

Heirs, not Slaves

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you've seen images of POWs or prisoners of war languishing in the camp. They're often heartbreaking images, aren't they?

Men stripped down to their shorts, skin and bones. In fact, I had a few slides that I found on Google. I was going to put it up, but I thought better of it. Now, if you ask any of them after they were freed whether they'd ever return to that camp, I'm pretty sure that they would say, no, never.

It's not just the deprivation, is it? But the loss of freedom as well. And anyone once freed would never in their right mind want to return again to a prison.

And yet what we have in this letter to the Galatians is Paul saying that the Galatians are toying with that very idea of going back to slavery even after they're free.

Now, to the Galatians, and some of you who have been coming over the weeks, you know this, what they were thinking to do is not actually go back into slavery literally, but to take up the law as an add-on to their faith in Jesus.

[1 : 15] They're not saying they want to ditch Jesus. They simply want to add things like circumcision, eating kosher food, or observing Jewish festivals. But Paul's argument is that if they really knew the freedom the Son brings, then obeying the law, the Jewish law, is to become slaves again.

And so if you look at the outline, you'll see that my first point is headed, the freedom the Son's coming brings. And in the first bullet from verses 1 to 3, Paul explains that before the Son came, the law functioned to enslave Israel, even though they were heirs to the promise.

So if you look at the Bible in verse 1, Paul says, What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.

The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also when you were underage, we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

Here the comparison is with an earthly inheritance. So a child who may have inherited a rich estate is still until they come of age under the control of a trustee.

[2 : 38] The wealth that they have is locked up, their funds are held in trust, and their lives are strictly controlled by these guardians. So much so, they are actually no better than slaves.

And although God had intended the law to be something else, something that the Israelites would obey willingly, that is not what became of them. Instead, the law served to become a burden for them, a constricting influence on their lives, on what they could and couldn't do.

Now we do it ourselves, don't we? Perhaps we start out with a desire for something, to do something. Perhaps it's to buy our parents a lovely birthday gift each year.

I'm sure all of you desire to do that. But then after a year or two of doing it, we start running out of ideas. Besides the jumper for that, what else can we buy?

Besides that pot plant for mum? And so the whole exercise, doing it year after year, starts to become like a chore. The joy goes out of our desire for it, and we end up just, you know, whatever, just get whatever that came out, better than nothing, you know.

[3 : 57] And the whole sort of intent of what we wanted to do just gets lost. Well, that was how the law was for the Israelites, particularly as they began to realize it was never going to be something they would obey perfectly.

Now, not all the Jews were like that, but by and large, it became a ritual in which they just went through the motions of. Now, Paul, in verse 3, doesn't describe their way of living as slaves to the law.

Rather, he says that they are slaves under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. Now, he uses this phrase because he wants to draw the connection between the Jews and the Gentiles, that both are enslaved, the Jews under the law and the Gentiles under their pagan religion.

Both are trapped within having to pay homage to sort of cosmic deities in one form or another. They had to do all these things in order to secure a favorable destiny for their lives.

It's almost as if they believed in something called fate. Now, even today, we hear people speak in these ways, don't we?

[5 : 14] About the stars being aligned for us or having someone smile down on us from heaven. It's that sense that, you know, there are cosmic forces that are directing our destinies.

That if we pay due homage through rituals or superstition, then perhaps the right cards will fall our way. Now, I have to say again that that's certainly not how God intended for the law to work.

The law was meant to help Israel to truly love God, to nurture their faith and their relationship with Him. But because the law contained certain practices that were ritualistic in flavor, things that were, you know, festivals that were tied to the seasons or to the moon cycle or whatever, it became easy for Israel to simply observe these things slavishly and therefore lose sight of the real purpose God intended for them.

And the Galatians themselves would have experienced the same thing with their own pagan religion before they became Christians. They would have engaged in ritualistic worship to idols or to the stars or to the moons or whatever, hoping that the gods would look favorably on them by whatever they did and then bless them.

