



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 4: 21-31

Summer 2021

"Two Mothers, Two Mountains, Two People"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and welcome back. Good to have you. Good to have all of you here. We're continuing our studies in the Book of Galatians. We're in chapter 4 and we're going to finish the chapter by looking at verses 21 through 31. An interesting passage yet, somewhat complicated perhaps. Paul writes,

²¹Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. ²³But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. ²⁴This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

“Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear;
Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor;
For more numerous are the children of the desolate
Than of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸ And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. ³⁰ But what does the Scripture say?

“Cast out the bondwoman and her son,
For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free
Woman.”

³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Galatians 4: 21-31

Now all of that needs explanation. But if it seems a bit complicated, here's the point. God's people are saved supernaturally, not by works, not by law keeping, not by any kind of personal merit that we may have with God or gain with God by the things that we do, but by grace alone, supernaturally. And those who teach anything differently from that are not of the church. They're not to be listened to. “Cast out the bondwoman and her son.” We'll spend more time on that in a few moments.

May the LORD bless the reading of his Word.

(Message) Our world is so diverse that we classify mankind in various ways. We have laws that do that according to race, gender, and creed. We divide people by languages, geography, and borders; just to name a few.

The ancients were much simpler: The Greeks divided the world in two; everyone was either Greek or barbarian. The Jews also divided it between Hebrews or the *goyim*, (“The Nation’, or the nations).

Scripture divides the world into two parts as well, not according to pride, or nations, or language, or race—but according to grace. Those, who by grace, believe—and those who don't. Those of faith—and those of unbelief. Or as Jesus put it in John 3,

those “born again” and those born only once: Those born of the flesh and those born of the Spirit; born from above or born from below. There are only two kinds of people in the world.

Paul has another division that adds to that. He has been called ‘The apostle of liberty’, and here in Galatians he divides mankind into ‘slave’ and ‘free’. Not materially, not physically, but spiritually. The slavery he wrote of here is due to the Law. In Acts 15, Peter called the Law of Moses, “...a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.” (vs10). Now the Law is good. We should not neglect or forget that. Paul makes that point in Romans chapter 7, verse 12: It's “holy”, it's “good”—but when it is used improperly, when it is added to faith as necessary for salvation, it is a crushing yoke on our necks that no one can bear. It's slavery.

Some men had come to Galatia and to the churches where young believers were living in their spiritual freedom. And these legalists were trying to put their necks in that yoke under the Law. Paul was amazed by what was happening, how easily these Galatians were swayed and willing to submit to the Law. So in verse 21 he asks them, “...do you not listen to the law?”

The Word of God is alive. It speaks to those who have ears to hear. And it has a clear lesson on the Law from the Law—from Genesis chapter 12 through chapter 21. Which Paul gives here, (*in Galatians 4*), beginning in verse 22, “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman, and one by the free woman.” Those two sons were Ishmael and Isaac, whose births occurred under very significant and different circumstances—and that's where the lesson lies.

When Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans, in modern Iraq, he was 75 years old. At that time he was *Abram*, which means ‘exalted father’. But the exalted father was childless—and his wife “Sarah was barren.” (In fact that point is made in Genesis 11, verse 30. Obviously, that is a point that the Spirit of God, inspiring the Book of Genesis, wanted us to understand very clearly because of all that followed.)

But when God called Abram, He made him a promise. He said, "Go forth from your country...to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation." (Gen 12: 1-2). This man without a child, without a son, would become "a great nation." So by faith, Abraham obeyed. He came to Canaan, but God didn't give him a child. Ten years past when God again spoke to Abram in Genesis 15, and He then reaffirmed the promise. He called Abram outside of his tent, at night, and He told him to look up at the heavens and to "count the stars". Then He said, "So shall your descendants be." (Gen 15:5). In other words, 'They will be innumerable.'

Abram was now 85 years old—and still childless. It wasn't for lack of trying but the biological clock was ticking—and time was running out. It troubled him. God gave a promise but it wasn't happening. It bothered Sarah, too—maybe even more because she was barren. But she got an idea: She had a handmaid, Hagar, a slave from Egypt. And she gave her to Abram so that he could have a child by her. And it was, according to the books as it were, perfectly legal. The ancient marriage contracts of that time stated that if a wife proved childless, she was to provide her husband with a slave wife to produce heirs.

So, following the custom of the day, she told Abram, "...go into my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." (Gen 16:2). Abram did; and from the slave he produced a son, Ishmael. Now Abram had a son. Ishmael was proof of his ability, his virility. It's what one writer called the result of the outworking of the philosophy that, 'God helps those who help themselves.'

But God doesn't need our help. He always fulfills His promises in His ways and in His time, not ours. We simply are to trust Him, and we are to wait on Him.

Now that's difficult to do. I think one of the great tests of faith is, 'Can you wait upon the LORD?' Abram didn't. This man of faith didn't. He had a lapse in faith. He acted in the flesh and he produced something that would become his pride and joy, Ishmael—but would also become a source of great sadness in his family and his life. And that is always the result of not trusting God's Word: Of not waiting on Him and instead taking

matters into one's own hands, and acting in the flesh—doing what we think is the wisest thing. But it's not in accord with God's will and Word.

