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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

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TITLE: Search and Rescue!

Terrified: I will never forget the day my wife and kids and I were visiting family up in Green Lake, Minnesota. Like most days on the lake, we were swimming and boating. My oldest son, who was about 5 at the time, wanted to be thrown in the air, hoping to be caught as he splashed down in the water. He's like any typical kid. Well I took my son, threw him up in the air, and he went right through my arms. Now, historically Green Lake is a pretty clean lake, but this day it was incredibly cloudy. I couldn't see even a foot below the surface. My son went through my arms and I couldn't find him. He wasn't a great swimmer at that time. I looked, but couldn't see him. I waited, but he didn't pop up! I began to grab and twirl and twist and pray. I dove down under the water and could see a little movement, so I grabbed what I thought was my son. I went up to the surface, *and had my child in my arms*. My 5 year old son was rescued that day.

As a parent who was able to rescue my child, I know the deep sense of satisfaction to rescue someone I love. Well you had better believe that my appreciation for being rescued from death has increased. If you are a follower of Christ today, you too have been rescued. But this kind of rescuing doesn't just save your physical life; it saves your spiritual life as well.

Today we are continuing our series, "We Are Free", a verse by verse study of Galatians. As you might guess by the series title, the theme of Galatians is freedom. Before Christ saved us, we were slaves to death, slaves to sin and we were slaves to ourselves. And when there is slavery, there is no freedom. But we were rescued, and that's what we want to talk about today, in Galatians Chapter One.

Paul, in the first 2 verses of Galatians One, has identified himself as a true Apostle of Christ. He says, "I'm not appointed by men like you say that I am." There were Judaizers, or religious Jews, who were declaring that Paul was just another man, sent by his own free will, to teach a message that was purely human. But we know that Paul was anything but just another man with a human message. He was a true Apostle - A man who had witnessed a risen Christ, and had been commissioned by Jesus Christ to go and make disciples who make disciples. And that's where we pick it up in Galatians Chapter 1, verse three (ESV):

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Here Paul begins by really addressing the issue at hand, and he says, “Grace to you.” I think we get a lot of confusion when it comes to the word grace. Usually when someone uses *let’s extend them more grace*, that’s not really what they mean. So let me just unpack a few terms, so I think we’re all speaking the same language.

In Christianity we talk about justice. And justice, we know, is getting something that we rightly deserve. There is a positive side of justice and a negative side of justice: positively - if you work for an employer - justice says you receive your paycheck: You did and you receive. That’s a form of justice. But then there’s also a negative sense of justice. You steal, and you pay a fine. You speed in a school zone - you have to go to court and pay a very hefty fee. You murder someone, and you experience justice by going to prison, or even being put to death. That’s justice - Getting what you deserve.

But then, there’s mercy. Mercy is the withholding of something a person deserves. This typically is in a positive sense, meaning we deserve something negative, but positively, it is withheld. For example, my son whips my other son with a wet towel, causing a welt. Justice would say either I administer some type of discipline, or my other son clocks him in the face. That would be some form of justice, but my son with the welt says, “Y’know what Dad? Don’t retaliate. I’m not going to do anything.” Instead, he says, “I forgive you” and so my other son experiences mercy. A person commits some act against the state, and the judge, instead of giving them 20 years in prison, gives them three years in prison. That’s a form of mercy. And I think this is what most people mean, when they say they’re going to extend grace. They really mean they’re going to cut them some slack, or show them mercy. So there’s justice, there’s mercy, and then there’s grace.

So what is grace? Grace is giving something that someone doesn’t deserve. It’s a gift in its truest form. It’s like receiving a paycheck, but you didn’t earn it. You didn’t work the hours. You never even met the employer. But you received a check. That’s grace. It’s a gift. It’s unmerited favor.

