

Freedom In Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. So wonderful to see you all on this kind of wintry morning, but it's great to be gathered together. And let's just pray as we come to God's word. Lord, I just pray that as we come to your word, that you will bless our time as we look to you together, that you would use this time, as Tom said, just to encourage our hearts and help us to see in a fresh sense just how much you love us and all that you have done for us.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we are excited this morning to be starting a brand new book of the Bible. In our history of Amazing Grace so far, we have gone through the book of Mark and we have looked at a big chunk of the book of Genesis and we've made our way through the book of Acts.

And this morning, we're going to be starting to look through the book of Galatians. And we as elders are just trusting that it will be a blessing to us all as we look through it together over these next few months or so.

Now, I think when we approach the start of any new book of the Bible or any new letter, that it's helpful for us to consider what is the big overall picture of the book or the letter that we are looking at.

You know, what's the overall message of the book that we're looking at? And I think that can really help us when we come to each passage in the book or the letter and that we have an overall context to work from.

[1 : 41] And that's what the overall message of any book or letter gives us. It gives us an overall context to work from. So with that in mind, this morning, just to kind of get the ball rolling, as they say, we're going to consider what is the overall message of the book of Galatians.

And then we'll briefly just look at a few of the opening verses of this letter together. So really, this morning is kind of like an introduction to the book of Galatians.

It's maybe a little bit like we're, you know, we're starting our engines and we're warming up our engines, getting ready to kind of launch into this letter together. Or I was thinking about this on the way down.

Or maybe it's a little bit like, you know, for our film crew that are with us these days. Maybe it's a little bit, I'm not sure if this is a thing or not, but maybe it's a little bit like a final look over the scene before someone shouts action.

Is that a thing? Oh, that's good. You all know what I mean. We're getting ready for action. We're getting ready to launch into this book together. So what is the overall message of the book of Galatians?

[2 : 54] Well, the book of Galatians was one of Paul's first letters that he wrote. And of course, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote it for a reason.

Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia. Because basically, some people in that area, some false teachers in that area, were trying to encourage the believers there to essentially go back under the bondage of the law.

They were essentially trying to encourage the believers there to go back under the works. Or as someone said, they were essentially trying to encourage the believers there to go back to some form of earning their salvation.

These false teachers were trying to add things in that needed to be done in order to be truly saved. So Paul is writing this letter to basically tell and to warn and encourage the believers there not to go back under these form of works.

[4 : 04] Not to go back under earning their salvation. Because they had been set free to what Jesus had done for them on the cross.

They had been set free by the grace of Christ. They couldn't earn it or buy it or inherit it. They were saved by grace. And these false teachers, or as the letter calls them a little bit further, these false believers, are telling the Galatian believers to go backwards.

To go back to trying to earn their salvation. So Paul is writing this letter to tell the Galatian believers, don't go backwards. You've been saved by grace.

Don't go backwards. And with that, many say that Galatians chapter 5 verse 1 kind of sums up Paul's whole message.

You know, different books and different letters kind of have what they call a key verse that kind of sums the whole thing up. But many say that Galatians chapter 5 verse 1 sums up Paul's whole don't go backwards message.

[5 : 17] And this is what Paul said. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then. And do not let yourselves be burdened again.

Don't go backwards. Don't let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. And you know, I think this sort of thing in ways can happen so easy.

You know, we can know that we are saved by grace. But yet somehow we can live in bondage almost trying to, by works, keep it.

Or almost by works trying to continue to earn God's favor and God's approval. When all the time as believers we have been set free from all of that performing and self-striving and kind of self-righteousness.

We have been set free. from all of that. So freedom in Christ really is the big message of the book of Galatians.

[6 : 31] In fact, about 20 times in this short letter we'll come across some form of the word freedom or release from bondage. And as someone said, 20 times in 6 chapters gives us a sense of of what this letter is about.

Yes, the book of Galatians, it deals with some other theological issues. But there's no doubt about it. The primary message of the book of Galatians is the freedom that we have in Christ.

Freedom from sin. Freedom from judgment. Freedom from trying to earn salvation. Freedom from trying to earn God's love.

Freedom from performing. Freedom from self-effort. Freedom from all sorts of spiritual bondage.

The wonderful message of the book of Galatians is the message of real freedom, true freedom in Christ. And that's not a freedom or a license to do whatever we want.

[7 : 40] Rather, it's freedom to have a life-giving relationship with Jesus, free from the power of sin and guilt and shame. You know, the enemy always wants to chain us up with guilt.

The enemy wants to encourage us to feel shame. The enemy always wants us to be captive to fear. The enemy wants us to think that we need to perform to continue to earn God's love.

But this book, this letter, reminds us that the Lord Jesus has set us free from all of that. And so in that sense, this book reminds us that our identity in Christ is that we're not captive to guilt or shame.

Rather, we are free. This book reminds us that our identity in Christ is we're not chained trying to perform and earn God's love. Rather, he loves us and delights in us always.

And this book reminds us that our identity in Christ is that we are not shackled by fear and insecurity. Rather, we are free. And who the Son sets free is free indeed.

