

Galatians 4:21-31

Children of The Promise

Image Church // Galatians: Week 6

Introduction

Image Family! I hope you're doing well!

Listen, a couple of weeks ago, we had **Compassion Sunday**...

- And I want to celebrate the fact that we sponsored 30 kids!
- And here's the cool part, that puts the total number of kids that we sponsor right around **80 kids!** That's incredible!
 - That's **80** kids that we've released from poverty in Jesus name!
 - *Can we celebrate that!*
- I'm so proud of you and the way that you have responded, and looking forward to sponsoring even more kids in the years to come!

Alright, if you have your Bible, turn to Galatians 4...

As you're turning there...

Build the tension: *When I was in college, my best friend got really bad athlete's foot... So we set out to fix it...*

- *Meanwhile, we had a team athletic trainer, her staff, and a team doctor that we had access to 24/7... It was crazy how good we had it and how easy it was to get any kind of help we needed...*
- *But we decided that we had this one when it came to his athlete's foot... Don't know why but we thought we were good...*

Well, one of us had heard that household bleach was the way that you get rid of it...

- *So we were like that's the fix right there... Let's go with it...*
- *So we took a paper towel and soaked it in bleach and wrapped it around his foot... And then to make sure it could really work well after we wrapped his foot in the bleach soaked paper towels, we put saran-wrap over the top of it to seal it all in really good...*
- *This is a true story...*
- *After it's on for a little bit, he starts talking about how it's stinging and I was like man you just got to tough it out, that means it working...*
- *So after about 45 minutes, he's finally like I can't take it anymore...*
- *So we take it off...*
- *Immediately we realized that there was a problem... His foot was like a bright red and hurt...*
- *So at this point, we're like ok we need to call Terry-Jo, our athletic trainer...*
- *So he calls her and tells her what we did, and she was like YOU DID WHAT?!?!?*
- *You need to come in right now...*
- *He did and turns out he had like a first-degree burn on his foot that had to be treated and for like the next 3 years his foot had a weird discoloration...*

What were we thinking?!?!?

- I don't know!!!
- To be fair, our brains were not fully developed yet we were under the age of 23!!
- It showed...

Here's the thing, my buddy had a problem, he had athlete's foot and wanted to get rid of it...

- And rather than us looking to the right source for help and healing, we tried to fix it on our own... But the reality is that we made a bad thing even worse...

The reality is that we do the same thing... when it comes to our spiritual life... We operate with the same logic...

- And just like how when me and my buddy did that it made things worse, the same is true with you...

This is what Paul's going to show us today...

Galatians 4:21-31

²¹ Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law?

Here's what Paul's doing at the end of **chapter 4**, Paul's going to go back to Abraham, who's been his go-to example in his letter, and he's going to hold up another part of his story in order to illustrate the mistake he sees the Galatians making.¹

Verse 22:

²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman. ²³ But the one by the slave was born as a result of the flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise.

God comes to a guy named Abram and says to him, I will bless you, and I will make you a great nation... And on top of that, I'm about to take you to a sprawl of land that I'm going to give to your offspring...

- Awesome, the only problem is that Abram is **75 years old** (Gen. 12:4), and he has no kids...
- God says no problem- I will give you one...

But God doesn't say **when** that will happen, but they are called to trust God...

Well, after about **15 years or so** and still no kids...

So, Sarah comes up with an idea... She goes to Abraham and says since I can't have kids why don't you take my maidservant **Hagar**, and *through her, I can build a family* (Gen. 16 1-4)...

- And Abraham's like, OK! No push-back from him on that one...

¹ Thought adapted from JD Greear, *Freed to be Alive*.

Abraham sleeps with **Hagar**, and she gets pregnant...

- **Hagar** gives birth to **Ishmael**...

As you can imagine, this doesn't go well in the house of Abraham...

- Sarah despised her...
- And she ends up running off **Hagar** and **Ishmael**...

Fast forward **about 9 years**, and God comes to Abraham and renews His covenant with him, reaffirming that they will have a child... (Gen 17)

- After that, God orchestrated the miracle that he had promised, and Sarah became pregnant. When Abraham was **100 years old** (Gen 21:5), Sarah gave birth to a son named **Issac**.

Here's the point:

Sarah and Abraham tried to accomplish in the flesh what only God could accomplish through His promise...

- **IOW:** they tried to manufacture something that only God could produce!

Sarah had been barren, and she tried to become fruitful by having Abraham marry Hagar. This failed and brought only trouble. The Law cannot give life or fruitfulness.²

The same is true for you and me...