I think we, as humans, really struggle with this concept of grace, because grace isn’t a human value. It’s a *God* value. Grace makes no sense, humanly speaking. It doesn’t make any sense religiously. Remember, religion says what you can do to achieve peace with God. Religion tells you what *you* can do to earn salvation, or keep salvation. *Grace blows religion up*. It says there’s nothing you can do. If you want peace with God, if you want salvation from your sins, God’s going to have to do it for you, and do it purely as a gift.

So here in Galatians 1, verse 3, when Paul says, “Grace to you,” he is reminding us of the true Gospel. He is addressing the core issue in the book of Galatians: Adding works to grace; adding strings to the gift. And when we add strings to the gift of grace, it stops being grace.

DISCUSSION:

N: So how do we do that today? Let’s bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. How do the two of you see people *adding* to grace? How or why do you think it happens?

C: Well, adding to grace is basically adding to the Gospel. So, you know, grace is a gift - it's not a loan. So nothing is owed in return. God doesn't say, "Here's my grace, but you have to pray this way, or pray to this Saint." We're not saved by our own efforts, achievements, by some morality, some ritual, some rites, some ceremony, some behavior. You know, gift givers are the ones that give something up when they give a gift. And that's Jesus - He's the gift giver. He's the one that gave something up, so we could have everlasting life. So people add to it all the time: They preach a false Gospel, and that should never intimidate us. We should never affirm that. I'm sure Arnie could give specific examples.

A: Well, I'm going to go actually to the other direction, and say, there's people that add license to grace, which I think, especially the younger you are, the more likelihood that you're going to add license to grace. At least, that's been my observation, not only in the research, but in real life - is you see a lot of kids that you thought were Christ followers - and they probably still are - but man, they've sure added a lot of license to grace.

N: Yeah. It's interesting. As I've walked with people, talked with people, there are definitely different camps. And the reality is, once you add one thing to grace, and you take one thing away from grace, guess what? We have just distorted the Gospel. And I know that there's a lot of debate on when we add works to grace, or encouraging obedience. You know, when you encourage obedience as an obligation to the gift that God has given us, we're turning into legalism. And I'll be honest - I'll be first to say, I don't think that's true, because there is a cost to following Christ. Even Jesus Himself talked people out of following Him, because there was a cost. Is it a high cost? Sometimes. But the reality is, we become free in Christ. We become no longer slaves to ourselves, to our sin, but a slave to Christ. So whenever that happens, we are declaring our allegiance to Him. And that means He may call us to go somewhere, and to do something, that's not to secure our faith, or to keep our Salvation ongoing. No, it is simply the outflow of it. So I think you're exactly right - whenever we add to or take away, we distort the Gospel of grace.

Paul greets the Galatians by saying, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

You see grace is the gift of Salvation, but the result is peace. When we experience God's grace, we receive peace with God. I think if there is one thing that people long for today, it's peace. Look around you. People are looking for peace. The problem is, they try to experience it in their own methodology. They pursue peace in drugs, alcohol, sex, job titles - validation from a spouse, or a parent, or even a child. They try to experience peace through religious activities, or giving money away to get their name on a brick. But the problem is, none of those things bring true peace. They may bring temporary joy, or maybe a piece of happiness, but not peace. So Paul says, remember grace, and from that grace of God, you experience peace with God, and from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then He reminds us of something so powerful:

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. (Gal. 1:4, ESV)

Jesus Christ gave Himself up for our sins. You see, that is the heart of the Gospel message. That is the heart of the gift. Jesus gave Himself up for us.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Jesus Christ voluntarily gave Himself up for us. He voluntarily became sin. The one who was sinless would take on our sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. But wasn't Jesus forced to do this? I mean, didn't God send Him on a rescue mission, so He *had* to give up His life? We'll listen to how Jesus would respond to this charge:

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:14-18).