[9 : 02] So folks, as we go through this letter, may we be freshly encouraged by the wonderful freedom that we have in Christ. May this letter help us to see more and more just how free we are as believers in Christ.

And, you know, I don't know how free you feel as a believer this morning. Maybe you feel really free and you're kind of basking in your identity in Christ.

Or maybe you don't really feel that free at all. Maybe for you, your Christian walk is performing and looking a certain way, trying to earn self-effort.

But despite how we feel, Paul wants us to know, the Spirit wants us to know, the Lord wants us to know that as believers, we are more free than anyone on this planet.

And, you know, that's why you have things like people in prison who will be in prison all their lives and they're in physical chains but somehow in their cells they've come to know Jesus. That's why you can have people in prison like that who in their cells can sing with joy that they are free.

[10 : 19] Even folks who are in physical chains in prison, they are far more free than anyone on this planet who does not know Jesus.

The freedom that Jesus brings is an ultimate freedom, it's an eternal freedom, it will last forever. And so it is our hope and it is our prayer that as we journey through this book together over the next few months that we will all grow to know more and more what it really is to be free in Christ. And we would know that in an ever increasing way because however free we feel, we're a lot more free than that. However free we think we are, the reality is we're a lot more free in Christ than that. So that's our hope and that's our prayer over these next months. So Paul has this very important message to bring to the Galatians.

to give weight to what he is about to say.

[11 : 33] that he has the authority to say what he is about to say. You know, Paul has this important message to bring but before he tells them anything about this message to give weight to what he is about to say he wants them to know first that this message is not coming from himself or it's not coming from any other man.

No, in verse 1 Paul wants them to know that he has been sent with this message by the Lord Jesus and by God the Father who raised him from the dead.

Paul said Paul an apostle sent not from men nor by a man but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

Well as messages go and as backing goes you can't get any more weight behind something than this. You know Paul here in verse 1 is basically saying to the Galatians you know this message is for you this letter is for you and by the way guys look who sent me.

It was the Father and the Son who sent me. So you know pay attention to what I'm about to say. I mean I know people go into maybe different meetings and different environments with a sense of backing with a sense of you know people behind them in what they're about to bring.

[13 : 00] it doesn't come anywhere close to this. This is the ultimate backing. Paul has been sent by the Father and the Son. This should really encourage the Galatians to take note of what Paul is about to say.

And you know it should encourage us all of these years later to take note of what Paul is about to say. He has been sent by the highest authority and that's what we need to remember when we come to any passage in Scripture.

Let us take note of what is about to be said. So I think that's a word for us as we begin this journey through Galatians. Let us take note of what Paul has to say through the Spirit.

Well after establishing that he has the authority to say what he is going to say, after establishing that he has the authority to bring this message, in verse 2 he highlights who it is to, the believers in Galatia, and then in verse 3 he moves on to a greeting.

Paul said, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul greets the Galatian believers with grace and peace also from the Father and the Son.

[14 : 26] And here we see Paul's heart and care for the Galatian believers. Paul here greets them with really two of the best possible things that anyone could receive from the Father and the Son.

I mean the two most wonderful things anyone could receive from the Father and the Son is his grace and his peace. It doesn't get any better than that.

Paul could not send them or pray over them or wish them anything better. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know the odd times someone says to me I don't really know how to pray for this person. Well if you ever can't figure out how to pray for someone go with grace and peace. it does not get any better than that.

Let us pray for each other. Let us as we think of each other look to the Lord for grace and peace for each other. Let us pray over each other with these two wonderful things.

[15 : 35] So Paul starts his letter by reminding the Galatian believers that he has the authority to say what he's going to say and then he moves on to highlight his care for them. His love and his care for them as he sort of prays over them grace and peace.

And it's from that position of authority and love and care that Paul from this point in the letter will go forward and he'll start to remind the Galatian believers what the Lord Jesus has done for them.

Verse 4 that he died for their sins to rescue them and of course set them free. And so from this point on from these opening verses onwards Paul in this letter will remind the Galatians again and again and us that we are free in Christ and over these chapters he will highlight what that freedom looks like.

So you know as I said it is our hope and it is our prayer that each one of us over these next weeks will grow to know more and more in an ever increasing way what it means to be free in Christ because that is the wonderful message of this letter and it's also the wonderful reality of our lives as believers.

As believers we are free in Christ and it does not get any better than that. So I hope we're excited as we jump into the book of Galatians together.

[17:11] So let's pray. Lord we thank you for your word and we thank you that your word is life giving thank you that your word is encouraging thank you that it reminds us of what you've done for us it reminds us of how you gave your life for us but it also reminds us of who we are in you and we thank you for the big message of Galatians and the reminder that we are free in you because of what you've done for us.

We're free from works from performing from self effort and all of these different things all because of what you have done for us. So it's our prayer that over these next months that we will be encouraged as we discover more and more how free we are in you and what that looks like.

So we thank you for our time now and help us just to as we sing this last song of praise help us just to sing from a place of thankfulness that we are free we are free in you and I pray this in Jesus name Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.