

July 14, 2019
Galatians 3:25-4:7
“Heirs of the Promise”

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This summer we have been looking at St. Paul’s New Testament letter to the Galatians. A group of connected churches in what’s now modern-day Turkey. It’s a letter in which you can easily see that Paul has a lot of affection and fondness for these people. And, with that affection comes a lot of concern. His concern for them is based on a significant problem that has arisen. He confronts them over the fact that though they first came to faith in Christ purely by receiving the Grace of God as a gift. Now, infiltrators have come into these churches swaying them with another message. With ideas of having to do more- requiring new gentile, non-Jewish believers, to become Jewish in order to become a follower of Jesus. In Paul’s mind, they are reverting back to a lesser thing. They have left the main thing- which is the freedom from the law that Christ has won for them.

Last week when I had the privilege to lead communion here for the first time, I used a phrase that has become very dear to me. I heard another pastor use it years ago, and it’s helped shape my own thinking, and the phrase is, “Christ, Our Life.” To say that “Christ is our life,” is to say in part, that he is the source of every good thing, that all that brings life, and light, and joy, and humility, comes from the gift of his hands. Every single day. And, to bear witness to that life, that Christ is our life, that Christ is the giver, means to see that the gifts of God do not come from anxious toiling but through grateful receiving and that all we have is found in him. That’s what it means to say, Christ our life. And this pastor said, and I’ve tried to use it in my own spiritual life... *“I want to go about life not as an anxious toiler, but as a hopeful receiver... of the gifts of God to his people.”*

The question then becomes, How? How do you live this way? How do we live with Christ as Our Life? Our entire life? The passage this morning will lead us to conclude this life comes from fully embracing that you are a son or daughter of God. That you are an heir of God. And, the word embrace is important and helpful, because it connotes the idea of something already being there. It’s already present- it simply needs to be embraced.

Which is different than how many people today come to view Christianity, and following Jesus. I think many come saying, “Well, what will I need to do to follow Jesus? What will I need to do to have God love me?” Or, “what will I need to give up... to follow Jesus and be accepted by him? And, I don’t know if I want to do that or am ready to do that...”

When in fact, for our life to be “Christ, our life...” it is simply embracing the gift of faith that God has made us his heirs. He has made us sons and daughters adopted into His family. This is the main thing in Paul’s Grace Manifesto of Galatians.

There are three questions I hope can guide us today, through this extremely important and beautiful passage of scripture:

- 1- How does Adoption into God’s family work?
- 2- Who is Adoption into God’s family for?
- 3- What is Adoption into God’s family doing for you? For me?

So, first... 1 – How does Adoption into God’s family work?

In the Ancient world, particularly in ancient Roman law, adoption was practiced. There were similarities and differences to what we think of as adoption today. In the ancient world, children were in many ways treated as slaves in that they had no access to anything themselves. Children and slaves were treated the same. One commentator added that because it was more common in the ancient world for men to marry late, it was also common then for minors to be orphans. So, the wills of Greek and Roman men would often name a guardian, or guardians to look over and govern the child if the father died. A guardian would be placed over an orphaned child to control the estate and from it provide for the child until the child came to maturity.

The point is that until a specified time, the child under the father’s authority does not inherit anything. In fact, they might as well be seen as a slave. That was the common practice, but look at what Paul says in v. 25 - *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (guardian).²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

And here is the difference Paul is trying to wake them up to, that builds directly off of what TJ said last week. Paul says, with God, you’re already IN.

You are no longer a slave, an orphaned child. You are sons of God through faith. You have been adopted and made an heir. Before, you were a child, an orphan. You were living as a slave under a guardian. And the guardian was the LAW. But, now you have been adopted and made an heir.

Look at 4:3 - ³ *So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.* Another translation says, the “elementary principles of the world.” There has been some dispute between scholars over what these elementary principles are. Is Paul talking about beginnings in knowledge or faith, elementary things? Or is he talking about ascribing deity or supernatural characteristics to things like earth, and fire, and water? Or the sun, moon, and stars? I’m inclined to side with those who think Paul saying, “listen... when you were children, the law was like an elementary school teacher or tutor... teaching you the elementary things of religious and spiritual life...” The LAW was revealing to you, your need. That you on your own, apart from God’s doing and intervention, we’re no different than a slave.

BUT Paul, uses that word. v. 4 – *But... when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

In the fullness of time... At just the right time... In God’s time... There are a number of ways we could look at this and study it. There are a lot of very good historical and sociological factors that many scholars and students of the Bible have pointed out about that particular time and place in the world making it the RIGHT time.

Was it because of the Roman roads, or roman law? Or the way the Roman empire was connecting the world? Was it because of the Greek Hellenization of the world... linking it in a more common language and philosophy? Those may all indeed be factors. BUT, let us remember that first and foremost- it was the “fullness of time,” because God decided it was.