Jesus says, I am on a rescue mission. God sent me, but I do it voluntarily, and I willfully do it, not begrudgingly, not under compulsion. But I lay down my very life for you, because I love you. The Bible says, there is no greater love, than the love of a person who lays down their life for another. This is exactly what Jesus has done for us. This is called the substitutionary atonement. Christ was our substitute. He paid the sin debt we never could pay. And when He paid it, it was paid in full. Remember, at the end of Christ's time on the cross, before dying, He said, “It is finished.” It was the word “tetelestai,” which is a banking term. In Paul's day, people would write it on receipts. It meant “paid in full.” Christ gave himself up for our sins, so our sin debt would be paid in full.

But we can't miss what Paul says in Galatians One, verse 4. ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to **deliver** us from the present evil age. Deliver has the idea of a rescue. Christ was sent on a rescue mission from God. Deliver means to rescue from danger. It was the same word that Stephen used in his sermon describing the rescue of Joseph and Israel from Egyptian suffering. They were rescued, just like we are rescued.

John 3:16-17 (NIV) says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

God sent Jesus to rescue us from our sin. It was truly the greatest rescue mission of all time. That day when I rescued my son from the water was a big day for him and for me, but it pales in comparison to the day Jesus rescued me from my sin. But here in Galatians, Paul doesn't just stop with rescue us - he says Jesus rescues us *from the present evil age*. Paul was not referring to a specific and short period of time. Instead, he's referring to the evil world system we live in. Jesus came to rescue us from the lies of Satan – from Satan's influence and deceit. Jesus came to rescue us from religion – from license. He came to save us from legalism. He came to save us from ourselves. He came to save us from the slavery of addiction and destruction. It doesn't say that He destroyed these things, though surely He will. We know that the evil age is still going on. It will go on until Christ comes back and delivers final judgment. But thankfully, we may live in the evil age, but we don't live by it, and for it anymore. He rescued us.

And this was all because of God's will. John 1:12-13 (ESV) says, “[But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.](#)”

All of this was by God's will, and all to the glory of God. All Paul did in his life was to glorify God. All we do as believers, we do to glorify God.

Friend, we have been rescued. Jesus rescued us. He took our sin debt and paid it in full. We can never outspend God's grace when we receive that gift of salvation. Today, don't slip back into the belief system of the evil age: Legalism, license, slavery to sin, and addiction. Why? We are free! You are free. You are free in Christ.

This is the message that people need to hear today: Your neighbor. Your friend. Your coworker. They are slaves to the system of the world. God has rescued you and made you one of His rescue workers. Will you rest and relish in God's grace? Will you share that Good News as you go? Because of God's grace, you are free to rest, and free to share.

N: Let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney to discuss this a bit further. Cara, what does it look like to rest in God's grace? How do you do that?

C: Well, no matter what, God is so loving and so kind, that he made a way for us to never perish. And we can rest knowing that no matter what happens, we're safe and secure. That's what we know to be true. And I think that we will never fully fathom grace. I think we rest in it, but we never fully fathom it, because deep down, we know we do not deserve it. But here's the good news. We have an entire eternity to contemplate that, don't we?

N: It's an exciting prospect, isn't it? I think so many of us, whether it's because of our background, being raised in a certain kind of church, or we were raised in a different religion, this notion of grace really is hard to grasp. And it's very natural for us to add in those legalistic tendencies. “Well, I better add this last prayer.” “I better give this extra, you know, \$5.” “I better

go to one more church service, just to be sure, or just to show God that I love Him, to let him know - I really am committed to you". But the reality is, when we love God, we'll want to do those things naturally. It's the byproduct of who we are in Christ. And so, when we really believe that, we can rest in His grace, and not worry about all those little additions. It's really quite freeing, and it makes our relationship with God much more enjoyable, and I think livable. Arnie, what do we need to know about evil? We've talked a lot about evil, you know, off the program, you and I, and as leadership, but what do we need to know about evil, so that we can answer the call to help people be rescued.

