

No longer a slave

Psalm 130 and Galatians 4:4-7

📖 You are saved by grace through faith alone¹;

📖 You are a child of God², and

📖 Loving God you may do as you please³.

Let us leave New Year's resolutions alone this year and be guided by these three truths as we move into 2021.

No longer a slave to fear but a child of God.

Nothing can take away your identity as a child of God, a daughter of God, a son of God.

Our gospel reading this morning comes from Paul's letter to the Galatians, Chapter 4:4-7.

In just three sentences and 70 words Paul captures the heart of the gospel message.

It is an exciting passage and we look at it this morning at the perfect time just after celebrating the birth of Jesus.

What makes this the perfect time to look at this passage?

I believe it is the fact that even as we have just celebrated the birth of Christ, we need to focus on why He came and what this means for you and for me.

This passage in Galatians allows us to do that.

We need to understand the background to this passage. Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Galatia. He had heard that the believers converted after his mission were being persuaded that they needed to adopt circumcision and law observance in order to be fully included in God's people.⁴ They were being persuaded by Jewish Christians, known as Judaizers, who were demanding that a number of the ceremonial practices of the Old Testament were still binding on the newly established Church of Christ followers. One of the reasons this was happening may have been to avoid persecution by Zealot Jews as appears in chapter 6 verse 12:

"12 Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ."

¹ Ephesians 2:8-9. "8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

² Galatians 4:4-7.

³ Saint Augustine Quote: "**Love God and do whatever you please:** for the soul trained in **love** to **God** will **do** nothing to offend the One who is Beloved."

⁴ See Article here: [Commentary on Galatians 4:4-7 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

Paul had also heard that the religious leaders of the old school were calling his views and authority into question, and were reintroducing religious rules and regulations.

Paul is furious both with the religious leaders who were intimidating the Christians into giving up their free life in Jesus, and he was also furious with the Christians for caving in to the intimidation.⁵

He expresses this:⁶

“6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—”

He goes on to remind the readers of his letter of his own background and how vigorously he persecuted the church of God,⁷ and to point out how, after receiving a revelation from Jesus, it became known that he Paul, the man who formally persecuted the Christian church was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.⁸

Paul takes this further, and talks about how he opposed Peter in front of others, asking why, when he, Peter, lived like a Gentile and not like a Jew he forced Gentiles to follow Jewish customs.⁹

He presses on to remind the believers in Galatia that *“... we ... know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”*¹⁰

Three times Paul repeats that it is by “faith in Jesus Christ” that salvation comes. He is driving home that it is not through any formalistic compliance with religious rituals but by grace through faith that the believers are saved.

Is Paul saying the law is irrelevant? How does he instruct his readers?

He refers to Abraham who **believed** God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.¹¹ Those who believe are children of Abraham, justified by faith, not by the law.¹² The need for the law, which came

⁵ Introduction to Galatians in *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, page 1705. "Paul was, of course, furious. He was furious with the old guard were coming in with their strong-nonreligious tactics and intimidating the Christians into giving up their free life in Jesus. But he was also furious with the Christians were caving in to the intimidation. His letter to the Galatian churches helps them, and us, recover the original freedom. It also gives direction in the nature of God's gift of freedom – most necessary guidance, for freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered."

⁶ Galatians 1:6.

⁷ Galatians 1:13-14

⁸ Galatians 1:23

⁹ Galatians 2:14

¹⁰ Galatians 2:15-16.

¹¹ [Genesis 15:1-6](#). See also [Genesis 26:3-5](#)

¹² Galatians 3:6-11.

after the promise to Abraham, was because of the transgressions of men and women until the coming of Christ. Christ, the "Seed" in the promise to Abraham.¹³

Paul quotes Habakkuk:

"11 Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."¹⁴

He continues to say that no one who relies on the law is justified before God. God *"redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."¹⁵*

You can hear how Paul is building his argument. The point he wants to make to those receiving his letter, and to us, is this:

- The promise to Abraham was made some 430 years before the giving of the law;¹⁶
- The introduction of the law did not set aside the covenant previously established by God with Abraham and thus did not do away with the promise;
- The law was the guardian of the people before the coming of Christ; and
- With the coming of Christ that guardianship was lifted.

Paul puts these last two points like this:

"24 So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."

And then Paul tells the readers that in Christ Jesus they are all children of God through faith, and that as children of God there is no distinction or rank among them.

"28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

As children of God you are free of all restrictions and man-imposed limitations.

¹³ [Galatians 3:9-21](#).

¹⁴ [Habakkuk 2:4](#).

¹⁵ Galatians 3:14

¹⁶ Galatians 3:16. "17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise."

It was important that we look at the context before we consider verses 4-7 of chapter 4 that we read this morning.

Paul uses the image of an heir who is a child. He points out that the child is no different from a slave. This is so even though in time the child, as heir, will own the whole estate because until the time set by his father arrives the child remains under the discipline and control of a guardian. The child has no legal standing.

In the same way he writes that before the coming of Christ: "...when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental forms of religion (spiritual forces) of the world."

Elemental forms of religion, I believe, here relating to the Jews under the law and the Gentiles under their old religious bondage.

