

Two covenants

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] Paul this morning in this passage. Before we dive really into it, look at verse 21. Look at what Paul says to them. This is very direct. Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

These Galatians are turning to the law, turning to something other than Jesus alone for salvation. But he's saying, do you really understand what you're doing? It's good to understand what we're doing, isn't it? But do these guys really understand what the consequences of that is? We're going to see.

So, we meet a man. We're reminded of a man. Verse 22. Turn to the people next to you. It won't take 30 seconds, but for 30 seconds, who's the man in verse 22?

Who's the man? Who's the man? Gracie, who's the man? Abraham. Who's the man? Anyone else want to confirm? Abraham. Abraham. Abraham is the man that Paul starts with here.

And when he talks about Abraham, he wants to talk a bit about birth. Not Abraham's birth, but the birth of some of Abraham's children. So, have a look there. Verse 22.

[1:25] And for it is written that Abraham had how many sons? Two sons. He did have others, but these are the two important ones for Paul's point. Two sons. One by the slave women and the other by the free women.

What's that about? What's that about? All of us, one way or another, we were born, weren't we? All of us, one way or another, should have one of these as birth certificates.

Know about that now, how it happens. I've had one all my life, but I didn't know how I got it. When Micah was born earlier this year, we had 40 days. No more, 40 days, up to 40 days to go to Brighton Town Hall and register the birth so we could get one of these, a birth certificate.

So we could say he's called Micah and who his parents are. The date he was born and all that kind of information.

And here, we're told about Abraham's sons. Remember that he had two sons. His first two sons. And we don't have their birth certificates, but we do have the Bible that records their births.

[2:40] And we know definitely who one of the parents are of these two sons. It's Abraham. But if you were to read the Old Testament, if you were to read the Genesis accounts, you'll see there's two mums involved.

There's not just one mum of his two boys. There's two mums. What's going on? Their names are Sarah and Hagar.

And in Genesis, before we get to them, in Genesis 12, told you we need to have a big overall picture of the Bible. We read out earlier those promises to Abraham.

Land, people, blessings. I'm going to give you a new land. I'm going to give you new people, descendants, people born into your family. And I'm going to bless you. And the important promise there for us this morning in this passage is the second one, the people promise.

Abraham is going to have a whole nation of people, not just two sons. God said to him, look at the stars. Can you count the stars?

[3:56] Well, that's how your descendants will be. Or look at the grains of sand on the sea. Can you count the grains of sand?

Well, that's how your descendants are going to be. Numerous, loads, countless. So for this to be fulfilled, Abraham needs to have children.

And we read what Paul writes here and we think, okay, it's fine. He has two sons. It's fine. But there's a lot more to this story than him simply having two sons.

It's a much more complicated story than that. So mom number one of son number one is Hagar. And she's a slave woman.

She was one of Abraham's wife's servants. Why is she the mother of his first son? Well, instead of Abraham and Sarah believing that God's promises were definitely going to come about through them, they thought it's not happening.

[5:12] We're getting old. We're too old to have children. It can't happen. God must be wanting us to do this in another way. So Abraham ends up having a baby with Hagar, the servant.

And that's a bad thing. That's Abraham saying, I don't trust you, God, to work a miracle. I don't trust you, the God who's created this world out of nothing, to create new life in my wife's womb.

And so a son was born called Ishmael. And yet, even though Abraham didn't trust God, as he should have done, God's promises are sure.

And God's promises are going to be worked out. And God is very gracious to Abraham and Sarah. That's not to encourage us to sin, to do wrong things, to stop trusting God and trusting ourselves instead.

God doesn't like sin. But he's also a merciful God, which is good news for us, because otherwise all of us would be without any hope, wouldn't we?

[6:30] It's good that God promises wonderful things. And if they're a promise from God, they are sure, they are trustworthy. So Ishmael was born, and born by the flesh, born because Abraham and Sarah didn't trust God to provide.

But then 14 years later, 14 years after keeping you awake, 14 years later, after Ishmael's birth, Abraham and Sarah welcomed their very own baby, Isaac.

A child born because of promise, because of God's promise. Think about it. Sarah was 90.

No 90-year-old is going to have a baby, except from a miracle. This was a miracle. This was God saying, I am more than enough to keep my promises.

You can trust me. And indeed that happens. And so we've got two sons.

[7:45] And they're a picture of us. All of us were born in a normal-ish way.

We were born naturally in a hospital, at home, somewhere. But some of us are born again. What does that mean?

What does it mean to be born again? Some of us are like Isaac. Not the two Isaacs in this room.

We're like Isaac in the Bible, born by promise, born by a miracle.

