

No Longer Slaves

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[0:00] Well, I woke up before 5 a.m. one morning this week with the television still on. I sometimes will keep it on as I'm having trouble falling asleep, and it just helps me to kind of zone out.

This infomercial was on for LifeLock. Identity theft prevention and this company who will restore people who've had their identities stolen.

We know that it can, maybe some of you experience this, where you've had money or private information taken from somebody. Your identity has been stolen.

Well, in a similar way, the Christians in Galatia are under attack, and the threat for their Christian identity in Christ is threatening to be stolen.

These Judaizers are claiming to be the true people of God and calling these Gentile Christians to come underneath the law so that you too may be true people of God and find salvation.

[1:10] And the Galatian Christians are buying it hook, line, and sinker. In fact, they're compelled to listen to these Judaizers, and they're persuaded by their thieving opponents.

Paul recognizes this. He recognizes what's at stake, and he comes writing this letter saying that salvation in Jesus Christ alone, through faith alone, is at stake, church.

And so, as we've been seeing for the last few weeks, starting in chapter 3, Paul's laying this rebuke down on the Galatian church because they're in danger of abandoning the freedom in Christ only through the gospel to become slaves underneath the law.

And he's been doing so with the spiritual life lock, the gospel. So that's where we find ourselves today in our passage.

Paul's continuing to sharply rebuke and correct the Galatian Christians by reminding them of their true identity and freedom in Jesus, and by exposing the identity of these Judaizing thieves for who they really are, slaves.

[2:32] So Paul's going to build his argument throughout the final 11 verses of chapter 4 and then reveal his purpose in chapter 5, verse 1. So that's how we're going to walk through the passage.

We're going to look at three kind of increasing contrasts and conclude with the command of 5, verse 1. So three contrasts and the command.

The first contrast we see is found in verses 21 to 23. And Paul's going to use this history lesson to present this contrast. So remember where we left off last week.

The last thing that Paul says in verse 20 of chapter 4 is, I'm perplexed about you, Galatians. And so what we're going to do in our passage is he's going to say, here's why I'm perplexed.

Essentially, it's because they're surrendering their freedom. It's only found in Christ for slavery to the law, for this man-made sort of our own strength righteousness that provides nothing but slavery.

[3:44] Paul begins in verse 21 with a question. Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? Now, as Paul often does, this isn't really a question.

He's actually kind of continuing this rebuke through a rhetorical question. You're actually not listening to the law because if you were, you wouldn't be doing what you're doing.

And this is started back in chapter 3, verse 1, where he says, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? And his reasoning is found as we keep kind of tracing his argument a couple more spots.

3, verse 10, Paul says, Those who rely on works of the law are under a curse. And in chapter 3, 21 and 22, Paul continues by saying, If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness

would indeed be through the law.

But the Scriptures imprisoned everything until Jesus, the promised offspring of Abraham, would come. And in 4, verse 9, Paul says, How can you turn back to the weak and worthless things of the world whose slaves you want to be once more?

[5:06] So you see, this isn't really a question in verse 21. It means you're not listening to the law, Galatians, or you wouldn't be headed down this path of no return into slavery.

And it's interesting what he calls them. You who desire to be under the law. And this is a really loaded term. And what he means by it is saying, You folks are trying to justify yourselves. You're trying to create this man-made, flesh-sustaining righteousness. And there is no such thing. The law was not given for this purpose.

And the question that Paul raises then leads into this history lesson in verses 22 and 23. It says, Abraham, you know him well, he had two sons.

Now the overarching purpose of Paul's history lesson here is this. He wants to start this contrast. And in the history lesson, he's going to contrast two sons.

[6:12] In the middle section of the passage, he's going to contrast two cities. In the final portion of the passage, he's going to contrast two groups of people. So the contrast is getting more and more defined as he goes.

Essentially, he's getting to the question, he's getting to the root of the issue. Whose gospel is legitimate? Is Paul's gospel the one true gospel, or is it the Judaizer's gospel?

Who are the true inheritors of God's rich inheritance? The Judaizers who are saying, you must keep this law, you must be circumcised, you must enjoy and benefit from the Jewish calendar, or is it Paul saying, Christ alone through faith alone?