Then our passage starts with the words:

"4 But when the set time had fully come,"

This was a time set. It was not a random happening. This was the time for the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus would come.¹⁷ Paul is also comparing this to the time set when a child would be released from guardianship. Until that time the child's status remained unchanged.

And then you will note that there are two sending's in this passage. The first is this:

*"4 But when the set time had fully come, God **sent** his Son"*

Remember John 3:16 where it was recorded by John that "God so loved the world that He sent His *"one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*¹⁸

His Son *"born of a woman, born under the law,"*

Paul is emphasising that Jesus, born of a woman, was fully man and truly human. At the same time, he was subject to Jewish law.

And why did God send his Son?

¹⁷ [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) and [Isaiah 11:1-5](#) by way of example.

¹⁸ See also [John 1:14](#), [Romans 1:1-6](#) and [1 John 4:14](#).

He sent him to redeem all those under the law, including us, to change our status and also that we might receive adoption to sonship.

This was an objective step taken by God at that time (in the past) without involvement by those under the law.

And it was taken that we might be adopted into God's family. Those receiving this letter would understand the reference to adoption. A child adopted in those times was taken in fully having all the rights and status of a child born into the family. Again, adoption is a step taken by the parent with no participation from the child.

Now, Paul goes on to the second "sending". And he writes that because you are all children "God **sent** the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."

It is again God that does the sending. And this time there is involvement on our part. The Spirit has been sent into our hearts. Sent to us that we would change inwardly in our hearts. Change now in the present and future times.

Ezekiel spoke of this:¹⁹

"26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

The Spirit sent to confirm that we are adopted into the family of God, allowing us, with the Spirit, to call out "Abba, Father".

The intimate call of a child to her/his Father.

And Paul continues recording that as a result, the believers in Galatia were no longer slaves, but children of God.

Again, those receiving the letter would have in mind firstly, the picture of a child achieving full status and being released from the control of the child's guardian. Secondly, the picture of themselves as believers being no longer a slave to the law. Released and free, not because of anything that they had done, but because God had sent his Son, and sent his Spirit to set them free.

¹⁹ Ezekiel 36:26. See also Jeremiah 24:7 "7 I will also give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me wholeheartedly."

Our passage then concludes with the words:

"... and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

Paul writing to the Romans set this out more fully:²⁰

"14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

Can you take that in?

"Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ!"

And then Paul poses the question: "Do you want to be enslaved all over again.

Paul points out that the believers in Galatia are being led astray. They have been set free. By moving away from the gospel message, they were being enslaved again.

He urges them to focus on the true gospel message as revealed by God in the coming of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

I started by saying that we should you leave New Year's resolutions alone this year and be guided by these three truths:

1. You are saved by grace through faith alone.

The first point that Paul emphasises is that we, as sinners, have been declared righteous through the work of Christ and not through anything that we have done. When Christ died on the cross for us, taking our sin onto his shoulders, the slate was wiped clean. It is just as if we had not sinned. This is referred to as justification and it confirms that as we come to Christ, confessing our sins and accepting Christ as our Lord and saviour, we are saved by grace through faith alone. Saved to eternal life and spared the wrath of God.

Stuart Olyott out wrote this:²¹

²⁰ Romans 8:14-17.

²¹ Preaching, pure and simple - page 60.

“(Justification) is something God does. It is an act which flows from his generosity. He pardons all our sins and considers us to be righteous as he is!”

2. You are a child of God.

Adopted into the family. What a blessing this is.

We have touched on this and this fact is one that you need to understand and hold onto. No matter what the world throws at you nothing can take away your identity as a daughter of God, a son of God. Hold onto the words of the song that we sing:

“Abba Father let me be

Yours and yours alone

May my will forever be

Ever more your own

Never let my heart grow cold

Never let me go.

Remember, this as you start the Lord's Prayer with the words “Our Father”.

3. Loving God you may do as you please.

When I first read this, it took me a long time to start to understand it. Does it mean that as long as I profess to love God, I can undertake whatever I want to do, whether good or evil?

It certainly does not mean this. It is based on the statement by Saint Augustine:

“Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved.”

What Augustine was saying was that if we truly love God, we will not undertake actions aimed at offending God. And as we strive to live as God would have us live, we will grow in grace and truth, and God will transform us into the image of Christ. As this happens we begin to bear the fruit of righteousness²², as we await future glorification.

This process is referred to as sanctification.²³

Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians:²⁴

²² Galatians 5:22-23.

²³ Sanctification is God's transformation of a believer's whole being, that is the mind, will, behaviours, and affections through the work of the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:18




"18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

This transformation is to take place throughout our lives here on this earth as we live in a way that brings glory to God. It is something that we need to do in response to what has been done for us.²⁵

Stuart Olyott describes this as follows:²⁶

"... We do not receive all of this blessing right away. God changes us inside and his image is renewed in us. This inward change means that our behaviour begins to change as well. Little by little, slowly but surely, we sin less and become more and more godly. We work at being like this, because God is at work within us."

Rather than write out any New Year's resolutions this year give prayerful thanks that:

-  You are saved by grace through faith alone;
-  You are a child of God; and
-  Loving God you may do as you please.

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²⁵ Philippians 2:12. 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

²⁶ Preaching, pure and simple-page 61.