

The gospel is a song that keeps us where we belong.

“Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don’t you hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and the other by a free woman. 23 But the one by the slave was born as a result of the flesh, while the one by the free woman was born through promise. 24 These things are being taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery — this is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

27 For it is written,
Rejoice, childless woman,
unable to give birth.
Burst into song and shout,
you who are not in labor,
for the children of the desolate woman will be many,
more numerous than those
of the woman who has a husband.

28 Now you too, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as then the child born as a result of the flesh persecuted the one born as a result of the Spirit, so also now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? “Drive out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave will never be a coheir with the son of the free woman.” 31 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave but of the free woman.” -- **Galatians 4:21-31** (CSB)

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Last week someone was describing that William Wallace was motivation for their daughter to wear the required skirt to school... and I haven’t stopped thinking about the imagery (from Braveheart) of the warrior king. An iconic film that probably added more lore to the story than the historic reality. But there is the penultimate scene and Wallace gives a speech that sends troops into battle for more than victory, they fight for freedom.

“Veteran soldier: Fight? Against that? No, we will run; and we will live.

“Wallace: Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you'll live -- at least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!!!”

We hear this, paired with a dramatic score, and we want to be on his side. Fighting for freedom! A declaration of freedom then paired with death - tragically heroic.

The blood and guts, the battle of kingdoms... we find it iconic because it speaks of your daily life!

Hear me out... you exist in the midst of declarations and maneuvers of two kingdoms - one familiar and one foreign to us. But it's the different one our souls must find rest in or all is lost.

So in a way, the Galatians churches are having a Braveheart experience. Two kingdoms waging a spiritual battle, and Paul makes it clear; you are either of the flesh or the Spirit. There is no in-between.

There is a song playing in the background and what tune the churches carry will be the difference of life and death. Joy or despair. Hope or condemnation.

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Law and gospel distinction in bright colors in Galatia. The church formed by the preaching of Jesus as King, as the Messiah that by his grace gives salvation to all who believe in him. This means anyone can come, no matter experience, knowledge, or ethnicity.

Some got seriously nervous about this. Because what used to be unclean, even people, are now mingling with the “pure.” False teachers then come and say new believers must carry the weight of the Law. Ritual, feasts, behaviors. Or they will miss the Kingdom.

Paul corrects them and calls the churches back to grace, salvation on the basis of faith, because of the work of Jesus not our ability to live up to it.

And as we approach the closing movements of this powerful letter, Paul uses allegory - flipping an old story used by the false teachers to crush people and breaking chains of captivity.

The issue at hand is that there are two mothers, and when you know who your momma is, you know who you are.

Tying things back to the promise given to Abraham - remember we are, in Christ, children of the promise, descendants of Abraham and heirs of the inheritance. Radical news for Gentile believers. This is the good news - those far off are brought into the family.

But there are two families. See, Abraham and Sarah were given this promise of children but they kept getting older without the “fruit” expected. So being human, Sarah thinks ‘we should take matters into our own hands and bring about the promise of God...’ So she gave her servant Hagar, that Abraham would get her pregnant and have a legacy.

Ishmael is born. But along the way the promise comes and Isaac is born to Sarah and Abraham. So there are two sons. One by a slave and the other by a free woman.

As Paul tells it, one is of the flesh, and the other is born of the promise, by the Spirit.

He says that these two represent two covenants, two kingdoms... the law and that of grace. And the present Jerusalem corresponds to Hagar and slavery. So those coming from Jerusalem and touting heritage and history are in slavery.

Still under the law and apart from God. Bold.

This would have driven the false teachers crazy. There were out there preaching that if you didn’t have an ethnic or ritualistic tie to Isaac you couldn’t be a child of God. And Paul is like, nah, you all are actually sons of Hagar and in slavery.

For those that follow Jesus though, the free woman, she is our mother. Gentiles now like Isaac, children of the promise. You don't have to go backwards, you are free.

Galatians tempted by slavery are bolstered by the lyrics of the gospel reminder.

And while we are historically far from this Galatians moment, we are so close when it comes to the lure of life on the basis of the flesh. Yet the remedy is the same.

Paul isn't just reviewing ancient history. The story is our story. "Everyone is a slave by nature, until in the fullness of God's promise he is set free. So everyone is either an Ishmael or an Isaac, either still what he is by nature, a slave, or by the grace of God set free," says John Stott.

