

Galatians 4:8-31

Really Free

Good morning church, and merry Christmas! I trust that you had a great day of food and family yesterday. But I also hope that at some point yesterday, each of you spent time giving thanks to the Lord for the gift of Christmas.

This morning as we worship through the Word together, we come to a long section in the book of Galatians, where Paul pleads with these churches, the people that make up these churches to LIVE AND WORSHIP LIKE SONS, NOT SLAVES. We're going to look at this, break it up into 3 parts:

- Paul's Fear for them → V8-11
- Paul's Care for them → V12-20
- Paul's Reminder to them → 21-31

If you have your Bible, go ahead and turn to Galatians 4. If you have a device, turn that on, and my encouragement to you is to find the CSB translation which is the translation that I teach and preach from. Since this is a long section (24 verses), I'm going to read a few verses, then we'll talk about it, then read a few more and talk some more.

Galatians 4:8-11 → Paul's Fear for them

READ 4:8-11:

⁸But in the past, since you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things^[d] that by nature are not gods. ⁹But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elements? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again? ¹⁰You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years. ¹¹I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.

I. Paul's Fear for them

This whole time in this letter → Paul's been hammering them on how they could be going back to the law and the ritual of Judaism. He had a very real fear → born out of a Godly love for them, that his labor had been "wasted" → that perhaps they were denying the Gospel.

When I read these verses – I think of Paul's last letter, the last things we have of his in the Scripture – in 2 Timothy – he writes about people that "have a form of godliness but denying its power." As if they were content to be slaves to religious activity, rather than enjoy the freedom they have in Christ as a son of God. How could they go back.

Paul is urging them – continuing to urge them – live like sons of God in Christ, worship like a son of God in Christ coming before your heavenly Father, as a child goes to, runs to his father that is deeply loved by him. Not like a servant or slave constantly seeking the approval of God. I have family that are trapped in this servant like mentality – and it's not life giving. It will, at least from what I've seen, it will suck the life right out of you.

The book of Psalms is an incredible picture of wide ranging emotions. And in Psalm 16 David writes about the abundant joy that we can have in God. And writing about being in the presence of God, he writes, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad
and my whole being rejoices;
my body also rests securely.
¹⁰ For you will not abandon me to Sheol;
you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.
¹¹ You reveal the path of life to me;
in your presence is abundant joy;
at your right hand are eternal pleasures.

This is the cry of a SON OF GOD, resting, living, worshiping before God his Father. This isn't the cry of a slave desperately seeking the approval of their master

See Paul's fear was that his ministry was in vain because **they'd rather be servants than sons**. They were falling back into this trap of slavery to religion and religious activity.

What does this have to do with us? Everything. One writer that I read this week says it this way: "What if Satan's strategy to condemn your soul involves NOT tempting you to do all the wrong things, but instead leading you to do all the right things with the wrong spirit?"

Is it possible to:

- Go to church every day
- Give some money to the church
- Pray
- Fast
- Volunteer at the church
- Maybe even teach a Bible study
- Going on a mission trip every year
- Holding to a form of godliness but denying its power as Paul wrote to Timothy

All the while missing the relationship God desires for you as a son, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. See it's not that we don't or shouldn't do those things – they can be good things. BUT we don't do them to earn our spot in God's family. In Christ we are free to obey God and live a life that brings glory to him. Free as sons, to obey. Not bound as a servant, forced to obey.

Paul had this fear that his ministry was in vain – that they'd rather be slaves than sons. And we see this special affection and care he had for these churches in the next few verses.

II. Paul's Care For Them

Read 4:12-20

¹² I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have not wronged me; ¹³ you know^[e] that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. ¹⁴ You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you.^[f] On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.

¹⁵ Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶ So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? ¹⁷ They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. ¹⁸ But it is always good to be pursued^[g] in a good manner—and not just when I am with you. ¹⁹ My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. ²⁰ I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don't know what to do about you.

Couple of things to point out here – specifically when we think about how Paul was caring for them:

- Up until now he'd been coming at them hard with theology. Really blowing them up theologically. But here we see a shift of tone – in V12 he refers to them as brothers and sisters. Then again in V19 he calls them his children – similar to how John the apostle addresses the church in the letter of 1 John.
- Here in these verses he's laying out for them his affectionate care
 - And he reminds them, that when he was suffering they welcomed him.
 - Now we don't know exactly what Paul was sick with, but he was sick, and they cared for him
 - In a 1st century context – sick people were generally avoided. Like COVID now, only worse.
 - And while the verses say that his physical condition was a trial for them – they received him as Christ Jesus himself
 - But now they despise him – simply because he was telling them the truth
- And instead, they have fallen into false teachers that are “courting them eagerly”.
 - The goal of these guys was to control the people in Galatia, and exploit them for their own personal good, and build up their own personal reputation. And it's evil and wicked then, and it's still evil and wicked now.

And in V19, we get this picture into Paul's affectionate care and concern for the people in these churches – it says he labors for them until Christ is formed in them. Where the false teachers of Paul's day, and today, and disqualified pastors – try to control people in order to elevate themselves. Paul's goal was to point people to the beauty of the Gospel in order for Christ to be formed in them.

- Any pastor worth his salt knows what it's like to labor for people – praying and working to see people be formed into Christ.
- And the goal of the Christian life is to be more and more like Jesus. We glorify God as we grow to be more like Jesus. It's what Paul wrote about in Colossians where he said “So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him.”
 - Have received → at conversion

- Continue to walk → day by day growing to be more like him
- **Paul's sole focus for these churches was that Christ would be formed in them.** See Paul wasn't trying to build a platform, grow a massive twitter or Instagram following, wow people with how sexy or how flashy his church was. No way. He was laboring far more important than those things – he was laboring that Christ would be formed in them. This is why it was so very personal to Paul that they were being led astray, to the point where they were now rejecting him and the Gospel he preached to them.

He closes this part of the letter with a reminder from Israel's history – he uses Abraham's 2 sons figuratively to compare living under the law and living under the promise of the Gospel. I'm not going to read the whole thing, I'll highlight a few parts of this final section.

III. Paul's Reminder

V21 – Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you hear the law? This rhetorical question – like “you know what the law says, right?”

And he walks them through the story of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. Like all the way back to Genesis 16. OT review – Abraham is given this incredible promise from God. And then years pass and nothing. So, Abraham and Sarah hatch up this plan to try and make it happen. Sarah says to him – “hey take my servant, let's try and make this happen in our own way.” And Abraham says “well, she's pretty, why not?” Not really what he said, but I'm going to tell you a complete failure on his part, regardless of how the conversation went. Ishmael is born of Hagar. Abraham would end up sending them away. And years later, Sarah would become pregnant and bear a son, Isaac – the son of the promise. Miracle of God that Isaac was ever born. Only possible way to explain it.

And Paul uses this story from the OT as a figurative representation of trying to live under the law versus living under the promise of the Gospel. And he brings this incredible reminder – you are not slaves, you are sons. And free.

What might this look like for us today? To live like sons of this great King? To live freely? Free to obey. Free to lovingly serve. Free to fail, and trust the loving compassion of the Father when we fail. Free to take God-ordained risks. Free to give everything we have and all of our time and energy to make this great promise known.