

A Perfect Portrait of Saving Faith, Part 2

Scripture: Galatians 4:21–5:1

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Let me encourage you to turn back to the book of Galatians and chapter 4. And I'm going to give you a kind of warning up front that your powers of concentration may be tested today because of the uniqueness of this passage. It is sanctified genius that is behind this in the case of the apostle Paul, and even beyond that, supernatural in the case of the Holy Spirit who also is behind every word. It is a remarkable, unforgettable, powerful, forceful passage, and yet one that is rarely, if ever, addressed.

We're in chapter 4 of Galatians, and we're looking at verse 21 down through chapter 5, verse 1, where this section ends. So, let me read it to you again.

"Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is figuratively speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai baring children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

"For it is written, 'Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.'

"And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

"But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.'

"So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman. It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

Now, I know reading that again leaves you sort of confused until we get into the details of this and it all opens up and becomes incredibly wonderful. But let's begin at the end with this statement in verse 1, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." That is a summary of what Paul says in this passage, and, in fact, in the whole letter to the Galatians.

Christian believers have been set free. That's what he is saying: they have been set free by Christ. Christian believers are free. We have learned that they are free from the bondage to the law that exists before salvation. And he says here, "Now that you are free, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." You are free; don't go back into slavery.

Now, what is he talking about? What is this freedom, and what is this slavery? Well, let's think about that a bit. Most people – just people in the world – think that freedom is being able to do exactly what you want to do when you want to do it and have no one constrain you, restrain you, limit you, judge you, or pronounce you guilty. The idea is that you are literally free to do whatever your heart and your will desire.

That's the freedom that the world seeks. And there is a measure of freedom in it; they are free to select their sin. But because they are, by nature, in bondage and slavery to sin, it is a false freedom; it is a delusion. But those who live with that understanding of freedom - that I'm free to do whatever I want to do, whenever I want to do it, with whomever I want to do it – those people who think they're free see then the church, and the Bible, and the Word of God, and the commands of Scripture as restrictive, restraining, condemning, judgmental. And so, there's hostility toward the truth of God and toward true Christianity.

False forms of Christianity can roll with this kind of perception of freedom by eliminating anything that's condemning, but that then adds to a false sense of freedom, a false kind of Christianity. There is no question about the fact that the Bible condemns sin. It condemns all sin and every sin, no matter who is doing it.

The Bible goes further than that and says that sin is not some kind of external impulse. It is from the heart; it is profoundly deep inside every human being. It rises up from within us. We are sinful to the core, driven by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

But as we live more and more in a society where freedom is celebrated, the Bible becomes more the enemy of that freedom. The reality is these people are not free; they are in horrendous bondage. They are in bondage not just to their sin, but they are in bondage to the law in this sense. They are living in constant violation of the law of God for which there will be a sentence and a final judgment in eternal hell.

In John 8:34, Jesus said, "Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. There's no freedom in sinning. There is no freedom, believe me, in living under God's law and flaunting it.

You say, "Well, is everyone under God's law?"

God uses His law to evaluate every human being who has ever lived, and every violation of that law constitutes a terminal judgment that ends up in hell. There is no freedom to the person living that way. They are not free from the demands of the law; they are not free from the record of the Law Keeper, and they are not free from the penalty the Judge will impose on them. Every person is under a curse.

We saw that – didn't we? – back in chapter 3, verse 10, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." Violate one command in Scripture and you are

cursed. The only freedom there is comes when you are delivered from that curse.

And again, back in chapter 3 – you remember? – we read wonderfully verse 13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’” Christ redeems us from the curse of the law. And that redemption is applied to us through faith, we have learned in the book of Galatians, as well as the rest of Scripture. By putting our faith and trust in Christ, we are set free – set free from the bondage of the law, the tyranny of the law, and the judgment of the law. Christ alone has set us free. Again in John 8, our Lord said, “If the Son will set you free, you will be free for real.” Real freedom.

Now, once you come to Christ, you are free from the law in the sense that you are free from the penalties from the moral law. Because Christ bore all the penalties for you. There’s something else that comes into play, however, in Galatians that I want to make clear in your mind. As a believer in Christ, you are also free from the ceremonial and ritual laws that were part of Judaism, when God identified His people through Abraham, identified the nation Israel to be His witness people in the world.