Who truly are God's people? That's what's at stake. So we remember the story of Abraham back in Genesis chapter 12.

God called a man named Abram, leave your country, and I will show you this new land where I'm going to take you. And the reason that I'm asking you to leave is because I'm going to make you this great nation.

[7:24] And a little while later in this story, God says, through your offspring, I'm going to bless all the nations. Well, the only problem with that is Sarah, Abraham's wife, is barren.

She's not able to give Abraham a child. So this promise that God has made seems to be in danger of never coming to pass. No offspring, no great nation.

No offspring, no blessing to the nations. So Abraham and Sarah, they get this really great idea. Well, you know, when we went down to Egypt during that famine, we got this Egyptian slave girl, Hagar, and we brought her back.

And Abraham, why don't you go sleep with Hagar? And she can get pregnant and she can birth the son that God promised to us. So as the story goes, that's what they do.

And Hagar conceives and Ishmael is born. But of course we know that this was not God's plan to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham. So God says, no, no, no, no, no.

[8:31] Abraham, you don't get it. Sarah, you don't get it. Sarah will bear you a son. And this is both hilarious and inconceivable. By this point, these two are getting up in years.

Sarah's never been able to conceive. But God works a miracle. At 90 years old, Sarah gives birth to Isaac, the child of promise.

This is a story that Paul is calling to mind in Galatians chapter 4. Notice the contrast. Verse 22, the contrast is, one son was from a slave woman.

The other was born by a free woman. And he heightens the contrast a little bit in verse 23. And this is really where he's driving. One was born according to the flesh.

The other was born through a promise. This contrast is extremely important to Paul's argument through this whole passage. So it's worth taking a little bit of time to think it through.

[9:39] What exactly does Paul mean when he says, in verse 23, according to the flesh? Well, in one sense, this just means the very natural way that children are born.

Right? We don't have to get into the details of that. People are able to naturally become parents, typically, without any outside additional effort. This is man's effort. But that's kind of what's hinting at this deeper spiritual and theological reality for Paul. Saying, see, we can accomplish this in most situations by our own strength. Human wisdom and a fertile Hagar equals Ishmael. There's no more need. This is human strength. Right?

We know. We know that we default to this kind of thinking spiritually all the time. Right? This is our default thinking. By my good works and my self-effort, I will justify myself before God.

[10:41] I will stand before God one day, completely approved of Him because I did it. And Paul's saying, no. In fact, all along, he's been telling the Galatians over and over, it's much better news the gospel brings.

Listen to verses 4 and 5 of chapter 4. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son born of woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and as daughters.

See, the point Paul's been making all along is that it's God who freely gives righteousness to those who trust in Jesus Christ, the one who lived the one who lived a perfect life under the law, the one who died in the place of sinners for our sin, and the one who was raised in victory over sin and death.

Paul's argument is, look, we measure up only because Jesus measures up for us and we are in Him. So that's Paul's ultimate purpose in the history lesson and he's going to drive it home as we keep going.

But he's contrasting man's effort with God's promise and power to fulfill His promise. It has everything to do with salvation, doesn't it?

[12:17] Self-effort is never ever going to save us. Just how self-effort was never ever going to get Abraham and Sarah a child through a barren old woman.

Only God's power in Christ can make us righteous. So that's the first contrast between these two sons. Now we move to the second contrast found in verses 24 to 27.

Paul's going to contrast two cities but he gets a little bit technical and tricky. But essentially, here's what Paul wants to do. He wants to repurpose the story from Genesis 12 to 21 to say, let me tell you who else is a slave.

And let me tell you who else is giving birth to free people. So in verse 24 we see Paul write this interesting word. This may be interpreted allegorically.

There's been a lot of argument about what this means but let me try and illustrate my best understanding of it. There's one fall a few years ago it was really windy and we came home from running errands back into our driveway and here lays this blue plastic kiddie pool sitting in our front yard.

[13:41] I didn't think much of it. I kind of just well it's got to get out of the yard so I threw it in our shed. A couple years later another fall we're raking leaves from our half acre property that's lined with these big oak trees.

I think we've got to get the leaves from the far back corner of our property up to the front curb so the village can bring by their vacuum trucks and get rid of these leaves. And I think aha I'm going to repurpose this blue kiddie pool to be a leaf transport vessel.

