

Galatians 4:12-16

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[0 : 00] Morning, church. Happy Palm Sunday. Glad you could make it out this morning. We're not going to preach on Palm Sunday this morning.

Sorry. We're going to preach on Galatians. We're going to continue our sermon series on Galatians because we want to finish it in my lifetime and in yours. So if we don't keep preaching through Galatians, we're going to just keep preaching through Galatians, which would be a beautiful and wonderful thing, but we'll try to wrap it up sometime in the calendar year.

So we're going to preach on Galatians this morning. Chapter 4. Verses 12 through 20. That's where we'll be this morning. Galatians 4, verses 12 through 20.

We've been just, as I've mentioned, working through the book of Galatians verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, just trying to mine out of God's Word everything we trust Him to be saying to us as a follower and as a community of Christians.

So we're going to continue that this morning. As we come to God's Word, let's pray together that He would indeed speak to us through His Word. Father, you've promised that when your Word is read and when it is preached and when it is received with open hearts and open ears, Lord, we are changed because your Spirit takes the Word and reveals Christ to us and does that deep work of transformation within us.

[1 : 25] God, we come before you this morning confessing that we need your Word. We need you to speak to us. Lord, we need you to reveal yourself to us again. God, so many of our thoughts are skewed, so many of the longings of our hearts are bent, and we need you, God, to come and to renew us from the inside out.

So, Lord, we come to your Word faithfully and humbly, trusting that you will do so in the way in which you've ordained. So, God, bless the reading and the preaching of your Word this morning. In Christ's name, amen. So, Galatians 4, verses 12-20. Paul writes this, Brothers, I entreat you. Become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

You did me no wrong. You know that it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the Gospel to you at first. And though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

[2 : 40] They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out that you may make much of them. It's always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you.

My little children, for whom I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

So here we have Paul's perplexed pastoral plea to the Galatians. For a number of weeks, we've been following Paul's logic in this letter to the Galatians, haven't we?

We've been seeing Paul's mighty intellect, as it were, at work. He's been advancing a tightly reasoned case for the truth of the gospel. We've been listening to Paul the theologian.

We've been listening to Paul the great mind, and we've been considering him in that regard. But this morning, we see that Christianity isn't just about the head, but it's also about the heart.

[3 : 44] For in this text, we see Paul bearing his soul, opening his heart. Here we get to listen to Paul the pastor, Paul the passionate friend.

Here it's not, oh foolish Galatians, but brothers, even my little children. And I think this is a much-needed passage for us, because I think there's a mistake that we're often prone to make, the

mistake to be all head and little heart.

We think, if I can just get the right argument, then I'll convince my co-workers about Christ. Or if I can just find the right answer, then I'll solve my Christian friend's struggle with doubt or guidance or suffering or whatever it happens to be.

We tend to think that we can think our way out of problems and difficulties, and we often mistakenly believe that we can reason people into the kingdom of God. But of course, we know that isn't the case.

Now yes, the mind matters. Yes, reason and logic and intellect have their place, and we should use them as rigorously and as faithfully as we possibly can. But you see, the heart must also be engaged.

[5 : 01] As the saying goes, people don't care what you know until they know that you care. Right? In another passage, Paul will say that what really causes spiritual growth is truth spoken in love, head and heart.

So this passage is all about a pastor's heart. And for those of us who are pastors or maybe discerning a call to ministry of some kind, it's a very important passage to take note of. But as we look at the pastoral heart of Paul today, it will be a help, I think, to each one of us.

It's not just for pastors, you see, but for all of us. You see, God has a part for each of us to play in reaching our city for the gospel and in building up the body of Christ.

God has put all of us in relationships in order to minister to one another, to have a heart for one another, a heart that longs to see real and lasting change.

So this text has something to say to all of us, all of us who long to be used in the lives of others, all of us who want to be an instrument that God takes up to bring change and healing and transformation in the people God has placed in our lives.

[6 : 18] Maybe a relationship comes to your mind even now. Maybe it's a Christian friend, perhaps. You're becoming close, maybe you're in a small group Bible study together, maybe you go to school together, maybe you even live together, your roommates.

How should your heart start to beat for this friend spiritually? Have you asked yourself that question? What would it look like to really love this friend for Christ's sake to be an instrument of redemption in their lives?

Or maybe the relationship that comes to your mind is that that you have with your spouse. You've been married for a while, things are going okay, no major fights, you're pretty happy all around, you're kind of just trucking through.

