



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 4: 1-7

Spring 2021

"Up From Slavery"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. We are in the Book of Galatians and our text this morning is Galatians 4, verses 1 through 7. Paul has been explaining the Law—‘Why the Law?’; and the Christian's relationship to it. And that's what he continues with in our text beginning with verse 1 of chapter 4,

4 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. ³ So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 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. 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.

Galatians 4: 1-7

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together.

(Message) I've taken my title from Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery*. He titled the first chapter, *A Slave Among Slaves*, and began, "I was born a slave." I would never write an autobiography but if I were to write one I couldn't begin it any better than that—because that was true of me. And that's true of all of us. I was born a slave, a slave among slaves, but Jesus Christ freed me. That is the reason He came into the world. And that is the lesson of our text, Galatians 4, 1 through 7; He brought us up from slavery.

The passage divides into two parts; in verses 1 through 3, Paul describes our life under the Law as "slavery". In verses 4 through 7 he describes our life in Christ as "freedom". John Stott summarized Paul's thought and meaning as, "Once we were slaves, now we are sons. How then can we turn back to the old slavery?" And Paul's answer is, of course, "We cannot." —that's what he has been arguing against doing.

So he begins the chapter by describing our life of slavery under the Law. He describes the Law as a 'guardian', an idea that he took from the wealthy Roman households of his day, where a child was placed under guardianship. This is different from the pedagogue that he spoke of in the previous passage. The guardian had control over the boy's property and finances until he was old enough to make his own decisions. But until then, he was no better than a slave.

That's what Paul says. Even though the child is the heir and is the owner of everything, still, while he is a child, "he does not differ at all from a slave." (vs1). He was under the control of his handlers. And that was only temporary, "...until the date set by the father..." as Paul says. (vs2). Then, when he reached a certain age, the age that the father had determined and had stipulated in his will, then the guardian's control ended. The child assumed authority and was no longer a slave.

"So also we..." Paul wrote in verse 3. The experience of a Roman child and a Christian are similar because we were all under the guardianship and control of the Law. 'We were like children' Paul says, "...held in bondage under the elemental things of the world." That's what the Law was, the "elemental things", the basic things. It's an

expression that means things placed side by side in a row. It's used of the letters of the alphabet in a row, like the A, B, C's, or the Alpha, Beta, Gammas. And then, because the learning of the A, B, C's, is the first lesson of an education, the expression came to mean the rudiments, the first principles, the basics.

Here, they are the basic religious principles, the basic rules of morality; the Ten Commandments. Or the rules Gentiles had; every man has a conscience; and from that men have developed ideas of right and wrong—they have within them that principle of right and wrong.

The Law of Moses defined those rules that 'everyone has' more precisely, (that men have always had), basic rules and truths that they held, which are proper, which are right. But the problem is, as with the Law and with the Jews, also with the Gentiles, they thought they could have salvation by keeping to those principles—those elementary, "elemental things" of the world. And, of course, that always fails. Paul's point is that it has failed for the Jewish people. This is not the way salvation is achieved. But it's true that it fails for the Gentile as well. The Law cannot save us—and it cannot save us not because the Law is at fault, or because the Law has anything inherently wrong with it. It cannot save us because we cannot keep it. And the Law doesn't give the power to do that.

But, that failure should cause a person to look beyond himself or herself to the One who can save. And that's what Paul has been teaching as the purpose of the Law. That's how the Law prepared people for the coming of Christ—that was its function. It taught us right from wrong. It taught us the basics and taught us that we cannot do 'the right'; we don't have the ability to do that.

God set a date for the Law's control to end. In verse 4, Paul refers to that date as "the fullness of the time", when the period of bondage would end, when the Law had served the purpose for which God gave it and Christ would then come.

And God had not only predetermined the date for that, but also providentially prepared the world for it—both spiritually and logistically. The age come to a "fullness"

when everything in the world, everything—the circumstances were right for everything that would unfold.

By the first century there was great expectation for the coming of the Messiah among the Jews. And in the Roman world there was great dissatisfaction among the Gentiles. The old religions were dying; the myths and gods had lost their hold on the people. The old philosophies were empty and powerless; and moral conditions were low. So men's hearts had been prepared for the LORD's coming.

