

## **Celebrate The Gospel**

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**Galatians 1:15-22**

### **Introduction:**

I want to thank Chris, David, and Ron for the opportunity to stand in front of you today and worship Jesus together. My wife, Traci, and I have had the honor of being members of CTR for 4 years. We have birthed and raised two kids here, and we love our family here very much. My hope for the time that we have together is that we celebrate Jesus and the gospel well. That our love for Jesus is evident in our worship, in our conversations, and in our lives together. Before we dive into God's word together, I have a video that I want you to see and my hope is that this video will begin to stir an affection in your heart for Jesus and what he has accomplished for those who call him Lord. Please watch:

(Propaganda- "Gospel" video)

One of the beauties of being in the family of God is that the God's family is not confined to one people group, one race, or one culture. Before coming back to my hometown of Memphis and getting married to Traci in 2010, I had the opportunity to live in Southeast Asia for 3 years as a youth pastor to an international youth group. Our youth group numbered around 150 students with 17 countries represented in this one small town. We had students from the United States and Malaysia, all the way to Australia and Denmark. One of the most beautifully difficult thing about the diversity in that group was interacting with families from a culture that is very different from the one that I was raised in. Everything was different! Specifically language that was used. An example of this was during a conference that my youth group hosted for international students from our province. We invited over 300 students to come in and worship Jesus and get trained in disciple making. We asked 3 different speakers that were well respected in our city, and all 3 were from different countries. Our goal was to help students see that

God was moving and making disciples all over the world. Our keynote speaker was a missionary from Australia that I did not know very well, but had come highly recommended to us. This Australian man got up in front of our students and his sermon started off on a very strong note, imploring the students with passionate words about what it means to walk with Jesus. Somewhere along the line, as he began to share stories about his work in Southeast Asia, his language changed. He started using language that I've always known to be mildly inappropriate for a setting like what we were in. My co-worker, who was American as well, looked at each other with shock. We had some students from Australia that were sitting there calm, intently listening to him without a care in the world. I looked around at some of the Asian kids and American kids that were in the room, and they had this look of horror on their face! I remember taking a step back and hearing the Lord say to me, "This is what's so great about following me! You will constantly be around people that have grown up different than you, or speak differently than you, or have different experiences in life than you, BUT I am their God, the same as I am yours. I sent my Son for them just like I did for you, not because of how you've grown up or life experiences that you have, but because, just like them, you were desperately in need of a Savior, and I am your Savior."

Everyone of us have stories that shape who we are, and, in some ways, why we make the decisions we make. It would be very easy for us to allow differences in our life experience to dictate what relationships we choose to pursue, and what relationships we choose not to pursue. History shows that differences between cultures and people have usually meant conflict and lack of communication between the two.

But in steps Jesus! Jesus doesn't allow for those differences to create divisions.

Romans 10:9, 12 says, "because, if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is the Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him."

The Gospel removes all opportunity for discrimination and division, because the Gospel tells us that ALL humanity is in need of a Savior. Everyone of us have different stories, but Jesus is the hero of our stories! My hope for today is that we can spend our time together celebrating the very thing that brings us together: the saving work of Jesus on the cross!

**Body:**

Paul wrote a letter to a church in a city called Colossae where a man named Epaphras, who was a disciple of Paul, was the pastor. Epaphras visited Paul in a Roman prison cell, and while he was there, Epaphras lamented to Paul that false teaching was threatening the church. Paul wrote this letter to the church to respond to the false teaching and encourage these believers in their growth toward Christian maturity. Take a look at 1:9 with me and let's look at Paul's response to this false teaching.

(Read 9-14)

Paul opens the doors of his prayer room to the believers in Colossae and he tells them about specific things that he prays for them.

Paul wants them to:

- Be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding
- Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord
- Bear fruit in every good work
- Increase in the knowledge of God.
- Be strengthened with all power, for all endurance and patience with joy.
- Give thanks to the Father who has qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

But Paul emphatically lets them know that all of these things are possible because of what Jesus has done for them. (vs 13-14) "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have

redemption, the forgiveness of sins." This is why the very next part of his letter goes into the most beautiful explanation of who Jesus is. Paul's transition seems strange, except for the fact that Paul wants us to have a proper understanding of who Jesus is, and in turn, have a proper understanding of his redeeming work on the cross.