But what would your heart long for if it were in tune with God's priorities for your marriage? What if you had one another's spiritual best in mind?

What would that kind of heart look like for your spouse? Or perhaps your children are on your heart this morning. God has put them in your life, you have this great responsibility to love and nurture them, to bring them up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord.

[7 : 26] What's your heart's longing for them? What ought your heart's longing be for them? Or maybe for you it's a co-worker or a neighbor or a brother or a sister.

God has put someone in your life just as God has put the Galatians in Paul's life. And God wants to use you, like Paul, to bring the gospel to bear in a richer and fuller way in their lives.

And he wants to do that not just with your head, but with your heart. So yes, we're not all pastors like Paul, but we all need this kind of heart that is demonstrated here.

So let's look together at what this heart looks like. In this passage, I think we see at least four things, four aspects, four characteristics of what Paul's pastoral heart looks like that can instruct all of us as we seek to be ministers to one another.

So first, it's a heart that pleads for freedom. Look at verse 12 again. The Greek of that verse is actually very sparse.

[8 : 39] Literally, it reads, become like me for even I like you. Now on the surface, that sounds a bit egocentric, doesn't it? Maybe even somewhat manipulative.

Become like me for I became like you. There's the guilt trip, right? But in reality, become like me should be one of the most basic heart cries of every Christian friend or spouse or parent or yes pastor.

You see, it's not egotistical or manipulative. It's authentic. It's transparent. You see, Paul isn't saying he wants us to become one of his little clones. No, at the end of the passage, we'll see very clearly

that's not what he means.

Rather, he's saying he wants us to know what he knows, to experience what he's experienced, to enjoy what he enjoys. In that sense, he wants us to become like he's become.

And we do this with anything of wonder or value we happen to find, don't we? Whether it's a musician we've recently heard or it's an amazing workout routine we've discovered, we commend it to others, don't we? You've got to hear this song I just heard.

[9 : 44] Here's the YouTube link. You haven't lived until you've done yoga in a 106 degree studio in New York City, right? We want others to experience the same thing as us, to become the same as us.

We want them to know the same joy and satisfaction and freedom that we've come to find. And of course, for Paul, it's the freedom of Christ that he wants us to know and experience.

The context makes that clear. In verses 1-7 of chapter 4, Paul tells us that God sent forth his Son to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as God's sons and daughters. Then in verses 9-11, Paul says, now that you've come to know God or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to slavery?

Every true Christian has experienced the freedom that Christ brings. Freedom from the guilt of the law and from the penalty of sin. Freedom for a relationship with God without shame, knowing that he delights in us as his children.

And if you've ever tasted that freedom, you'll want to say to others, you'll almost be compelled, you'll almost plead with others, become like me. Your heart will make its appeal, become like me.

[11 : 02] But verse 12 reminds us that if we're going to say, become as I am, we have to first be able to say, I also have become as you are. I think this is particularly relevant in our relationships with friends or family members who aren't yet Christians.

If we're going to invite them into the joy and freedom of knowing Christ, we should be able to say to them along the way, I have become as you are.

For Paul, this meant that even though he was a Jew by birth, he decided to live like a Gentile when he was with the Gentiles. He ate unclean foods. He didn't keep all the Sabbath regulations. He was willing to forego his comfortable cultural practices in order to identify with them.

This principle was a defining feature of Paul's life and mission. Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 9. To the Jews, I became a Jew in order to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law. Not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law. To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak.

[12 : 16] I've become all things to all people, and by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. The heart that pleads, become like me, is the heart that's willing to become weak for the sake of the weak.

It's willing to step outside of its cultural comfort zone in order to bring Jesus to others. Like we said, Paul was a good Jew. He probably never ate a piece of pork in his life before meeting Jesus, but now he was willing to sit down with Gentiles at the table and say, please pass the hot dogs.

And it wasn't a sales technique. He did it because he loved them, right? He wanted to share with them, as he says, the blessings of the gospel. He did it in order to give, not to take.

And because he loved them, you see, he listened to them. He read their newspapers and, you know, surfed their blogs. He stepped inside their world to feel what it was like. He caught a glimpse of their longings and dreams and then he started to see.

He started to be able to imagine firsthand how the gospel was good news for them too. So when he said, become like me, for I also have become like you, they knew that he meant it.

[13 : 40] He'd actually won the right to be heard. He could tell their stories, he could quote their poets, he could identify their gods. But he had also eaten meals in their homes and played with their kids in their backyard, helped them fix their flat tires.

