

Two Mothers, Two Sons, Two Mountains

Text: Galatians 4.21–31

Theme: There are two ways to live: man's way or God's way

Introduction — Passage for our consideration today is Galatians 4.21–31

- Pew Bibles, page 1157

Galatians 4:21-31 ESV

Having heard God's Word, let's look to the God of this Word in prayer...

Almighty, eternal and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp unto our feet a light unto our path, open and illuminate our minds, that we may purely and perfectly understand Your Word and that our lives may be conformed to what we have rightly understood, that in nothing we may be displeasing to Your Majesty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The text before us is one in which Paul makes a shift

- he moves from a very personal, pastoral appeal, 12–20, to appeal to Scripture, 21–31
- he needs not only the believers in the churches to think biblically...
- but also the false teaching Judaizers, so he goes back to Genesis

Only way to be truly free is to be biblical

- hold to Scripture; interpret it well and wisely and you'll be free
- misuse it for your own means, you will be bound in slavery to law
- **John 8:31-32—So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

So Paul takes Galatians back to Scripture to see the clarity of things

- goes back to OT—only Bible Paul had at the time
- but shows us how we must use the NT to help understand the OT
- and what we see here is just that: Paul reveals how real people in real time in real events were like shadows with a greater light cast about them
- does this with two mothers, two sons, two mountains
- and it all shows us that we have two ways we can choose to live
- man's way that leads to bondage and eternal death
- or God's way, freely given by His grace in Christ Jesus which leads to liberty or eternal life

So, let's follow Paul as he seeks to lay out...

I. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: GENESIS

- **Galatians 4:21—Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?**
- Paul uses a rhetorical question to make his readers stop and think
- “Think about what you're doing!” is the essence of v. 21
- Judaizers want to be “under the law”—cannot comprehend life without it
- but Paul is going to point out that they either haven't listened well or never read it
- “under the law” refers to the Mosaic law
- “not hearing the law” refers to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis—Deuteronomy

1. Two mothers

- while not mentioned by name yet, Paul refers to Hagar & Sarah
- many of you familiar with account of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar
- Abraham has been chosen by God to be one from whom Promised Deliverer would come
- already seen how in Genesis 12 & 15, Abraham believes and counted to him as righteousness
- so, God's gracious provision of salvation comes by faith, not by any good deeds or works
- and we've learned that the Judaizers in Galatia missed this point of God's Word
- they jumped ahead to Moses receiving the law & commandments on Mt Sinai
- and this bound them...for century after century after century

1) and this is where the story unfolds, in Genesis 16

- **Genesis 16:16—Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.**
- Abraham had been promised a son, that he, even an old man, would father a great nation
- Abe was 75 when this came to him and Sarah isn't far behind
- but time marches on, still no child
- God comes in Gen. 15 and refreshes His promise, His covenant with Abraham
- by Gen. 16, however, Abraham thinks that maybe he needs to help God out just a bit
- he and Sarah take matters into their own hands
- which is the basic description of man's way to save himself & bring on God's promise
- so, Sarah gives her servant/slave woman, Hagar, to Abraham, that she might bear the child
- Ishmael is born, but God says this will not be the heir of promise
- that son would come about by God's means, miraculously
- **Genesis 17:18-19—And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"**
God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.
- God says, "My way is the way of the gospel: the good news of My gracious provision"

2) born of the flesh and born thru promise

- this is what took place, flesh and promise
- man's way to achieve salvation and God's way to receive salvation
- this is what Paul has in mind as he reminds his readers of this account
- even though Abraham's descendants as numerous as stars of sky, none yet
- so, in his own fleshly way of thinking, he tries to bring about God's promise on his own
- through his own sinful efforts, Abraham proceeds
- but God says "No" that's not how My grace works
- you don't do anything; if you do, you will not receive My promise & live eternally
- so God provides graciously, blesses well-past-childbearing-Sarah with a son
- this was according to God's promise

2. Two sons

- so Ishmael is born to Abraham via Hagar, the slave woman
- this makes Ishmael a slave-bound son, and not the heir of God's promise
- Isaac is finally born, miraculously and graciously because of God's promise
- he is the son of the free woman, Sarah, and the God-provided salvation, heir of promise
- Ishmael, however, mocks and laughs at Isaac, for whatever reason
- Sarah takes offense and Hagar and her son, now probably in his 20s, are dismissed
- they are both sent away, fleeing to the area around Mt. Sinai

- yes, the very mountain that will feature prominently in book of Exodus
- Isaac goes on to father Jacob & Esau; Jacob has his 12 sons
- and eventually, we see the people of Israel arising at last, according to God's promise
- they will establish Jerusalem as the center of their life as a people
- so, we have real people living out real events in real time: true history
- Sovereign God superintending all of it
- for God, Abraham's ends with Hagar did not justify the means
- Abe and Sarah tried bringing salvation in their own way: always of our flesh and sinful
- only by believing and receiving God's gracious gift of salvation His way can we live

Let's move on and see Paul explain...