And I did and it worked. The next year I even added a tow rope so I didn't have to stoop down and kind of bend awkwardly.

I could just walk like I was plowing a field like an ox would. And it works great. It's still a swimming pool but I've repurposed it for a different task.

And that's what Paul's doing by referring now to the allegory of this story. And like I was saying he's going to move through talking about the two moms associating them with sort of two different covenants and ultimately associating them with two different Jerusalems.

[14:58] Those are the two cities that he wants to get us and our eyes and our minds around. There's a here and now Jerusalem. He's saying to the Galatians you guys can find it on a map. You can go visit.

You can get the tinker toy tourist things and bring them home. And then there's this heavenly Jerusalem this above Jerusalem. You can't go visit that. There's no bus that takes you there. So notice the contrast. First in verses 24 and 25 look what Paul is going to assign to Hagar. Remember she's the slave sort of wife of Abraham who gives birth to the slave son Ishmael. He says Hagar is Mount Sinai. She's bearing children for slavery and she corresponds to present day Jerusalem.

This is the center of the Israelite religion. Giving birth to slaves. His argument is this.

[16:02] Hagar birthed the slave son according to the flesh. Present Jerusalem is birthing slave children according to the flesh. Because they're trying to get people to submit to a law that cannot save.

In verse 26 then Paul moves from the first woman covenant city to the second. He skips over the kind of comparisons of Sarah and this and that and the other thing and just goes straight to the Jerusalem above is free.

She is our mother. Paul's argument is very similar in this one. See Sarah birthed free Isaac through God's promise and his power to fulfill that promise.

The Jerusalem above aka heaven is birthing free sons and daughters of the father through that same promise and the same power of God. Why would Paul be doing this?

If we remember from the gospels and you may have even read it in your bulletin this morning there's always been this claim from the Jewish folks that we're offspring of Abraham.

[17:16] We're children of the promise all of this belongs to us. And this certainly would be part of the Judaizers claim. See we're children of Abraham. We have the authority to call you to submit to this law.

And Paul is saying you've got the wrong mom. You're children of the slave woman. Who's still giving birth to slaves.

You see the contrast here. The flesh versus the promise. Slavery versus free. Present Jerusalem versus the above Jerusalem.

Paul's saying DNA human effort doesn't make you a son of Abraham. Your biology and family tree don't make you a son of Abraham. Promise makes you children of Abraham.

Paul says as much at the end of chapter 3 in verse 29. If you look at that and listen to it. And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring.

[18:22] Heirs according to promise. See the only way that you truly become Abraham's offspring is if you are in Christ. That you've put your faith and your trust in him for salvation. That's how you become children of promise.

It's through Jesus. There's one more step that Paul takes in this repurposing section and it's verse 27.

Essentially he's answering the question well Paul you know okay so you're saying this stuff but where does the law promise us anything. And he goes to Isaiah 54 verse 1.

He's wanting to convince the Galatians who their mother is. And in verse 27 quoting from Isaiah Paul quotes a verse that gives us this picture of Israel in exile.

Israel is seen as the barren one who does not bear children. And the interesting thing right is that we know why Israel is in exile. Because Israel couldn't keep the law.

[19:33] God judged Israel for their fleshly efforts to keep the law which fell way short. They slipped into idolatry they disobeyed and they're in exile and yet look what God says he is going to do.

Again he issues a promise and says I will give you more children than she who has a husband. And it's not going to be because you all of a sudden start measuring up to my standard.

All along it's meant to show that God's promise is how he births children of Abraham and Jesus. God's going to intervene and restore Israel but not just Israel right? Because Paul's talking to the Galatians and saying look at verse 28 you brothers like Isaac are children of promise.

This was never just meant for Israel but for the nations right? Going all the way back to Abraham it's through your offspring all the nations of the world shall be blessed. And Paul looks he pens this joy brothers your children promise.

[20:50] This leads us to the third kind of contrast of what Paul's getting at in verses 28 to 31. It's a contrast of identities.

He wants the Galatians to be crystal clear that they are children of promise and that as children of promise they are free. See he says that in 28 and he compares them to Isaac.

Isaac of course was the original offspring of promise. The one not produced by human effort but the one supernaturally produced by the power of God.

