

SAVING FAITH: GALATIANS

Week One: Introduction

Galatians 1:1-5

Good morning Lake Wylie. If you have a copy of the scriptures go ahead and open to Paul's letter to the Galatians. If you are using one of the Bible's in the pew rack our text is on page 972.

Now—before we just into this sermon series I want to read something to you to help us set the stage for where we are going:

"September 25th, 1983 - Lake Wylie, SC:

Under the prompting of the Holy Spirit and after much personal praying 40 people gathered together in the home of Jim and Ruth McDowell, on the last Sunday of this month at 11:30 A.M. for a time of prayer, praise and worship with fellow Christians and Our Lord. God's presence was REAL and very evident with the very first people that arrived. As their living room, dining room and hall bulged with happy faces-- it could also be seen that this "joy" was coming from deep within. Tears of joy flowed often throughout the entire 90 minute time of fellowship and worship."

Those are the notes taken from the very first worship gathering of Lake Wylie Baptist Church.

Now the first thing I'd have you see is this—their service was 90 minutes, so don't complain if my preaching goes a little long. Vance Havner used to say that far too many church services begin at 11:00 sharp and end at 12:00 dull.

On a more serious note, let me ask you this. Why did that group of 40 people, over 30 years ago gather together and form the church we are now a part of? I'll tell you why they gathered.

Article 1 of our church constitution—this is our founding document.

Lake Wylie Baptist Church was organized for the purpose of -advancing and promoting the worship of God through the reading and studying of the Holy Bible as the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Can I just share with you what God has been putting on my heart for the last week:

30 years from now. In 2047 when people think back to this year and they ask, "What was Lake Wylie Baptist Church about in 2017," what will the answer be?

What did they care about? What was it that drove that church? What was their highest priority? What did they love more than anything?

My prayer is this. I pray that 30 years from now, when people think back to what we did with these years God gave us, they would say, "Those people loved Jesus by treasuring his Word. They were a people who read the Word of God; who took the Word of God seriously. They obeyed the Word of God. Yes, they grew in number—but numbers weren't their focus. Their eyes were on the master—their eyes were on the Word."

Today we are beginning a sermon series through the book of Galatians. Each week I'll stand here and pick up where the text left off last time. This will be a longer series than we've done together up to this point. We'll be in Galatians for 15 weeks. There will still be some topic based preaching throughout the year, but our steady diet of the Word on Sundays will be primarily given to the systematic preaching of God's Word.

Let me tell you why this is the path we're taking here—because many churches don't do this anymore. Many churches no longer let the Scriptures guide the preaching—they let the preaching guide the Scriptures. So here are a few reasons we're going to slow down and plow deeply through the Word:

1. Preaching through a Book of the Bible will help you learn to read it for yourself. If you will commit to being here, and making the worship gathering each week a priority in your life you will grow in your own ability to read and study and relish God's Word, that you won't get if I just jump around from text to text. You need to be a self-feeder. I'm telling you that as a spiritual leader. You are responsible for your spiritual growth. I am responsible, and this church is responsible to give you tools to help you, not to spoon feed you.

2. The second reason we're preaching through books is because it gives me great confidence. God's Word is authoritative, my word isn't. So expositional preaching says—the authority in this church is with the Word of God.

3. It forces the preacher to preach delicate texts. If you don't preach through the books of the Bible you can choose to avoid tough passages in the Bible.

4. It allows the church to systematically hear the whole counsel of God's Word preached. What Lake Wylie Baptist needs, what I need, what you need is to bring all of the Word of God to bear on our life. We need the totality of this book to weigh on us.

So that's the conviction of the original authors of our church's constitution—they gathered to hear the Word preached.

That's the conviction of the church that called me here: to hear the Word preached.

And it is my conviction. I pray that you will stay with us for the years to come, as we faithfully open this Word every week, trust what it says, allow it to break us open and build us up and I can't wait to see what that kind of faithfulness of the course of 30 years brings to our church and our city.

So, let's begin. First let's introduce Paul and his audience, the churches of Galatia. Look back at verse 1:

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead¹

Who was Paul?

If you're new to church you've probably heard preachers quote people by their first name in the pulpit often.

- Matthew says,
- John says,
- Paul says,
- Peter says,

And, if you've visited multiple churches you may even wonder how the same 5 guys end up at every single church. Well, it's because these are names of some of the authors of the Scriptures.