And so Paul is saying that before Christ, Jews and Gentiles are in the same boat, simply practicing religion instead of having a lively faith in a personal God.

[6 : 51] Now today, Australians, if you look around, you don't see many of them offering animal sacrifices or indulging in pagan rituals. But I still think that the idea of fate and destiny is actually really strong.

It's very hard to shake, but people are still, in one sense, steeped in superstition. They very much think in terms of luck and chance playing a big role in the outcomes of their lives.

So if you recall with the grand final last month, did you remember what happened to the Magpies banner? Yeah? Before the team ran through it?

It got torn, didn't it? Before the team got a chance to go through it. And many people, you know, on Facebook and elsewhere said, oh, that must be a bad omen. It turned out they lost as well, but, you know.

What about the idea of feng shui or jomancy, you know, where you would orientate certain objects or doors or windows in order to bring good luck? It's big among the Asians, but, you know, I've been told that now even the Aussies are getting into it.

[8 : 00] Likewise, you hear stories of sports people who follow strict rituals thinking that that will help them to win. I think one top tennis player always wears the same underpants, I think, before a big final.

He won one time and he thought, if I wear it again and he won, I've got to keep wearing it. Now, where do all these things stand from? It's from the belief that their fate is in the hands of forces outside their control.

That if they did this ritual or did this certain thing or other, then perhaps they could maybe tilt these forces or these gods or whatever they believe in favor of what they want.

And Paul, therefore, says that it's only when we have Christ that we are freed from this mindset. So look now at verse 4 and 5 where he says, when the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship.

For the Jews, Christ's coming freed them from the law. When finally, Israel realized that they were unable to obey the law and needed a savior to come and rescue them, well, God then sent his son to provide such a savior.

[9 : 20] But Jesus comes born of a woman so that as one who is fully human, he is exposed as it were but not enslaved to the elemental forces of the world.

He has the same human nature as us but he's not enslaved to the dictates of that nature. Likewise, Jesus was born also under the law.

Again, subject to and required to obey the law but yet again, he's not enslaved to sin or to the law. And so by fully obeying the law without sinning, Jesus is able, Paul says, to redeem those under the law.

That is, to buy their freedom so that they may become sons of God. Now, if you were here last week, you recall me saying that the word son or sonship is used because Paul is trying to connect our blessings as heirs whether we're male or female with Jesus' own inheritance as God's son.

And then, as he continues to make this point here in this passage and in fact, I've noticed that he's so keen to show this relationship that actually, in this six verses or so, he does not actually use the name of Jesus.

[10 : 35] He simply refers to Jesus as the son in order to be able to draw this connection between Jesus as God's son and us as sons of God.

Now, most prison rescues that you see on the TV or in movies require, you know, some force, you know, some SWAT team or whatever to storm the prison by force, right, in order to break the prisoners out.

That's normally how it happens. But, notice here that with Jesus, it's actually totally different because what Jesus does is he willingly enters the prison and he willingly serves the full sentence for everyone in order to be able to buy their freedom.

And this sentence is served by him going to the cross for us and therefore paying the penalty for our sins. So, friends, if there is anyone here today who does not know Christ, then can I ask you whether you've ever longed for this kind of freedom?

Do you ever wish that you no longer feel like you're subject to fate or luck or whatever other unpredictable force in the world is? Would you rather instead be known by God, the Creator, in a personal and loving way?

[11 : 58] well, if that's your desire, then friends, the only way is to come to him through faith in Jesus because it's only through Jesus that we are freed from slavery and made heirs in Christ.

Now, that's exactly what Helen and Felix did some months ago and I want to encourage you to follow in their footsteps. So, if that's of any interest to you, then please come and speak to me afterwards.

I'd love to talk to you. Well, now, Paul isn't done yet with these blessings in Christ because now in verses 6 and 7, he speaks about yet another great gift and so he continues verse 6, because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba Father.

So, you are no longer a slave but God's child and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. Paul has just said that God sent his son to free us from the law but now we learn that God has also sent the spirit of his son in order that we might relate to him in the same way that Jesus does.