Paul says so too are you Galatian Christians so too are you church you didn't measure up Christ measured up for you.

It was God's promise that redeemed your life. And Abraham was promised this offspring would bless all the nations. Jesus has come and fulfilled that promise.

[22:00] As his name and his word go out more and more people from around this globe put their faith and trust in him. and become children of promise.

Isaac was the original child of promise but he is followed by countless others like us. We're free from the law's curse and condemnation. We're born from above not by human effort.

We're saved by God's gospel and not man-made righteousness. righteousness. Paul repeats this idea in verse 31 with a little bit different language.

Again contrasting the mothers. So brothers we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. Children of promise. Children born free. Children born from above through promise not through effort.

And in between these kind of bookend here's who you are Paul sets a further contrast in verses 29 and 30.

[23:06] He returns once more to our story from Genesis. He says look the slave son Ishmael he persecuted the free son Isaac. So too today.

Right? I almost hear Jesus' words ringing behind what Paul is saying. Do not be surprised if the world hates you for it hated me first.

Paul himself bears witness in 511 which we'll hear from Billy next week about. Paul says that it's the offense of the cross. It's the reason why he's taken so much flack.

He's telling these folks that you're slaves and you need to wake up and you need to repent and you need to trust in Christ or you will remain slaves. The slave will always resent and resist the free.

Paul is saying don't cave Galatians. Don't let this heat of persecution overwhelm you. There's a loud and demanding voice that's pulling you into a prison and it's claiming to be setting you free.

[24:15] Don't buy it for a moment. Your children of promise. You're already free. Verse 30 Paul quotes the words of Sarah to her husband 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. God agreed with Sarah. The slave will not inherit along with the children of promise.

Along with the free. Here's essentially the two voices speaking in each side of the Galatians ears. First the Judaizers are saying to the Galatians, we're the heirs.

We have the riches and promises of God. The inheritance is ours and until you join us under the law, you don't have any share in that. Paul flips it on its head.

They are the cast out slaves with empty pockets. You are the heirs according to promise. They can't offer you anything.

[25:24] And you stand to lose everything if you listen to them. You're already free because Jesus has set you free. free. So stand firm in your freedom.

That's where Paul has been going this whole time to 5 verse 1. For freedom Christ has set you free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Stand firm in the freedom Christ alone provides for you, church. God has done what religion could never do.

What the law has no hope of accomplishing and what human effort just simply cannot accomplish. A promise made to Abraham results in a supernatural birth.

A heavenly Jerusalem is continuing day after day after day to birth many children of promise as people put their faith and hope and trust in Jesus alone. So stand firm in the freedom you have in Jesus.

[26:43] Don't turn back to weak and worthless things thinking that you're somehow going to justify yourself or somehow going to sustain your

salvation in your own strength. That's slavery and it leads only to death.

Christ sets us free so that we can remain free. Children of God and heirs with Christ.

Not because we earned it but because we believe God's promise. Sinners can be made sons and daughters through faith in Jesus due to no merit of our own.

We're no longer slaves. This is why Paul is so perplexed with the Galatians and why he's dropping this harsh rebuke on their heads like a hammer.

Because spiritually speaking they were acting like slaves. Imagine if Isaac came up to mom and dad and said mommy dearest dad would you please cast me out with Hagar and with Ishmael?

[28:02] I know that I'm this special kid that God's promised to use to be a blessing to all the nations. I know that this beautiful inheritance has been secured for me and for my family.

And yet I really like Hagar's mac and cheese. Ishmael just got that new call of duty for Xbox.

Are you kidding me? To abandon the freedom in Christ to become a slave to something that will only lead to your demise? No way! Stand firm in the freedom you have in Christ Paul says.

Don't return to slavery. The law cracks a whip. Christ unlocks our chains.

Stand firm in the freedom you have in Christ. So I want us to consider three questions as we close this morning. first question are you free?

[29:21] Has your inability to measure up led you to the cross of Jesus? To trust in his work on your behalf to save you and set you free?

Or are you still trying to make yourself presentable to a holy and righteous God? you? This passage today calls you don't remain a slave.

Christ can set you free. That's why he shed his blood. That's why God raised him from the dead to offer a salvation free of charge. You'll never deserve it.