A: It exists. Oh my goodness. When you've got 50% of evangelical Christians saying, "all roads lead to Heaven" - it's just bizarre. "And people are basically good" - I forget what the percentage was, but it was tremendously high. And that is the big, big fake-out that Satan gives to people is, "Hey, man, we're all good." "Basically, we all try hard." "If you're screwed up, it's because you got a bad childhood, or an environment." And you know, "There's really no evil. It's just shades of gray." "Oh yeah. Hitler was evil, but you know, none of us are like that evil". I mean, it just goes on and on and on. And I don't know if it's because the pulpit has moved away from what was called "fire and brimstone". You know, I think the pendulum swung the other way, but evil does exist. And if people don't believe in Jesus Christ, they're not going to a good place. [Right]. And it's called Hell.

N: Yeah. I think you're exactly right. A lot of evangelicals, a lot of people, do not believe in evil. They don't believe in the spiritual realm. They've just abandoned this whole notion. And I think you're right. I think it is partly to blame because of the churches. The churches have walked away from preaching the whole counsel of God. Last night, we were actually watching *Pollyanna*, and that's kind of a weird movie for us to watch, but there's that preacher. And he's like, you know, *God's wrath is upon you*. And the one lady is like, *This is awesome*. And you'd never hear that nowadays. And is it a happy message? No, you're not singing *How Glad We Are* at the end of that - unless you're a Christian, because we know that it's by grace, we've been saved from the wrath of God, and there is evil, there is pain, there is a spiritual battle. And we need to be open to seeing it, to discussing it, and being willing to fight it, because that is where the real battle is at. Now back to the topic of Salvation, which we've talked so much about so far in this series - how do you guys view our Salvation being in this present age, in our daily lives? And why is it so important for us to understand?

C: Well, I'll take it back to *Pollyanna* - by grace, through faith. It doesn't change. It's hard though. Like I said, we just never can fathom it, because we know we don't deserve it. And so we diligently pursue these works to earn God's favor. We're going to fail every time. So we do good works because they're a natural outgrowth of our relationship with Jesus. And you know, I just always have to go back to Jesus - you know, when I get too intellectual or too - it's just by grace through faith - go back to my first love.

N: Arnie, what about you? I mean, how do you see us being saved from the present age - just in our daily lives?

A: I mean, it's like Cara said - it is hard, especially if you look at yourself honestly. And you know, it seems like when you get older, all those delusions of grandeur just are gone, and it's like, "Wow, how could Jesus save a jerk like me?" You know? I mean, and then if you really start thinking about it, you get the concept of grace: "I totally did not deserve this". And it's so opposite with what people are saying today: *We're all basically good*. I mean, just think about that for a minute - in the context of that statement - we're all basically good - you don't need grace, because you're great. Well, come on, really? You would have to be a complete idiot to believe something like that. I know when I was in school, we studied what was called humanistic psychology, and way back in the day, they actually thought people were evolving to being better. And this was before a lot of the stuff that's going on today, but people actually believed that we're getting better over time, and that a lot of these things you've seen historically - we're just kind of evolving into much better people.

C: Well, I don't think too, we can fully enjoy our Christian ride, if we're constantly wondering if what we're doing is enough, right? [Oh, for sure. For sure]. I think that it's the happiest Christians are the ones that really know, by grace through faith, [right], where you really are going, "Wow, this race is an adventure. [Yup.] It really is awesome. And thank you Jesus for that". Right?

N: Well, it really does - it frees us to have life, and life to the fullest. As Jesus said, we don't have to worry about performing for others' love, performing for God's love. We don't worry about how we compare to anybody else - that is freeing, but also it gives us great freedom to not get so wrapped up in the cares of the world; about what's happening outside your door; what's happening on the East Coast or West Coast. Do you care because you care about people? Yes, but the reality is, the turmoil around us pales in comparison to eternity with Christ. So He rescues us daily from so many things, but thank God, from that wrestling, and that performing, for God's love and His acceptance.