

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, when people used to buy and sell horses, a man arrived at a ranch to check out a horse he was considering buying. The owner said, "Now, this is a religious horse. He doesn't respond to 'giddyup' or 'whoa.' To get him to go you have to say, 'Praise the Lord.' To get him to stop you have to say, 'Amen.' So the guy jumped on the horse for a test ride. He said, "Let's go. Giddyup," but the horse refused to move. So, the owner yelled, "Praise the Lord!" At that, the horse took off galloping across the field. The rider was enjoying it for a while, and he wanted the horse to stop, but he couldn't remember what to say. They were approaching a cliff, so the rider stared saying, "Whoa! Stop!" But the religious horse didn't slow down. The man was so frightened he might die that he started praying the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father, who art in heaven ..." he made it all the way to the end and said, "For Thine is the kingdom and the power forever and ever, amen!" When he said, "Amen" the horse screeched to a stop right at the edge of the cliff. The rider was so relieved that he said, "Whew! Praise the Lord!" And over they went!

As we come to the end of our series on Galatians, we're going to read the final "amen" and I can say a hearty "Praise the Lord" for how I've been blessed from the riches of God's grace found in Galatians.

Paul started the letter with God's grace and he concluded it with God's grace. After the salutation he wrote: "Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:3) And the final sentence of the letter says the same thing, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." (Galatians 6:18) My definition of grace is God giving us what we need (forgiveness) instead of what we deserve (punishment).

Paul had preached that salvation is by grace through faith alone. His grace formula was JESUS + NOTHING = SALVATION. He wrote this letter because false teachers had infiltrated the church and were teaching a false gospel. Their false formula was JESUS + KEEPING THE JEWISH LAW = SALVATION. That's not grace, that's legalism.

Paul wrote this letter to plead with the believers to reject this false teaching. His main message was "Don't Stray from the Grace-Way!" These false teachers, called Judaizers, were boasting of their accomplishments like keeping the Sabbath, observing the Jewish festivals like Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. But one of their main demands was that all the men had to undergo religious surgery, circumcision. That's probably what upset Paul the most. So, as he finished the letter he reminds them he has physical marks on his body that are a stronger testimony than circumcision. He had scars all over his body from the many times he had been beaten and stoned. And for Paul, every scar told a story of his love for Jesus.

Galatians 6:14-18. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."

Paul's final appeal was, "From this moment on, I don't want any more trouble with these Jewish teachers. They brag about their mark of circumcision, but I have visible marks on my body that settle the argument." I want us to focus on those powerful words of Paul where he wrote, "I bear on my body the marks (*stigmata*) of Jesus."

Since Paul wrote this letter, the word *stigmata* has taken on a different meaning. If you Google *stigmata* you'll learn that in the Roman Catholic tradition there have been some Christians who claimed that the wounds of Christ have miraculously appeared on their hands and feet, and these have been called *stigmata*. St. Francis of Assisi was the first to have this reported condition. But originally, the word *stigmata* didn't have a religious meaning. It was a word used to describe what we would call an identifying brand on a cow or horse, or even a tattoo—a permanent badge of identity. What can learn about Paul's scars?

I. SCARS TELL THE STORIES OF OUR PAIN

Unless you've lived a very sheltered, careful life, you probably have some scars on your body. They may be scars from accidents, or a scar from some surgery. And every scar on your body has a story. There are two different kinds of scars.

A. Physical scars

Through the years I've visited church members in the hospital hundreds of times. There are many times when I've gone into the cardiac care unit after someone has had bypass surgery. It's a painful experience, and the surgeon has to hurt the patient to heal them. If you've ever had open-heart surgery, you have that tell-tell scar tattooed on your chest. Every time you look at it, you probably remember the pain and discomfort of that surgery. But you also must realize that you're probably still alive because of that remarkable surgery. That scar tells a story.

I've never had surgery, but there are scars on my body, and every scar tells a story. There's a scar on my chin from the time when I was only about four years old. My mother was in bed recovering after she gave birth to my younger brother. I wanted to make her feel better so I picked two hands-full of wildflowers to give her. I was running up the concrete steps to our back door and I stumbled. In that split second my young mind had to decide whether to let go of the flowers and catch myself or hang on to my mother's lowers. I made bad choice: I hung onto the flowers, and took it on the chin, literally, and needed several stiches to close that wound. That scar tells a story.