Galatians 4:4 is describing an inbreaking of God into the world in a new way. God sent his Son, born of a woman, born UNDER the law. This is incarnation. This is God in the flesh. God come to dwell amongst us. How does Adoption into God’s Family work? It takes an inbreaking of God upon this world. So that you and I might be redeemed. Purchased, from under the law as slaves and adopted as sons and daughters. Made heirs of God.

And Paul is telling them throughout this letter, “this is true of you. You ALREADY are heirs! Sons and daughters of God. In fact, when you were baptized. You were baptized INTO Christ. You PUT ON Christ. You have CLOTHED yourselves with Christ.

I saw a scene in a recent tv show where one person was left in his boss’ office alone. He’s been angling for this same job for a while now. And while he’s on his own he goes behind the desk and he sits down in the chair with a big smile on his face, imagining to himself that one day soon it will be his chair and all that comes with it.

Paul is saying, “You don’t have to imagine!! You are ALREADY sons! So, why would you want to go back?? Why would you want to go back under the law, to be a slave again, to be under those elementary things again?”

For the Christian, we experience what John Calvin calls a “double grace.” We have been redeemed from under the law, our sin taken away, and the righteousness of Christ placed upon us. We have been adopted into the family of God with all the rights and privileges of heirs. Heirs of the great promise that all Christ enjoyed with God, we now enjoy through Him. We are clothed with his robes. We PUT on Christ.

And, if you’re going to say that Christ is your “clothing,” it means that your ultimate identity is found in him. “Christ, Our Life...” It means to think of Christ constantly. To have his spirit infuse everything you think, say, and do.

This goes so far beyond the keeping of rules and regulations. Paul is countering the teaching that a baptized Christian needs some additional commitment to the law to be fully accepted by God. Another way of thinking about this might simply be to say, “The gospel, grows us up.” “We come of age in the gospel.” Which is what makes the Christian gospel so unique.

Because our temptation as we’ve seen throughout this letter, and the temptation I’ve felt throughout my life, is to think that if I can drill down deeper into doing all of the right things, well, then maybe I’ll get a little better taste of God’s blessings and riches for me. Maybe my life will go a little better for me.

And that's when all of us need to hear Paul's surprised, shocked, confused cry, "Hey! You're already a Son. You're already a daughter. You've been redeemed and adopted! Stop that!!.... IT's yours. Christ is yours! Christ is your Life!" That's how adoption into the family of God works.

But, secondly, 2 - Who is Adoption into God's family for?

You see, for Paul, the problem is not limited to what do I need to do to be right with God, and be a follower of Jesus? He sees, that if you go back to placing this burden back on yourselves, you will then absolutely limit who can then be a legitimate follower of Jesus.

Why? Well the main issue was that in order to be truly Jewish, you needed to be circumcised. And if that becomes the criteria for participation in the Galatian church, then that will absolutely exclude women, slaves, and foreigners. It puts them in the category of "other." Because women cannot be circumcised, and slaves were not circumcised, and Greeks or foreign men would have to be in order to believe. Most Jewish teachers believed that women, gentiles, and children were exempt from biblical commandments.

So, what does Paul say? All of you who have believed, who have been baptized, who are sons of God... look at v. 28 - *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* ²⁹ *And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

If you belong to Christ, if you have PUT ON Christ, you are an heir. You belong to him, which in its historical context, would have been a revolutionary statement by Paul.

What the infiltrators are promoting, is not only additional things in order to follow Jesus properly, but they are promoting a restriction for who can participate in them. And once again, Paul connects them back to what they are supposed to already understand. He takes them all the way back to Abraham.

In Genesis 12, when God first calls Abram, he picks him out and establishes him as his man. "From you Abraham, I will build a family that will be a blessing to all the nations."

My favorite professor in Seminary, the one who had the most impact on me, was Dr. Richard Pratt. He used to speak often about the importance of Abraham and this initial promise of God that Abraham's house would bless the world. He would say, right here we see that God is a God of mission. And he would use this example. He would say when you look at an older house, many older houses have had renovation work, or have had editions built on.

I'm still new here at Park Road I'm learning the building. I'm always wondering when this was added, or trying to think back to what it must have looked like years ago. But, he would say, almost always you can tell in an older home when something wasn't a part of the original floor plan. This was added on years later. Then he would say, the mission of God, to see all peoples of the world blessed and brought into God's family, was NOT a late edition that was drawn up after the death and resurrection of Jesus. This was NOT Paul's plan. To see Gentile and Jew, slave and free, men and women, from every culture and place, was part of God's Original floor plan. It was his promise to Abraham.

And it was echoed throughout the Old Testament, even when God was judging Israel. Like in Joel 2:28-29 - *"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.*

Who is Adoption into God's family for? It is for all those who PUT on Christ. Who receive his work. Who are redeemed and adopted.

