (Rm 12:1-2). This is a constant process, and it starts with the renewal of our minds according to the truth of Jesus.

C. Within the context of worship – a Christ follower lives to declare the worth and to display the worth of God in Christ.

1. We are not a group of "glory thieves" refusing to honor God and boasting about ourselves. We are a group of "glory givers". We are people who acknowledge God's shining brilliance and surpassing value. Christ's rescue of us has opened our eyes to the splendor and majesty of God Most High. We are worshipers of God. This is our identity.

2. We are not a group of "now only" people, who try to grab for everything we can get for immediate self-satisfaction. We are people who wait expectantly for the glory that God will share with us. We do not see this life as a destination, but as a journey on the way to glory forever, when and where we will enjoy the glorious God forever.

Apply: How do you respond to this? There is only one correct response—by a confession of worship. You agree by saying, "Amen." Truth! Reality! Do you agree that Christ and his saving work reconfigures your entire life? You may come to him today.

Dave Frampton

<http://www.newtownsquarebaptist.org/>