Week One:
GRACE THAT TRANSFORMS

Sermon Seeds

SUNDAY APRIL 28, 2019

KEY VERSE

They only heard a report about me: “The man who used to harass us now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy.” (CEB) — Galatians 1:23

SUGGESTED VERSES FOR WORSHIP

Galatians 1:13-16, 23-24

KEY CONCEPT

Central to Paul’s letter is the power of the gospel of God’s transforming grace. Just as God transformed Paul from persecutor to preacher through grace, by grace God will transform our lives.

SERMON HELPS

In this first chapter of Galatians Paul is sending two messages, first God’s grace can and does transform people’s lives and how they view the world. And second, once you have experienced God’s transforming grace don’t accept anything less.

The transforming power of God’s grace can and does change people’s lives and worldviews.

In Galatians 1:13 Paul states, “You heard about my previous life in Judaism, how severely I harassed God’s church and tried to destroy it.” Paul’s life is an example of the transforming power of the gospel, a power so real it turned his life and worldview upside down. For Paul, God’s revealed and transforming grace is central to the claiming and reshaping of his identity.

In Galatians 1:23 Paul states, “They only heard a report about me: ‘The man who used to harass us now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy.”

Personal Connection/Illustration:

Share your story of how God’s transforming grace changed your life or the life of someone you love. How has your view of the world changed? How has God used you?

Theological Connection/Illustration:

Galatians 1 captures the essence of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.
Prevenient Grace

In this first chapter of the letter to the churches in Galatia, we see the movements of God’s prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. In our Wesleyan understanding of grace, we talk of expressions of grace. One such expression is prevenient grace described by Adam Dragos as “the grace that “goes before”—the grace which precedes any human action and reflects God’s heart for us. It testifies to God being the initiator of all relationships with him and reveals God as one who pursues us” (https://www.seedbed.com/a-primer-on-prevenient-grace/). Galatians 1:15 captures prevenient grace, “But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was please to reveal his Son to me...” Paul did nothing to receive such grace, no human action. God pursued Paul.

Justifying grace

In the salutation, Galatians 1:1-4, clearly Paul is speaking of justifying grace, the grace that pardons and forgives. “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”

The word grace is not a greeting but a calling to the Galatia to remember that Paul has taught them through his authority and experience of God’s grace that the gospel is a gospel of grace. The gospel message is not something we do that puts us in right relationship with God, some rule, practice or custom such as circumcision. the gospel message is grace, what God has already done for us in Christ Jesus.

The second expression of grace is justifying grace, the grace that restores our relationship with God. Galatians 1:3-4 captures the essence of justifying grace. Justifying grace is the “grace of being reconciled and realigned with God and the acceptance of God’s atoning act in Jesus Christ.” (Bishop Kenneth Carder, http://www.interpretermagazine.org/topic/a-wesleyan-understanding-of-grace)

Sanctifying grace

By the end of the first chapter, Galatians 1:23-24, we see evidence in Paul’s life of sanctifying grace. “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.” “Wesley affirmed that God’s grace seeks nothing less than a new creation in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Sanctifying grace is God’s freely given presence and power to restore the fullness of God's image in which we are created” (http://www.interpretermagazine.org/topics/a-wesleyan-understanding-of-grace).

The Book of Discipline defines grace as “the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit” (2016 BOD p. 51).

Accepting anything less that the message of God’s grace is the act of turning to a different gospel—there is no other gospel.

Personal Connection/Illustration:

“If you have ever returned a rental car, you have driven over those spikes that are made to ensure that the rental cars are not stolen out of the lot. The spikes collapse when you drive forward over them, but if you were to back up, the spikes would presumably stay upright and cause, as the sign says, “severe tire damage.” To read Galatians is to witness Paul trying to spare people the damage caused by backing up. The Galatians are easing the car into reverse, and Paul is waving his arms and shouting, “No!” In the first chapter of the letter, Paul tells his own story and hints at what is at stake for his readers” (Mary Hinkle Shore, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1744 ).

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