He became like them so they could become like him. And of course, Paul never stopped being a Jew, right? But the Galatians knew he loved them when he sat down for dinner and ate a slice of ham.

And parents, you'll never stop being parents. But your teenagers will know you love them when you go for a car trip and listen to some of the music they happen to like.

Or engage them on something they're interested in. It will take some cross-cultural savvy for you to say, become like me. I also became like you.

It's not easy to do. It takes effort, right? It takes looking a little foolish. But it gets easier when you remember that this is exactly what Jesus did for us. After all, Jesus himself is perhaps the one who can truly say, I also became like you.

[14:57] not just culturally, but totally. He took on our very flesh. And though he was sinless, he even took on our sin. Something you and I could never do for one another.

He truly became like us so we could become like him. He became sin so we could become his righteousness. righteousness. And if that's the case, what's a little ham?

What's a little crazy teenage rock music when he's done all that for me? You see, the gospel sets you free. It sets you free so your heart can be like Paul's heart.

So your heart can be like Jesus' heart. It sets you free so you can plead with others for their freedom too. That's the kind of heart we need. That's the kind of heart the gospel gives us.

But look a little further in this passage. We see that it's a heart that doesn't just plead for freedom, but it's a heart that inquires after joy. Look at verse 15. Paul asks this profound and penetrating question.

[16:03] What then has become of the blessing you felt? The word blessing here means not the same as the blessing we talked about earlier actually in Galatians, but this blessing means something a bit more common.

Satisfaction. Joy. Happiness. You see, the Galatians were losing their joy. As they slid further and further into works righteousness, their profound sense of joy slipped further and further from their grasp.

It's always that way, you know. The gospel of grace will produce joy and the gospel of works will steal it away. one of the great indicators that we've lost touch with our status as God's daughters and sons in Christ is that we're simply lacking joy.

There's no gladness to be found and a pastor's heart will ask in love, where has it gone? What has happened to the blessing, to the joy, to the satisfaction you felt?

Of course, we're not talking about the cheap kind of happiness that we typically think of when we hear the word today. That kind of happiness typically means the absence of problems, right? And the abundance of worldly comforts. But biblical joy, this kind of blessedness, this kind of happiness is something that you have even in the presence of problems.

[17:32] Something that you have even when all your worldly comforts have been stripped away. Look at how Paul describes their blessing or joy in these verses. He says that when he showed up in Galatia, he was in bad shape.

Some kind of affliction or illness had beat him up pretty badly. Something that Paul had caused some form of malaria on the Mediterranean coast, so he actually headed north to get some reprieve in the higher altitudes.

That's why the illness caused him to preach the gospel to the Galatians. The illness might have even physically disfigured him. We don't know. We don't know for sure. But whatever it was, Paul says that he was a trial for them.

He implies that they could have very well scorned or despised him. He was in such a mess. The ancient Greeks considered disease and disability to be signs of divine displeasure, actually, or demonic influence.

So, you know, culturally, they had every reason to spit at him, which is what the word despised literally means, and send him away. But hearing the gospel message that Paul preached, that produced such a deep and profound sense of joy and God's favor for them that they gladly cared for Paul, even though it was a trial.

[18:44] They would have done anything for them, for him, he says, even gouged out their eyes and given them to him. And all these details are important because they show us that this joy, this gospel joy that Paul's talking about is something that's not based on circumstances or appearances.

It wasn't easy to have sickly Paul hanging around, and it certainly didn't look good to their neighbors. Here was a guy that the gods clearly didn't like. But even though their time and their

money and their reputations all took a hit, they felt the most profound sense, the deepest sense of blessing and joy and happiness perhaps they'd ever felt.

And they received Paul as he truly was, a messenger of God, an apostle who spoke authoritatively on behalf of the risen Christ. What would produce such counterintuitive joy?

Is it not the very message of the gospel itself? Ben read a scripture reading earlier from Psalm 32, and there it was, right for us.

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity. Friends, nothing produces lasting joy like the forgiveness of sins.

[20 : 07] Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy all you upright in heart. When the gospel comes and declares that our sins are forgiven and that we're counted righteous in Christ, how can joy not be the result?

Now, of course, this joy doesn't outwardly look the same in everyone, right? You might not be a very visibly bubbly person who smiles all the time, or maybe you are, I don't know. I know a couple people here at Trinity who are like that.