But what does that mean? Isaac is a picture of everyone who comes to salvation in Jesus, who comes to trust in Jesus alone to save them.

And we've been seeing that in Galatians. Chapter 3, verse 26 says this, So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

[8:52] All of us are born to our moms and dads. We've got birth certificates somewhere, I'm sure, to say we were born in a real place in this earth.

But some of us have also come to faith in Jesus, and we're born again. And we're called children of God.

And so, and I don't recommend you do this with your birth certificate, because I don't know what would happen. But if you're trusting in Jesus, you could legitimately put a stamp on your birth certificate that says born of God.

Born by the power of the Spirit. Isaac, later in chapter 4, in verse 29, I think, it says that he was born, that he was the son born by the power of the Spirit.

Born a complete miracle. No 90-year-old is giving birth. A complete miracle. And none of us on our own, when we're born, are Christians.

[10:06] We need to come to Jesus. We need to see we're sinners. We're born into sin. And we need him to save us. Him alone. And then we're children of God.

It's an amazing thing. We're going to pause there. Lots we've talked about already. We're going to pause there, and we're going to sing a song to help us reflect particularly on Jesus.

And we're going to sing this song. It's a song we've not sung in the morning service before. We sang it a couple of Sunday evenings ago. It seems to me a really singable song. Quite hymn-like. So good for singing as a church. Are you going to play through the verse, first verse, to see how it sounds to us, and then we'll all stand and join in with the song. When he comes. When he comes. So we've thought about our birth as we've remembered the birth of Abraham's first two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, some born by the flesh, and then the son born by the promise.

[11:28] Secondly, we're thinking about our home. Our home. Look at this world, and all of us will be able to pinpoint somewhere that it's home.

Perhaps we're living in Brighton, but perhaps some of us don't feel the Brighton is our home. Actually, home is far away. Some of us are from other countries, India, Sri Lanka, the US, Ethiopia, other places.

We look at the world and think, that's where my home is. That's where I belong. And it's true, and where we're from is so important, isn't it?

Shapes who we are. Shapes what we think about. It's what we eat. What we do. Home is important. And here in this passage, we find there are two homes.

Two homes where these two sons belong. One, the first one is this. Mount Sinai and Jerusalem.

[12:41] Mount Sinai and Jerusalem. What's going on there? Verse 24. These things are being taken figuratively. The women represent two covenants.

Okay. Already, big verse. Don't think of Hagar and Ishmael and Sarah and Isaac. Don't think of them literally as these things.

This is to help us to understand that Jesus plus nothing equals everything. And hopefully we'll see that as we go through these verses.

And also, covenant. Big promise of God with a commitment from God to keep it. That's essentially what a covenant is.

We can talk about covenants over lunch later to explore more. But let's go with that. So, the first one. The first covenant is this.

[13:39] One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves. This is Hagar. Okay.

Mount Sinai. What's that? Why is that here? Well, Mount Sinai is the place where God's people, descendants of Abraham, ended up round that mountain after they escaped from Egypt in the book of Exodus.

And the mount is a bit like a big fireworks display. So, last week, last Saturday, we were in Preston Park watching fireworks.

And when you watch fireworks, you have to stand back. They had a fenced-off area. Don't get too close because it's dangerous. Injure yourself.

They even die. They're dangerous. They're explosives. So, it's a bit like a fireworks night being at Mount Sinai.

[14:45] Danger. So, here's Mount Sinai. I'm going to read a few verses from Exodus 19. Maybe you want to turn there as well.

Because that's going to help us see Mount Sinai, see what it was like for God's people around Mount Sinai. So, Exodus chapter 19. Just going to read a few verses from there, not all of it at all. Exodus 19, verse 12. God said to Moses, put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it.

Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. It's like fireworks. Stand back. Don't get too close. Verse 16.

On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast.

[15:51] It's like fireworks. It's noisy. There's a very loud trumpet blast. And so, everyone in the camp trembled. And then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

And Mount Sinai was covered with smoke. Again, like fireworks. Smoke with fireworks, I guess. And the smoke was there because the Lord descended on it.

The Lord was on the mountain. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace and the whole mountain trembled violently like an earthquake. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Moses was the only person who could really go up that mountain. Too dangerous for other people. That's what Mount Sinai was like.

And at Mount Sinai, God's people are given the law. The law of God is given for them to obey.

[17:04] And so, in the next chapter, in Exodus 20, you would read the Ten Commandments. You've probably heard of them. The Ten Commandments, they were shared. They're a good sort of starting point when we think about the law of God.

You shall not have no other gods before me. You shall not make an image and worship it. You shall not misuse God's name. Remember the Sabbath day.

