

Galatians 3:23-4:7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 June 2016

Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[0 : 00] Back in November 2013, three women were rescued from a 30 year ordeal. They'd been kept prisoners in a house in South London, it was an ordinary South London street.

! They'd been kept there, probably by cult leaders, imprisoned, enslaved, seldom allowed out, excluded from normal society, constantly living in fear, having to try and please the people who had kept them slaves. Now I can't imagine what that ordeal must have been like, but I can imagine they would never choose to go back to it. I can imagine they would never want to go back to being slaves again.

Although I also can imagine that after 30 years of other people dominating your life, to suddenly have freedom would be a very strange thing, and a hard thing to get used to.

And no doubt they'd still live with the fears of those days, and the traumas of those days, for a long time to come. And perhaps at times they would, they'd perhaps default to some of the behaviour they had when they were slaves, perhaps seeking approval of others.

What Paul is telling us, and telling the Galatians here, is that if you have faith in Christ, then you have been set free. Like those women rescued from that house. You are no longer a slave, but you are free.

[1 : 25] The trouble is for the Galatians, they were being tempted to go back into slavery. They were being tempted to feel like they had to earn the right to be God's people.

That they had to do things to get closer to God, to get more secure. I think actually that's a temptation for all of us. We're so conditioned by our culture to think you don't get something for nothing.

We have to work for everything, don't we? I was in a coffee shop just now, sitting next to some poor guy with his headphones on, reading an A-level chemistry textbook. I think I know what he's slaving away for.

Brings back memories of a long, long time ago. But we know we have to earn to achieve, in most cases. And so often we can behave like that towards God as well.

We find it hard to trust that God's good promises in Christ are really unconditional. And I think part of that is an underlying form of pride. Actually we want to achieve something.

[2 : 22] We want to feel like we've contributed. We had a young lady come to our door a few weeks ago, trying to sell one of these fancy food delivery company things.

And the basic idea was, for a small sum of money, more than we could pay, we could have these fresh ingredients, already chopped up, delivered to us.

Why do companies do that? It's so we feel we've prepared our own food, even though actually somebody else has measured it all out, weighed it all up, chopped it all up. We can feel virtuous, because we cook the food.

Well, you feel less virtuous, you just shove it, the Tesco's ready meal, into your microwave and press it. Start, don't you? See, it's pride. We want to feel we've achieved something. There's two things, pride and fear.

It can be ruinous for us. And that's what Paul is getting at here. He wants us to show that simply through faith in Christ, simply through trusting what Jesus has done, God gives us great blessings, great promises.

[3 : 25] In fact, to sum up these two particular blessings here in two words. Inclusion and adoption. See, inclusion in verses 25 to 29, and adoption in verses 1 to 7.

We all want to be included, don't we? None of us wants to be an outsider. That's why we often hear that we are supposed to be an inclusive society. No one's left out. Of course, that's not true.

Secularism never manages to do that. It always excludes some people. But here we find in Christ, all are included, who trust in him. A sense of both inclusion and adoption, if you look at verse 25. But now that faith, that is Christ, the object of our faith, has come and lived and died for us, now faith has come, we're no longer under a guardian, we've no longer got the law to tell us what to do, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

So through faith and faith alone we have inclusion and adoption. Let's look at inclusion first. We're part of a new community, where once we were prisoners, enslaved, now we belong.

[4 : 31] Look at verse 26, summed up there. Paul says, starts at verse 26, for in Christ you are all sons of God through faith. What does it mean to be in Christ?

To be in Christ means to be joined to him, to be planted into him. It means that what is true of Jesus becomes true of us.

So Jesus died and was raised to life. So our old selves have died, and we've been raised to new life. We are new people if we've trusted in Christ.

Paul gives us two little pictures in verse 27, what being in Christ means, or how it comes about. So verse 27, for as many as you were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.

Being baptised in water is a sign and a seal of being a member of God's covenant people. It's a sign of being united to Christ.

[5 : 30] It's a physical outward sign of a spiritual inward reality. And it's interesting what Paul says here. He doesn't say baptism is a sign that you told the world you believed in Jesus.

He says, no, baptism is a sign of what God has done to you. It's not a public declaration of your faith, rather it's a public demonstration of God's promises.

That you've trusted in him, you've been washed and sealed and united to Christ. So baptism is a sign, a picture of that.

Paul also goes on to say, put on Christ, verse 27. Put on Christ. Where I live in Isleworth, I'm not too far from Austley Underground Station, quite often we see people walking down our road in blue uniforms, I don't mean police, dragging little trolleys behind them, little wheelie bags behind them, and they're clearly British Airways staff.

They're clothed in British Airways uniform, they're obviously on their way to Heathrow. The clothes they put on, tell us who they belong to. They're clothed in British Airways, that's their identity.

[6 : 40] That's their identity. And think about clothes. What is the closest thing to you? It's your clothes, isn't it?