But the world had also been prepared politically and materially for His coming, and the spread of the Gospel. It was the age of the *Pax Romana*. The peace of Rome that extended over the whole of the known world, over the empire, and produced a time of political and social order—and economic stability. Wherever the Roman legions went they built roads that connected all of the major cities and regions of the empire. And all the roads led to Rome, the capital of the world.

Because of the earlier conquests of Alexander the Great the world was speaking Greek. And they spoke Latin, they spoke Aramaic, they spoke Scythian and other languages, but they all spoke Greek as well—it was the *lingua franca* of the day. *(a language that is adopted as a common language)*. So travel was possible on Roman roads, and communication was easy with a common language. In fact, Greek was a language particularly suited to the teaching of the New Testament. It is an exact language and it's more suitable for expressing abstract thought—theological thought—philosophical thought.

Also, due to the Jewish *diaspora*, (the forced relocation of Jews), as well as their movement due to economic opportunity, Jews had settled abroad. They had settled across the empire—and beyond. They were in the east. They were around the Mediterranean. They went to the west. And so, as a result of that, they'd established synagogues throughout the world. And these provided places for Christian missionaries to reach both Jews and Gentiles with the Gospel and establish churches with new converts. Roman laws protected the rights of Roman citizens, allowing churches to grow.

And Roman soldiers protected the peace, allowing the Gospel to spread more freely.

Christ's birth at Bethlehem, then, was not an accident of history. It happened in "the fullness of the time", at God's appointed time. He is sovereign over the ages and directs history. And when the world had been prepared, and the appointed time had come, Paul writes, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." (vs4)

Now that's a carefully worded statement that is full of meaning. Paul didn't say in the fullness of time Christ was *born*, but "sent forth"; literally, *sent out*, and has the idea that 'He was sent out from heaven.' He was sent out from God. He was sent out on a mission. It's a statement that indicates Christ's preexistence.

What is particularly important is He sent forth "His Son". Not an angel, but a "Son". And He was already a Son when He sent Him suggesting that He is eternally God's Son. He was with God, He was God, and there are many texts that support that—that suggest that. That's the prologue to the Gospel of John that I alluded to. But there are others as well. Titus chapter 2, verse 13, Paul wrote that He is "...our great God and Savior..." Hebrews chapter 1, verse 2; Revelation chapter 3, verse 14; I could list many texts that support the deity of Christ.

He left the heavenly glory that He enjoyed with the Father for all eternity to go on the Father's mission into this world. And He did it by being "born of a woman"—by becoming a man—by becoming one of us through the mysterious conception in the womb of the virgin; which in the Gospel of Luke is simply described as the 'overshadowing of the Holy Spirit'. (Luke 1:35). But through that mysterious, miraculous conception, the LORD assumed a human nature, which He derived from Mary, so that He became the unique person, the unique *God-man*.

John simply says, "And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14). He became a genuine man—flesh and blood. And Paul's emphasis here is on that, it's on His true humanity. Through a miraculous conception, as I said, but a natural birth. He entered the world as all men do, "of a woman": in His case, a Jewish woman, into a Jewish nation, and so under the Jewish Law. And He submitted to it. —Completely. He

kept the Law perfectly; and in so doing He proved that He is sinless and He is qualified to carry out the mission on which He was sent.

It was a mission of salvation and is described in verse 5 with two goals: First to “redeem”, and secondly to ‘adopt’. “...that He might redeem”, Paul says, “those who were under the Law...” Now that's a hard place to be, “under the Law”. ‘Do this and live’, is what the Law says. But that is impossible.

Peter spoke of the Law as “a yoke” (Acts 15:10), that neither they nor their fathers could bear. It's a heavy yoke. It was given amid thunder and lightning. It terrified Israel when it was given. The mountain, Mt. Sinai, smoked and shook. But we've been freed from its strict regulations over daily life; from diet, to clothing, to the calendar: it regulated every aspect of daily life. Christ has redeemed us from that. Paul used this word, *redeemed*, earlier in chapter 3 in verse 13, where he said that, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law...”

