

Gal. 1:3-5; John 16: 31-33; God's Greeting to the Galatians I. The Requested Blessing II. The Promised Deliverance III. The Closing Declaration

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you ever wish you could go back to the good old days? I

imagine that if you were to look back, most of you could point at a time in history or perhaps a time in your own life when things were better. Life was easier- and the world was safer and a lot more moral.

Well, as it has often been responded- the good old days were not that good. The church has dwelled in the land of the shadow and we continue to see the prince of the ruler of the air wage war against Christ and His people. This is called the antithesis- the battle between good and evil! But sometimes we forget this- sometimes we look to this world for our happiness and peace- we expect this world to deliver a life of blessing to us- only to be shocked when reality strikes again. Today we find Paul's opening to this letter which includes a greeting from God to His people. Paul is an apostle sent from God now speaking to the church. Being a herald of God's Word, Paul pronounces blessings on Christ's church. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ promises blessings to those He delivered from this present, evil age.

I. The Requested Blessing

After Paul introduces himself as we saw last week, he begins his letter by requesting blessings. He asks for grace and peace from God to be upon these saints. Now this is a very common introduction- we find it again in Romans and Corinthians. These words should sound very familiar to you as well since they are declared at the beginning of every worship as a part of what we call God's greeting. Grace to you and peace. In Greek this is "charis and eireignai". Grace and Peace. Now grace is the unmerited favor and kindness that comes from God. Blessing that affords us joy, pleasure and delight. The merciful kindness of our God. Grace is our good news because it is unmerited and undeserved. This was particularly important for the Galatian churches to remember because they were falling back into the false gospel of works righteousness. Emphasising the gracious nature of our salvation is the solution

when we start to trust in ourselves or our works. For it is by grace that you have been saved. And it is the fact that we are saved by grace that gives us peace. Peace is the positive blessing of our well-being. When all of your family is safely at home and sleeping soundly in their beds- that is peace! It is our rest and refreshment- a quietness of our souls. Now this kind of peace corresponds to the OT theme of shalom. It is to be well- to be in harmony- all is right and as it should be. It is grace that brings peace to our souls. In this peace we are convinced that all is well with me. This grace and peace is directed to you- to the church. These are our possession- belonging to us! And they come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! There is no man that can give grace and peace! Although Paul can preach the gospel of grace, he cannot give grace and peace! It is God and God alone who can secure and send these blessings. They come from our Father- from our heavenly Father! We are His and He is mine! We belong- and since we belong, we have grace and peace!

II. The Promised Deliverance

After identifying God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as the source of our grace and peace, he continues his focus on the ministry of Jesus by stating in v. 4- who gave Himself for us. First of all, in v. 4 we find the willingness of Jesus to go to the cross. He gave Himself up. He offered Himself- giving His own life as a ransom. Like a lamb that offered himself as a sacrifice. Freely offering what was needed of His own accord. No one took His life from Him; He gave it up- laying it down freely as John 10 affirms. But to what end? Why would Jesus need to lay down His life? Well, He did so in order to deliver us. He gave His own life away for our sins! This giving of Himself for our sins is really the payment that satisfied the debt incurred by our sins. He was made sin- and that is why He suffered the wrath and curse of God on the cross. His death was the necessary payment. His offering was made to save us from the power of evil and slavery to darkness. He became our substitute- our ransom- our redeemer. The debt that our sin had accrued was paid in full as He offered Himself for our sins. He died for our sins, as I John 2:2 puts it, to be a propitiation for our sins- even the sins of the whole world. But the waves of riches

continue to wash over us. Not only did Jesus deliver us from hell as He died for our sins, He also died to deliver us from this the present evil age. His sacrifice is our emancipation from this wicked age!

What is this present, evil age? Well, the evil age is a way of speaking about the current world's affairs as corrupted by sin and dominated by the devil. Now when Paul was writing this letter, he was living in an evil age. With Roman Emperors feeding Christians to the lions and the mobs stoning anyone who spoke the truth about Jesus Christ; it truly was an evil age. The structure of the sentence emphasises this fact- the age is evil. The times in which we live are bad- they are wicked. This was true back then- and it is true in our present day as well. If we have learned anything from the recent months, this age and the rulers of it are evil. The powers of darkness continue to gather, our world is dominated by evil, wicked men who have no use for the truth but rather spout their false teaching and hatred. Our age or our times are evil. Full of hardships, toil and trouble. We see wickedness exalted and works of evil praised. Hatred toward us, our Lord and the truth. But take heart, believer, because Jesus has come to deliver us from this world! To deliver here is to pluck out- to snatch from the fire like stick snatched from the flame. Jesus came to deliver us from this world and the destruction that will soon fall upon it! The devil and his ideas will be defeated! Wicked men and their schemes will come to nothing! As Jesus said in John 16:33, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart I have overcome this world! There is comfort in knowing that this evil world is only a present reality. Jesus has delivered us from and has overcome this present evil world! This world in its present, evil state is not eternal! Our future is not bound or stuck in this evil world! Your life is not bound to this present, evil age! In Christ, you too are an overcomer! Although it may seem like this world with its devils is filled. We suffer the constant attack on the family and on truth-but these are not going to win the day! You are delivered- liberated- set free! By way of application, this deliverance from this wicked world is a truth that calls for us to examine our priorities. Knowing that this world is going to be burned up- and everything that is wicked will be destroyed by fire- we need to be careful that we do not place too much stock in the things that

are passing. What good would it do to gain this world, but lose our souls? Friendship with this world is in fact hostility towards God. So we need to be on guard that we do not align ourselves with this evil world for we have been delivered from it!

III. The Closing Declaration

Now that we have considered grace, peace and deliverance; what remains is glory. Paul concludes his opening paragraph with these words- to our God be the glory forever and ever- Amen! When we clearly see that our deliverance is a work of the Father accomplished by His Son, you cannot help but glorify God! Notice that our work is not present in this equation at all. The only thing that we provide in v. 3-5 is the sin that necessitated Christ's death! Therefore, all glory must be to our God! Because of all the grace that comes to us, all the glory must be directed to Him! It is this central point that the Galatian churches had forgotten- salvation is by grace alone! And as a result, all the glory must go to God alone! This word for glory is "doxa." We get our word doxology from it. To God be the glory for great things He has done! The better we understand the gospel of grace- the greater we will be motivated to glorify the God of our deliverance. There is so much packed into this little paragraph. Salvation by grace alone. Jesus as our atonement and mediator. All things and particularly our salvation working out for the glory of God! And how long is God to be glorified? Well, the answer is forever! To God be the glory forever and ever! World without end! Although this present evil world is passing away, not so God's glory! His is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever! So shall it be!

To conclude, although most of us might fondly remember days gone by the fact remains, we live in an evil day. The powers of darkness are gathering and waging war. But take heart, Jesus has delivered us from them! As our theme state: Jesus Christ promises blessings to those He delivered from this present, evil age. So give glory to God for the grace, peace and deliverance that we have from His hands!