Most of us aren't, though. We tend to be dour, academic, New England types, right? But you still know true joy when you have it. You might be dispositionally more subdued or melancholy or intense or thoughtful, but joy can still be a very real thing in your life.

I think biblical joy is maybe a bit like Alka-Seltzer. You know, if you put Alka-Seltzer in water, it starts to fizz. If you put Alka-Seltzer in soda, it starts to erupt, right? But they both have the same amount of Alka-Seltzer in them.

Now, when the joy of the gospel gets in us, it seems that some of us are water and some of us are soda, some of us fizz, and some of us erupt, but it's not necessarily better than one or the other because it's the same joy in us bringing us alive.

[21 : 20] But the problem comes when there aren't any bubbles at all. And we need someone in our lives who will ask, what then has become of the blessing you felt?

And even when our circumstances are rotten, I know some of you this morning have been struggling with chronic illness, some of you even with clinical depression, some of you are struggling with joblessness, the loss of family members.

Circumstances are bad. But at some point along the journey, is there someone in your life who has the courage, do you have the courage to ask one of your friends, where's your joy?

And do we have the courage to point each other once again to the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ? Do we have the boldness to say, if we've got that, then no matter what may come or what may go, then we're blessed.

that we have an indestructible source of joy, no matter what the appearance is, no matter what the circumstances. We need hearts for one another that will inquire after that joy, persistently, if need be, until we've found its true source again, until we've found it in Christ above all else.

[22 : 56] Another aspect of Paul's heart, verse 17, we see that it's a heart that warns against flattery. He says, they make much of you but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out that you may make much of them.

Paul's referring here, of course, to the false teachers who are troubling the Galatians. And the real trouble was that these false teachers, like nearly all false teachers, well, they seem so very nice. They genuinely seem to like us.

They made much of them. They cared for them. They told them how special they were. But it was all for no good purpose, Paul says. It was all just selfish flattery so that the Galatians would turn around and make much of them.

That's how it still goes today. Rarely will a false teacher or a bad influence belittle us or shame us outright. We know that. Most of the time, they'll make us feel great. They'll write us cards and send us flowers.

They'll take a genuine interest in us. And this is why we've got to have the kind of hearts that are willing to warn one another. This one's hard for some of us.

[24 : 02] We don't like stepping on other people's toes. We don't like saying someone else is wrong. But when you truly love someone, you'll do it, right? When your friend is falling asleep at the wheel, you'll shout, you'll shake him awake because you know he's in danger.

And when the flattery of false teaching is creeping in and lulling us to sleep, we also need a friend who will issue a warning. Do you have a heart that's willing to warn this morning? Not until we do can we say that we really love someone. Because even though it's hard, it's often a rebuke or a warning spoken in love that can have the biggest transformative impact in someone's life.

We need hearts that are willing to warn. We need the courage to do so. Well, for the sake of time, let's look at the final aspect of Paul's pastoral heart and draw this together. We see in verses 19 through 20 that it's a heart that agonizes for true Christ-likeness.

Look with me again at these verses. It's always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

[25 : 14] I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Paul describes himself here like a mother in labor in the anguish of childbirth.

Now, I've only been up close and personal with the anguish of childbirth one time, and here's what I've observed. First, it is total.

It involves every part of your body and being. There isn't a single square inch of your body that isn't racked with some kind of anguish. Second, it's uncontrollable.

It seems to happen whether you like it or not, and sometimes in very unpredictable ways. And third, it's kind of scary. You find yourself asking along the way, is my baby going to make it out alive?

You find yourself asking, am I going to make it out alive? Now, what would drive Paul into the depths of this total, uncontrollable, and scary anguish of childbirth?

[26 : 28] It's what he calls Christ formed in you. This is the passion, the anguish of every true Christian friend we've ever had, of every parent, of every spouse, of every true pastor, that Christ would be formed in the ones they love.

This goes much deeper than many of us dare to ask or think. Many of us would be content with some mere outer changes in our loved ones, right? Maybe a sinful or annoying behavior modified. Maybe an affliction relieved. Maybe a healthy activity taken out. But our hearts have to long for something deeper. We've got to be in anguish for true interchange, for true spiritual formation in the very depths of who we are.

Because, you see, after all, only when Christ is truly formed in us will we see lasting and permanent change. And too often our prayers and longings merely strive for some version of ourself to be formed in our loved ones.

Am I right? We often want to see them shaped into our image. Into an image that would please us and be comfortable for us. But this too will not do either, of course.