Now, this is quite mind-boggling actually because do you notice who's the one that's calling out Abba Father? Look at that verse. It's not actually us but the spirit in our hearts because without Jesus' spirit that's not something that we can do by ourselves to call out to the father but with the spirit of God's son then what we have now is the relationship which is not just between a creator and a creature but actually this relationship that we enjoy with God is part and parcel of the relationship that the father has with the son Jesus.

[13 : 57] That's the kind of relationship that's the kind of intimacy that we're actually talking about. God is our father because Jesus is our brother and you know our destiny whatever we're looking forward to in this world is actually tied up with Jesus' glory.

We can't have a better future than that. That's why as a Christian there's simply no room for superstition or bad luck or fate.

There's nothing random about our lives as if you know we could fall out of God's blessing. No, God loves us and knows us because of Jesus even if from time to time our circumstances may tell us otherwise.

Our lives if we are in Christ are actually secure in the palm of God's hand because why? We're heirs in Christ. Now Paul says all of this to the Galatians and even though this is true of them as we look now Paul can't believe that they knowing all this would begin even to flirt with returning to slavery.

What folly is how he thinks. And so in the remainder of our passage Paul pleads and persuades them not to. So in verse 8 Paul says formerly when you did not know God you were slaves to those who are by nature are not gods.

[15 : 24] But now that you know God or better or rather are known by God how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

You are observing special days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my effort on you. Paul is saying compare the pair you know known by God on the one hand or slaves to weak and miserable forces on the other.

Why would you choose the latter? Do they not recall when they were slaves worshipping idols who by nature are not gods? Now again as I said earlier to be fair to them they are not actually returning to paganism but they are toying with the idea of obeying the law instead.

But as Paul has already said that is tantamount to doing the same thing. And so Paul pleads with them don't let these Jews deceive you. Just because the law came from God doesn't mean God now wants us to keep obeying it.

The law has served its purpose as I said last week and now that Christ has come were no longer under the law. Further Paul also encourages them to remember the joy with which they received the gospel.

[16 : 38] So verse 12 I plead with you brothers and sisters become like me for I became like you you did me no wrong. Paul too once lived as a Jew under the law but when Christ came and he finally believed his eyes were open he became like a Gentile that is he was free from the law.

And furthermore he did so in order to be able to preach the gospel to the Galatians. It was no imposition on him he says. It was no big deal for him to give up the law because he wants them to be like him.

And what joy they had when they first heard it. So Paul goes on to say as you know it was because of any illness that I first preached the gospel to you and 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 and as if I was Christ Jesus himself. Such was their joy for the gospel when they heard it that they didn't mind at all that you know Paul's illness was being imposed on them.

On the contrary they welcomed him like an angel they actually welcomed him like Christ himself. That's how gladly they received the gospel when they first heard it. So Paul wonders now why things have changed.

[17 : 53] Where then is your blessing of me now? I can testify that if you could have done so back then you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. So people think that's a reference that his illness was something to do with his eyes.

But then he says have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Paul's saying it can't be me I haven't changed my message I'm still preaching the gospel and if you accepted it back then you know why are you treating me like I'm an enemy now?

Why are you rejecting the truth which is the same truth? Well the only reason that I can think of and which is quite clear from the letter is because of the lies of the Jews.

Paul warns that their zeal the zeal of these Jews is malicious. Verse 17 Those people are zealous to win you over but for no good.

What they want to do is alienate you from us so that you may have zeal for them. It is fine to be zealous provided the purpose is good and to be so always not just when I am with you my dear children for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is forming you how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone because I am perplexed about you.

[19 : 12] You see Paul actually understands their zeal he sympathizes with the fact that they want to please God but even though their heart is in their right place in one sense their zeal is misdirected observing circumcision festivals food laws none of these pleases God because they actually take away from what Christ has done.