Now that's the idea here. We've all broken God's Law. Whether Jew or Gentile, we have all sinned against the elemental things of the world; whether it's the Law of Moses, or just the law that Gentiles have arranged through their conscience, through their knowledge of right and wrong, their sense of ‘ought’, (which is there by virtue of the fact that we're all born in the image of God.) It's a wrecked image because of the fall, but nevertheless, the rudiments of it are there. There's enough there for us to know right from wrong.

We've all sinned against that—whether it's the codified law of Moses or what people just have as a sense for their own code of what's right and wrong—it's been violated. All men have violated the principles and proven themselves to be sinners. As a result of that, all men stand condemned. They stand under a curse. But Christ came to *redeem* us from that—which means He came to set us free by paying a price.

The word Paul uses here, (*redeem*), is an intensive form of the word. It means to ‘buy out of’—and that's the idea of redemption. It was a commercial term that was used of buying things and often it was used of buying a slave. Slave markets were common in Roman cities. There were something like 60 million slaves in the empire. So it was very

common for a person to go into a slave market and buy a slave, either for himself or in order to set one free. Christ came to buy us out of the slave market of sin and set us free. That was the only way that we could have freedom.

As Paul pointed out in chapter 2 verse 21, if there had been any other way to obtain freedom, to obtain salvation, it would have been the way that we would have done it. If there was any other way that it could have been achieved to free ourselves, then, he says, "Christ died needlessly."

Well, Christ couldn't die needlessly. So the fact that He died, that He was crucified, proved that we needed that for our salvation—that we needed the cross; that there was no other way possible for salvation except through the death of the God-man. We could not save ourselves. We were slaves of sin. We were helpless, we were held captive by sin, we were held under the "curse of the Law".

But Christ redeemed us. He bought our freedom by buying us out of slavery and for Himself—bringing us out of the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of light and setting us free. And again, He did that by dying for us. That was the price that was paid for our freedom. He 'became a curse for us', as Paul puts it in chapter 3:13. He suffered the penalty of the Law so that we would escape that penalty.

Now that is an immeasurable blessing. To be set free from a life of slavery to sin and death; a dismal, degrading, dark existence; to be freed from the curse of the Law, from the condemnation of the Law ... if that were all that Christ did, that would have been enough. But that's not all that He did.

He also brought us out of slavery that we might receive "the adoption as sons." God sent His Son into the slave market of the world to set us free. He sent Him into the orphanage of the world to adopt us as His sons.

Adoption was not a Jewish institution. It was a Greek and Roman practice, in which a wealthy, childless man might take into his family a slave boy who, by adoption, ceased being a slave and became a son and heir. Lou Wallace drew on that custom for his book, *Ben Hur*. I read the abridged edition, back when I think it was in the seventh

grade, so that size (*holding his thumb and index finger ½" apart...*) as opposed to 'that' (*...now holding fingers 3" apart*). Some of you may have read it.

You've probably all seen the movie. But in it the hero, Judah Ben Hur, a Jewish prince, suffered a series of misfortunes. He was arrested and he was sent to the Roman Galleys. He spent years chained to an oar. His future was dismal; one of bondage, hard labor, and death. Then in a great sea battle his fortunes changed. His ship was sunk, but he escaped, and in his escape he saved the life of the admiral of the fleet. In gratitude, the admiral adopts him as his son and Judah Ben Hur rises to a position of wealth, power, and authority.

Now that is only a very, very pale illustration of our sonship. We did nothing heroic to gain it. Everything was done for us. We were redeemed, bought on the cross, and born again by the Holy Spirit. —From beginning to end, from eternity to eternity, it is all a gift. We were rescued. So we sing about that in Charles Wesley's great hymn. Chris quoted it this morning in the Sunday School class, "And can it be that I should gain?" It's a great hymn. I think Dr. Johnson had said one time that was his favorite hymn. Even though it was Wesley's great hymn, it was a great one ... as all his hymns were. This is Charles Wesley's hymn, *And Can It Be?*

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

We followed—not simply as freed men and women, but as sons and daughters of God; who as our Father has given us all of the rights and privileges of His family. We're like that Roman boy who, when he reached manhood, took off the child's tunic or toga with its crimson border, and put on the long, white robe, the toga of manhood. He was

accepted as a man in the family. He took his place at the family councils, enjoyed his freedom and privileges, and undertook the responsibilities of the family.