So what's the problem? What's the difference?

The Law Speaks

These Judiazers seem to be the "in-crowd" and their teaching is captivating, but it is a lie.

I love this stunning question that opens our text. "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law?" -- **Galatians 4:21** (CSB)

We know the law says condemnation, yet we itch for it. Weird.

Do you hear it? It speaks condemnation because you can never accomplish it. Do more, try harder. All activity yet not your heart.

The law, and those promoting it, becomes about bending the knee externally but not in your soul.

It is the low toned chastisement of failure and undesirability.

Crazier still, we like it! We like to be in control, to track our progress, get status, stand out above the rabble. We think we can solve the problem of salvation and life by the flesh.

If we come away with one thing from our study of Galatians, it should be that apart from the grace of Christ you can not be saved. Your effort, your circumcision, your pedigree won't save you.

And we think this was a first century problem... We survey the land and can declare that we are the Galatian churches with our get-ahead schemes, our claims at autonomy, the need to prove our faith is bigger than the next guy and our disregard for Jesus.

We become Ishmaels when we attempt to build our identity instead of receiving it from the one who accepts us, forgives us, and wants to be our loving Father.

It is slavery.

"All those who trust in works never are free, and never can be.... If I could keep all God's law, I should have no right to favor, for I should have done no more than was my duty, and be a bond-slave still. The law is the most rigorous master in the world, no wise man would love its service; for after all you have done, the law never gives you a "Thank you," for it, but says, "Go on, sir, go on!" The poor sinner trying to be saved by law is like a blind horse going round and round a mill, and never getting a step further, but only being whipped continually; yea, the faster he goes, the more work he does, the more he is tired, so much the worse for him." Charles Spurgeon

No inheritance - like Jerusalem and her children. Thinking blessing comes through activity and not promise.

It ends in either despair or pride and neither is life in Christ. Despairing that I can never live up, never earn God's pleasure. Or prideful that I am not as bad at that dirty sinner, thinking God needs me for my displays of pious superiority.

Shouldn't be appealing.

The reminder from Paul is that they have a different momma. They should hear the law and its burden and cast it off. Living instead under the song of freedom.

Cast out - He's saying, "In the attitude of your heart, cast out the tendency to want to get right with God through scruples and rules and law-keeping; they only

ever breed pride and self-sufficiency. They bar you from possessing the inheritance that is yours. They rob you of your true identity and steal your joy. Cast them out, and hear once more the gospel from the lips of the Spirit.”

The Gospel Sings

Paul ties Jesus’ work to the promise - in it there is no condemnation, there is freedom.

“For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery.” -- **Galatians 5:1** (CSB)

The kingdom you are part of has changed - in Christ you are part of the new Jerusalem (heavenly now and coming).

"The New Jerusalem is not just for the future. God has already started to build his eternal city. The “new” Jerusalem has replaced the “now” Jerusalem. The spiritual Jerusalem has superseded the earthly Jerusalem in the plan of God. The promises of the Old Testament were not for the Jews only, but they are fulfilled in the church of Jesus Christ. Anyone who receives Jesus as Savior and Lord is a son or daughter of Sarah, a true child of Abraham. If we belong to God’s family in this way, we are free in Christ. We are citizens of the New Jerusalem and enjoy the freedom of that eternal city." Phil Ryken

The weight lifted. No longer despairing because we know God approves of us in Christ and nothing can rob us of that love. Not prideful because we are humbled by our residual sinfulness, humbled that he would claim us.

Where the law excludes the gospel sings that you are included. By the grace of Christ. It is a song that at moments makes our hearts tender and calmed. It is a song that at moments moves our feet. It is a song that keeps us where we belong, in the grace of Christ.

I have been intrigued by simple recipes lately, five ingredient meals that dazzle! It’s not like I am going to cook, but I like the idea! I realize that’s what we do with Christianity... we say ‘you don’t need to do a lot to be saved, but if you could do these five things you can be God’s child... Pray a prayer, attend church three out

of four weeks, vote in the only way that is clearly Christian (mine), pick the neighbor to love, and spank your children...

Scripture says salvation is external, happening to us so that we trust in Jesus. We look at the recipe and the only ingredient is Christ.