- It's true when it comes to our **salvation**
- It's true when it comes to our **sanctification**

So here's the question: **What are you trying to accomplish in your own efforts?**

- Appeal for salvation...
- Appeal for transformation...

Where do you need to trust God this morning?!?

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 712.

Illustration: It's like trying to make a plant grow by pulling on it. We can pour all the water and nutrients we want, but ultimately, growth is in the plant's nature and we can't force it. Similarly, there are things that only God can bring about in our lives, and we need to trust His timing and process.

Salvation and transformation happen by looking to Jesus!

Verse 24: *Paul says...*

²⁴ These things are being taken figuratively,

IOW: Paul's saying, I'm about to use what happened and use it as a symbolic illustration of faith and works...

Here's why this is such a good illustration... Abraham had a choice, he could either have faith in God and His promise, or he could have faith in his own ability and efforts...

- Either way, Abraham was choosing to exercise faith, but the choice he had is what his faith would rely on...
- Either faith in his efforts or faith in God's...
- He chose to put his faith in his own efforts and it made a hard situation even worse... They went from struggling with barrenness to dealing with bitterness that destroyed things at home... ³

Illustration: *Think about a teenager trying to put together a piece of furniture without reading the instructions. Some of y'all have seen those IKEA instructions... He can either have faith in his own abilities and end up with a wobbly bookshelf or he can trust the guidance and follow the instructions to have a sturdy, reliable piece of furniture. In the same way, we can choose to have faith in our own efforts or rely on God's wisdom and direction.*

Let'sx keep reading...

for the women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery—this is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

So what Paul does here is punch them in the mouth pretty good here... He's calling the Jews descendants of **Hagar**.

- He calls the Jews, Arabs...

His point is that if you think works of the law play a part in your salvation, then **Hagar** might as well be your mom because it was works of the flesh that established her son and family line...

But Sarah, on the other hand, her son Issac and his offspring were established by God...

Summary:

- **Hagar** represents works of the law as a means of salvation...
- **Sarah** represents God's grace... He's the one who established her offspring...

What Paul wants them to see is the beauty of God's grace...

- God's grace is what established Jerusalem, and God's grace is what saved Jerusalem...

What we see in Sarah's situation is God gives grace to the barren when it isn't deserved...

- This is the gospel...
- This is a picture of what God would ultimately do through Jesus!

This is why Paul says this in Verse 26:

²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

His point is that Sarah, Isaac's mother, being a free woman, stands for the heavenly Jerusalem or the Christian church.

³ Tim Keller, *Grace to the Barren*.

- As Christians, we are citizens of *the Jerusalem above*. We are bound to the living God by a new covenant, and this citizenship is not bondage **but freedom**.⁴

*Listen ***the beauty of Christianity is that it's not a religion of bondage... It's an offer of freedom to be in a relationship with God.***

This is where so many people miss... They assume that Christianity is all about religion and rules and regulations...

- This is what makes Christianity drudgery for so many people...
- No one wants to be told what to do...
- No one wants to experience life and transformation from that...

When you look to law as a means of salvation or standing before God, you're enslaving yourself to your works, which can't accomplish anything... ***Your attempt at work just makes things worse...***

- Masks the problem...
- Diminishes your motivation...
- Doesn't compel you... it drains you...

Verse listen to the call of **Jesus in Matthew 11:28–30... He says:**

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The call of Jesus isn't to work harder or do better, it's come to me...

- *Rest in me...*
- Some of you came in, and you're tired... Been working for God...
- Been assuming that your salvation is up to you... Being religious enough...

⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*

It's about coming to Jesus...

- Being freed from the bondage of your sin and your inability to obey God...
- You have been set free...
 - And this is what we're going to spend all of next week talking about... What this freedom looks like!

Now, what Paul's going to do is quote a song about Sarah from **Isaiah 54**. Here is **verse 27**:

²⁷ For it is written, Rejoice, childless woman, unable to give birth. Burst into song and shout, you who are not in labor, for the children of the desolate woman will be many, more numerous than those of the woman who has a husband.

This is a song about Sarah that Isaiah uses to prophesy about Israel's changing fortunes, and Paul brings up as a reminder to the people...

- That Sarah's change in fortune didn't come through her efforts, it came through God's!!...

Here's something you need to understand... **God is much better able to accomplish his promise than we are.**⁵

Think about Sarah and Hagar.

