

## **1. Galatians 4**

### **Born to be free!**

**2.** Born free is a film about a lion that was hand reared. As it grows Joy Adamson realises that it cannot remain a pet and sets out to give it its freedom so that it can live as God intended it to. That is the message of Galatians. God in Christ offers real freedom to be the people he intended us to be. Religion, in contrast, tells us what we can or cannot do to have a relationship with God. Our gospel is that the straight jacket of religion never ever satisfies God. Sin itself condemns us to the prison of guilt. Instead Jesus died on a cross for our sins so we are free from the punishment that we deserve. We are free from the struggle to obey all the rules to survive. We are free to live God's way. What was happening in Galatia was that having joyfully received Christ as Lord and Saviour, some Jewish Christians were pushing that all Christians had to observe the Torah – the Jewish rulebook. As we have seen last week Paul is appalled at the idea that having received salvation as a free gift, we were then to be controlled by the very rules he had found brought no peace or joy.

**3.** Lets start back with the end of last week's chapter.  
<sup>26</sup>*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,*  
<sup>27</sup>*for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* <sup>28</sup>*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* <sup>29</sup>*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Just as it was important last week, this is the key to chapter 4.

It is that, in Christ, we are sons and daughters of the living God and adult ones able to inherit.

**4.** So chapter 4 begins with an explanation of what being a son or daughter of God means.

He then speaks of his concern for the Galatians.

After which he moves on the Abraham's seed and speaks of Sarah and Hagar as exemplars of Grace and Law.

He is building up to the central statement of this letter in chapter 5:1

***1** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

**5.** If you have turned from your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ you are a son or daughter of God. All of you. What are you? A son or daughter of the living God. Jesus is the firstborn, we are his brothers and sisters. Enjoy the thought! God does not save you just to be a slave or acolyte or even to go to some inferior part of heaven; you are a son or daughter. 'All one in Christ Jesus' places you at the centre of heaven, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God and in terms of our relationship with God that is where you are. Conceptually it sounds a bit crowded, millions of blood-bought Christians all on the same seat, but you get the idea.

Paul continues:

*<sup>1</sup>What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. <sup>2</sup>He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. <sup>3</sup>So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. <sup>4</sup>But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup>Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

It is a little unusual for our nuclear family to get our head round the homes Paul was familiar with. But you can get the gist of it. In a Roman household you would have servant, slaves, children, all managed by stewards, etc. The head of the house would leave instructions in his will how and when the children inherited. If he died before the children were old enough, his steward would take over until they were old enough. In English Royal terms, it is called a regency.

You are I were all born sinners. We are slaves to sin. We are subject to the basic principles of the world. We are born to die. We are born to suffer grief and misery because of sin. In Paul's terms the guardians are monsters of our own creation, the consequences of sin.

But there is hope ‘when the time had fully come, God sent his Son’. 70 billion human beings alive on this planet live out their lives but one man steps into this world and breaks the tyranny of sin. He was born of a woman – a human being. He was born under Law, subject to the same limitations you and I have, guided by the same rules that we are given, but his purpose was to redeem us who are under the Law . Notice the repetition of the word ‘under’ in this passage. We are the ‘under’ people. In verse 2 under guardians, in verse 3 under basic principles, in verse 4 under the Law which is repeated three times.

Do you recognise the ‘under’ destiny? The best we have is still to be under the curse of sin and death. Judged by the 10 commandments as failures. Most of us cannot keep one of them when Jesus reveals their full impact. We envy, we lie, we steal, we hate, we lust, we abuse our family, God’s plan for our lives, take God’s name lightly, we have our idols and celebrity culture, Jesus is not our first choice. And as a result we are ‘under’ doomed to punishment and death. But Jesus has come, right into the world we know to redeem us from slavery and to release us to be sons and daughters of God. The expression here is son only because in Jewish Law the sons inherit. In our gospel all are sons, male and female that is in 3:28. All of us inherit the blessings of sonship. Much will be made in the coming months of Charles III who became King with 5 palaces and several other estates, But you are not adopted into the royal family but God’s family.