I got an extra jumper just now because I realised I had coffee spilled all over my shirt. Clothes cover you, don't they? Clothes are what people see. They're also close to you. So being in Christ means that is your identity, like those British Airways staff.

It means you're close to Christ, you're covered with him. It means that's your character, it's what people see as they look at you. And this is a great change.

When we trust in Christ, formerly we were imprisoned. Verse 23, Paul said that. We couldn't be free, we were slaves, like those poor women rescued from that house in South London.

But now we are included in Christ, included in Christ, and therefore included in Christ's people, this new community. Look at verse 28. Here there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you're all one in Christ Jesus.

[7 : 47] Paul is saying you're now included in this new community. All the old social divisions are broken down. Jew and Greek, Jew and Gentile was the biggest division in the world of Paul's day.

Male and female was a big division. A first century Jewish man would pray every day, thanking God that he was not born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman. Now Paul said all those old distinctions are all gone.

You're all united in Christ. The gender distinctions, the socio-economic differences, the racial differences, no longer matter. Now let's be clear for what this doesn't mean.

It doesn't mean everyone is the same in Christ Jesus. Jews still spoke Aramaic, Greeks still spoke Greek. Today, in this room, many of us come from different nations, different backgrounds.

The cultures that we grew up in are still part of this. It's not that those differences disappear.

Equally, there are still differences between men and women. And in the Bible story, and in the biblical teaching, there are different roles for men and women.

[8 : 57] It doesn't mean we're not equally valid and equally loved by God, but it does mean there is a distinction in our roles. So that's what it doesn't mean. What it does mean is that no one is

excluded because of their race, because of their socio-economic class, because of their gender. So the Galatians were being taught that they had to obey a whole lot of Jewish laws. If they really wanted to be close to God, if they really wanted to be secure, they had to go and obey the Old Testament law. And what that did was created at least a two-tier system that the Jews were really in and really loved and the others who weren't.

They weren't quite up to standard. Paul was saying, no, we are all one in Christ Jesus. All his distinctions are God because what matters now is faith in Christ. Now, what about us today?

We maybe don't think we have to obey the Jewish laws to be more loved by God. But do you think that some types of people are closer to God than you are? More loved, more accepted?

See, here's a test. Do you look at some people and think, oh, they're much better Christians than I am. They must be more loved by God. Or do you despair sometimes that there's something in your life that means you just haven't, you're just not quite good enough.

[10:19] you could never make the grade. Or perhaps something in your background makes you feel inferior in some way. Or do you look at other churches other than the one you go to and think, they don't really have it.

You know, their theology isn't as good as ours. They do some really weird and wacky things. So you think like that, if we think like that, I think we probably haven't really got what Paul is saying here.

What matters to be accepted by God. What matters to be included in his people is not what we've done, not how good our theology is, not our socioeconomic status, but what Christ has done.

There's no advantage or disadvantage in being a Jew or a Greek, in being British or American, in being a man or a woman, in being rich or poor, in being middle class or working class.

All these distinctions are transcended by this new reality. We have faith in Christ, we are one in Christ Jesus. We are included. We are included in God's people.

[11:25] And that, by the way, is the one mark of being included in God's people. That ties into Christ, faith in Christ. So Paul is saying, do you want to enjoy the privilege of belonging to the one truly multicultural society on earth?

Then you need to just trust in Jesus. Don't try and add to what Jesus has done. Don't try and make yourself better and more loved by obeying certain rules. Don't trust in your own performance or your own niceness or your own church gang.

Trust in Christ alone. It is in him that we are included. This is the first privilege we have through faith in Christ, is inclusion. Included in Christ, included in Christ's community.

We are connected to one another, united to him. That is the first privilege to enjoy. The second privilege then is adoption into a new family. We will go down to verses 1-7.

See the people from a Jewish background in these days could have thought there was something special. So we were given the law. We have all this Old Testament history behind us. You Gentile believers, you people who have only just believed this gospel message about Jesus Christ, you are a benufferian.

[12:40] you are not quite as good as us. That is why you need to live up to our standards. But look what Paul says, even about the Jews. Chapter 4, verse 1. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, even though he is the owner of everything.

Now Paul is using an illustration that would have been well understood by the people of his day. In the Roman world, a son in a wealthy family would stand to inherit everything.

Inherit a house, inherit all the slaves, inherit all the land, inherit the business. So there's a sense that she had everything coming to him, but while he was a child, he didn't actually own anything.

In fact, while he was a child, he had a slave assigned to him as his guardian, as his teacher. And that's what Paul is referring to back in verse 24, when he says that so then the law was our guardian until Christ came.

So this guardian slave would be there to teach and instruct and train up the child. Paul says the law that was given to Israel was just that. It was a guardian sent to instruct, to show Israel their need for a true saviour.