Paul, is the first century apostle and author of the letter to the Galatian church. So, go ahead and put on your history cap for a moment and let me give you an over view of his life. By the way the notes for this sermon will be made available online after this service so don't feel like you have to get this all down. There won't be an exam at the end of the sermon.

Birth and Early Life:

Born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 9:11) likely in the first decade of the first century. He was a member of the Israelite tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). His birth name was Saul after the first king over Israel. Paul was his Roman name. Although he was Jewish by birth Paul was also a Roman citizen; a benefit likely purchased by his parents at the cost of more than a year's wages.

Training as a Pharisee:

Acts 22:3 tells us that Paul learned Judaism at “the feet of

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ga 1:1).

Gamaliel” who was the most influential Rabbi of his day. As a young man Paul viciously persecuted Christians, having them imprisoned and even put to death.

Conversion from Judaism to Christianity:

While on his way to persecute Christians in the town of Damascus Paul converted to Christianity through a vision of the risen Lord and the ministry of a man named Ananias (Acts 9). After spending a few years ministering to various groups, Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the church of Antioch as missionaries. Paul would spend the rest of his life planting churches in Asia Minor and Macedonia (modern day Turkey and Greece, respectively).

Apostle to the Gentiles and Author of Scripture:

You’ll notice in verse 1 that Paul referred to himself as an “apostle”. The Greek word *apostolos* means, “Sent one.” Someone who is sent with a message. And, in the New Testament, the word almost always refers to someone Jesus hand picked for a ministry. Someone who saw Jesus personally and to whom was given the task of bearing the gospel message. And that’s what Paul did.

As Paul planted churches all over the world he wrote letters of continuing instruction to those churches. The New Testament includes 13 of Paul’s letters to various churches and disciples making up nearly 1/3 of the New Testament. Luke, author of a gospel and the book of Acts, dedicates 16 chapters of Acts to Paul’s ministry (13-28).

Roman Imprisonment and Death:

After causing an uproar in the city of Jerusalem Roman authorities imprison Paul and he appeals to Caesar (Acts 21). Church tradition tells us that Paul was beheaded under the reign of Emperor Nero. At the end of Paul’s life he wrote these words

to a man named Timothy that he trained:

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

And even though Paul died without earthly dignity, he entered into a heavenly reward. Friend, let me tell you this:

Friend, if you please Jesus it doesn’t matter whom you displease. And, if you displease Jesus it doesn’t matter whom you please.

Paul lived his life for an audience of one.

Who were the Recipients of the Letter?

You’ll notice the recipients are identified in verse 2:

To the churches of Galatia: ²

Broadly speaking—

Southern Galatia- bottom half of modern Turkey. Cities like: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Psidian Antioch. These are all churches Paul planted in those cities on his first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas set out from Syrian Antioch, sail to Cyprus, then Southern Galatia. They went into a city, preached the gospel in the synagogue, preached the gospel in the gathering places of the town, won converts to Jesus, and stayed long enough to establish leaders called elders or pastors, then they moved on to plant churches in other towns.

Paul is preaching, writing, and doing mission work in a time of

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ga 1:2).

unprecedented globalism. Hellenization. Because Rome had conquered the known world and brought under one Imperial banner, every nation and religion of the world. Timothy George puts it this way:

“Under Caesar Augustus and the emperors who succeeded him the Roman Empire was fused into a unified political entity with one common language, a centralized military organization, a shared legal system, a uniform mail and transportation service, a single monetary currency, and an interconnected pattern of trade and commerce. Never before or since have all the shores of the Mediterranean been under one single rule. The earliest heralds of the Christian gospel coursed along the major highways and well-developed sea routes of the Roman Empire as they continuously “gossiped” (cf. Phillips translation of Acts 8:4) the story of Jesus in all of the great urban and commercial centers of the known world.³”

And just like today when Paul preached Christ he was making an exclusive claim in a pluralist age. The gospel challenges every culture, every generation. Because every culture has its own unique idols. Every generation has its own pet sins. The gospel subverts every culture. It challenges every generation.

There’s a temptation to believe that the claims of Christianity have only become offensive in the last 50 years. That up until this previous generation Christianity was just accepted. It didn’t ruffle feathers. But it always has.