Keep it holy. Honor your father and mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal. You shall not lie. You shall not covet. And we'll read through those commands and actually none of us can keep them.

But you say, I've never murdered anybody. Okay, but Jesus takes that and says, even if you call someone a bad name, if you call them stupid, in your heart, you've broken that law.

All of us have broken these commands of God. God. And so God giving the law at Sinai, it was an awesome event.

[18:23] Showed how big and how holy our God is. Showed that you can't get close to him. Stand back. None of us have the ability to approach God because we have not lived up to his standards, not lived up to his law, not even obeyed those 10 commands.

So don't get too close. Don't climb up. Home number one, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. Jerusalem. See Jerusalem there in verse 25. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem because she is in slavery with her children. What's Jerusalem got to do with it? Well, this is where Israel sort of found their capital city, where the temple of God was going to be built for them.

It's where people who were trying to follow the law of God would come and they would make sacrifices. The priests would be there to represent them before God.

[19:40] It was the place of religious worship. Mount Sinai and the temple in Jerusalem, they go together because they're about following the law.

You've got to keep making those sacrifices to God because none of us are right with him. All of us break those commands. You lie one day, you're going to make a sacrifice.

But then you lie another day and, oh dear, need another sacrifice for my sins. And you're just in an endless cycle. That's not good.

This is why Paul is saying to the Galatians, do you really understand what living under the law is like? It's slavery. It's not good.

It's constantly failing to do what the law said. It's constantly needing to sacrifice before God.

Constantly feeling like you're not good enough before God. Constantly needing a priest to do things on your behalf.

[20:45] It's a bit like this. I'm going to make sure the sound is off for this one. It's a bit like this. I wonder if you've seen one of these. See that man going up these steps?

You find those in gyms, step machines. You go up them, but you're never going to get very high. You're just endlessly walking and not getting anywhere.

That's what the law is like. It's constantly going up a step machine. You're stuck. Stuck. No progress. Up a bit and back a bit.

Never able to go up to the top of Mount Sinai and be close to God's. So Galatians, if this is where the law leaves you, are you sure you want to be looking to that to save you?

Or would you rather remember the gospel I preached to you? Gracie helped us. She opened the letter and it said, Jesus plus nothing equals everything. Do you want to be under Mount Sinai?

[21:48] Or do you want to turn to Jesus and trust in him alone? So that's where home number two comes in. All of us, as we said, find our home somewhere in this world, don't we?

I'm old enough to remember when Google Maps, there's no power on the laptop, there we go. When Google Maps had street view. And what was the first thing you do? It's not look at all sorts of interesting places in the world, it's find your home. Even though I could stand outside and find it, isn't it more exciting to see it on the internet? Perhaps not anymore. No. Where's our home? Because you're not going to find it on Google Maps. You're not going to find it in this globe if you belong to Jesus. If you've been born of God. Where's your true home? See, Paul says there's another home. Verse 26.

[22:56] But the Jerusalem that is above is free. And she is our mother. There's a Jerusalem above. But what's that Jerusalem about?

Some of us at the moment are going through Revelation on a Sunday evening. Do come back this evening and join us for more of that. We haven't quite got to chapter 21 yet.

But this is what we're going to see when we get there. I saw the holy city. The new Jerusalem. Coming down out of heaven from God. Prepared as a bride. Beautifully dressed for her husband. There's another Jerusalem. A Jerusalem above. And it's coming. And what is it? Next verse.

21 verse 3. Look. God's dwelling place is now among the people. And they will dwell with him. There will be his people. And God himself will be their gods.

[23:56] And this is for all those. Who are born of gods.

Who are born like Isaac. Born of the promise. There's a new Jerusalem. There's a new home for God's people. Where we won't be told to stand back.

But where God will dwell amongst us. Because our sins have been cleansed. We're right with God. Because Jesus plus nothing equals everything.

It's the home of those who are trusting in Jesus. It's a real physical place. Where God's people will live forever. So it's all about birth certificates.

I think about something else. Passports. This is my old passport. Couldn't risk bringing my new one. And it says. I'm a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

[24:59] It tells you I'm born in Hayward Seath. It shows you my photo. It shows you I'm really me. And I can use this to travel. Well I could.

But for the Christian. It's like we get another passport. One that doesn't say. I'm a citizen of the United Kingdom. Great Britain. Northern Ireland. But one that says.

I'm a citizen of heaven. I'm a citizen of Jerusalem above. And so. Don't do it. Don't recommend you do it.

On your passport you could say. Citizen of heaven. Citizen of the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem. That's where the home of God's people are.