Just receive it by faith. Second question. Are you standing firm in your freedom?

If you're a Christian in the room, are you standing firm in your freedom? Or are you a child of God who's kind of living like a slave?

[30:30] I want us to think about standing firm a certain way this morning. Have you ever kind of seen a football coach who's got kind of this blocking pad, right?

It's this kind of big pad that he holds and he keeps in front of him so linemen and other people will kind of practice the technique of kind of running into it. You imagine that football coach needs to stand a certain way to not get bowled over by the people working on their tackling technique or their blocking technique.

technique. He needs to get in a stance that's going to allow him to stand firm. Sometimes I think we can kind of just sort of just coast through this life as Christians not knowing that there's voices all around us and within us that are seeking to knock us off our feet and ruin the freedom we have in Christ.

So are you standing firm in your freedom? Here's kind of a diagnostic. Do your own thoughts tend to puff you up and give off the impression that you have earned or are earning God's approval? people. Like during the weeks or the longer periods of your life when you're feeling pretty good and you haven't really messed up too badly in a while and you haven't gotten really angry, you haven't done anything really blatantly offensive to God, you start thinking that you're earning something in that moment.

[32:11] Paul says that's slave thinking. You're not earning anything. Christ has freed you from that kind of thinking, of thinking that you have to submit to the law to find your salvation because Christ has set you free.

Repent of that thinking, slave thinking. On the underbelly of that, are you, maybe you're hiding sin in the dark, thinking that it's just a matter of time before God kind of casts you out.

You're not feeling good about your self-events, you're feeling terrible about them. I don't measure up. I never will. I don't know why God would ever have anything to do with me.

And you're just kind of sulking in this despair and this Christian depression. You too are living like a slave. To stand firm in the freedom that Christ has accomplished for you is to humbly admit your sin, your failure, and your weaknesses.

Bring it into the light. Because we don't maintain our freedom. freedom. And if we don't maintain it, it means that we can't mess up so bad to lose it as long as we are seeking to remain in it.

[33:29] Don't hide in the dark. Don't live defeated and shackled. Step into your freedom and stand firm in it by faith. We know too, right, that there's outside voices.

We have enough sort of internal struggle that wants to get us to forget all this, but there's voices outside of us too. Stronger and powerful and more convincing probably than ourselves at points. We know Satan would like nothing better than to enslave us under some false gospel. We know the voice of the world too. Those Jesus people are intolerant, they're bigoted, they're hate filled. Paul's saying these are slave voices. This is not the voice of freedom. Only Christ speaks freedom. Stand firm. Are you standing firm in your freedom?

Third question, are you helping others stand firm in their freedom? It's going to look a couple different ways.

[34:42] If we're speaking of non-believers who are outside of the church, who are not currently free in Christ, it means, as we kind of mentioned earlier, it means bringing them face to face with the offense of the cross.

Letting people realize that they're in slavery. And until they stop trying to measure up, until they stop trying to ignore God's laws and repent and put their faith in Christ, they'll remain a slave. whether they're a rule keeper or a rule breaker, we point to them that, look, you're enslaved to sin. You can't free yourself. You need Christ to set you free. That's how we can help others move into the freedom that Christ alone offers.

But then for one another, for the brothers and sisters of the church, we need to be reminding each other of this freedom. We need to be exhorting and warning each other that we can lose out on this freedom and we can live in ways that deny this freedom.

[35:51] And sometimes even like Paul to the Galatian church, we need to rebuke one another when we see that we're abandoning this freedom. How could we do that?

Why would we want to go back to slavery? It can't save us. Return to the freedom of the gospel, Jesus.

Church, we must do this. We must be helping one another to stand firm in this freedom that Christ has purchased for us. But isn't it good news?

Christ has unlocked your chains. Stand firm in your freedom. Let's pray. Father, thank you in the fullness of time, you sent your son Jesus to redeem us out from under the things of our own effort that could not save us.

God, thank you Jesus for the freedom that you have secured for us through your own life, death, and resurrection. Father, help us to live in this by your spirit day by day.

[37:14] All for your glory. We rejoice together in the salvation that you have promised and accomplished for us in Christ. we pray through him.

Amen. Amen.