The Apostle Paul suffered many wounds because of his love for Jesus. In Acts 14 we learn that Paul was so hated by the Jews in Lystra that he was dragged outside the city and stoned. Stoning wasn't a mild punishment; it was the Jewish form of execution. When the Jews stoned someone, they were pushed off a ledge higher than a man's height, and then executioners would hurl rocks so large it required them to use two hands. When you read the story in Acts 14:19 those who stoned Paul thought he was dead. That's why they stopped. Some commentators even suggest that Paul died and God revived him. We won't know until we ask him, but Paul did claim to have visited the third heaven. Whether or not he died, it's certain he carried the scars from that stoning with him for the rest of his life.

In Acts 16 a Roman soldier beat Paul and Silas before they were imprisoned in Philippi. When the Jews whipped someone they limited the number of blows to 40, and they stopped counting at 39 just in case they miscounted. But the Romans didn't have a limit. On more than one occasion Paul knew what it was to have his back bared and his hands drawn up to a whipping post. Then one or two Roman soldiers would take a cat-of-nine-tails with pieces of rock or metal at the end of each leather strap. There are accounts of prisoners dying from Roman beating. Paul gladly carried these scars with him; he called them the stigmata of Christ.

Like Paul, every scar we have tells a story. But there are other scars beside physical scars. There are also

B. Emotional scars

Not all the scars on our hearts come from surgeons. Sometimes we bear the invisible scars of a broken heart. There might have been a time in your past when you experienced a great loss, or survived a catastrophe, or you were able to escape from a harmful, dysfunctional relationship. Combat veterans may return with no visible wounds, but still have to struggle with the pain of post-traumatic stress. Emotional wounds are real.

Clinical psychologist, Dr. Maxwell Maltz, says, "Every hurtful word said by someone you look up to; every humiliating episode; every mistake that you wish you could just forget tends to stay in your mind. If those past experiences are constantly dwelt upon, constantly relived in vivid detail to the point where you actually start feeling the same emotions as before, then you may experience serious emotional scars."

If you skin your knee, a scab, and possibly a scar appears as a sign the wound has been healed. If you aren't careful you can ignore emotional wounds and they can fester and become infected. Dr. Maltz writes that forgiveness is the key to turning your emotional scars into strengths. All of us suffer emotional wounds. If you think you may still have open emotional wounds, then I encourage you to seek help from a Christian counselor. Our GraceWorks Ministry exists to help people deal with the wounds of life that are often invisible, but just as painful as physical wounds.

II. SCARS MAY BE SIGNS OF OUR SACRIFICE

Paul was actually pleased with these scars, because they gave testimony to his service and sacrifice for his Lord. He was from England, but moved to the United States in the 1950s. He was an evangelist and author, but many consider him to be a true 20th century prophet. He spent his final years in Garden Valley, Texas and when he was a mentor to men like David Wilkerson and Keith Green. He's buried in Garden Valley next to Keith Green. In one of his books he has a chapter on this passage entitled "Branded for Christ" in which he writes, "Look closely at Paul—at that cadaverous countenance, that scarred body, that stooped figure of a man chastened by hunger, kept down by fasting, and ploughed with the lictor's lash; that little body, brutally stoned at Lystra; that skin, pickled for thirty-six hours in the Mediterranean Sea! Finally, count in the 199 stripes, 3 shipwrecks, 3 beatings with rods, a stoning, a prison record, and deaths so many that count is lost. And yet if one could add it up, all must be written off as nothing, because Paul

himself wrote, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'" (Branded for Christ)

What were the meanings of these marks for Paul?

A. The mark of ownership (slave)

In Roman times, a slave was often branded with a hot iron identifying the owner. Paul repeatedly referred to himself as a bond slave of Jesus Christ. So he considered the scars in his body as a mark of ownership. He belonged to Jesus Christ.

In Texas we know what it is to brand cattle. For many years ranchers have branded their cattle with a mark of ownership so if a steer wandered away to another property, the owner could claim it by the brand.

Some northerners bought a ranch in Texas. Friends came to visit and asked, "What's the name of your ranch?" The new owner said, "I wanted to call it the Bar-J, but my wife wanted to call it the Suzy-Q. My son wanted to name it the Flying-W and my daughter wanted to name it the Lazy - Y." So we're calling it the "Bar-J-Suzy-Q-Flying-W-Lazy-Y Ranch." The neighbor said, "Where are all your cattle?" The rancher said, "So far, none of them survived the branding."

Although some modern ranchers use ear tags with computer chips, branding is still a common practice.

