

THE CROSS BRINGS FREEDOM (Galatians – outrageous grace)

We're continuing our Good News series looking at the book of Galatians – exploring the gospel and grace. American pastor and theologian, Tim Keller says that

“It is very common in Christian circles to assume that “the gospel” is something just for non-Christians. Christians need the gospel as much as non-Christians do! Our problems in the Christian life come because we often lose or forget the gospel. And we progress in faith only as we grasp and apply the gospel in deeper ways. Thank God for His gospel, and ask Him to help you never to think you should move beyond it to more “advanced” doctrines. Ask God to show you where your life needs to be changed by His gospel message.”

Today we have one main verse to focus on – but what a verse. Galatians 2:20.

It is a well-known verse, but I'm going to read from The Passion Translation which will help us avoid familiarity and maybe hear the truth in a new way.

“My old identity has been co-crucified with Messiah and no longer lives; for the nails of his cross crucified me with him. And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me—we live in union as one! My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, and dispenses his life into mine!

Galatians 2:20 (TPT)

The first thing to note is that the footnote in TPT points out that the Aramaic for the last sentence is plural - God loves us so much that he gave himself for us and dispenses his life into ours!

This is not exclusive to those who are already in relationship with God - this is an invite to freedom for all. All of us are included in the love of God and are able to have this new life!

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that in Christ we are new creations - the old has gone, the new has come. Our old life is gone and paid for in Christ.

I'm sure we all know people who seem to have died to their old lives - they're not living lives that are full of “sin” but somehow they seem to have not yet come alive to the new life - possibly judgemental, unloving, quite happy to protest against things, but less likely to stand for things - lacking joy, weary and negative about life - not the best advert for Jesus who was nothing like this - who people loved to be around and felt great being with - who was loving, kind, accepting, full of joy.

Let's be honest we're probably all a bit like this at one time or another. I know there are times when I can be judgemental in my thinking, lacking grace and love for others - I can be weary and lack joy... The thing is this is most often the result of living in self effort and law rather than the free grace that is offered.

The idea of being crucified with Christ emphasizes our union with Him and His death on our behalf. We trust in Christ's crucifixion as payment for our sin penalty, and we rely on His power to live in a way that pleases God. The emphasis is on what He has done for us, not what we have to do for God. Too often, “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is Christ who lives in me” becomes “I need to crucify my sinful desires and try harder to live for God.” Our old life is dead but we carry it into the new in our memories, habits, routines, relationships, environments and circumstances. When this becomes our perspective, we have slipped out of grace-living and back into law-living, and we

minimize the power of Christ's death for us. We are relying less upon the power of Christ and more upon our own power—and that will never work out well!

We try and overcome that which is already overcome - maybe we feel we have to do something to earn this freedom, or to repay Jesus for it and we try and strive and struggle, but ultimately we can't do it ourselves - it is already done, it's like try to fight your own shadow, no matter how many punches we land it is us that gets bruised.

“God's means of delivering us from sin is not by making us stronger and stronger, but by making us weaker and weaker. That is surely rather a peculiar way of victory, you say; but it is the divine way. God sets us free from the dominion of sin, not by strengthening our old man but by crucifying him; not by helping him to do anything, but by removing him from the scene of action.”

Watchman Nee (Chinese church leader and teacher)

Without understanding all our sins are covered/dealt with already, then our eternal security and salvation will hang in the balance and will rely on our own merit, we will never be fully confident in God's presence and unfailing acceptance of us.

In the NIV Colossians 3 tells us to put to death that which belongs to this earthly nature... The reality is that we put it to death in Christ when we become one with him. Our old life is dead, the new life has come. TPT helps clarify here, telling us to live as one who has died. Our ties with this life have been severed through our crucifixion with Christ. As we reveal Christ in our lives, living in the freedom he paid for not only is he seen, but our true selves are revealed.

Your crucifixion with Christ has severed the tie to this life, and now your true life is hidden away in God in Christ. And as Christ himself is seen for who he really is, who you really are will also be revealed, for you are now one with him in his glory!

Live as one who has died to every form of sexual sin and impurity. Live as one who died to diseases, and desires for forbidden things, including the desire for wealth, which is the essence of idol worship.