And, just like this pushed the Galatians- it pushes us. It causes us to step back and to ask ourselves, "is what I'm placing on other people restricting them, or keeping them from seeing themselves as an adopted child of God?" Maybe another way to think about it, for those within the family of God- "am I limiting or restricting others from truly knowing and feeling and believing that they are an adopted child of God?" When instead, we're called as brothers and sisters to be reminding each other, just like Paul is reminding us here, that you are already an heir! "Believe that brother. Believe and trust that sister."

Finally, 3 – What is Adoption into God's Family Doing for you? For me?

v. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

When the Christian puts on Christ- when he or she is united to Christ, it is the Spirit of Jesus, God's Son, that is sent into our hearts. And what does He do? He cries out for us to God. He brings us into this intimate relationship with God, in which we... little ol me... little ol you, can call on God and come to him just as Jesus does. "Abba..." Which means, Papa, or daddy- an endearing term.

That's how true sons and daughters interact with a loving Father. And when we do, here's what it begins to do for you and me...

1) It changes the way we love others.

With both the people we love and the people we struggle to love and embrace. The gospel begins to go to work in us and because it's the spirit of the Son in our hearts, it's as if Jesus takes our really weak, terrible love for others and makes it something we can't. Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that freeing? And, shouldn't that make us love others more? Because even though we know we don't do it well.... We believe Jesus by his spirit is going to take over.

But, 2) The Spirit of Jesus in our hearts continues to say to me, and you, that we are loved and accepted by God as his sons and daughters...

I come from a family of adoption. My brother, who is a few years younger than me, was adopted at birth. And, so he's always been with us. And I've always known he was adopted. My brother has always known he was adopted. It was something my parents were very open about. Adoption is a wonderful thing. It's something more Christians need to be doing. I believe it's perhaps the single greatest thing we can do to communicate the value of life to the world. But, adoption is very hard. And, I've said this to others... I think within the evangelical church in particular, we celebrate adoption, and "gotcha days," and we should. We absolutely should.

But, we also need to recognize the difficulties adoption can bring into the lives of both children and parents. We don't hear enough from adults who have been adopted. Or from Parents of adopted adult children. Because without fail, no matter how healthy the family dynamics. No matter how adjusted and comfortable every adopted child is with their being adopted. The questions

will always be there. They will always linger. And parents of adult adopted children know this. All you can do is continue to walk along side and affirm your love and acceptance. That all you have is meant for them. They are yours. Always and forever.

And the same is true for us as adopted children of God. We hear it and we know it... but the questions linger. We wonder. Is it really for me? "Yeah, but God I don't know. Maybe it's not for me..." And we live with this fear of being rejected or abandoned by God. "God, can I really believe that your promise is for me?"

One of my favorite films of the last few years is the movie *Boyhood*. It won a number of Oscars. It was really unusual because it was filmed over 12 years and followed the same actors as they grew and changed over those 12 years. Every year they would come together for about two weeks to film this movie. Quite a commitment.

And, my absolute favorite scene – it's a difficult scene for me, but it's my favorite. The young boy who the film follows as he grows from a 6 year old to an 18 year old... He loves his dad's car. His parents are divorced and his dad has this classic muscle car. And in one scene, when the boy is about 12, his dad says, "*you know one day this car will be yours.*"

Later in the story, the boy is 16, and in those few years his dad has remarried and now has a new baby, a new family. And they come to pick up Mason, the 16 year boy for a trip. And, when the dad pulls up, he's in a minivan. The baby is in a car seat. But, as he gets in, the son says, "*Where's your car?*"

His dad says... "*Oh, I sold it.*"

And the son is shocked... "*What!?*"

His dad says, "*Yeah, I had to sell it, we needed to get the van for the family...*"

So, for a good bit of the ride, the son is giving him the silent treatment...

Finally, he erupts and says, "*You promised me that that would be my car one day!! You promised!*"

And his dad, says, "*What? I didn't say that, Did I? Did I say that?*"

He didn't remember. The father didn't remember the promise he made his Son. He sold the car without even telling him. It was just a comment he made

in passing to his son. It was a throw away comment. But the son... the son held onto that. It was a promise. It was in his heart.

Let me tell you... as a Father to my own young boy, THAT is haunting. Because I know... I KNOW, there are things I will say to my son, that I have already said to my Son, that he will hold on to. That he will set his heart on, and I will forget. I will break my promise.

Friends, if you are a child of God, you are an heir of the promise. And every good gift comes from the Father. Every good thing that Jesus has is for you and for me. And we have a Father who has never forgotten His promise. And he will never forget his promise to you.

If we can just receive and embrace that Christ is Our Life.
It is for you. You are ALREADY sons and daughters of God.
Do not turn back.

Let's Pray.