One of the fastest growing styles of churches in Texas is called the Cowboy Church. I'm not talking about the Dallas Cowboys Church, the Jerry Dome, where thousands of people worship their (small-g) god on Sunday. I'm talking about real churches where rural folks wear their boots and jeans and worship Jesus and share the gospel. There are almost 1,000 Cowboy Churches in the U.S. and Canada. One of the most popular names for a Cowboy Church is Cross Brand Cowboy Church. There's even one in Tyler located near I-20 by that name. I like that name because it employs the idea that we have the cross branded on our hearts and lives. We belong to Jesus.

Paul had the literal scars in his body that marked him as being owned by Jesus. We don't have a visible brand, but do people know you belong to Jesus? Have you asked the Lord to stamp you with his brand of ownership? The Bible says we don't belong to ourselves; we belong to Jesus. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." Paul considered his stigmata as marks of ownership.

B. The mark of loyalty (soldier)

In ancient times, soldiers sometimes got a tattoo, or a brand identifying them with their army. Alexander the Great conquered much of the known world before he died at age 32. It was said that he wept because there were no more kingdoms to conquer. One thing that made him great was the loyalty and allegiance of his soldiers. Every member of his army was so loyal to Alexander that they bore a stigmata. They had the Greek letter alpha, for Alexander, branded or

tattooed on their hand. They were the original A-Team. This mark was their way of saying, "I pledge my loyalty to my general."

Paul wrote to young Timothy to "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:3) As soldiers of the cross, we will suffer persecution. There will be battles and there will be battle scars.

In the stories about King Arthur and his Round Table, Arthur and his knights gathered at Camelot and recounted stories from their battles. In the heat of the battle, the bravest warriors stood around their king and protected him, because the enemy was hoping to slay him. The knights who stood closest to the king bore the most battle scars. They showed their scars proudly as proof of their love for their king. Other warriors, who had no scars, didn't consider themselves fortunate. They were too scared to be scarred. These warrior-wannabes hung their heads in shame, because they didn't have the courage to stand near the king in the heat of the battle. When we stand close to our King of Kings and Lord of Lords chances are we'll have some battle scars.

Amy Carmichael was a Christian missionary from Ireland who gave her life while serving in India. She served there for 55 years without a furlough. She was also a gifted poet. She wrote one poem where Jesus asks, "No wound? No scar? Yet as the Master shall the servant be; and pierced are the feet that follow Me; But thine are whole; can he have followed far Who has no wound or scar?" Then she responded, "Captain beloved, battle wounds were Thine; Let me not wonder if some hurt be mine; Rather, O Lord, let my deep wonder be; That I may share a battle wound with Thee." Do have any battle scars that give witness to your loyalty to Jesus? Paul considered his stigmata as a sign of his loyalty to his King.

C. The mark of identity (the Savior)

Paul said he bore in his body the marks of Jesus. Why did he call them "the marks of Jesus" rather than "the marks of punishment?" I believe he was implying that the wounds on his body gave him a powerful point of contact with the wounds of Jesus. Roman soldiers mutilated the back of Jesus, and I suspect Paul was thinking about that every time the cat-of-nine-tails cut into his flesh.

In Philippians 3:10 Paul expressed his life goal. He wrote, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Philippians 3:10) How many of you want to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection? Amen! Me too! But how many of us will admit we also want to experience the fellowship of sharing His suffering? Oh, me.

I have another scar that tells a story. You can hardly see it because it's in the web between my two middle fingers of my right hand. When I was in high school I worked during the summers on a green chain of a sawmill. The green lumber that had just been cut rolled out on a moving chain. It was my job to pull the fresh-cut lumber off the chain and stack it up according to its size. This lumber was rough and full of splinters; it hadn't been the planer mill yet to smooth it down. I had to wear thick canvas gloves because of the splinters. One afternoon as I pulled off a board, a

sharp splinter as thick as a nail went through my glove between my fingers and penetrated about three inches into my hand. I screamed with pain and they stopped the green chain and took me to the foreman and he put me in his truck and drove me to the nearest doctor. As I waited for the doctor to come and remove it, I was moaning in agony when suddenly I have the most crystal clear thought. I looked at my hand and thought about the hand of Jesus and how He had more than a wooden splinter punched into his hand. I thought about how they drove massive spikes into His hands. And in that moment I realized a little bit of the pain and suffering Jesus had endured for me. I can't say my pain went away, but suddenly it took on a new meaning. I believe I was experiencing for the first time what Paul called "the fellowship of sharing His sufferings."