Of course, there were moral laws which really are a reflection of the nature of God. Moral law is simply the radiating glory of God in precepts. But God also gave to Israel all kinds of ceremonial laws, all kinds of feasts and festivals, and Sabbaths, and new moons, and dietary laws, and clothing laws, and lots and lots of laws. Laws that related to society so that God could isolate them from the rest of the world and insulate them a little bit from the influence of idolatry.

Every believer in Jesus Christ is free from those, because that whole ceremonial, external, ritual law was abolished with the coming of Christ. That was all symbol. When the reality came, the symbols disappeared. That’s why there are no more dietary laws. “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” That’s why the apostle Paul said, “Don’t let anybody hold you to a new moon, a festival, or even a Sabbath day. That’s why there’s no more sacrificial system. The veil in the temple was rent from the top to the bottom, and there is no more priesthood except the priesthood of all believers who have direct access to God.

So, all that was external, all that was ritualistic, all that was formal, all that was symbolic is gone away in the reality of Christ. And there is no ethnic people of God any longer; there is only the people of God, Jew and Gentile, the church. We are the people of God, and we are not defined by any kind of externals.

So, there is no reason, if you have come to Christ, to feel like you should be bound by something that was given to define an ethnic people, the people of Israel in the Old Testament, symbols of what was yet to come. Since the fulfillment is here, those symbols play no role.

Now, why am I saying all this? Well, this helps us reset the book of Galatians for our lesson this morning. Let me help you with it. The Galatians had come to Christ. They are called brethren, in the passage I just read you, a couple of times. They are brothers in Christ. They are true believers, and they’re referred to as believers all through this letter. They had believed the gospel. They had been saved by faith alone in Christ alone. They had received the Holy Spirit, chapter 3, “having begun in the Spirit,” they had seen the power of God in regeneration, transformation, new life. They lacked nothing. They lacked absolutely nothing. They also had been so transformed, as all believers are, as

to love God and love Christ. That's what being a Christian is; it's loving Christ. Being a non-Christian is not loving Christ. "If any man doesn't love Christ, he's damned," 1 Corinthians 16:22 says.

So, Christians love Christ; they love God. And therefore, they love the glory of God manifesting itself even in the precepts of His holy law. So, they loved God, they loved Christ as all true believers do, and they loved the law. Like David, "Oh, how I love your law." And like Paul, "It's holy, just, and good." We don't always do what we want to do, but our affection is toward God, toward Christ, and toward that law which reflects His glory.

So, they're living in the newness of life, lacking nothing. Lacking nothing. The Holy Spirit has empowered them to both love and obey the moral law of God. But along come some very intentional teachers. They are Jewish teachers from Jerusalem. They claim to be Christians, to believe in Christ. And they come to these Gentiles, and they tell them, "You are not saved. You think you are; you are not. You cannot be saved until you acknowledge circumcision" – the physical act of circumcision – "as the mark of the blessing of God and until you keep all the ordinances, ceremonies, and rituals" - all the external symbols – "of Judaism."

In other words, this is what they believed. They believed that the foyer, the entrance into the house of God, into the kingdom of God, was through Judaism. There was so much pride that they thought no Gentile could come into the kingdom of God, into the Christian church, unless he became a proselyte to Judaism.

And so, what they were saying was, "You have to teach these Gentiles the old order of Mosaic ceremony, ritual, festival" – whatever – "before they can truly be saved." Now, where did this come from? What brought this idea to dog the steps of the apostle Paul throughout his entire ministry? There were always these Judaizing Jews following him around with this false gospel. Where did it come from?

A little back story. Okay? You remember the Pharisees? They were the dominant force in Judaism theologically. The Sadducees were the dominant force in terms of the power structure and the money because they ran the temple operation. But the Pharisees were the dominant theological influence in Judaism and had been for quite a while. They were people obsessed with the law. Literally obsessed with the law - and not with the internal elements of the law, but with the external. Because they were not regenerate, because they did not have a new heart, because they had not been truly converted, they couldn't do anything to change their hearts.

Jesus said about them that on the outside they were whitewashed, on the inside they were full of dead men's bones. They were hypocrites. He called them hypocrites. So, these hypocrites, who could not do anything about the wretchedness on the inside, painted up the outside. So, they became obsessed with the external features of the old covenant ritualism, formalism, externalism, symbolism – anything that was a visible sort of behavior that spelled piety or religiosity. They were into that.

At the same time, they were utterly neglecting the inside; they were wretched on the inside. Fastidious with the externals, utterly careless with the internal hidden virtues. They had no righteous character. So, there were no godly virtues; there was no love, mercy, compassion, humility, integrity, purity. Jesus said to them – this kind of spelled it out – "You tithe the mint and the anise and the

cumin” – these tiny little seeds they were tithing – “and you leave undone the weightier matters of the law like mercy and righteousness and justice.”

They were proud, hypocritical legalists. And they believed that they were earning their salvation by these external behaviors. They thought that the law was life to them, that the law was the source of life – spiritual life, eternal life. The truth was it was the source of death. The law was the source of death. That was Paul’s testimony. Remember, Paul was a Pharisee, and he thought the law was life to him. He said, “Those things I counted as gain.” He thought that was life to him. Romans 7 he says, “However, when I understood the gospel, I realized that the law was killing me.” Here again is the picture of the sinner who thinks he’s free, and he thinks he may be gaining some favor with God by whatever good things he does, or religious things he does. And what he thinks might give him life is killing him. For such heretical Jews, all their confidence – all of it – was in their fanatical obsession with ceremonies and rituals. Paul knew it well. He’d lived in it for years and years and been more zealous than other Pharisees. But the true gospel came to him, and the gospel said you’re not saved by adhering to the moral law, which you can’t do perfectly. So, that can’t save you.

You’re not saved by anything external, ceremonial, ritualistic, because there’s no power in that to save you. You’re saved only by faith in Jesus Christ. You do not have a righteousness of your own, but a righteousness given to you - the righteousness of God that comes to you through faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel came, and the gospel exploded on Paul’s mind on the Damascus Road. And then he was carried away for a couple of years into the desert while the Holy Spirit taught him in a tutorial to perfect his understanding of the glory of the gospel of faith. And then when he came out and began to travel around and preach, guess who followed him everywhere he went? These Judaizing ex-Pharisees followed him everywhere and dogged his steps. But they were following a man who knew them well. He became the archenemy of the legalists. He knew the true gospel, and he became the one who knew how to take care and take down this false gospel.

In fact, in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, the Jerusalem Council is meeting as the church is beginning to form, as the gospel is being preached to the Gentiles. Some concerns are rising; so, the Christian leaders of the church in Jerusalem get together. And at their meeting, this is how Acts 15 begins, “Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” There it is. That’s the Pharisees’ Judaizing message. And that poses a discussion.

Well, fortunately, Paul and Barnabas were there. Verse 2, “And Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them” – that is with those Judaizers – “the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.” Look, this has got to be settled. This has got to be settled. Paul has to go to Jerusalem. They have to have a high-level council. He does that.

Verse 4, “They arrive in Jerusalem, received by the church, the apostles, the elders, reported all that God had done.” What does Paul tell them? That God is saving Gentiles everywhere we go – every town, every city, every village, God is saving Gentiles. This is most wonderful. And he reports all of that.

But verse 5, “Some of the sect of the Pharisees” – there it is; there was a Pharisaic sect inside the Jerusalem Council, inside the church council at Jerusalem. They stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Law of Moses.” So, the apostles and elders came together to look into this matter. They had to destroy that false doctrine. And they did at that council. They came up with the right answer. They dismissed it for what it was: grave, heretical error. But that was not daunting to the false teachers. They still did everything they could to upset the ministry of the apostles, and particularly Paul.

So, they came to Galatia, and they told them, “You can’t be saved unless you become a Jewish proselyte first. The only way into the kingdom of God is through Judaism. So, you’ve got to acknowledge circumcision and all the ceremonies of the Mosaic order.

