

Babies... Chasen Thomas Lee born yesterday! RHC is Baby Central these days. I mean we have heard the command to "Be Fruitful and Multiply" and we are taking care of business. Lokulutus! Broggis, Snyders, Turleys.

We all love babies. They are so cute, they are so sweet. They cuddle and stare up at you with their precious little eyes. All they do is cry, eat, burp, poop and pee, and *even still*, they are just so sweet. If you put a baby in the arms of the most stoic and gruff man, he will, at some level, begin to melt. Jackson, Malachi, Benton, and Adriano. These guys can't help but make you smile. But here's the sticking point. As sweet and innocent as the little lives begin, we understand that what is more important is where these lives end up. That is why we should pray for the salvation of our kids constantly and raise them in the ways of God.

Today we are going to hear the story of two women and two sons. Their origins and destinations are very distinct. Open your Bibles to Galatians 4:21 (p. 974) We are going to dive into the Paul's reflection on the story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael, and Isaac.

Most people would agree that this is the most difficult passage in the book of Galatians. BUT, it expounds one of the most beautiful and invigorating truths of Scripture. Namely, the freedom of the Christian.

### **"The Freedom of the Gospel"**

#### **Galatians 4:21-5:1**

The Book of Galatians has been called "The Magna Carta of Christian Freedom."

**The Point: Walk in the freedom of the gospel as a gracious gift from God.**

T: Here's the first truth I want you to see..

#### **I. All those born of the Spirit are sons of freedom (4:21-5:1a).**

*Read 21-5:1a*

- Did you catch the irony in verse 21? He says those who seek to gain acceptance through a rigorous keeping of the law, do not really listen to the law.
- The volume of the law's standard and how far they fell short should have been maxed out, but apparently their headphone jack was barely plugged in. The truth was not coming through.
- That is why Paul continues to expose the inconsistency of their position by highlighting a portion of the law the Judiazers gladly identified with, the story of Abraham.
- The backdrop of this story is found in Genesis 12-22 (1<sup>st</sup> book of the Bible).
- Here's the quick sketch: God promised a son to Abraham and his wife, Sarah. This son would fulfill the covenant promise to give Abraham more descendents than the stars in the sky and bless the nations.
- So they tried to have a child. And they tried, and they continued to try, but Sarah's womb was barren.
- What were they to do? Enter Hagar. Sarah's servant, the slave woman in the family. They devised a plan, against God's will, for her to bear a child for Abraham, and she did!
- Man, if I'm God, "Abraham, you blew it! There's your son... hope it works out for you!" But God is gracious beyond belief. He is a promise keeping God. But God, in his infinite mercy, stoops down, touches Sarah's womb and gives the gift of a son, Issac.

T: In verse 24, Paul tells us: "*Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants.*"

- Paul sees allegory here, meaning the major threads of this story represent or "correspond" (v. 25) to something beyond their literal meaning.

- [Now, be warned: some Bible teachers end up allegorizing & spiritualizing the whole Bible. For example, the story of David and Goliath is really about slaying the giants in your life, or Jesus calming the storm is about how God can calm the storms in your life.]
- So, when it comes to allegory, we can have confidence to take it allegorically when the Bible tells us to. [Otherwise, we should be very careful to apply sound interpretive principles to understand the meaning for the original audience and then trace how it relates to the story of redemption in the whole of Scripture.]

T: So where does Paul connect the dots of that story with the lines of redemptive history? Here is the key phrase: “these women are two covenants.” Hagar & Ishmael represent the Judiazers. Sarah & Issac represent the Galatians Christians. Where is the correspondence Paul sees, and how do they differ?

*Source.*

- Hagar had Ishmael “according to the flesh.” The “man of faith,” Abraham, slipped into distrust, and it led him to take matters into his own hands. Rather the relying on the power of God to deliver a son through his promise, Abraham relied on his own plan.
- But verse 29 tells us that Isaac was born through the promise “according to the Spirit.” God will provide... Hanging like a banner over the birth of Issac are these words: “God will Provide. God Keeps his Promise.” (cf. Genesis 22)
- T: What about their . .

*Consequences.*

- Hagar bore a child of slavery.
- Sarah bore a child of freedom.
- T: They also had a different

*Destination.*

- The sons of Hagar will only belong to “the earthly Jerusalem.” This will be as good as it gets for them.
- The sons of Sarah belong to the heavenly city. They have an amazing inheritance in the presence of God waiting for them.

Here’s the deep irony and the tragedy of this story. One of the greatest boasts of the Jews was their identity as children of Abraham. They made a huge deal about their ethnic identity and spiritual heritage.

