



"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." (Galatians 2:20-21)

PRE-SEASON TRAINING SESSIONS 11 & 12: THE GALATIAN CHALLENGE

Paul's final farewell to the Galatians is testimony to a life unashamedly sold out for Christ. Describing his total, absolute commitment to Jesus, he pens the words "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." No pity party. Just a plain, simple fact. And while the physical scars of his ministry would be obvious (read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29), the unseen emotional scars of hatred, hostility, disrespect, dishonor, mistrust and constant fear for his life must've surely taken their toll. Yet in the midst of his sufferings, he never lost his fire or his faith. He rejoiced where others may've mourned; he remained firmly anchored when the battle raged both externally and from within (read Romans 7:15-20). He was a man with a purpose – intent only on pleasing the One who saved his soul. Beaten and belittled, scoffed at and stoned, Paul saw himself as Christ's ambassador on earth – His representative – certainly not an unwilling victim of God's wrath and displeasure.



Scars. We all have them. Some, like Paul's, are visible – a reminder of times in the trenches on and off the athletic field. Badges of honor, maybe, but scars nonetheless. Others are less obvious. Hurts from the past, rejections, unsolved conflicts, unrealized potential. And while wounds come in all shapes and sizes, no one is exempt. As the song goes, "Everybody hurts...sometimes." What we do with those hurts depends on perspective. Do we blame God or turn in His direction? Do we ask "Why me" instead of "What is He teaching me?" Do we scream "Why now" instead of "use me right now, right here – to be a witness for your glory." When the trials of life strike, are we able to (genuinely) ask the BIG questions, "Lord, how can I be molded into your image through this painful process?" and "Lord, how can this situation be used to draw others to you?"

The book of Galatians has been labelled, "The charter for Christian Freedom" and for sure it sheds light on the liberties we have as believers. Death no longer holds us. Religion no longer enslaves us. And as we walk in step with the Spirit, sin no longer entangles us. We are free to boast only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14). But beyond the content of the letter – behind the pen is the writer, Paul. Described by Charles Swindoll as "A man of grace and Grit", his life has much to teach us. He was deeply passionate about sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Many times he stood alone, staring fear in the face, trusting only in Christ for his deliverance. He knew what it was like to be "on the other side" – a man without Christ and thus without hope. A man destined for eternal separation from the very God he (falsely) believed he was serving before his Damascus Road experience. Once converted, this self-proclaimed "chief of sinners" turned from persecutor to a powerful spokesman for Christ. He understood grace so profoundly perhaps because he had been unlikely the recipient of it. Unworthy? Yes. Undeserving. Yes.



Freely given and gratefully received. A resounding yes! That's why Paul's life is such an encouragement and source of hope for us today. His forgiveness can be our forgiveness. His courage can be our courage. The message of salvation can be the same message we present to a world in desperate need of truth, healing and leadership. Christ is the answer. Paul knew it. His life of unflinching resolve reflected it, and he serves as an example for all who choose to take up their cross and follow Him. For Paul, life was never about his achievements or his credentials. It was always about Jesus Christ. Why? Because Christ loves, lives and saves. He comforts, brings healing, peace and hope. So acknowledging this, may the message of the cross be our rallying cry to the world, and may Paul's life inspire and motivate us to press on and press into the Lord, seeking His favor and feeling His pleasure as we pass through this fleeting moment called "life."

See you next week for the start of season training!
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