It seems in Acts 15 that there were some even in the church council there who needed some help with this issue. So, there were definitely some in Galatia who needed some help with it. So, Paul writes this letter to denounce this idea. He calls it a false gospel. He calls it a damnable gospel. He says, “Anybody who preaches it will be accursed.” And he asks, in chapter 3, verse 1, how the Galatians could have been so foolish to be bewitched by this teaching.

And then from chapter 3 to where we are, he launches into a defense of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, apart from any rituals attached to the Mosaic order. And that’s why he says, in verse 1 of chapter 5, “It is for freedom that Christ set us free; keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” The whole letter is a defense of the gospel of faith.

Now, in chapters 1 and 2, he defends it by his own personal experience, what God did in his life to reveal to him the gospel of faith. That’s chapters 1 and 2. Chapters 3 and 4, he defends it from Scripture. From Scripture. And we are now at the end of that scriptural section. He’s already made his defense of Scripture, and now, starting in verse 21, he gives an illustration to support his defense, and it is absolutely stunning. Stunning.

Notice down in verse 24, some of your Bible’s say “allegorically.” This is not an allegory; this is a figure of speech. This is an analogy. This is an illustration. It is an actual historical account from back in the book of Genesis. It simply serves as an illustration, and there’s a level of genius here that’s astonishing as he connects all the dots to make this illustration so powerful.

Now, he speaks to these Galatians who have been sucked into this idea that they have to go back to something they’ve never known – Judaism – in order to be saved. Verse 21, “Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?” If you’re going to go back under the law, you better listen to what the law says. And you could interpret that a lot of ways. But first you could say, “The law is there, the moral law is there to condemn.” You don’t want to go back under condemnation. The ceremonial law was there to define an ethnic people, in time past, under the old Mosaic covenant. You’re not part of that people. You’re not part of that people; you’re a part of the new people.

Ephesians says the middle wall between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, and we’re one new man, one body in Christ. But even beyond that, if you’re going to go back under the law, you better listen to what the law says. So, let me quote you a few things from the law, meaning the Old Testament. Here’s – here is his figure of speech; here is his analogy, his illustration. And he starts in verse 22 and goes down to the end of the chapter and into chapter 5.

Now, very quickly, follow it. Last time we looked at point 1, the historical illustration, verses 22 and 23, “It’s written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh and the son by the free woman through the promise.” This is the historic illustration. Abraham – everybody knew Abraham. He was, of course, the one from whom God gave birth to the entire nation. Abraham had two sons. He had two sons. There was Ishmael, the first one, and then there was, about 14 years later, Isaac. Now, they were born, he says, of two mothers. One mother was a bondwoman, a slave, and that was Hagar, the slave in the household of Abraham. Hagar. And one was born by the free woman, and that was Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

The son by the bondwoman, the slave Hagar, was born according to the flesh and the son by the free woman through the promise. Now, do I need to remind you about that? Abraham had only one wife, but God made a promise, “I’m going to give you a people; they’re going to come through your loins. You’re going to have a son, and beyond that, your people - your children - are going to number like the sand of the sea and the stars of heaven; this massive nation is going to come through your loins.” And they’re barren; they’re in their 80s. Abraham and Sarah, they’ve never been able to have a child. God says, “I’m going to give you a child; this is My promise to you. I will give you this promise.”

Sarah doesn’t believe it. So, Sarah thinks it’s going to depend on her to come up with a plan to accomplish this. So, Sarah goes to Abraham and says, “I think you ought to go into your – to my slave woman, Hagar, and get her pregnant, and that way we can fulfill the promise of God.” She is the slave, and Ishmael is born according to the flesh.

In other words, “God has a plan, but it’s up to us to fulfill it. We’ve got to do it in our own flesh, in our own strength, by our own machination.” So, Ishmael is born according to the flesh.

On the other hand, later on, when Abraham is 100 and Sarah’s 96, God does a miracle in Sarah’s womb and she brings forth a son miraculously conceived in her between the two of them – Abraham and Sarah – not a virgin birth, but a miracle birth in barren people beyond the point of birth. The Bible says they were as good as dead in terms of child production.

So, God had a promise. In Hagar and Ishmael, they attempted to fulfill the promise of God in the flesh. But Abraham and Sarah, by the power of God, fulfilled the promise of God by faith. They believed God, and God did a miracle. The spiritual truth being illustrated, as I said last time, is this: Ishmael is the result of the flesh. It’s the result of sinful action, self-effort to achieve God’s promise. Ishmael was a slave because Hagar was a slave; and the progeny that came out of Ishmael, the people that came from Ishmael – and there were many of them – were also slaves.

This is analogous to trying to accomplish the will of God by works. Works righteousness is trying to achieve God’s will in sinful self-effort by works. On the other hand, Isaac is the result of God’s power, a supernatural miracle to give life to fulfill His promise, and all Abraham had to do was believe. Human effort, works, self-righteousness, legalism, the flesh produces only slavery and slavery and slavery and slavery. You start out a slave, and you just have extended your slavery.

On the other hand, faith in God’s promise, faith in God’s way, faith that God will do what He says by

His own power produces freedom. Produces freedom. So, that's the illustration.

Second point is the divine interpretation. This is amazing. And follow very carefully. This is the divine interpretation. Verse 24, "This is figuratively speaking, these women" – that is Hagar and Sarah – "are two covenants" – they are like two covenants; this extends, this figure, into the two covenants – "one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now, this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem."

Now, let me help you to understand this is really pretty clear and amazingly insightful. We know the old covenant, right? That's the Mosaic covenant. The old covenant and the new covenant – there are two covenants. You can't understand Scripture unless you understand those two covenants. The old covenant – here's how to understand the old covenant: you shall; you shall; you shall; you shall; you shall or else. Here's how to understand the new covenant: I will; I will; I will, I will just believe.

Two women had two sons, and they illustrate two covenants. Hagar/Ishmael is like the covenant from Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai. The one proceeding from Mount Sinai, it says in verse 24, "The slave who produced more slaves; she is Hagar. Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia" – Mount Sinai was in Arabia. What happened to Mount Sinai? God gave – what? – God gave the Law. Mount Sinai was a terrifying, terrifying place. God said, "Don't go near the mountain," when He gave the Law, "don't touch the mountain. If you ever touch the mountain, you'll die." In fact, it was such a terrifying place that Moses was terrified. Moses. "Don't go near it; it is the Law. And you break the Law and you die." And there was an illustration of that. When Moses came down with the Law and found what he found, smashed the law, there was a massive slaughter.

So, verse 25 says, "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds" – let me stop at corresponds – *sunstoichei* means belongs in a row or belongs in a series of columns. This is the next part of the illustration in line. Hagar equals Ishmael; Ishmael equals Sinai. Hagar is a slave, Ishmael is a slave, and the Law given at Sinai was bondage with a death sentence. And then it extends one more step, verse 25, "to the present Jerusalem" – not our present Jerusalem today - although it is also encompassing that; it's still that – but the Jerusalem of Paul's day. The Jerusalem of the New Testament day. Now listen to that. That is just amazing.

"The Jerusalem of today," Paul says – from which these Judaizers have come with their legalistic Pharisaic system is connected to Sinai, which is connected to Ishmael, which is connected to Hagar. Now, you know the Jews didn't want to hear that. They prided on being the sons of Abraham through Isaac. He says, "That may be true genetically, but spiritually, you're the children of Hagar; you're the children of Ishmael, the present Jerusalem is connected to Sinai."

It goes like this: Hagar equal Ishmael equals Sinai equals Jerusalem equals the flesh equals the law equals bondage equals condemnation, trying to do God's will in the flesh. That's what the Judaizers were doing. That's what all false religion does. Hagar, Sinai, Ishmael, the present Jerusalem just produces more slaves, more slaves, more slaves in bondage to sin, in bondage to the judgment.

Sinai, by the way, is in Arabia. That's a desert, not the Promised Land. So, Hagar, Ishmael, Sinai, Jerusalem of today are all in the same line. They all produce slavery and bondage. A sinner who seeks to be saved by the law is in that line, and he's on a legalistic treadmill. He can be on that treadmill his whole life, and he will get off exactly where he got on. Ishmael is the child of the flesh,

nothing more. And the present Jerusalem is fleshly, connected to Ishmael/Hagar. I can't imagine the fury of the Judaizers to hear that, because they all proudly despised Hagar and Ishmael.