A home that is above. That's going to come down. And God will dwell with his people forever. And that's amazing.

[25:59] Many people like the idea of going to heaven. The idea that they will go somewhere better when they die. And people will do all kinds of things to get to heaven.

They will be good people. Try and live a good life. Give to charity. Things like that. And if I do that. I'm going to get to heaven. Other people.

Maybe they'll go on a trip to a religious place somewhere. A pilgrimage. Maybe even go to Jerusalem. Jerusalem. They've been to Jerusalem. I'm going to go to heaven.

Or some people will come to church. And they will make sure that. Maybe it's just once a year.

They'll come to church. And take communion. And say. I'm going to go to heaven. I took communion. Some people will follow another religion.

And say it's okay. All religions lead to the same place. Or like these false teachers.

[27:05] They'll say. You need to live like a Jew. You need to follow the law of God. And in fact. If you were born a Jewish person.

It's even better for you. But Paul says no. Our home. Our future home.

Is not about our birth. Into this world. In a hospital. Our home.

Our heavenly home. Our future eternal home. Is only given to us by God. When we're trusting in Jesus. And no one else.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Plus. Nothing. Equals. Everything. And he.

[28:02] Alone. Can free us. From being stuck. In that endless cycle. Of obeying the law. That endless cycle. Of trying to be good people. Trying to make ourselves.

Right with God. He alone. Can free us from that. And give us true. Peace with God. And bring us into his family. Mount Sinai.

The law. It says. Do this. Do that. Jesus says. I've done it. Rest in me. Let's see how Paul finishes. This. Passage off. Verse 30. What does scripture say? Get rid of the slave woman. And her son. For the slaves. This woman's son.

Will never share. In the inheritance. With the free. Woman's son. What. What does that mean? What does that mean?

[29:01] It only makes this passage harder. I don't think this is telling us. That. We should be getting rid of people. In our church this morning. Who are not Christians yet.

I don't think this passage. Is telling us that. We're all welcome. To be in this place. We want you to be welcome. It's great you're here. Please stay for lunch.

If you can. I think that what this. Is saying. Is that. As Paul quotes.

From Sarah. He says this about Isaac. Hagar even. Hagar even. Get rid of her. Get rid of her son. Causing trouble. Saying that they won't share.

In our inheritance. And we're being shown very clearly. In this passage. Being in heaven. Being in the new Jerusalem. Is only. Through Jesus.

[29:59] But others tell us. There's something else. That we need to do. Have nothing to do. With that sort of teaching. It's destructive.

It's misleading people. The Bible says. Only Jesus can save us. The inheritance isn't.

Going to be shared. If you're not trusting in Jesus. You. You won't be in heaven. You. And so if that is you. This morning.

Please take this seriously. We want to be there. With. God. And his people. And we want you to be there. Alongside us.

And you can't. Do it on your own. You can't do it. Any other way. But trusting in Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.

[31:01] Plus. Nothing. Equals everything. And so do call out to him. And ask him to save you. Ask him to forgive you your sin.

And we're assured in God's word. That he will have mercy. Upon you. Because of Jesus. Who has died. In the place of sinners.

Jesus. And that's such good news. So hopefully this passage makes some sort of sense.

We began with Abraham. Who had two sons. By two mums. Who represent two covenants. Two promises of God. One is.

Being under the law. Mount Sinai. Not able to get close to God. The other is. Trust in Jesus. And all he's done. And you get to go to heaven.

[32:01] You get to go to the new Jerusalem. And you're free. And so all of us. Have a choice. Are we going to be. Like Ishmael. Or like Isaac.

If you've got questions. We've got lunch together. I'm more than happy to chat more about this passage. And maybe you'll help me to understand it a bit more as well. But I think we should respond by singing this hymn.

Our hope is built on nothing less. Than Jesus' blood. And righteousness. We cannot hope in anything else.

Cannot hope in the sweetest frame. Cannot hope in ourselves. Holy trust in Jesus' name alone. So when the music begins. We'll stand and sing.

Thank you. Thank you. All of the ground is sinking sand. On Christ the solid rock I stand.

[33:05] All of the ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand What a precious song to sing.

Just to remind you, we meet again this evening at half past six. Do join us if you can. There's also a prayer meeting on Wednesday, the most important meeting outside of a Sunday in the life of our church.

Do join us then, half seven. For now, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you for Jesus.

We thank you for the blood that he has shed. So that we can be free. Free from the power of the Lord, from the power of sin.

Free to live a life that's pleasing to you. Free from the power of sin. And free to enjoy the certain hope that one day will be with you in heaven.

[34:11] In that new Jerusalem. Father, help us to trust in him. And him alone this week. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen..