

Slave or Free? – Gal 4:21-31

Gal 4:21-31; We hosted Iron Sharpens Iron this weekend, a men's conference, and had over 1000 men from 80 different churches in attendance
And last week we saw 29 people get baptized; W/ some people watching online (Email)

- That said, we're back to our study of Galatians, and I'd like to read the passage through, to give you a sense of what it's about
The churches in Galatia remember, were being influenced to reject the *true* gospel, the gospel of justification by *faith*, to embrace a *false* gospel – a gospel of works
Thinking that following the Law in *addition* to faith, is necessary for salvation

To which Paul says, in v21 . . .

[21] *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?* [22] *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.*

[23] *But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.*

[24] *Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. [25] Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. [27] For it is written,*

*“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband.”*

[28] *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. [29] But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. [30] But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” [31] So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

- That's a lot; And I never cease to be amazed at the different ways Paul describes our salvation and standing before God; It's incredible
But it takes some sorting out for sure; So let's start with the bottom line; Here it is:
Who your spiritual mother is, makes all the difference in the world; Which is why I almost titled the message, “Who's Your Mama?”
B/c that indicates your spiritual status before God; Whether you're a slave or free
One leading to death, and the other to life; *That's* the issue

And Paul gets at it in 3 steps; Starting first of all, with some . . .

1. History (v21-23)

V21 – *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*

Do you not read the very thing you purport to follow? The Old Testament regulations for how to live right and relate to God? It sure doesn't seem like it
B/c if you did, you'd see that even there, our standing before God is crystal clear

Do you not listen to the law? [22] For it is written [in the Law, v22] that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.

Abraham, the father of the Israelites and *spiritual* father of those in Christ (Gal 3:7), had 2 sons – Ishmael, by Hagar, Abraham's slave; And Isaac, by Sarah, his wife
Two sons, from two women; History (Gen 16-21)

[23] *But the son of the slave [Ishmael, from Hagar] was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman [Isaac, from Sarah] was born through promise.*

Abraham had 2 sons Paul says, but they're *vastly* different

One, Ishmael, was born according to *human* desires; While Isaac was born according to a promise

A promise referring to a word *from* God, *fulfilled* by God; That's what Paul means when he says that Isaac was *born through promise*
God *said* it would happen, and God *made* it happen

- Remember the circumstances?

God had promised to make Abraham a great nation in Gen 12; But by the time Gen 16 rolled around, Sarah was 80 years old and barren; No children, and no nation

So Sarah took matters into her own hands, and sent Abraham in to her servant Hagar, so *she* could bear him a son; And to his shame, he acquiesced

B/c they thought God needed a bit of *help* to keep his promise; Or might have forgotten
And sure enough, Hagar bore a son named Ishmael

But God *didn't* need help, and *hadn't* forgotten his promise; It just wasn't the time
That came 10 years *later* when he told Abraham that Sarah *herself* would bear a son
And she did; At the age of 90; Naming him Isaac, which means laughter; B/c that's what *Sarah* did when God made the promise
But I imagine God had the last laugh when she was in the throes of labor
God *gave* his word, and God *fulfilled* his word; History

- And the most *important* aspect of that history, is the differences; B/c they illustrate a *larger truth*; Think about it – one came by works, and the other by faith
When Abraham got Hagar pregnant, he and Sarah took matters into their *own* hands; They were *self*-reliant
But when Isaac was born, they were *God*-reliant; They did nothing but trust
And that divine dependence led to *freedom* for Isaac

But for Ishmael, it was slavery; B/c of their *self*-reliance

Ishmael was born a slave b/c they took matters into their *own* hands, while Isaac was born free, b/c they left it in God's
2 massive differences, from 2 different approaches to God; That's the *larger truth* here

- **There are 2 basic approaches to God: self-reliance and divine dependence**

One leading to bondage, and the other freedom; One to duty, and the other delight; One to death, and the other life

And Paul's like – “Don't you see it? Don't you get it?” *You who desire to be under the law*? You who want to rely on yourself; It's right there

- How about you? Do you get it?
Seriously; Are you *self*-reliant or God-reliant? Independent, or God-dependent?

If it's independent, if you routinely take matters into your *own* hands, you're a slave, just like Ishmael

But if it's God-dependent, if you trust *his* way and *his* timing, you're free, like Isaac
That's the *point* of all this history; That we would make an honest assessment of our lives, to know where we stand – slave or free

The 2nd way he gets at the issue, is with an . . .

2. **Allegory** (v24-27)

Like he says in v24 – *Now this may be interpreted allegorically*

Which is simply an illustration by analogy; That's an allegory; A story where people, places, and events represent *other* things (Ryken, *Galatians*, 184)

Like the book **Pilgrim's Progress**; With people named Christian, Faithful, and Hopeful, traveling to places like Doubting Castle and Hill of Difficulty

It's an allegorical story to make a spiritual point

And Paul says that's *exactly* the case with the account of Sarah and Hagar*****

In addition to the facts and the *lessons* learned from them, it can be interpreted allegorically – as an illustration of *other* truths

➤ Starting with the 2 main *covenants* in the Bible – Old and New; V24

[24] *Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.*

This is the first of 5 parts of this allegory, for which there are 2 sides to each part, and a meaning for each side; It's a bit overwhelming

So let me encourage you to stay focused on each part as we go, and I'll put it all together in a chart before we're done

Here's the first part – *Hagar* Paul says, represents the *Old* Covenant, the Law; First given to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai

These women are two covenants [v24]. *One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery*

It's a metaphorical way to say that the Law leads to a lineage of bondage

And Hagar represents it in this allegory

Made even clearer with the next statement; V25

[25] *Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia*; The land commonly possessed by the *Ishmaelites*; So Hagar represents the Law, that leads to slavery . . .

Just like Ishmael represents our way of flesh

➤ And then he takes it a step further, and drops a bomb; V25b

She [Hagar] *corresponds to the present Jerusalem* [referring to the city and its people], *for she* [the city] *is in slavery with her children*. Boom

He's basically saying that although the Judaizers were Jews, spiritually speaking they were Ishmaelites; They were slaves; On the outside looking in

So in the allegory, *the present Jerusalem*, the Jerusalem below, represents those in this world who *reject* the gospel and are slaves to sin; Slaves to works

Children of bondage from the spiritual line of Hagar

That's the next part of the analogy – Jerusalem below = unbelievers

➤ *But the Jerusalem above* [v26] *is free, and she is our mother*. Speaking to believers
Did you catch that? The Jerusalem above is our *mother* Paul says
Painting a picture of heavenly purity, *above*, to convey that those of faith are children of freedom, children of righteousness, children of blessing

IOW just like Jerusalem below is comprised of sinners, Jerusalem above is comprised of saints; Both those who have gone before, and those who remain

What we normally call the *church* – those of faith; Free as free can be

That's *our* lineage; That's what we're a part of – *Jerusalem above*

And it equals the church

➤ And look at the *reason* he gives for such citizenship; V27

[27] *For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."*

It's a quote from Isaiah 54:1, 750 years earlier, about the city and people of Jerusalem in *his* day; Whose prospects for continued existence were slim to nil

They had sinned, God was sending a nation to destroy them, and their future was bleak

But with the advent of a suffering servant, of whom Isaiah just spoke in chapter 53 – one who would be wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities . . .

With his coming, everything changes; So that he says in the very next verse, **Is 54:1** . . .

[1] *"Sing [or rejoice], O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor* [you who had no hope of godly offspring!] *For the children of the desolate one* [aka Jerusalem, the people of God after their destruction] *will be more than the children of her who is married* [referring to the nations and people who conquered them, and seem to have it altogether], *" says the LORD.*

It's a prophecy that Isaiah spoke to *physical* Jerusalem in *his* day, applied by Paul to *spiritual* Jerusalem, in *ours*; To say that it's happening; It's a reality; Right now

It's a prophecy from the past, being fulfilled in the present, and by virtue of our faith, we're a part

God is bringing life to barren *lives*, just like he did with Sarah's womb

Only this time, he's forming a city; A *heavenly* city; Right here on earth

Free in Christ and far from slavery*****

➤ It's a powerful allegory, intended to clarify our *standing* before God, and fortify our *living* among men; So here's the **chart**

SLAVERY

Hagar – lineage of slavery

Ishmael – our way of flesh

Old Covenant – based on works

Jerusalem below – the world

Children below – unbelievers

FREEDOM

Sarah – lineage of freedom

Isaac – God's way of promise

New Covenant – based on faith

Jerusalem above – the church

Children above – believers

On the one side is slavery, and the other, freedom

Where *Hagar* as we saw, corresponds to the former, and *Sarah* to the latter
With *Ishmael* representing our way of *flesh* – doing things in our *own* strength and *own* time; And *Isaac* representing God’s way of *promise* – accomplishing things *his* way

And then there’s the *Old Covenant* based on works, opposite the *New Covenant* based on faith; *Jerusalem below* representing the world, and *Jerusalem above*, the church
And finally, the *children below* corresponding to *unbelievers* in the world . . .
While *children above* represent believers – both here *and* in heaven
It’s an allegory, to fortify our living, and clarify our standing; That . . .