In contrast to that – I love this – verse 26, “But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.” The Jerusalem that is present is the earthly Jerusalem, and it's still the same way it was during Jesus' time. Listen, contemporary, modern Judaism is slavery, bondage to the law, bondage to sin and judgment and death and hell. It is Hagar, Ishmael, Sinai, flesh, works, slavery, bondage, death. In contrast to that is the Jerusalem above. She's our mother.

He's saying to the Galatians, “You're believers. You have no connection to the Jerusalem that is here.” The Jerusalem above. That's why Jesus said in John 3:3, “You must be born from above.” You must be born from above. The spiritual Jerusalem is the Jerusalem above. Used to sing a chorus, when I was a kid, “This world is not my home.” The Jerusalem above is your home.

Hagar, the slave, symbolizes the old covenant; the earthly, legalistic, Judaistic Jerusalem; the Ishmael mentality of law and bondage. Sarah, the free woman, symbolizes the new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the wonderful, wonderful blessing of faith and grace. We belong – we belong to the Jerusalem that is above.

I want to talk about that a little bit. So, would you turn to Hebrews chapter 12? Hebrews chapter 12. Because here – this is kind of spread out for us a little bit, Hebrews chapter 12, verse 18 - here the writer of Hebrews is really kind of further explaining this same kind of analogy. He's saying to the believers, “You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind” – that's Sinai; you haven't come to that – “and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they couldn't bear the command, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it'll be stoned.’” And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, ‘I am full of fear and trembling.’”

You haven't come to Sinai; you're not Sinai; you're not Ishmael; you're not Hagar; you're not the present form of religion in this world.

“But you” – verse 22 – “have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

Jerusalem is our mother, but the heavenly Jerusalem. We're not under the bondage of Sinai. We're not part of the slavery of Hagar and Ishmael. We aren't trying to please God in the flesh. We're connected to a spiritual city. “We're blessed with all spiritual blessings,” Ephesians 1 says, “in the heavenlies.” The invisible heaven is where we draw our life. We're in the line of Sarah, Isaac, the Jerusalem that is above, faith, freedom. “And if the Son shall make you free, you will be free for real,” John 8:36 says.

Isaac's birth was miraculous. It was miraculous. So is ours. The miracle of the new birth cannot be accomplished by human effort. You must be born from above.

Now, quickly back to Galatians 4, “So the Jerusalem above is free” – free from the bondage of the law, free from all the ordinances that were prescribed to Israel in the past. You don’t need any of that. You’re attached to heaven. And then this wonderful support of that in verse 27, “For it is written, ‘Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.’”

And you say, “What is that, and where does it come from?”

It comes from Isaiah 54:1. This is an amazing approach by Paul. Isaiah 54:1 is long after Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Sarah, Sinai. Where does this fit? Isaiah’s writing to the captives in Babylon. The people of Israel have been taken captive into Babylon. And Isaiah writes to cheer them up. And this is in the section on salvation. And what he says to them in this verse – chapter 54, verse 1 – is that, “You’re desolate, you’re barren, you’re in exile, life is horrible. You know, you’ve hung your harps on the willow trees. You have no song to sing. All is sadness.” And Isaiah says, “Cheer up, rejoice barren woman who doesn’t bear; break forth and shout you who are not even in labor; for more numerous are going to be the children of you who are now desolate, you who have no husband – more fruitful are you going to be than even those who are married and flourishing.”

What was that? That was a promise of the return to the land, “You’re going to be out of captivity; you’re going back to the land.” And when they got back to the land, the women began to flourish, and the nation began to reproduce and reproduce and reproduce, and the nation of Israel grew and grew and grew and grew. And the apostle Paul is using another scripture to say, “I promise you that when God says, ‘You will flourish,’ you will flourish.” God said it to the exiles in Babylon, and He fulfilled it. God said it to Sarah, and He fulfilled it by His power. By His power.