[13:52] That's why he goes on to carry on in chapter 4. Paul says, this child is unbegadions and marriages until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of this world.

See, Paul's saying even the old Jewish law, where people tried to follow it, ignoring Christ and thinking they could earn their way to God, they were actually just being slaves to the elementary principles of this world.

What are those elementary principles of the world? Well, they're the basic religious ideas that you find in any culture around the world. The basic religious idea that to be accepted, to be on God's side, you need to achieve, you need to do certain things, you need to live up to what God wants. And that ends up in slavishly trying to keep rules which we can never keep. See, that Old Testament law was never supposed to perform that function. It was always supposed to teach the people of Israel that they were sinners, they could never be good enough for God. It was to teach them that they needed someone that sin, rebellion against God, failing to live up to God's standards, always deserved death. And it was to teach them they needed somebody else to die so they could have the life and promises God gave.

[15:18] But it was often misused. So instead they used it as a way of feeling they could earn God's favour. Paul says that is nonsense. Why? Well look at verse 4.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.

See, the fullness of time refers to that illustration again. The father would set a date when his child could inherit everything. And God finally sent his own son, the Lord Jesus, at just the right time.

Born of a woman, Paul says, an echo of the very first great promise back in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, when God had promised Adam and Eve that one day someone would come who would end Satan's reign on the world, he would be born of a woman.

And Paul adds, born under the law. In other words, Jesus was born in Nazareth, in Palestine, born as a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, keeping that law all his life.

[16:25] But unlike every other human being, he kept it perfectly. His life was marked by obedience to that law. And that is why, Paul says, he could redeem those who are under the law.

See, Jesus fulfilled all the obligations. He loved God with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. He loved his neighbours himself. He kept the law perfectly, which all of us fail to do.

And then he took the curse, the punishment for breaking the law, which you and I deserve. Let me put it like this, Jesus lived the life that you and I could never live, and he died the death that you and I deserve to die.

And in doing so, he redeemed us, he rescued us from the curse of the law. Like the police going into that house in South London, getting those women out. Jesus entered into our world, took our punishment, and got us out.

See, we needed Jesus' perfect obedience to fulfil the law, we needed Jesus' death to take the curse of the law for us. And what's the result of all that? Look at verse 5, the end of it. So that we might receive adoption as sons.

[17:39] No longer slaves, no longer imprisoned, but adopted as sons. Now what happens when a child is adopted? What happens when a child is adopted?

Well for a start they suddenly have a family where once presumably they may have been in care, maybe living in an orphanage somewhere. They receive a new name, they take the family name, they get a new identity, a new security, they're loved, they're indeed chosen by their parents. Instead of being excluded, now they're loved and brought in. And any disadvantages of their natural circumstances are done away with.

If they were born into poverty or born unwanted and deprived, whatever. Suddenly those problems, those natural consequences are being dealt with, may take time for that to work itself out, but they are dealt with, they have a fresh and wonderful new start.

And so it is for Christians. When we trust in Christ, we're immediately adopted by the Father. That's his whole purpose. He wants to adopt us into his family.

[18:52] And that is the wonderful truth of the good news. If we've trusted in Christ, we're adopted. We have a Father who loves us. Can I ask you, how do you think of God?

How do you think of God? Do you have this image in your mind of a distant, stern, taskmaster who needs to be obeyed, who gets fed up with you a lot? Is that how you think of him?

Paul is telling us here we can think of him as our Father in Heaven. Now I know some of us in this room have had terrible fathers. Maybe they ran away, maybe they took no responsibility, maybe they were abusive.

But even if you've had a bad father, you know what a good father should have looked like, don't you? At every point you would critique your own father, you know what a good father should look like. And here we have a father in Heaven, if we've trusted in Christ, the perfect father. We do not need to own his love, rather he's given his own son, so you can be adopted as his child. So those women who were freed back in November 2013, they had a lot to get used to, freedom in the new world.

[20 : 09] But they'd gone from being imprisoned and kept apart from society, now they're included. They'd gone from being slaves to being free. Maybe they weren't quite adopted because they were all adults.

Perhaps they were at least adopted into some communities that would look after them. This is what freedom means. It means freedom from fear of rejection because of our failure. Freedom to be included and adopted and loved.

Not because of what we've done but because of what Christ has done. It means freedom from our habits and failings. Look at verse 6. What does Paul say there? Because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

The Holy Spirit changes us and enables us to know we are adopted by God. It also means freedom from fear about the future for a real hope of the future.

Look at verse 7. If you're no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. An heir. You have an inheritance to look forward to. A future living forever in God's place with all God's people, the new family you're included into with our Lord Jesus Christ, our big brother, in that new creation.

[21 : 24] That is the inheritance. And how does all this come? Through our own hard work, through our own niceness, Jesus. Now look at those last two words of verse 7.

It comes through God, through what he has done. Let's pray.