There was the temptation in the first century to tone down certain doctrines to make them more appealing to the masses. In the first century, you could believe whatever you liked, as long as you paid homage to the Emperor. And to be a Christian in the 1st century meant you had to abandon and disown the gods of the day.

³ George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 28). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

It’s the same today. There are false voices that say, “Christians, you’d be far more accepted if you would just shift your view on _____ . If you don’t you’re going to lose all of your relevance.”

After 2,000 years I doubt this is the moment where Christianity becomes irrelevant. So let this be an encouragement to you. There is no reason in this generation for doom and gloom. There is reason for hard work, and gospel faithfulness. The church of Jesus Christ has weathered far worse times than these, and our master, the Lord Jesus has always provided—sometimes by life and freedom, sometimes by faithfulness in the face of persecution and death.

So when we read Galatians we are reading a letter written to a people very much like us. In a broad sense, the audience is made up of non-Jewish congregations living in the middle of a highly pluralistic empire in which traditional systems are breaking down and there are a variety of religious views, opinions, persuasions, all being mixed together.

You’ve seen the author—Paul.

You’ve seen the audience—the churches of Galatia.

Now let’s wrap this up by seeing the beginning of his message to them and us:

I want you to see two things:

1. WE ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE GOD IS WATCHING OVER US

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead⁴

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ga 1:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

We aren't here under our own steam, by our own power, because of our talents, because our goodness. We are here because God almighty is watching over his church.

- Paul didn't begin his ministry because he decided to, but because God chose him to.
- Paul didn't write Galatians because he decided to, but because God called him to.
- Those first century churches weren't faithful to preserve pure doctrine because they were capable, but because God was powerful.
- 34 years ago Lake Wylie Baptist Church wasn't formed by the will of man, but by the will of God.

God is looking out for his church. God loves his church. God gave his Son for his church. God will preserve his church.

And listen, until Jesus returns, God will call men and women to serve him in their generation. We are here today because God is watching over us.

2. WE ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE GOD IS GRACIOUS AND GIVING

³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁴ *who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,* ⁵ *to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.* ⁵

Paul begins by saying “Grace to you and peace from God” What a wonderful place to begin:

- Grace, not condemnation.
- Peace, not hostilities.

And it's from God. What more could you want or need? Grace and peace from God! These are accessible. You can possess them both, Grace and peace.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ga 1:3–5).

Now here's the thing: many religions say, “Grace and peace from god.” That's common language in many religions. Even the Koran says, “Grace and peace with God.” In fact, every chapter of the Koran begins, “In the name of god, most gracious and merciful.” And you might think, “Well that sounds like Christianity.” But, as Ray Ortlund says, when you read the Koran you find that the grace there is earned grace. Hard-labor grace, which is no grace.

Listen to me, you can read every page of the Koran and you'll never hear the words, “*who gave himself for our sins to deliver us.*”

Christianity isn't just that God is gracious—God is also giving. We don't earn his grace Jesus earned it for us when he lived the life we should have lived and died as Paul says in verse 4 “to deliver us from this present evil age.”

The Scriptures teach that the age that you and I live in is currently wrecked by our disobedience to God and our rejection of his love. We live in an evil age, and we all participate in the evil of this age. And you need to understand something here: **the goal of the Christian church isn't to get heaven into this world, but to get this world into heaven.**

Let me explain what I mean: when you hear Christians talking about obeying God we do not believe that if we can just get everyone to do the right things then all will be as it should. Mainly because we don't even think that's possible. We can't even get ourselves to do the right things.

What the Scriptures teach and what Christians believe is that obedience to God in this life is a good thing, but we are still waiting to final and full deliverance out of this evil age, and into the age to come.

So, Christians are those who are currently **delivered from the penalty of sin, and yet we are waiting to be delivered from the presence of sin.**

And that deliverance doesn't come through our obedience, but through Jesus radical obedience and sacrifice on the cross for our sin.

That's what Paul is saying here.

Finally, you see how Paul closes his introduction to the letter:

Verse 5: *to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*⁶

The Biblical word for glory literally means weight. "To whom be the weight, or weightiness, forever and ever."

When you understand that you are here because God is watching over you. You are here because God is gracious. When you understand and we understand that we are here because God is giving, and he's accomplished our deliverance: the only response is glory. The only response is Amen. So let's respond to God's watchful eye, his grace, his generosity and let's as a church body say together, "Amen."

Let's Pray and then we'll sing.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ga 1:5).