Colossians 3:3-5 (TPT)

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:3-5 (NIV)

Eugene Peterson said that the essence of the spiritual life is “learning how to die”. “You start losing all your illusions, and you start being capable of true intimacy and love.”

Two weeks ago Bev posed the question of whether or not it was possible to live sin free – it is, Jesus was fully human like us and lived without sin – he lived in perfect relationship with the Father and has paid the price through his death so we too can enter this relationship. Our old life is gone. Cut off. Severed. Dead. The new has come. The life of Christ in and through us.

The trouble is there is continuity through this death – we are still us – and old habits die hard. Our old life and old way of thinking cling to us like a shadow influencing our thinking, behaviour and beliefs.

Watchman Nee describes this saying that ‘In China, anyone committing murder had to carry the body of the person they’d killed strapped on their backs, arm to arm and leg to leg, until they themselves died.’ Some Christians can be like this; they carry their old person with them into their new life in Jesus.

He is specifically talking about baptism and how our old person is left dead in the water and we come out alive in the power of Jesus. This description shows the link between baptism and the death and resurrection of Christ – a physical outworking of a spiritual reality in our lives.

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" **Philippians 1:21**

Not about physical death so much – although that is gain because we then fully enter glory with the Father, but more so now we die to our old life, putting to death our old ways – this is gain because right now, and here is the Good News - which this series is all about - our old life has no more influence or control over us - it no longer dictates our future, or even our present. In death we are freed from our past, freed from our sin and bondage, even from our worries and fears.

John Crowder (author and advocate of mystical Christianity, marked with miracles, signs and wonders) puts it this way:

It is difficult for a dead man to be worried about his bank statement or a bad doctor’s report.
No circumstance can dictate my emotional state.

On top of this we get to enter into and live in the glorious freedom that Christ bought for us. This is because crucifixion is linked to resurrection - death in Christ is linked to His new life - freedom and glory forever!

Whatever life a crucified man has must be new life. Whatever you have of life was not given you till you came into union with Christ.

CH Spurgeon (19th Century Baptist Preacher)

Paul tells us that not only is our old life gone but the new has come - Christ living in us, dispensing life to us. Good news it is about relaxing into his grace and flowing with his presence. In Him the internal battle and struggles find peace and resolution - they’re done away with.

"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus"

Romans 6:5-11

Christ living in us, ourselves living upon Christ, and our union to Christ being visibly maintained by an act of simple faith in Him—this is the true Christian's life.

CH Spurgeon

So, what should this new life look like?

Our being crucified is inherently linked with resurrection life and power – we are called to live life in the power of the Spirit – allowing Christ to live in us, our mystical union with the Father through Christ in the Spirit bursting forth life in and through us – allowing us into the life that Christ lives – not just the Christ who lived on earth who we read about in the gospels – that and more – the resurrected, now glorious Christ, raised to the right hand of the Father, with all authority in heaven and on earth, reigning supreme over all – his life – the life through which all things were made and live and have their being pulsating through us and leaking into and transforming this world.

His life in us is described by **Joseph Prince**, Senior Pastor of New Creation Church, Singapore (a church of around 35,000) like this:

Though Jesus is completely God, He was born completely human. He went through temptation after temptation and conquered every one of them (see Hebrews 4:15). And all that overcoming power is found in His life. And He put that life in you—the life of Christ is in you!

During Jesus' ministry on earth, He conquered sickness, the winds and waves, the powers of darkness and death. It is His life that brings victory over the devil and all his works. And He put that life in you—the life of Christ is in you!

Finally, Jesus went to the cross. And that life in Him put an end to everything that was natural of the Adamic race—sickness, poverty, failures, pains, curses and death. All that was natural ceased to be in that life of His. But all that was supernatural remained in Him. And He put that life in you—the life of Christ is in you!

Then, Jesus rose from the dead. And in that life of His was added the power of resurrection. And He put that life in you—the life of Christ is in you!

After His resurrection, Jesus went back to heaven to His Father. Today, He is seated at the right hand of God, resting in His finished work, occupying a place of the highest authority. And He put that life in you—the life of Christ is in you!

And because Jesus went back to the Father, the Holy Spirit came to indwell you (see John 16:7), so that you will live life with His anointing in you and walk in His overcoming power.