“Almost everything we’ve been taught to do and think [concerning the Christian life] is not only wrong, it only makes things worse. Trying harder doesn’t work. You should know that by now. Becoming more religious will only magnify the problem. Being disciplined and making a commitment will, more often than not, cause you to “hit the rocks of reality”; and your efforts, in the end, will turn to dust. Pretending is stupid. At some point, you will slip up and be shamed. And reading the latest book on making an impact, changing your world, or being driven by a purpose (as good as those things can be) will probably drive you nuts. You will only feel guiltier. Motivational advice, biblical directives, challenges, and resolutions are dogs that simply won’t hunt anymore.” **Steve Brown**

May the song drown out the speaking of the law... That freedom is found only in Jesus and there is nowhere else to go. And that he pursues you, not to judge or harass you but to hug you, to hold you and keep you for eternity.

We are children of the promise, not by the flesh but by the Spirit. For the letter (law) kills, but the Spirit gives life. -- **2 Corinthians 3:6** (CSB)

"The Holy Spirit gives us a new will that wants what God wants; a new heart that loves God and hates idolatry; a new purpose, to serve God and others; and a new destiny, hope in the coming kingdom and freedom from trying to build a utopia on earth out of your retirement fund. These are firstfruits of the new covenant blessings being fulfilled in you. Like Isaac, the rest of the inheritance will follow, as surely as dawn follows dusk."

Did you notice Paul singing here? “Reflecting on the spiritual freedom of true sonship, Paul breaks into song: “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear” (Gal 4:27). He’s singing because love has set his feet dancing. He’s free to call upon God and to love God; he’s so filled with love, he even desires to love his neighbor. And he sees that this freedom is going to fill the new Jerusalem with more souls than the old Jerusalem ever had.”

Even when those born of the flesh persecute those born of the Spirit (which means likely in the church!) We remain children of the free woman, unmoved and secure in Christ.

When we get it, when we hear and own the song for ourselves, we sing back.

“Music shapes us more than laws do. Music moves our hearts. Which is why singing together is a creative force for a whole new world. I remember the civil rights movement of the 1960s, with Bob Dylan and Mahalia Jackson and others giving the people music that validated their longings and inspired their courage. Here’s a true story from that era. Jamila Jones, as a girl in 1958, went to the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee for training in activism. The police raided her school. The city shut off the electrical power. In the darkness of that night Jamila and her young friends began to sing “We are not afraid” to the tune of “We Shall Overcome.” In an interview recorded by the Library of Congress, Jamila told us what happened next: We got louder and louder with singing that verse, until one of the policemen came and he said to me, “If you have to sing,” and he was actually shaking, “do you have to sing so loud?” And I could not believe it. Here these people had all the guns, the billy clubs, the power, we thought. And he was asking me, with a shake, if I would not sing so loud. And it was that time that I really understood the power of our music.” Ray Ortlund, *The Death of Porn, Men of Integrity Building a World of Nobility*.

The gospel sings in the face of our enemies and condemnation. And it’s louder.

Living under this song won’t be easy - you will go on sinning, hopefully less but still, the One who sings to quiet our souls frees us from despair when we do. In our sin is where we are loved - he sees us, knows more about us than we do, and he still says “mine!”

This freedom gives us a settled humility that others notice and might just be drawn to Christ through.

An appropriate church mantra: “I am a complete idiot, my future is incredibly bright, and anyone can get in on this!”

The gospel is a song that keeps us where we belong. Secure with Christ now and forevermore.

Let the song keep you, give you hope for tomorrow.

If you insist on living religiously according to the flesh, remember that Abraham had a son according to the flesh, but Ishmael didn't get the inheritance. But if, by faith, you hold on to what Jesus did on the cross, you can bank on two things: the pain of persecution, and the privilege of inheritance. They can persecute you but they can't take your freedom in Christ!

What a privilege to share in the suffering of Christ and doing so from the safety of his arms?! Hear the sweet resounding melody of the gospel, the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus for you, for salvation and new life.

Sing it to one another. Sing of freedom and life, by the Spirit. Burst into song and shout. Sing it softly when appropriate and at the top of your lungs the rest of the time!

As you sing, live, rejoice, in Christ you are children of the free woman, you are heirs according to the promise. You are kept forever.

William Wallace - at least the Braveheart version - was heroic. But he is a pale reflection of the true King. Whose death made the promise true. Whose resurrection is the refrain and sends us soaring. Sing on!