Have you suffered because you are a follower of Jesus? There are believers around the world who are being tortured and killed for their faith. Thankfully, for us in America it hasn't come to that...yet. You may not bear the physical stigmata of Christ, but if you truly live for Jesus, you may find there is a stigma attached to your name. We get our English word "stigma" from the very word Paul used. According www.dictionary.com, a stigma is "a mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on one's reputation." If you claim to belong to Jesus and believe the Bible, don't be surprised if our society stigmatizes you. We are seeing a growing hostility and animosity toward Christians—mainly because of our biblical stand for the right for an unborn child to live, and our old-fashioned definition of marriage as relationship between a man and a woman. The attacks aren't going to let up; they will only become more intense.

III. SCARS REMIND US THAT GOD CAN HEAL OUR WOUNDS

A scar is actually a good thing, because it is a wound that has healed. For instance, here's another scar with a story. If you look closely you'll see there's an ugly jagged scar on my right thumb. Back in 1981 when we built our first house, we used a lot of sweat equity. I did all the electrical wiring and Cindy did all the painting and wallpapering. I was also installing a sheet metal chimney for a metal pre-fab fireplace. I had crawled out the second floor window onto the roof to attach the next section of the round sheet metal chimney. When I crawled back into the window, I lost my balance and fell inside the room and as I fell, my hand hit the next sheet metal section and the knife sharp edge sliced my thumb. I did a good job, because it was hanging over touching the back of my hand. Fortunately our local doc was able to give me about 30 stitches and now, it's as good as new. God healed my hurt. You may ask, "I thought you said the doctor sewed you up?" He did. God used the doctor, and He used antibiotics, but when tissue heals, it's God that heals.

Have you heard the expression, "Time heals all wounds?" I read where an old person with sore feet changed it to, "Time wounds all heels." But it's not time that heals; it is God who heals. And just as He can heal your physical wounds, He can heal your emotional and spiritual wounds as well. God said, "'But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord, 'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.'" (Jeremiah 30:17)

CONCLUSION

In fact the Bible says, "By His stripes, you are healed." That's such a powerful promise that God said it in the Old Testament and again in the New Testament. 750 years before Jesus was

crucified, God promised through Isaiah that the Messiah would be wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace would be laid upon him, and by his stripes we ARE healed (present tense). (Isaiah 53:5) Then forty years after Jesus died on the cross Peter wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you've have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24). The wounds of Jesus are the reasons why our wounds have been healed into scars.

What are the only man-made things in heaven? The scars on the hands, feet, and side of Jesus. His scars should convince us that He is more than a man. Do you recall on the first Easter evening Jesus appeared suddenly among the disciples in the upper room? They thought He was a ghost, so Jesus showed them Hands and His side. Thomas was absent that night and when they told him that they had seen the Lord Thomas doubted. He said, "I won't believe it unless I can put my fingers in the nail prints in His hands, or thrust my hand into that sword wound in His side." A week later Jesus appeared again and Thomas was there. Jesus walked over to Thomas and held out His hands. He said, "Go ahead, Thomas. Stick your fingers into these nail prints. Plunge your hand into my side." But instead, Thomas could only say, "My Lord, and my God!" Every scar has a story and the scars of Jesus tell the greatest story.

I grew up in South Alabama where there were alligators in most of the ponds and swamps. It wasn't uncommon for to hear reports of gator attacks on pets or even people. So I can believe the story I read about an alligator attack on a little boy in Florida a few years ago. When the gator tried to drag the boy into the water, he screamed and his mother ran and grabbed onto his arms. She and that gator had a life-or-death tug-of-war for her son. She screamed for help and refused to let go. Fortunately a passerby had a rifle and shot the gator and it released the boy. His legs were terribly wounded and he spent time in the hospital. While he was there a newspaper reporter interviewed him. He asked to see the scars on his legs and the boy showed him. Then he said, "I have some great scars on my arms as well, would you like to see them? These are the scars from my Mom's fingernails when she refused to let go of me." And that's what has happened to us. We had a spiritual monster who wanted to drag us under, but in the divine tug-of-war for our souls, the nail pierced hands were holding on to us. And those hands are still holding us.

One of my favorite songs is "By Your Side" by Tenth Avenue North. In one of the verses Jesus says, "Look at these hands at my side; They swallowed the grave on that night; When I drank the world's sin; So I could carry you in And give you life." And the chorus says, "And I'll be at your side wherever you fall; In the dead of night whenever you call; And please don't fight these hands; That are holding you; My hands are holding you."

Sure you have scars, we all do. Sure you've had pain, we all do. But every scar tells a story of how God healed you and carried you through. Yes, there are some strong hands that are holding you and those hands are the nail-scarred hands.

OUTLINE

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- A. Physical scars
- B. Emotional scars

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- A. The mark of ownership (slave)
- B. The mark of loyalty (soldier)
- C. The mark of identity (the Savior)

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes