

Rev Joe Barnard: Galatians 4

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, feel free to open it to Galatians chapter 3, verses 26 down to the fourth chapter, verse 7.

Now once upon a time there was a beautiful young woman named Cinderella, and her father died tragically in a car accident on the A9, leaving millions of pounds to Cinderella.

Now in spite of the many kind-hearted pleas of her very generous and kind-hearted stepmother, asking Cinderella to receive her portion of the estate, and in spite of all of the steps sisters please, again asking Cinderella to receive her portion of the inheritance, Cinderella refused any of it.

She refused to live in the luxury estate home. She refused the financial security of the trust fund payments that were due to her.

Instead she chose to scrub toilets and to sweep floors and to try to muster just enough income together to be able to have a flat of her own and to be able to eat porridge.

[1 : 17] The end. Now would that not be a tragic fairytale? Now the sad thing about that fairytale is I think it's the story of many of our lives.

The truth is God has given every Christian an inheritance that if we could just understand what he gave us it would make all of the palaces of this world look like youth hostels.

He's given us a dignity, he's given us a status that if we could just get our head around it the whole question of self-esteem would be utterly irrelevant.

He's given us such an unbelievable hope in the gospel that if we believed in it you know it really wouldn't matter with the next 10 or 20 or 30 years of our life we're like.

He's given us security, he's given us family, you know you've got to ask the question as you think about the gospel why is it that instead of accepting and enjoying all of these gifts of God we scavenge around.

[2 : 27] Try to find some meaning, some purpose against some self-esteem, some hope, some love when God's given us so much.

Now all I want to do this afternoon or this morning is I want us to think about the fact that we don't have to live this way and I want us to think a little bit about the gospel and I want us to think about the fact that what the gospel tells us is we're not slaves we're sons and we're daughters of God. Now let's just begin with a question, let's begin with a question why do so many Christians have the mentality of slaves instead of as sons and daughters?

Why is it? You know maybe the problem is that our status is undefined. So maybe if we think back to the Cinderella story maybe the problem is maybe Cinderella you know she didn't maybe know who she was, where she stood in the family, she didn't know if she was a legitimate heir, she didn't know if she was really a sister, if she was on the outside of the family.

Of course in the version of the story I told it was absolutely clear the will of the father indicated her status. What's so interesting is as you read through the New Testament God he leaves no ambiguity when it comes to defining our status in his family.

[3 : 54] You don't have to read very long before the gospel tells us that if we're in Christ that we're sons and daughters of God, that if we're in Christ then we're coheirs with Christ, that Christ is unashamed to call us his brethren.

There's no ambiguity for the Christian as you read through the New Testament the status is clear for the children of God. So let me ask a different question.

Maybe the problem is that God is cruel. Maybe the problem is that God he's not like the stepmother in the version of the story I told who was generous and kind-hearted but in the traditional story, remember the traditional stepmother in the story of Cinderella, how she liked to be mentally abusive towards Cinderella, she liked to force all the difficult jobs upon her, she didn't let her eat at the table.

Is that the way God is? Is the problem that one moment God is warm and affectionate, the next he's cold, he's callous, he's detached from us?

Of course not. What we see in God is that God, it's his grace that's initiated the whole process of our salvation. There's nothing cruel in God's heart, there's nothing malicious in God's heart, there's utter constancy, there's utter integrity.

[5 : 22] Every word that he's spoken can be trusted absolutely and what he speaks are words of mercy and grace and kindness. Okay, so the problem, it's not that our status is undefined, our problem, it's not that God is cruel, maybe this is why we live as if we're slaves, maybe God's provision is inadequate.

You know, he just hadn't given us enough. The fact is that if you look at what God has given us in terms of the dignity of being a child in his family, it's not really enough for us.

So we really need to find a career. We really need to make money. We really need to have good looks. We need something to boost the worth that he's given us as his children.

It's not enough. And again, maybe the future he's given us is just not enough. Eternity is great, but if we're really going to be happy, you know, we really need that next job.

You really need this relationship that again, as you look at the whole package of the inheritance given us in Christ, it just doesn't satisfy the heart.

[6 : 32] Is that the problem? Of course, that's not the problem. What could possibly compare with the worth of having the Creator God love us particularly, intimately, totally?

I mean, what could possibly compare with eternity as our future? I mean, the next 30 years of good health and happiness compared to eternity beyond it, that's nothing.

What could compare again to the networks of relationship that are ours in Christ? God is Father, Jesus is brother, one another is the family of God.

There's nothing inadequate in the provision of God. It so far exceeds anything we could ever imagine. So again, if we're going to think and ask the question, why do so many Christians live with the mentality of slaves?

If the problem is not that our status is undefined by God, the problem, it's not that God is cruel. The problem is not that the provision's inadequate, so what's the problem?

[7 : 52] The problem's relatively simple. Is that we just don't believe the Gospel. Now the Gospel is one of these marvelous things.

It reminds me of, we've spent the last couple of days in Harris, and I'm going to go out on a limb here. I don't know what it's like to talk well about Harris and Lewis. I don't know what your attitudes is toward the people in Harris.

So forgive me, I'm stepping on toes. But one of the amazing things about Harris is there's no place that you can go and you can stand and say that you can see the whole of Harris from this place.

There's such richness and diversity in Harris. You go to the west side and there's beautiful beaches. You go to the east side and there's these amazing kind of prehistoric rocky areas.

You go to the north and there's mountains, and you have to explore it all to be able to appreciate Harris. Now the Gospel's like that. It's so hard to reduce the Gospel and be able to look from one angle and see all of it.

[8 : 56] So I'm not going to try to tell you about the whole Gospel. I just want to pull one fundamental Gospel truth out, the truth of adoption.

Now I want to suggest to you, on a plea with you, that if you can get your head, if you can get your heart around this fundamental Gospel truth, it will free you up from that mentality of being a slave. And it will set you free and enable you not just to think but to live with the heart of a son or a daughter of God the Most High.

Now in this little passage that we read, chapters 3, verse 26 down to chapter 4, verse 7, Paul, he's communicating this Gospel truth of adoption to these Galatian Christians.

I'm not going to go verse by verse. I just want to pull out of this some of the key ideas that Paul is communicating.

[10 : 00] So one of the things Paul wants us to understand is that none of us have any natural rights before God. Now this is pretty counter-cultural because in our world today we all view ourselves as having natural rights.

We view ourselves as having intrinsic worth. Every individual person is of infinite value. That's the way we think, so we honestly think God owes us something.

Now that's not the truth as Paul sees it. Paul recognizes that no individual has any natural right before God. Nobody can say, look, naturally by nature, I'm your son, I'm your daughter, you owe this to me.

In fact, Paul, he's very clear about our status outside of Christ. Look at chapter 4, verse 3. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

[11 : 09] So what's our natural status? Is that of being a slave? A slave to what? To the elementary principles of the world. You might ask, well, what are those?

Friends, that's the basic values, the basic lifestyle of the world outside of Jesus. What's so interesting is if you were to go around Lewis and ask people outside the church, are you free? They'd all say, yes, I'm free. Of course I'm free. Every person is free. Now what's so interesting is they're not free.

They didn't think of their own values. They didn't shape their own lifestyle. In fact, they value the same thing all of their peers value. They live the same way all of their peers live.

They've just been held in bondage according to these elementary principles. They've conformed to the world as it is outside of Christ.

[12 : 08] That's a position of slavery, Paul says. Likewise, look at what he says in verse 5. That Christ came to redeem those who were under the law.

What's interesting is Paul recognizes there are two forms of slavery. It's not that there's just a slavery of the world. There's an additional form of slavery that he talks about as being under the law.

That we could speak of as being religion. That the irony is that you can be just as bound in servitude within the constraints of religion as you can be with the license of the world.

This is the natural position of human beings. A position of bondage. A position of alienation from the life, the freedom that comes exclusively in Christ.

That's the position that we have naturally. Paul would have us know. The next key idea in these verses is that those that are children of God, they've been adopted by grace alone.

[13 : 20] Look at verse 4. When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son. Who initiates the process of salvation?

You? Good people? Religion? God does. And what did God see? We might imagine that maybe God looked out and he saw the beauty of this world.

He saw the beauty of our hearts. He said, I need those adorable people in my family. No, that's not what he saw. He saw the slavery.

He saw the sin. But nonetheless, he sent his Son in order that what? In order that who may become adopted as sons, verse 5.

Not people who earned it, but people who simply looked and had faith in Jesus as Savior.

[14 : 20] And so the mechanism of adoption, Paul wants us to know. It's all the grace and the mercy and the action and the initiative and the generous love of God that enables us to happen.

Now the outcome of this, what Paul wants us to see, the stunning truth that he's working toward in this passage is that those whose faith is in Christ, in spite of what they are by nature, in spite of what they've done with their lives, because they trust in Jesus, their legal status before God is not that of a slave, but is that of an heir.

Now let me just tell you a little bit something about the way adoption worked in the Roman world, because it's different than in our world. When we think of adoption, we tend to think primarily in terms of nurture.

Maybe you've seen the compassion children, the little photos of the children. You look at these compassion children and you see a girl from Nicaragua, you see a little boy from Chad, your heart it breaks, you long to be able to nurture these children.

And when we think of adoption, we think in that way that they're some adult and they see a child in need. And the primary purpose of the adoption is to nurture this child.

[15 : 52] Now that does fit within the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, we read that God, he cares for the orphan. But you know to the people who read Galatians first, that's not how they thought of adoption.

For them, adoption was not primarily about nurture. In the Roman world, adoption was about inheritance.

In other words, if you were a wealthy patrician and you could see that your time was coming to the end, then you'd raise the question and say, well, who do I want to pass my estate to?

Who do I want to inherit my fortune? Who do I want to have my name, to have my reputation, to have my social influence?

And so you would adopt somebody and that individual would become the heir to your wealth, would become the heir of your reputation and your status.

[16:54] Here's the stunning thought that Paul is trying to communicate to these Galatian Christians. That God is looking for heirs.

It's not that God's going to go anywhere. It's not that God's about to die. That doesn't make any sense. It's not the idea, but the idea is that God wants to share his wealth.

He wants to share his authority. He wants to widen his family. And so he's freely adopting children to be heirs of all that is his.

Now that's a pretty astounding thought. And if you can get your head around that thought, it has immediate bearing and implication in your life.

What would happen to you if you begin to believe that in Christ, it's not just that you're saved from sin. Yes, you're saved from sin. It's not just that you're saved from wrath.

[17:57] Yes, you're protected from the wrath of God, but that you actually become what he calls an heir with Christ as Paul says in Romans, a co-heir with Christ.

What would that mean for you? Friends, first it would mean dignity. It would mean worth. How many Christians struggle with self-esteem?

How many Christians struggle because honestly their career hasn't gone the direction they'd like it to go? We live in a competitive society.

We live in a society that measures your worth by what you achieve, what you accomplish, what you look like. How many Christians are groveling trying to get together some modicum of worth?

When what Paul's trying to tell us is that if you are in Christ, you are an heir of the inheritance that Christ has won.

[19:00] If you can really believe that you're a son or a daughter of the eternal creator God, does it matter anymore what your neighbor thinks of you, what your daughter thinks of you, what your father thinks of you, what society thinks of you?

It becomes absolutely irrelevant because it's trumped by the love of God. Here's a second implication. If you can get your head around adoption, it's the security and the protection of having God as your father.

You know, in Roman society it was all about who you knew. If you were poor, you were vulnerable. Because you were connected to someone who was wealthy and was powerful.

In that whole idea of being adopted, if you were adopted into a family with prestige and with influence, you were adopted into a family with the security that came with that.

Do you recognize that if God is your father, the one who protects you, the one who provides for you, it's not the United Kingdom.

[20:21] It's not the local council. It's not the United Nations. It's not NATO. It's the Almighty Creator.

If you can really get your heart around Psalm 103 that He loves you, He pities you, He has compassion upon you as a loving father, is this not what Jesus keeps trying to tell us?

He's good. He didn't give stones to children who need bread. He didn't give serpents to children who need fish. If you can really believe that you've been adopted into the family of God, that He now protects you, will that not give you more security than any amount of money, than any kind of international network of security?

The key to peace, the key to freedom from anxiety, it's all together your conviction that God is your God, that God is your father.

I mean, if you can get your heart around this message of adoption, you will have hope. You know what Christ's inheritance is?

[21:35] It's not just His resurrection. It's not just a little plot of land in Canaan. You know what Paul says in Romans 8 it is?

He says it's a new heaven, it's a new earth. You know what John says at the end of Revelation it is? It's a world where there's no suffering, where there's no sin, where there's no heartache, where there's no sickness, where there's no death.

If you really believed that that was your future, a world with no suffering, with no death, with no ending, can you imagine how hope driven your life would be?

When Paul uses the language of air, that's the inheritance he's talking about. You get your head around this message of adoption. Again, there's the dignity, there's the protection, there's the hope. There's also the calling. Let me just imagine with you. Imagine that you were adopted into the royal family. How would that change you?

[22 : 45] You know, if the queen was suddenly your queen mother in the sense of your mother, if you actually sat down at a table with princes, with princesses, how would that change you?

It would all together change you, right? You would have to think about your bearing, you'd have to think about your speech, you'd have to think about your manners, you think about your lifestyle, you think about how other people viewed you, that all of a sudden you would have to step up and that you'd have this calling to become a new kind of person due to this new position that you are in. That's part of this message of adoption. If we believe that we've been adopted out of the families, out of the communities that we're from into the household of God, well all of a sudden our life objective becomes one thing and that becomes putting off the old self, putting on the character of Christ.

Let me just read you a little quote. This comes from someone who is writing about Roman adoption. This is what they say. One of the strengths of Roman adoption was its complete acceptance of the adoptee.

Once a child had been adopted, everything from their past was erased. While they still had blood connection with their former parents, the legal and family ties to them were severed entirely and adopted child in the Roman society was in doubt with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of his new family just as though he was a natural born son.

[24 : 37] So when Paul says that we've been adopted in Christ, what is he saying? He's saying everything that had identified us from the past were free from it and that now what defines us is who we are in Christ and that our life calling now becomes putting on that new character with the values, the lifestyle, the loves that belong to his kingdom.

Let me just tell you to end a story about one of the most famous adoptions from the ancient world. In 44 BC, the peace of Rome was shattered.

Julius Caesar was murdered. After spending five years entrenching himself as the dictator of Rome, Caesar was dead.

Now speculation that swept through Rome because Julius Caesar had no biological children. There was no natural heir.

Yet the news quickly spread that Caesar's will had specified that a grand nephew by the name of Gaius Octavius was his adopted son.

[25 : 56] All of the power, all of the wealth, all of the prestige of Caesar was legally transferred to a 19 year old boy who would take the name Augustus Caesar and become the first emperor of Rome.

Now let me ask you, what do you think Octavius did when all of a sudden he got the news that he was the adopted son of Caesar? You think he yawned and bored him?

You think he just went on with his life as if nothing significant had happened? No, all of a sudden his world was changed. His task was to become the man who could fill Caesar's shoes in a totally unspiritual sense.

He was born again and had a new identity on that day. Friends, do you know what happened at 33 AD?

Jesus Christ was crucified. He died purposefully. He died intentionally so that his inheritance could be transferred to us.

[27 : 13] He didn't want the inheritance exclusively for himself when Jesus died, his status became our status.

His hope became our hope. His relationship with his father became our relationship with our father. We were adopted on that day. And let me ask you the question, how will you respond to the news that we're adopted in Christ?

If your faith is in Jesus, you're adopted as a son or a daughter of the Creator God. Will you yawn and bored him?

And think about what's going on this afternoon? Will you act as if none of this has really happened because it's not that important? Will you recognize that this adoption changes your whole world?

[28 : 18] And so all of a sudden your life has meaning and purpose and worth and hope and relationships that you never could have dreamt up on your own and that you have a whole calling in your life to grow into the measure of who you are, not in the self, but who you are in Jesus.

This gospel truth of adoption, if we can get our head around it, if we can get our heart around it, it will change the whole way we view the world. It will change the way we view God. It will change the way we view ourselves. Let's pray and ask God's blessing on His word.