II. THE REALITY BEHIND THE SHADOWS: GALATIANS

- This is seen in verse 24–28, where Paul uses allegory

1. An allegory

- without going into great detail grammatically and literarily, here is what an allegory is
- allegory: method of interpretation that sought to avoid literal interpretation
- usually attempt to have more spiritual meaning
- not what Paul is doing here, though
- Paul: clear relationship between historical & NT spiritual principles
- drawing analogy; doesn't ignore or explain away history, for that is important

2. Parallels

- Abe: justified by faith, but sought to accomplish promise in the flesh
- produced bondage, still left without heir
- Galatians: justified by faith, yet now thinking of finishing by their own flesh
- Paul: "You're doing exactly what Abraham did!"
- if you submit to circumcision, you are back in bondage to law, trying it on your own

3. See what Hagar represents

- Hagar was the slave/servant & her son was born out of sinful desires to bring salvation
- so Ishmael & Hagar both put out by Abraham
- Hagar is in bondage, outside the church, the people of God
- she lived near Sinai, which depicts the older covenant given on that mountain
- strongly depicts spiritual state of people trying to accomplish salvation by human effort

4. Hagar is Mt. Sinai

- now Paul says,, v. 25: Hagar is Mt. Sinai, corresponds to present Jerusalem
- here it is: Judaizers telling Galatians you must become Jews!
- get connected to Jerusalem; Jerusalem center of OT, it seems
- missed Ezekiel & Jeremiah entirely: Jerusalem predestined to become derelict & desolate
- Babylonian captivity, soon after days of Paul, AD 70
- so, literal, physical Jerusalem of Paul's day: Mt Sinai, bondage, under law
- one day will be cast off

5. Sarah is the new & free Jerusalem

- v. 26: but Jerusalem above is free and our mother
- the church has become God's new Jerusalem
- Mt Zion serves as type of the church of Jesus

- we are Abraham’s seed, God’s holy city, the new Jerusalem, where God dwells in & with us
- Sarah & Isaac correspond to this: mother of freedom, son of freedom & promise
- God begets His people thru the church
- foretold: Isaiah 54.1, quoted in v. 27
- **Isaiah 54:1—“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the Lord.**
- as Sarah received her son supernaturally by gracious provision of God
- so too will church grow by God’s supernatural provision of grace thru Christ Jesus

6. Problem with trying to bring spiritual life by human initiative: only get human results

- flesh only begets flesh
- sinful humans only reproduce more sinful humans
- so Paul must insist that old covenant of law is not the answer
- true freedom—freedom in Christ—only comes thru God’s initiative
- this is the gospel: God’s gracious provision in Christ Jesus
- this is the promise, the inheritance that is ours in Christ
- if we take matters into our own hands, we are slaves, and dead slaves at that
- but if we receive God’s glorious promise in Jesus, we are free to live, and live eternally

7. The glorious reassurance

- v. 28: Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise
- Paul applies his work from the OT to the Galatians
- products of grace & promise of God
- not born of our own attempts, our own flesh
- all Paul’s arguments grounded in history
- writer of Hebrews does same thing

•Hebrews 12:18-24 ESV

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly 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 that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

- old covenant church, the people of God, joined to Mt Sinai
- new covenant church, the people of God, joined to Mt. Zion, the eternal city of God
- men still try to build church their way; will never last—not eternal, wrong foundation
- church is God’s glorious people justified by faith in promised deliverance of Christ
- mother of God’s elect; children born of her witness & nurture

As we’ve heard all this, we need to consider...

III. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION: SO WHAT?

- this is seen in vv. 29–31

1. Cut Off

- Paul comes back to Sarah & Hagar
- Ishmael mocked Isaac
- so too the Judaizers mocking Gentile believers for thinking above the law
- what happened then?
- Ishmael cut off, cast off
- God confirmed request of Sarah to do this
- son of bondwoman had no place in church, the people of God
- all who now resort to works to earn their way into heaven: cast out and cut off
- they are to be cast out of the church; effective church discipline—cut them off
- instead: all who cling to Christ by faith due to God's grace: children of free woman
- you who are in Christ are part of the new Jerusalem, the true Mt. Zion
- no longer is the city on the eastern side of the Mediterranean important
- Jerusalem is now the church, the people of Lord Jesus Christ
- what about Jews in Israel now? To be evangelized, pointed to Christ the Messiah

Conclusion – What must I do to inherit eternal life?

- Jesus asked this question often
- response: obey what God requires, the law of God
- love Lord your God & your neighbor

So, even today, so many ask: what must I do in order to get to heaven?

- man keeps answering: do this and live
- every other world religion & philosophy other than Christianity answers with this
- only one problem & Paul has repeated it often here in Galatians
- You can't do it! You can't do anything to earn eternal life! Impossible!
- instead, sinners, fallen short of God's glory, must look elsewhere, not themselves
- to corrupt JFK's famous quote: Ask not what you can do for God, but rather what has God done for you in Christ

What must I do, we think and ask?

- nothing; nothing you can do
- you are dead in trespasses and sins & dead people can do nothing
- but God...reaches down, brings out of spiritual death in life by power of Holy Spirit
- removes heart of stone, unstops our ears, removes scales from eyes, enables us to see, hear, and believe in Lord Jesus Christ
- our faith is "extrospective"—look out to another for our salvation
- only there is there peace and joy in salvation
- we are now free to obey, without the curse
- we live out of gratitude toward God's grace shown in Christ
- we should never desire to return to slavery of sin
- nor should we cast off our rights and privileges as adopted sons of God
- instead, our lives befit our royal status: we live like children of the King