- We belong to Abraham... We’re all set. Here’s the problem. They overestimated the value of their physical descent by assuming their spiritual position before God was wrapped up in their ethnicity. “Hey, I’m a Jew, so since I have the appearance of belonging to the people of God, I must really belong to God.”
- We saw this with John the Baptist and the Pharisees, another group who assumed their standing on the basis of physical descent and external righteousness.

**Matthew 3:7-9** tells us: **“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”**

- The Pharisees, the Judiazers, and all who are Sons of Hagar have “form without substance.” *As 2 Tim 3:5 says: “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”*
- People do this today. “I go to church. My grandma prays everyday. I was baptized, confirmed, never smoked pot, typically don’t swear.” So what? If your heart is not in it, Jesus will say to you on the last day, “I never knew you.”
- God wants our hearts. Everything else is just a show. It’s a show. Very practically . . . God is not blown away by your appearance to our church gathering today. There are times, even for Christians, where Sunday worship simply becomes a sort of spiritual cameo. We show up. What’s happening? Name Tag. Bible. Prayer. Song. Sermon. I’m in this! But our heart is not really in this. You are here for you . . . more than you are here for him. God wants you, all of you.

- **“The religion of the Lord Jesus is valuable *only* as its power is experienced in the heart.” - Octavius Winslow**
- Listen: There are two paths set before us. One is the path of slavery, based on works righteousness, filled with the sons of Hagar. The other is the path of freedom, based on grace, filled with the sons of Sarah.
- Are you an Ishmael? Or an Isaac?

T: Paul’s whole point is to encourage them, like a spiritual father, “You belong to the free woman. So have absolutely nothing to do with any hint of works righteousness. Cast out the slave woman and her son... You are free, so live free. “ That message is observed in verses 28-5:1 which teach us to . . .

## II. Stand firm by living in the freedom of Christ (4:28-5:1)

- Look at *verse 1* of chapter 5. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”
- As Americans, we live in the land of the free and the home of the brave. And on top of that, we are New Englanders. We live the cradle of freedom itself. New Hampshire’s state motto is the revolution cry: “Live free or die.”
- And Paul feels much more deeply about freedom than that. He is saying, “Jesus died, so that you might live free.”
- Don’t miss that: As Americans, we fight to maintain our freedom, and we should thank God for Veterans who have both risked and given their lives to preserve the freedom we enjoy, but that’s not how it works in the gospel. *Freedom is not achieved. Freedom is received.*
- Christ fought for us, and he sets us free that we might be free. In fact, the Hebrew word for salvation “yasha” carries the idea of being set in a “wide open space,” released from that which restricts us. It is to have the shackles and chains removed that we might run free.
- The prevailing cultural view of freedom is the absence of outside restriction... Having the ability to do what you want to do. [This is why so many dream of being their own boss. But in reality, most of the time, we are just falling under another set of demands.]
- The biblical view of freedom involves living within the bounds of God’s wise and life-giving guidelines.
- Before we meet God we are slaves to our sinful ways, bound by the demands of the law and the consequences of our sin. We tend to underestimate the powers of the law, sin, Satan, and death, but Christ came to abolish all of that and set us free.
- Listen to his words in **John 8:31-36** **“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.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:31-36)**
- It is the truth of Christ, his word abiding in us, that sets us free. And this freedom is so comprehensive!
- Not only does the gospel free us from the guilt of sin and the power of sin. It also carries the power to free us from our *anxieties, worries, and fears*. It frees us from having to *measure up* in the eyes of others. We don’t have to be *attractive enough, successful enough, or smart enough* in the sight of others, because our identity is in Christ. The gospel frees us from *bitterness and resentment*. The gospel frees us from *greed and self-love*. The gospel frees us *to love like we’ve never loved before*.
- So Paul’s message is: Enjoy the freedom you already possess! Anything less is to reapply a yoke/a burden of slavery designed to weigh you down and hinder you from living the life God intends for you to have in him.

T: How do we do this? How can we stand firm in the freedom of Christ?

- We are going to get a heavy dose of practical instruction from Paul as we finish Galatians 5 & 6, but to get us started, here are two ways we should stand firm in the freedom of the Gospel.

### **1) Gospel freedom leads us to pursue gospel growth.**

- The goal is to grow in grace to be more like Christ. We can do this because now we are *free to obey God from the heart*.
- We are slaves to righteousness. We grow to be like Jesus as we receive the words of Jesus. (John 8:32)
- And, we not only have the ability to obey and please God, but also with the desire to carry out the ability, so that we really *want* to live for God. All of the sudden, it becomes not just a duty but your delight.
- Worship? Can't wait! Jump in the Word? Straight up hungry! Serving others... let's go!
- If you are only obeying out of obligation, you are not living in the fullness of the freedom of the gospel.
- If persecution or suffering comes our way, as Paul highlighted in verse 29, we have resources to overcome.