A.W. Tozer in his masterpiece, "The Knowledge of the Holy" agrees with Paul when he says this: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous (significant) fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God."

- Tozer is saying that our physical response to God and each other is not the most important thing about us. The way we react (verbally, in our actions, or in our minds) tells us what our thoughts are about God.
- Quick test: Do you struggle in showing grace to others that do wrong by you or don't live up to your standards? We begrudge grace, because we believe that God begrudges grace upon us. Even though his word tells us that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning"

So I want to spend the next few minutes with you and unpack what Paul says about Jesus in vs 15-20 and implications for us as believers if what Paul says is true:

(Read vs 15-20)

Paul says that Jesus is:

The Lord of Creation

Verse 15 says that "Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Paul's wording here is key. In the original language Paul is declaring Jesus to be the fulfillment of OT prophecy, specifically words that were used to speak of the Messiah in Proverbs 8. Proverbs 8:27 says, "When he (God) established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman.."

This is not just an Pauline idea though. The disciples that followed Jesus believed that Jesus was the very likeness of God. John 1:18- "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

Both Paul and John are saying "You want to know God?" "You want to know his character and likeness?" You must know Jesus.

NT Wright says it beautifully in his commentary on Colossians:

"From all eternity Jesus had, in his very nature, been the "image of God", reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father... Humanity was designed to be the perfect vehicle for God's self-expression within his world, so that he could himself live appropriately among his people as one of themselves, could rule in love over creation as himself, a creature."

- To know God's will and design for his creation, we must look at Jesus' vision and mission for his life.
- The life of Jesus is not meant for us to copy in order to live a good life only, but should create in us a desire to honor and worship the Father more deeply.
- Jesus was not Plan B in God's story because humanity didn't fulfill the full extent of the Law, Jesus is Plan A! Jesus is the greater Moses, the greater David, and is the Messiah of God's people! He is the image of the invisible God.

Verse 16 then says "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him."

Paul is adding more layers to the idea mentioned in verse 15 that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. As the firstborn of all creation, Jesus has rights to the throne of God like the son of a monarch who would inherit total power in ruling his kingdom.

But Jesus wasn't a created being like the rest of us are. Paul adds another layer to who Jesus is by saying "For by him all things were created." Jesus was the agent of creation through whom God made the heaven and earth. Once again, this isn't just an idea written by Paul that isn't substantiated by other authors of Scripture.

- John 1:3 says, speaking of Jesus, "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made."
- 1 Corinthians 8:6- "yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Paul, then adds even more layers to who Jesus is, by not just saying that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and that Jesus is God because he created all things, but also that Jesus is the goal of all creation. "all things were created through Him and FOR Him."

Everything was created for His honor and glory because he is the creator of all things.

The Lord of Redemption

Vs 19-20 "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Jesus possesses the wisdom, power, Spirit, and glory of God. Because all of this is true, He is truly God.

And because Jesus is God, he is the only one that can truly redeem his creation. He is the only one that can bring peace between the Creator and the created. And he did that, and is doing that, through the Cross.

### **Conclusion:**

So what does this mean for us?

1. Celebrate the gospel daily. Let this be the story that we are known for..

- Paul's language here is amazing! You were once.... You are now.....

- Vs 21-22 (NLT Version) "This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault."
- You were once... "Far away from God"; You are now....."he has brought you into his own presence"
- You were once.... "His enemies"; You are now... "He has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ.."
- You were once.... "Separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions."; You are now...."Holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault."

2. Consistently examine yourselves to see whether or not you are in the faith. Test your fruit!

- 2 Corinthians 13:5

- "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?- Unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"
- Is your story filled with Paul's language in vs 21-22 (You were once.. You are now....)??
- You are not what you once were, you are a new creation!

## **Lord's Supper**