Now that is what every believer in Christ has experienced. Through faith in Christ, we have been delivered from bondage, made sons of God, and entered into the privileges and blessings of sonship—and the responsibilities of it. There's no position of greater prestige than that—and no position of greater security than that. We are sons of God—we are all sons of God as believers in Christ; male and female. We have the privileges and power, real power, that comes with faith in Christ and being adopted into God's family—and nothing can change that.

Well, people worry about that. They worry that it can change, that if we sin, we may fall out of His favor, fall away from God and perish. —It's impossible. Whose son or daughter hasn't sinned? Did you cast them off? Did you disown them? Of course not. Do you think you are more loving of your children than God is of His. He who sacrificed His own, eternal, natural Son for you, who paid that price to gain your freedom and your sonship and your part in His family—that He would then cast you off? He can't do that.

The calling and the love of God is “irrevocable”. That's Romans 11, verse 29. We have been bought. We have been called. We have been made sons and daughters of God; that is our position; that is our spiritual status. It is greater than that of the angels, and it is forever.

Now how do we know that we have it? It's a great blessing, and we could spend much more time exploring that, the greatness of it. How do we know we have it? What's the assurance that we have it?

We know, first of all, because God's Word said it. Chapter 3, verse 26 of Galatians, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." That is the external witness to our status as sons. Those who have believed, and all who have believed, are sons of God—without exception. We can rest confidently in our salvation based upon the witness of Scripture. It is our authority. It is God's Word. It is true. It is reliable. It is inerrant. It's the foundation of knowing.

But there's a second witness, an internal witness, just as real, just as objective as Scripture—but within. And that is the Holy Spirit. God sent Him on a mission into our hearts where He bears witness to our adoption and sonship. That's what Paul says in verse 6. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!" It's because we are sons, that He comes. No other qualification is needed.

We don't need to have some 'second blessing' in order to receive the Holy Spirit. We don't need to strive for some 'experience', or speaking in tongues, or being baptized, or, (more to the point of this book), being circumcised to have the Spirit. Sonship is all that's required—and we have that through faith alone. At the moment of faith, the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit. That's Ephesians chapter 1, verse 13. When you believe, "...you were sealed", permanently, until "the day of redemption.", as Paul goes on to say in Ephesians chapter 4 , verse 30.

Now Paul calls the Holy Spirit, as you noticed, "the Spirit of His Son"—the Spirit of Christ. The reason for that is because He proceeds from the Son and the Father—both; and is sent forth by them into this world and into our hearts. And as sent by both, He testifies specifically to Christ. We see that in John chapter 15, verse 26. That's His ministry; it's to witness to Christ and to promote the LORD Jesus Christ. So He's the Spirit of His Son, of God's Son. So His ministry is to confirm the truth about Christ, and do so in our hearts and confirm in the hearts of believers that we are God's son, that we belong to God.

So in verses 5 and 6, Paul brings together the three distinct yet identical persons of the Trinity, to show that salvation is a work of all three—that Salvation is of the LORD. God the Father sent the Son into the world to die for us. And the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to live in us. And coming into our hearts He cries, "Abba! Father!" Now in Romans 8, verse 15, Paul describes us as the ones who cry "Abba!" But we do that as a result of the Spirit's ministry within us, as a result of the Spirit giving the assurance that we are sons and daughters of God—that we are all sons of God. He enables us to cry out in that way.

This word, *Abba*, is a term of affection. It is the Aramaic word for 'father', and it's very similar to our word, 'Papa', or 'Daddy'. J. B. Phillips, in his paraphrase put it, "Father, dear Father." It's a very personal way of addressing God: expressing affection, expressing confidence, and intimacy. But it also has a significant connection with Christ because this was the same expression that He used in the garden of Gethsemane.

