

Sermon

In God's Time

Trinity 31 December 2023

Readings: [Luke 2:25-32 and Galatians 4:4-7 NLT](#)

Songs: **Joy has dawned** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbSCbZ-1wdw> and **I will wait for you** - [Shane and Shane - I Will Wait For You \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

It is the last day of 2023. It is the time when we consider making New Years resolutions.

This year I will:

- ✚ Exercise more.
- ✚ Eat healthier.
- ✚ Learn something new.
- ✚ Spend more time with family.
- ✚ Be happy.
- ✚ Focus on spiritual matters.

You may have others in mind. But this morning I want to suggest just one resolution that I believe we should take and that is this:

“In 2024 I want to own and remember who I am - a child of God.”

Let me attempt to unpack why I propose this as your single New Year's resolution.

The two passages that were read for us this morning guided my thoughts.

On Monday, we celebrated the birth of Jesus. Luke's passage takes us beyond the birth of Jesus. Very little is written in the Bible about Jesus' childhood. But this is one of the passages. The passage describes how Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. This was for the purification rites in terms of the Law of Moses.¹ Joseph and Mary, conforming to the requirements of the Jewish law, just as they had done when they travelled to Bethlehem for the taking of the census.

We read about Simeon, in Jerusalem, righteous and devout, who was waiting for the comfort that the Messiah would bring to his people. The Holy Spirit was upon him, and it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. He knew that this would happen in God's time. As he arrives at the Temple he sees the baby, takes him in his arms and praises God.

“29 “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. 30 I have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared for all people. 32 He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”²

He tells Mary, that Jesus would be both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel. He would be misunderstood and contradicted and that a sword thrust would pierce Mary's own soul too. Anna, the prophetess, breaks into an anthem of praise to God and spoke about Jesus to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

¹ [Exodus 13:2,13, and Leviticus 12:2-8](#)

² Luke 2:29-32.

In God's time prophecies made hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus being fulfilled:

Hold onto this as we jump forward to the passage chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Paul had established the church in Galatia. He wrote this letter after hearing that the gospel that he had preached was being perverted. There were Jewish Christians who believed that several of the ceremonial practices of the Old Testament were still binding on the new church. They were insisting that the Gentile converts to Christianity should abide by certain of the Old Testament rituals, especially circumcision. They also argued that Paul was not an authentic apostle and that he had removed from the gospel certain legal requirements to make the message more appealing to the Gentiles.³

Paul starts his letter like this:⁴

"6 I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News 7 but is not the Good News at all."

Paul establishes his authority. He reminds his readers of his early life as a persecutor of the church. And then points out that the gospel that he taught, was received by revelation from Jesus.⁵

He describes how he was accepted by the Apostles.⁶ He writes how he opposed Peter, who regularly ate with the non-Jews, but when the Conservative group (the circumcision group) came from Jerusalem, he pulled back and separated himself from the Gentiles.

Paul says that he and his readers are Jews by birth, not "sinners" like the Gentiles,⁷but:

¹⁶ Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law."

Justification by grace through faith and not by observance of the law. Paul emphasises this three times in this one verse.⁸

Galatians is often referred to as "Luther's book" as he relied so strongly on this letter in bringing about the Reformation.

Paul states that righteousness was credited to Abraham because of his faith. He believed God. Before the giving of the law, Scripture recorded that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. Paul is not saying that the law is opposed to the promises of God. The Law had its place. He makes two statements. Firstly, that *"We were prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed."* And secondly that now that this faith has come *"... we are no longer under the supervision of the law."*

And he uses two images: the first of being subject to a jailer, and the second, a minor son being subject to the control of a Guardian. The prisoner would anticipate release. The minor son would eagerly anticipate the date on which his father determined that it was the time that he should enjoy the full rights as a son.

³ NIV Study Bible page 1780.

⁴ Galatians 1:6-7.

⁵ Galatians 1:11-12.

⁶ Galatians 1-10.

⁷ Galatians 2:16.

⁸ [Ephesians 2:8-9](#).

These images must have sounded strange to the Jewish Christians. Had God not brought the people out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.⁹ Had he not set the people free?

Paul goes on to explain in the last verses of chapter 3 that all the believers are "... *sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*"

Note the reference to "sons" here. Understand this in the context of the times in which he wrote. Roman law recognised that male children could be heirs. Female children were excluded. But even sons had no rights until their father determined that the period of supervision was over. Also, sons adopted into a family were accepted as heirs to the father along with the sons born to that father.

Paul clarifies this, while sons were placed in a particular category in terms of Roman law, there are to be no exclusions among those who have clothed themselves with Christ. He writes:

"And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹⁰

And then he says that the believers who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

It is against this background that we consider the first seven verses of Galatians 4. Paul goes back to his reference of a minor child. As long as the heir is a child, he is no different to a slave, even though he is the future owner and master of the whole estate. Until that time set by his father he is under the authority of a guardian. He was not free.

Then Paul says:

"3 So also we [whether Jews or Gentiles], when we were children (spiritually immature), were kept like slaves under the elementary [man-made religious or philosophical] teachings of the world."

Here Paul refers to the forms of religion, whether those of the Jews under the law (see verse 5), or those of the Gentiles, and their old religious bondage (see verse. 8).

When the Galatians were pagans, they thought of the beings they worshipped as gods. Paul is urging them not to go backwards.

The argument that Paul is developing is the point that even the Jewish people, the rightful heirs of God's promises to Abraham¹¹, experienced a certain kind of slavery for a period.¹² Although the Mosaic law was given by God, it was not God's last and ultimate revelation, which was the coming of the Messiah.