This is the divine interpretation. Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Born of two mothers: Hagar and Sarah. They represent two covenants: old and new. Two Jerusalems: the Jerusalem that is now on earth and the Jerusalem that is above. Hagar is law and bondage and death. Sarah is grace, faith, freedom. So, it’s not whether you’re of Abraham, your father; it’s who’s your mother spiritually speaking. [Laughter]

Final point, personal exhortation. We saw the historical illustration, divine interpretation, personal exhortation. And it’ll all make sense to you now because you have come to this point. So, verse 28, “And you” – here comes the exhortation, a personal one – “And you, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.” Isn’t that wonderful? We’re in the line of Isaac, children of promise. We’ve been born by miracle. We’ve been saved by grace. Sovereign grace. Not by any work that we did; we didn’t work it out our own way like Sarah instructed Abraham to do with Hagar.

But know this, this has consequences. And here’s some information and then an exhortation. Remember this verse, “You children of promise” - you’re not Hagar; you’re not in that line, so you don’t need to think of yourselves as in bondage; you’re free; you’ve been freed from all of that – “as at that time he who was born according to the flesh” – Ishmael – “persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now.” Get this; Hagar hated Sarah. Hagar hated Isaac. We see that in Genesis 16. Then in Genesis 21:8 and 9, we see Ishmael hating Isaac. Ishmael thought for years that he was going to be the heir to the fortune. And then along comes the true heir, and he’s out.

And so, there was animosity, and Ishmael was a hater of Isaac, as Hagar was a hater of Sarah. So,

persecution came then – mark it – the sons of Hagar, Sinai, the works, the flesh, false religion are always the persecutors of the truth. They will continue to persecute the children of Isaac and Sarah, the children of promise.

The greatest persecutor of the true church is false religion. Satan's system of works. So, the personal exhortation is – know this; you're like Isaac, a child of promise. You will expect to be persecuted. "All who live godly in this present age will suffer persecution," Paul says.

"But what does the Scripture say?" – verse 30 – "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."

This is so amazing. So, we've got this false church persecuting the true church. We've got a war going on. Somebody might say, "Why don't we just get together? Let's have an ecumenical movement." [Laughter] "Let's have evangelicals and Catholics together. Let's all join hands and sing Kumbaya." [Laughter] "We don't want to be divisive; we want to all get together."

Listen; he quotes Genesis 21, where it says Sarah goes to Abraham, and Abraham goes to God, and here's the message: we have to get rid of this Hagar and her kid. This is not possible for them to coexist in our family. That's the message from Sarah to Abraham. And God weighs in, and God says, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." Did you get that? The son of the bondwoman is anybody in a religious legal system. They cannot coexist with the children of promise and grace and faith. They cannot.

Somebody comes along and says, "Well, God accepts the Jews differently than us," they are the sons of Ishmael and of Hagar. "Cast the bondwoman out. The son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." And God said, "Absolutely," and they were sent packing. There's no concord with Christ and Satan. This is an unequal yoke that Paul addresses in his letter to the Corinthians. They can't coexist.

And then this, "So then, brethren, we're not the children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." You got it? Everybody get that? Okay. Ishmael can't inherit along with Isaac. People under the bondage cannot inherit with those that are free in Christ. Those who are trying to please God by the flesh and works cannot inherit with those who have come by grace and faith.

So, just know this, we're not children of the bondwoman; we have nothing to do with them. Since that is true, here's the final exhortation, verse 1, "It was for freedom" – from all that – "Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Don't go back into that system from which you have been set free. This is the good news of salvation.

Anybody who comes along, tries to add any kind of externalism, any kind of ceremonialism to your freedom in Christ, you tell them, "I'm in the Sarah, Isaac, promise group, not the Hagar, Ishmael, law group. I'm not under bondage; Christ has set me free."

Father, thank You for our wonderful time this morning. Such a blessing. What an overwhelming, beautiful text this is. How magnificent are its nuances. Like a diamond, it shines with many facets.

And now, Lord, we pray that You'll do Your work in every heart. It's unmistakable what You've said to

us. We thank You for our salvation by grace through faith alone. We give You praise and honor for all of it. You receive all the glory. So, we offer it to You, grateful, thankful, beyond expression, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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