Regardless of your nationality, economic status, male or

female or other when you put your faith in the grace of God you were born again a Son of God with a palace in heaven and the Holy Spirit in our hearts The full rights of Sons here is explained as ‘God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts’

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus. You want to know what effect he will have on your life? He will transform you to be like Jesus. And Jesus called God ‘daddy’ “Abba, Father”. So if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus, I want you to cry out this morning ‘Abba, Father’

## ABBA, FATHER

A moment of prayer as you let the Holy Spirit fill your mind and heart and express the core of Christ-likeness. Abba, Father.

Verse 7.

*<sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

Let’s move on.

Verse 8-11

*<sup>8</sup>Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup>But now that you know God -- or rather are known by God -- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over*

*again? <sup>10</sup> You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

Don't miss Paul's main point here in verse 9. It is about knowing God or being known by him. It is living in the relationship of Father/Son knowing and being known. Here that is developed into knowing and being known. You are a Son of God. You are known personally by Jesus. And in turn, you know Jesus. This should transform our prayer life as we recognise that when we talk to God we are talking to Abba, Father, who knows you better than you know yourself and cares about you. So you will want to know him more in turn.

READ verses 12-20

*<sup>12</sup> I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. <sup>13</sup> As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. <sup>14</sup> Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. <sup>15</sup> What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup> Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?*

*<sup>17</sup> Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. <sup>18</sup> It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not*

*just when I am with you. <sup>19</sup> My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup> how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!*

**9.** The Galatians were being derailed from that by ritualism, turning knowing into carrying out sacred actions and losing the direct relationship with God made possible and practical through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Never let rules get in the way of relationship. The rules God gave tell us when we fail. The relationship we have in the Holy Spirit, having enlivened our consciences, directs us to the forgiveness we have in Christ. So we confess our sins and are forgiven. The break in our relationship is healed.

Paul's frustration that this lesson was being unlearned is palpable. Here rather than the anger of chapter 3 is headache. He arrived sick, possibly with an eye problem he suffered from or maybe malaria and yet they listened to him and responded to the Good News. Now they seemed to have thrown it away. Verse 18 is very pointed in today's extreme society. "It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good." Fundamentalism has replaced good doctrine. We see aggressive intolerance of others the mood of our time. We see it in international politics with sanctions, barriers, trade restrictions and in the case of Russia a war against 'fascists', In religion, over sexuality

and Woke issues, We shout what we believe rather than win others to Christ.

**10.** What follows only makes sense if you understand that Abraham had a wife called Sarah who was promised a son but was barren. Hagar was Sarah's slave who was provided as substitute child bearer and she bore Abraham a Son named Ishmael. But he was not God's promised Son and when in God's time Sarah had a child, called Isaac, in old age, Ishmael was displaced and sent away. You can read the full story in Genesis 16 and 21.

Read 21-31

*<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.*

*<sup>24</sup> These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labour pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."*

*<sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. <sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." <sup>31</sup> Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.*

Paul uses the two mothers as illustrations of the point he is hammering away at.

Hagar, the slave, bears a normal son, Ishmael. This is normal human experience without Christ. Sarah bears a son of promise. This is the Christian, born of the Spirit of God because of the promise of Jesus as in for example John 3:16

*<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

He then moves on to two places. Sinai where the Law was given which relates to Jerusalem with its rules to follow and the New Jerusalem which is heaven where those who put their faith and trust in the promises of God will go. The place of freedom.

Rather than analyse this for a view on the spiritual position of Ishmael or Isaac, keep your eye on the main theme – freedom does not come from slavery to the law but by receiving the promise. **11**. So where are you in your

day to day life? Are you living as a child of the Law, believing that by doing all the right things you will please God or are you a Son or daughter of God and living in a relationship reflecting that of Jesus, knowing God as “Abba, Father” or being known by him as loved child. Only sonship leads to the freedom we will hear of next week.

Take the opportunity to meditate on these words in Galatians 4:4-7

*<sup>4</sup>But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup>Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*