While the pagan Gentiles were not enslaved to the Mosaic Law and the Jews were not enslaved to pagan idolatry the two situations were similar in this respect, wrote Paul, that they were enslaved to something less than the immediate knowledge of God, enjoyed by the Christian believers.

In chapter 3 Paul reminds his readers that the promises spoken to Abraham and his seed, Jesus, were given 430 years before the law was given to Moses.

In verse 3:7 Paul wrote, "*Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham" who through faith would be blessed along with Abraham*".

⁹ Exodus 20:2.

¹⁰ Galatians 3:26-29.

¹¹ [Genesis 12:7, 13:15, 24:7, 17:7-8](#)

¹² See the InterVarsity Press Commentary

In verse 3:14. *“He 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.”*

The law was accordingly not a condition for inheriting the promised blessing, but a period of supervision under the law that ended with the coming of Jesus.¹³

Paul explains this as he writes verse 4.

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son.”

This echoes what was said in verse two, where we saw that a minor is subject to guardianship *“until the time set by his father.”* It is the father that determines the time when the guardianship ends.

This event is part of God's plan and takes place in God's time. It is an action in history. This follows other references to God's actions in time. In chapter 3:19 we read that the law *“was added because of transgressions **until the Seed**, to whom the promise referred had come.”*

In verse 3:23 we read, *“**Before this faith came**, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up **until faith should be revealed.**”*

Then in verse 3:25 *“**Now that faith has come**, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”*

These are references to God's actions in time. And now, when in God's plan the proper time had fully come, God sent Jesus to redeem and to liberate those who were under the Law. And then Paul goes on to make it clear that Jesus was fully man, and fully God.

Jesus was *“born of a woman,”* pointing to the full humanity of Jesus, sent to be with us in our humanity.

Born of a woman, but also *“born under the law.”* Jesus confirmed that he had not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it.¹⁴ He was born into a Jewish family. There was an obligation to keep the requirements of the Mosaic law. Jesus was circumcised 8 days after his birth. Joseph and Mary had come to present Jesus to the Temple. Jesus was in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover with his disciples just before his death.

So, Jesus, born of a woman, born under the law, was sent by God to redeem those under the Law. With what purpose? So that we might receive the full rights of sons. Paul goes back to the image of the minor son waiting to be set free.

The Amplified Bible puts it like this:

“that we [who believe] might be adopted as sons [as God's children with all rights as fully grown members of a family].”

The reference now to “adoption” moves from the picture of a son until he reaches a certain age, to a slave adopted into a family. Receiving the full rights, without any limitations, of being a member of that family. The reference to the son is in line with the Roman law. But before this at the end of chapter 3 Paul has already confirmed:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

¹³ Galatians 4:15-25.

¹⁴ Matthew 5:17.

Calvin said Jesus coming to redeem us under the law meant that by putting the chains on himself, He took them off others, namely us.

And then Paul refers to a second “*sending*”.

“6 And because you [really] are [His] children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts”.

Jesus being sent objectively changes the status of believers to children of God. The Spirit is now sent so that subjectively there will be a change in us, in our hearts.

The Spirit allows us to cry out *Abba Father* using an expression of an especially close relationship to God. *Abba* is an Aramaic word for father.

A daughter, referring to her father as *Abba* would be expressing love, appreciation, confidence, and trust.

Jesus addressed his Father as *Abba, Father* in the Garden of Gethsemane expressing total confidence, trust and willing obedience to his Father.¹⁵





Eugene Peterson paraphrases verse seven like this:

“Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.”

This is what you and I need to understand and to own completely. This is what Paul was urging the Galatians to understand. There was no need for them to go back to practice any ritual. They were no longer held prisoners by the law (3:23). They were no longer under the supervision of the law (3:25). And they were no longer subject to guardians and trustees (4:2).

The false teachers in Galatia were distracting the believers from their identity as children of God and telling them that they needed more. The world in which we live does the same. We are called to believe that we are defined by what we do, by the position we hold, by the possessions we have, by the number of followers we have on social media and by the way we look.

I googled the question: How do you find out who you are? I got some 200 million results. A few of these:

-  5 Strategies.
-  Who you are 6 questions.
-  15 simple ways to figure out who you are.
-  14 steps to find out who you are – with pictures.

Today is the last day of 2023. Tomorrow the New Year starts.

And this brings me back to where we started this morning. This year it is my suggestion that before writing down any resolutions for yourself you do this.

¹⁵ Mark14:36: ³⁶ And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

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Set aside 15 minutes and prayerfully read through Galatians 3:23 to Galatians 4:7. Think through the two "God sent" statements in the passage.

God sent his son, Jesus, for my salvation. As a result of this I am a daughter of God. I am a son of God. Not through anything that I have done but God's plan for me.

And God sent the Spirit of his Son into my heart. That as I accepted Jesus as my Lord and saviour, I received the Holy Spirit, enabling me to be in the closest relationship with God and allowing me to pray *Abba Father*.

And then set yourself only one New Years Resolution for 2024:

"I resolve in 2024 to own, remember and to live who I am - a child of God."

And then live this in 2024. Knowing that your identity is not altered by the circumstances that you will face, by the possessions you have, or do not have, the position that you have or what others may think or say about you.

As you live this, I believe that you will find a new focus without pressure or striving to:

- ✚ Exercise more.
- ✚ Eat healthier.
- ✚ Learn something new.
- ✚ Spend more time with family.
- ✚ Be happy.
- ✚ Focus on spiritual matters.

And don't let the noise of the world distract you.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Romans 12:1-2 as follows:

"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you."

"I resolve in 2024 to own, remember and to live who I am - a child of God."

Amen.

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