That's recorded in Mark, chapter 14, verse 36. He was in great agony. And He addressed His Father as "Abba!" It was the greatest crisis of His life. When He needed His Father most, He leaned on Him the hardest; He called Him "Abba!" And what Paul is saying here is that the Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that we have the same closeness to God that Jesus Christ had—the very same. He is our *Abba*, too. What a privilege, what a blessing that is. No servant could ever say "Father" to his master. But we are sons, not slaves. We have a close, intimate relationship with God almighty. Understanding that, we should draw near to Him with the same confidence and affection that Christ did. We cannot be closer to God the Father than that.

So do you think that the Law could add anything to your relationship with God that faith has not already obtained? Of course not! Through faith, you are sons of God. Male and female, you are sons of God, with all of the rights and the privileges of sonship. And the Holy Spirit enables us to live as sons—to live in those privileges and those responsibilities. He not only gives us the assurance of our salvation, He gives us love, and He gives us the desire to obey, and the ability to walk obediently. Paul speaks of this later when he speaks of the fruit of the Spirit—the work of the Spirit and what He produces in us.

Now, in verse 7, Paul concludes with a summary of what he has said. "Therefore" he says, "you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." An historical shift has occurred. There's been a change in the ages. "The fullness of the time" came. The Law's rule has ended and believers in Christ are now sons and daughters. As F. F. Bruce wrote, "We have freedom, and the power to use it

responsibly." We have real life changing power. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We have a new nature—we have a new heart that is, as Spurgeon said, "a law unto itself, that keeps the regenerate from departing from the LORD, and gives us the desire to obey, to walk by the Spirit." Well, that's our present situation.

But our future is even greater. Because we are sons—we are heirs. What can we say about that? Well, we can only begin to scratch the surface of our inheritance. We know it involves absolute purity and unlimited joy and happiness. In 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 4 we read of "...an inheritance *which* is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." It is pure, it is permanent, it is eternal, and it awaits us.

That's where life is heading for the believer in Jesus Christ. Not oblivion; not the dark shadows of some unknown existence—but a kingdom of light and glory. It awaits us. —Glory beyond description. Paul indicates that in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9, where he wrote, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." In other words, we can't even begin to imagine how glorious it is.

But again, it's there for us. The Law didn't gain that for us—and it can't add to what we have. What we have is ours because of Christ. It's all of grace. It is all ours, as Paul said, "through God". So all the glory goes to Him because He sent His Son. Christ came and bought us; and in so doing brought freedom to us, real freedom—the greatest freedom, true freedom, spiritual freedom. He has given us new life and new ability through the Holy Spirit, to live responsibly and obediently in that freedom—and live the best life, live as God has created us to live.

So may we live that life. May we appreciate all the blessings that Christ has gained for us. And it's as we grow in our understanding of those blessings, and our understanding of what it cost Him—what it cost Christ to gain them for us—as we reflect

on that and understand that, we grow in our appreciation and we increase in our resolve to live that life.

Booker T. Washington wrote that the first time he knew he was a slave was one morning when he saw his mother on her knees praying that she and her children might be free. We could say it took the blood of over half a million Americans, 750,000 to free him and bring him up from slavery. It took more than that to free us. It took the sacred blood of the God-man, the Son of God, to gain our freedom.

Are you in Him? You are not in Him if you have not believed in Christ as your God and Savior. You're still a slave, living in bondage to sin, under the whippings of the Law. And judgment is coming. —It is coming!

Escape to Christ. Flee to Him. His sacrifice wipes away all our sins. It removes all our guilt. It's sufficient for all our sins—and an infinite number of sins. It will save you. It will make you free. It will make you a son of God. Come to Christ. He receives everyone who does. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for all that You have given us—all that we have in Christ. We can only barely appreciate it but we are to spend our lives doing that; and seeking to live for You in the great blessings that You have provided for us and the great abilities that we have through the new nature You've given us: a new heart and the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us all who are believers in Christ.

We thank You for that. We thank You for Your grace. Thank You for all that we have in Christ. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)