- **We’re either free in Christ or slaves to works**

One or the other; Depending on God, or relying on ourselves
Not that we shouldn’t *do* good works; We should; God tells us to, and he has prepared them for us; *That we should walk in them* (Eph 2:10)

But *never* to justify ourselves; *Never* to live by a moralistic code that if you do more good than bad, you’re good
That’s not biblical, and that’s not free; It’s self-imposed slavery

So which is it? Slave or free? Which side of the allegory are *you* on?
Which side best reflects your life? Are you free in Christ? Or a slave to works?

There’s history, there’s allegory, and last, there’s . . .

Application (v28-31)

Starting in v28 – *Now you, brothers* [brothers and sisters in Christ], *like Isaac, are children of promise*. It’s a statement of fact
That having put our faith and trust in Jesus, God *promises* – to save us from our sin, adopt us into his family, and dwell with us forever; Making us *children* of promise
And this is Paul’s straightforward declaration, to assure us of such; To say . . .

- **Know who you are and live like it (v28,31)**

That’s the first part of the application
Know for *certain*, that in Christ, you’re on the *freedom* side of the allegory
Know for certain, that you’re *released* from the Law; Not the principles, but the particulars; And consequences
Rest assured, as he says in v31, that – *we are not children of the slave but of the free woman*. So that “Who’s your mama?” is no longer a question

We’re *free* from works; To live for Christ
Serving for the *right* reasons instead of the wrong ones
No longer thinking it’s up to *us* to get to heaven, when it’s up to God
No longer wondering if we’re *part* of the family, when we’re already in

If Jesus is Lord of your life, your chains are gone; You’ve been set free
Know who you are, and live like it

- **Expect persecution and endure it (v29)**

After telling us who we are, Paul warns us of what’s to come

[28] *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. [29] But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh [Ishmael] persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit [Isaac], so also it is now.*

The Bible tells us that Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac, and treated him with contempt; Laughing at him (Gen 21:8-9)
From his mom, to his name, to his brother – it seems Isaac couldn’t get away from it
A constant remind from whence he had come, making him all the more thankful

And Paul is saying – the adverse influence of the *Judaizers* on the Galatians, is just like the contempt of Ishmael
A form of persecution, directed at those who love and serve the Lord

Which is no different in our day, b/c the heart of man hasn’t changed
What the Galatians experienced then, we should expect now
Bearing the reproach of Christ is a tale as old as time
And the extent you fail to *expect* such persecution, is often the extent you’ll fail to endure it; It’s part of the application

And then 3rd, is to . . .

- **Reject bad influences and be done with it (v30)**

You’re going to be persecuted Paul says . . .
But what does the Scripture say? [v30] “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

It’s a quote of Gen 21:10, where Sarah spoke it to Abraham regarding Hagar and Ishmael, saying they needed to go
Not b/c she was selfish, but b/c they were opposed to God’s plan and God’s people
Just like the *circumcision party* was opposed to the Gospel in Galatia
And Paul’s like, get ‘em out; Reject them; Just like Sarah did
Whether in our individual lives or in our church, we should reject bad influences, and move on

➤ Now, don’t get me wrong here
I’m not talking about rejecting people who are off, but want to learn; Want to grow
Nor am I talking about those who are mistaken in their thinking and want to *know* better
I’m not talking about them; And neither is Paul

I’m talking about those who are wrong, and refuse correction; Those who are wrong, and cause division; Those who are wrong, and are unappeasable
Those who are wrong, and insist they’re right; No matter what you say or do

After showing the utmost patience in trying to reason with them, and open the Word with them, and loving them – there comes a time to reject them and be done with it
B/c the church of Jesus Christ and the truth of God’s Word, *must be protected* at all costs; Popular or not (**Summary**)

It’s part of the application, that flows from the allegory, and starts with history
Who’s your mama? And which side of the allegory are you on – slave or free?

Pray – Lord, help us; Impress these truths on our heart and soul as only you can; Change
our thinking wherever necessary; And give us the courage to live it out
We give now of our tithes and offerings for the fame of your name, the spread of your
word, and the ministry of our church