Now Paul knew what it means to be a zealot right he was one himself when he was a Pharisee he was thinking all the while as he was a Pharisee that what he was doing was serving God and doing it to the best that he can only when Christ confronted him and appeared to him on the road to Damascus did he realize that actually it was the exact opposite of what he was doing that he was actually persecuting Jesus and so if the Galatians really wanted to be zealous then they needed to be zealous for the gospel you've got to be zealous for the right thing do what they did when Paul was with them in the first place and to then keep doing it even when he's not around and friends you know as Christians that's a common trap that we can fall into you see many of us like Helena and Felix today will start out with great enthusiasm for the gospel you know as we're being prepared for our baptism we hear rightly that we're saved by faith alone and that as Christians we are to stand firm in that assurance but then as time goes on sometimes we get tempted to want more don't we perhaps we hear other Christians sharing about how their faith is growing so much or we hear or see hear people talk about miracles in their lives and of course given the rage now with things like mentoring and life coaching you know we're constantly being told we need to better ourselves and so we take that into our Christian life as well we need to be better Christians and so we become dissatisfied with the gospel but Paul's point to the Galatians is this

Christ is all you need by his spirit we are children and heirs of God everything we need in this life and in eternity we already have and God is actually working in us according to his plan we don't need to become more righteous before God's eyes God's Christ's righteousness is all we need and so all we need to do really is to keep trusting in God and putting our faith in his son and I know that sometimes this seems hard because you know a lot of times in our lives we're being taught to live not by faith but by sight seeing is believing everyone keeps saying and so we want to look for tangible things for our security you know being able to tick off a list of achievements that's tangible right you know when you're 50% through it looking at that bank balance in our bank accounts that's tangible right thinking that if we come to church regularly or we do our quiet time for 20 minutes a day or give 10% of our income to God or we follow whatever other spiritual practice that all of this would please God well again that's all like really tangible things that we can measure but do you know what it's also legalistic and ritualistic and it's the exact opposite of faith it may seem like zeal for God but in reality as Paul says it's simply returning to slavery because we think we need these things in order to please God or be right with him

Helen read today from Exodus chapter 16 do you recall that reading after the Israelites were freed from slavery as they entered the desert having to trust God for their food what did they do they started to grumble didn't they to ask Moses to what let them go back to slavery like why would they want to be enslaved again did they forget how the Egyptians treat them well if you look at verse 2 you'll be able to and I've got it on the screen you'll be able to see their reason they said that they were even willing to die in Egypt as long as they had tangible security that is as long as they knew where their next meal came from pots of food is what they called it whereas by contrast when you're in the desert what happens all they could do was actually trust God to provide and friends that's the same with us

God's desire is that we trust in his word and believe that the promises that are in it are now fulfilled in his son Jesus if you think about it there are really only two tangible things by which we cling on by faith the first is God's word and the second is God's fulfillment of it which he accomplishes by sending his son Jesus to die and then to rise to life and that's the only assurances we need actually to know that God loves us and has saved us and has made us his heir in Christ because he promised he would do it and because he sent his son to fulfill that promise anything else we add to these things in order to make it more tangible for us becomes things that enslave us it becomes things that take away our whole hearted trust in God so if we chase after these things it's almost as if we're saying

[25 : 02] God your promises are not enough your word is not enough or God what your son has done is not enough so brothers and sisters we must guard against legalism that is the idea that somehow the rules we follow or the good things that we do as a Christian make us more righteous before God and likewise we must also guard against ritualism that is somehow if we went through the motions of religion at church or in our private spiritual activities then somehow again that draws us closer to God now some of these habits are actually helpful I'm not saying don't do quiet time and all these things but if we turn these things into a checklist an assurance then it's the equivalent of returning to slavery under the law it's returning to the very thing that Jesus has freed us by his death so Felix and Helen what a wonderful thing it is to see you baptized today and let me encourage you then to keep remembering the gospel and to keep standing firm in it there's nothing more you need to be heirs of God and brothers and sisters that's the same for the rest of us as well if we believe in Jesus then we're no longer slaves but truly free as heirs of God that was to be a about you truth you a