[27 : 53] It must be Christ formed in them. Not Paul. Not me. Not you. Not you. Christ. And that's why it's anguish. Because it's Christ and not me that needs to be formed.

Because it's inner formation and not outer modification that has to take place. And that means it's out of my control. And that's scary. It's like childbirth.

You know, I could maybe manipulate you to look like me on the outside. But it takes the Spirit of God to form Christ in you.

It's something we can't control. I wonder, friends, is this what gives you a sleepless night when you think about your kids? Not ultimately that they get into a good college or that they marry Mr. or Mrs. Wright or that they stay away from drugs, but that Christ is formed in them.

Does that drive you into labor pains? Or is it the least of your worries? Is Christ just one spoke on the wheel of life along with school and career and marriage and on and on?

[29 : 10] Oftentimes, it's not the formation of Christ that's our ultimate concern. And this is because we don't really see what's at stake. But to have Christ formed in you means to have the very image of God repaired and restored.

This is the message of Christianity, friends. Not rules and rituals and meetings on Sundays, but the very repairing of the fabric of your humanity. The renewal of your very self in Christ.

Christ. You see, Christ did not just come as truly and fully God, but he was truly and fully human. His life was a human life that it was always supposed to look like.

And if that life could be formed in you, then you'd finally get a taste of the life that you were created for and that you're longing for.

Christ formed in you means becoming who God created you to be but what was lost in the fall. Christ formed in you means becoming fully and finally alive.

[30 : 31] At the end of the day, what else is worth our heartfelt anguish than Christ formed in you? Now maybe you're wondering how this happens.

How does Christ get formed in us? What should we be praying for? What should we be longing for? How should we encourage it? What do we do? Well, the simple answer is one that we've been saying all along in Galatians.

The answer is faith. In Galatians 2.20, Paul's already told us, our union with Christ is sealed through faith. We hear the word proclaimed that Christ came and lived and died and rose again and ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father and offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe.

And when we believe, we're united with Him. And then we can say with Paul, it's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

If you're putting your heart's trust in Christ and He's already there at work by His Spirit, forming His own life in you, bringing the image of God to perfection in you, making you truly human again.

[31 : 59] So this is Paul's heart, the heart that we too must have as we seek to minister to one another. It pleads, it questions, it warns, and agonizes. And no doubt as this last point makes abundantly clear, this kind of heart is very costly.

It means anguish and agony. It means the potential of disappointment and heartbreak. After all, any real relationship means opening ourselves up to hurt and frustration, but especially these kinds of spiritual relationships.

love it all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken.

If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements, lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

[33 : 22] What Lewis is saying is that the only way to keep oneself free from the vulnerability and the cost of love is to lock away your heart for good.

And then your heart will grow cold and unlovable and finally irredeemable. But on the other hand, there's the pain of childbirth.

And when Paul talks about childbirth, there's one more thing that I think I should mention. The fourth thing I noticed being in the delivery room. Here's what I learned about the pain of giving birth. Yes, that anguish is total and it is uncontrollable and it is scary, but it's also completely worth it. No matter how intense the pain, there's nothing that compares to bringing a new life into the world. A daughter or a son full of possibility and joy and beauty and hope. Whatever anguish we may experience on one another's behalf in order to see Christ formed in us, it will have been utterly worth it.

[34 : 40] After all, this is the God we serve, is it not? He sent his son to experience the pains of childbirth for us.

More than that, he didn't just go into the pain of childbirth, but in the depths of death itself so that we might live. Knowing his costly love for us, we too can extend costly love for one another.

And as we do, God will use us as instruments of change and Christ-like formation in each other's lives. He will.

Let's pray that God would give us hearts like this, to do his work and to glorify his name. Father, we remember the words of Paul in the epistle to Ephesians when he said, God, when we think about the prospect of having this kind of heart, we realize that it's your power within us that needs to both give us this heart and work through us to do far more abundantly than we could ask or think.

But Lord, thank you for the promise that we see in this passage that we can be free, that we can be joyful, that we can be impervious to flattery and that we can have Christ formed in us.

[36 : 10] And Lord, that you choose to use us in one another's lives to bring that to be. God, I pray for my brothers and sisters here this morning that they would grow that kind of heart, that your spirit would produce that kind of love within them because they've seen the love of Christ for them, who

became like us so that we could become like him, who went to the pains of death so that we could know the joys of life.

God, may that be a foundation upon which we can then give and love and suffer and see the image of God, the very image of Christ formed in us.

Lord, we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.