All that Jesus is, God meant for you to be. All that He has, God meant for you to have. All the exciting things that you read in the Bible about Jesus, all the treasures of Him hidden in the Old Testament and the unsearchable riches in Him that you find in the New Testament, all of that life of His, is not out there somewhere. God has deposited all of it in you, so that you can live the abundant life that Jesus came to give you!

It will look like freedom and joy, hope and glory, peace and love - outworked internally in our lives and overflowing through our actions and relationships, the things we give ourselves to and sacrifice for, the effort we put in and how it is multiplied in its effect because of the favour and blessing of the Father, the transformation we make happen, the influence on those around us, the blessing of God overflowing through us, life being shared, hearts being healed, the broken being restored,

circumstances overcome and not dictating our feelings or actions, insecurity and fear being things of the past, salvations, miracles - the lame walking, the dead rising, heaven on earth.

I know this is the kind of life I want to live, and I know I'm not living in the fullness of it yet - maybe in part - but there is always more - we have an infinite God, with infinite power and infinite goodness and love. We have a freedom that was bought at a price for us, that we enter into through union with Christ in His death and resurrection - I want to learn to live in the fullness of this freedom and be part of bringing others into this same freedom - bringing hope, joy, love to neighbours and colleagues, friends and family, the homeless through Hope into Action as we start that up, to those at the school gates, people I meet in the shops, those I meet and support in India, and for us as a church or as individuals there will be many more - refugees, women exploited in the sex industry, the lonely, youth, local schools, those working in healthcare - the list is endless.

This freedom, this new life is achieved as we relinquish control, cease striving and trying to earn that which we're freely given; as we stop doing everything in our own strength and let go allowing God free rein in our lives - letting His life flow through our own. This is what the world longs for (Rom 8:19-21) - but doesn't know how to get.

We're invited to let go and take the hand of Jesus. To let go we have to trust the one whose hand is being offered.

Galatians 2:20 confidently tells us Christ loves us - he gave himself for us. It is him that offers not only his hand to hold, helping us let go, but complete union with him - a mystical connection in our spirit that allows his life to flow through ours.

As we do this and as we live revealing who Jesus is to those around it makes this possible for others too - they are invited into this same freedom and are able to see Him as trustworthy too.

So, in this new year who wants to join me in living with more letting go, more trusting Him; more letting Him lead instead of us leading and asking Him to come along; more listening to what he has to say and less talking about our own ideas?

Even in this it is not about what we can do, about our effort, but about His grace. We're told in Eph 2:8-9:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.

The faith needed for this adventure is received from him - it is His faith, the faith of the Son of God, none of us need to conjure anything up - if it is what we want as children of God let us ask our gracious Father who loves to give good gifts to his children.

So, my prayer for us in this new year is that we may know the truth of Galatians 2:20 and all that it means for us in our lives; that we would receive and live in the revelation that:

"Our old identity has been co-crucified with Messiah and no longer lives; for the nails of his cross crucified **us** with him. And now the essence of this new life is no longer **ours**, for the Anointed One lives his life through **us**—we live in union as one! **Our** new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves **us** so much that he gave himself for **us**, and dispenses his life into **ours**!

Questions for connect groups:

1. How important do we feel the 'gospel' is in our lives? Have we fallen into the trap of thinking it is just for non-Christians? Do we agree with Tim Keller that "we progress in faith only as we grasp and apply the gospel in deeper ways"?
2. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that the old has gone, the new has come. Is this our daily experience or do we struggle, feeling the old life clinging to us? Why might this be?
3. What would it look like for us to be completely free from our old nature, and fully alive in our new God-given life? What differences would we expect to see?
4. How can we "live as one who has died" (Colossians 3:3-5, also CH Spurgeon: Whatever life a crucified man has must be new life.)?
5. What things is God asking us to let go of, trusting Him; where are we being called to let Him lead instead of us leading and asking Him to come along; how can we listen to Him more rather than just talking to Him about our own ideas?
6. Read the Jospeh Prince quote and receive all that God has for each of us.

Pray together and ask God to impart faith to us that we may live in the revelation and reality of our new lives in Him.

Suggestion: Print out Galatians 2:20 from the Passion Translation and declare it out loud daily 0 faith comes from hearing the word of God!