### **2) Gospel freedom leads us to pursue gospel mission.**

- We live in a Twitter world... we respond to that which moves us...
- Once we really taste this of this freedom, there's really only one response: We are going to want others to experience this same freedom. The Judiazers boasted in their work. We boast in Christ.

So how are we going to get there? **Gospel Freedom for Gospel Mission**

- **1) Pray for a heart of anguish for those around you who need the gospel.**
  - God desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)
  - As we grow in grace, then we are going to really carry a healthy burden for those around us, but it could get even deeper than that.
  - In Romans 9:1-3, listen to Paul's heart for his fellow Jews to be saved.
  - **"I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have *great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart*. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh." (Romans 9:1-3) Unpack.**
  - Consider this: Whether you are an extrovert or an introvert, we all have people in our relational networks who need to know and experience the freedom of Christ.
  - **PPT Slide 1: "YOUR RELATIONAL NETWORKS"**
    - Friends. Family. Coworkers. Neighbors.
    - But think about the potential of what this begins to look like . . .
  - **PPT Slide 2: RELATIONAL NETWORKS EXPANDED – MEDIUM**
    - We all have many people in each of these spheres of influence to whom we are responsible to shine the light of Christ.
    - Now this next slide, is a truer representation of our relational influence.
  - **PPT Slide 3: RELATIONAL NETWORKS EXPANDED - LARGE**
    - What happens if you multiply this by 200 people, and we start really owning the responsibility to faithfully share the love of Christ with them. It's gonna get wild up in the Club! This one. Jesus' Club! ☺
  - Who can you *identify* in your relational networks who needs the truth of the gospel? God has placed you strategically among those friends and family and acquaintances for a reason!
  - It is through sincere encouragement of trusted friends people are going to come, so invite and share this news.
  - Let me ask: How bad do you want our friends to come to Christ? Enough to do something about it? For real, man, I'm preaching this to myself. This is not guilt. This is grace and truth.
  - Today we're going to spend some time in prayer for these people. And let's ask God for a healthy sense of anguish.
- **2) Seek deeper *belief* in the truth of the gospel and its power to bring freedom.**

- "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)
- Do I believe that? If I believed it more wholeheartedly, then surely I would be quicker to share it.
- We are obviously *big* on relational evangelism around here, which I believe is great. BUT, listen to what **David Helm** says about this: **"Relational evangelism is not really evangelism at all until the word of God is introduced into that relationship."**
- We have to make the gospel explicit in our relationships. Otherwise, we become the aroma of moralism, not Jesus. (2 Cor. 2:14-17)

Ed Stetzer with Lifeway Research surveyed 1,000 people (900 Americans & 100 Canadians) a few years ago and uncovered some surprising but encouraging data.

- **89% of twenty something's and 75% of people over 30 said they would be willing to listen if someone wanted to tell me what they believed about Christianity.**
- **61% of twenty something's and 42% of people over 30 said they would be willing to study the Bible if a friend asked them.**
- That is why we must . . .
- **3) Move out with boldness in telling others about Jesus.**
  - *What holds you back? Fear of Man: "The fear of man is a snare" (Prov 29:25)*
  - In some cases, boldness means *stepping out and letting people* know you're a Christian. That can be challenging. Then we can *move onto boldness in our conversations* and actual witness. But finally, we also need to *call people to respond* to the message of Christ. Not simply present it, but humbly and persuasively call them to respond.
  - How can you leverage your relationships and connect them to Christ and our church?
  - **PPT Slide 4: CONNECTING YOUR RELATIONAL NETWORKS TO RHC**
  - To do this, we will need boldness. Listen to Milton Vincent.
  - **"Boldness is critical. Without boldness, my life story will be one of great deeds left undone, victories left unwon, petitions left unsprayed, and timely words unsaid. If I wish to live only a pathetically small portion of the life God has prepared for me, then I need no boldness. But if I want my life to bloom full and loom large for the glory of God, then I must have boldness – and nothing so nourishes boldness in me like the gospel!" – Milton Vincent**

*It's our privilege to live in the freedom of the gospel. Let's distribute this freedom freely to others!*

*It's going to have to start with you.* **PPT Slide 1: "YOUR RELATIONAL NETWORKS"**

### **Conclusion...**

God, give us anguish for those around us in need of your gospel.

God, give us a deeper belief in the truth of your gospel.

God, give us boldness to more readily share your gospel. *(3x)*

- We're going to sing a great song of God's love. His love, and the freedom he brings, moves us to boast in Christ and in Christ alone. Let's stand and sing.