- One has great potential for childbearing—the ideal candidate for motherhood; the other has no potential.
- But **God chose the one with no potential** to accomplish his promise.

The **good news of the gospel**: God doesn't need any potential from you to work miracles in you.

- As Zechariah says, *Not by might, or by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.*

You may think you have no potential, but it's not about you. It's about Christ in you!

⁵ This point and following section is credit to JD Greear, *Freed to be Alive*.

That means it **doesn't matter** what YOU bring into this place;

- whether you come from a jacked-up background
- Maybe you were a **high school dropout**; prison; abortion; divorcee; fired from your job; alcohol problem—God can still bring about his promise through you.

Illustration: Mary Slessor was a Scottish missionary born in 1800's, in Aberdeen, Scotland,

- She grew up in poverty and faced many hardships, including an alcoholic father.
- Despite these challenges, Mary felt a calling to serve God as a missionary, inspired by the missionary David Livingstone.
- When she was 28, she was sent to Calabar, Nigeria, where she learned the local language and immersed herself in the local culture.
- She became known for her courageous efforts to protect twins, who were often killed due to superstitions that considered them cursed.
 - She adopted many of these orphaned children, providing them with love and care.
- Mary's work extended beyond rescuing children; she advocated for women's rights, education, and health reforms.
- She established missions, schools, and clinics, and often mediated disputes, bringing peace to troubled areas.
- **Mary Slessor's life is a powerful testament to the idea that God can use anyone to accomplish His work.**
 - Despite her humble beginnings and the many obstacles she faced, her faith and dedication allowed her to make a significant impact on the Nigerian communities she served.

For Mary, it was not about her, it was about Christ in her...

- The same is true for you, is **not about you**; it is about Christ in you.

- **If God can make something of Abraham...** Old, sterile, slept with his wife's maidservant... Then he can make something of you.
- Some of you need to be encouraged by that this morning!

Verse 28:

²⁸ Now you too, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But just as then the child born as a result of the flesh persecuted the one born as a result of the Spirit, so also now. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? **“Drive out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave will never be a coheir with the son of the free woman.”** ³¹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman.

Paul's saying that those who try and live under the law as a means of salvation will always be at odds with those who live by faith in God's promise...

The false teachers who are trying to implement the law in Galatia who are trying to **oppose** the gospel that Paul is preaching are evidence of that opposition...

- And Paul's saying to the Galatians, **drive out these false teachers** who are telling you that salvation comes through works of the law!

You aren't bound under the law, you've been set free through the promise of God that came to fruition through Jesus Christ, making you sons and heirs! *So powerful...*

Listen, I want you to understand that we still see evidence of this opposition today!

Ishmael's descendants would become the sworn adversaries of Israel, continuing down to this day.

- Muslims around the world proudly claim Ishmael as their spiritual father—and Islam is a religion that from start to finish teaches that you are saved by works!
- Ishmael was Hagar’s son who was born of fleshly efforts and Isaac was the child God gave Sarah and Abraham in light of his promise...
 - **Example NYC trip.**
- ***Speaking of Muslims-*** *we have some of our own members that are in a muslim country dealing with this reality.*
 - ***Interest meeting right after church....***

So, here’s where Paul leaves us... Any who rely on obedience to the law—whether we’re talking about Judaizers in Paul’s day, the Catholic Church in Luther’s day, Muslims in our day, or legalistic Christians in our own churches—will **hate and resent those who rely solely** on the promise of grace for salvation.⁶

Some of you, if you’re honest, wonder why every week the gospel is the point and the application...

- Some of you grew up Catholic, or you come from a super legalistic household...
- So growing up, Christianity was a list of dos and donts, rules and regulations, that were drudery and frustrating, not freeing
- What I want you to see, as your pastor, is that is not what Christianity is, and that is not what Paul wants for the Churches in Galatia...
- That is why every week, the application is to apply the gospel

For those of you, you’re trying to make Christianity rigid rules and its not actually producing any change in your life...

The power of Christianity is not the rules but the relationship...

- The marker God gave us for that relationship is **baptism**...

Conclusion [VAMP]

What validates you as a child of the promise is your baptism...

- New believer
- Not a new believer but gap in the timeline...
 - A prayer, no life change...

Maybe for some of you, you got baptized because you thought it was a rule and a work, not a marker of a relationship...

For others of you, there are other things in your life that you are trying to do in your own strength and not leaning into the relationship you have access to through Jesus...

Challenge to come pray and give those things to God...

⁶ Ibid.