Well, it wasn't long before the problems began. Hagar's ability to conceive gave her a sense of superiority over Sarah and she couldn't conceal it—and she began to gloat. It was humiliating for Sarah; Hagar and her son were a constant reminder to her of her inability. Now that's not all that bad. One thing we need to know is our inability. In fact, I think it's true to say that, 'Where theologies have gone wrong is right there at that point—not realizing one's inability'. As that great sage, Dirty Harry said, "A man's got to know his limitations." *[Laughter]*

I'm glad you didn't take me too seriously there, but take me seriously about the inability. It's true. But it got to Sarah and it went on for years. But Ishmael wasn't the son of promise. God would not fulfill His promise through Hagar. God does things differently from the way that man does them. His ways are not our ways. He is the God of the universe. He is the almighty God. He does mighty things. He's the God of the supernatural. He's the God of sovereign grace and not the God of human works, (though He produces all the human works that we produce). And when Abram was 99 years old, God again visited him and changed his name from Abram to *Abraham*, (meaning 'Father of a multitude'), and said Sarah would have a son, Isaac...he would be the heir—not Ishmael.

So now he was Abraham, "Father of a multitude", without an heir and well past the age of producing children. In Romans chapter 4, verse 19 Paul called him "...as good as dead..." But that was all by design, because now that he was no longer able, now that he was 'as good as dead', he had to rely completely on the power and promise of God. And God never fails in His promises.

When Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born—whose name means *laughter*. It was a miracle child, proving that nothing is too great, and nothing is too difficult for God to do. He brings life out of death. He brings a universe out of nothing. And He produces joy where there is grief; He gives laughter where there is sadness.

'God', as John the Baptist said, 'is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.' (Mat 3:9). And He proved that here. That was the reason God waited so long to fulfill His promise. He always has a purpose in everything that He does, and that's why we need to wait upon Him. This was the demonstration of His sovereign grace.

Now Abraham had two children, two sons, one by Hagar the slave, and one by Sarah the free woman. And the boys grew up together for the first years of Isaac's life, until Isaac was weaned.

Traditionally, Jewish women would nurse their children late—until they were about 3 years old which would have made Ishmael 17 years old at the time that Isaac was weaned. It was a big occasion. It's recorded in Genesis 21. To celebrate it, Abraham gave a feast. But during the celebration, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac. Now she saw in it more than a brother's playful conduct. She recognized, in the mocking, a hostility that she knew would be dangerous—fatal for Isaac. And so she insisted that Abraham "drive out" Hagar and Ishmael from the family.

Well, Abraham was reluctant to do that. He loved Ishmael; he was his son. And even the ancient law codes were against that—they protected the slave wife from being expelled from the family. Abraham refused to do it. But Sarah had more insight here than Abraham. And God spoke to him, again, and told Abraham to 'listen to his wife'. That's always good advice, gentlemen. And we have many examples of that in the Scriptures. "For," He said, "through Isaac your descendants shall be named." (vs12). So Isaac and Hagar were given food and water and sent away.

Now that's the story where Paul finds the lesson. And in verse 23 he sets it up by drawing out of those events two central facts about each son. They had different mothers and they had different births. Isaac was from the "bondwoman", and so he was a slave child, while Isaac was from "the free woman", and so he was free. Ishmael "was born according to the flesh"—according to nature by Abraham's own power. While Isaac was born "through the promise", contrary to nature. His father was 99 years old, well past the age of producing children. And Sarah was over 90 and infertile. And so the

slave child was natural and the free child was supernatural. Ishmael was the result of Abraham's reliance on self; while Isaac was the result of reliance on God.

Those are the facts. And from them, Paul now draws a lesson. He introduces it by saying that this story of Abraham is an allegory, "...allegorically speaking", he says, and it has a lesson behind it. Now in saying that, Paul didn't mean an allegory in our sense of the word, which is a story that gives a moral or a spiritual lesson without being historically true. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a great example of that. It's an allegory. It doesn't pretend to be history. In fact, it begins with Bunyan writing, "I dreamed a dream." It's fiction that illustrates spiritual truth.

Well, the events of Abraham's life are history—they happened. Paul meant that they are allegorical in the sense that they correspond to spiritual truth. They are what we would call a 'type', or 'an illustration'. Typology makes a correspondence between a person or thing in the past with a person or thing in the future. It is a 'prophetic foreshadowing'. It's an illustration, a prophet picture. Israel's historic deliverance from Egypt is an illustration of our salvation. They were redeemed by the shed blood of the Passover lamb, and redeemed out of slavery, brought through the Red Sea to freedom. And eventually brought into the land of Canaan. A picture of us being redeemed and brought into our heavenly rest.

Now that's a 'type'. There is a type to be found in the sacrificial system, and all of the sacrifices that were offered; on the Passover, on the Day of Atonement, on the morning and evening sacrifices at the temple; they all picture something that was future. And that was the final sacrifice of our LORD Jesus Christ. And there are many, many others.

So Paul says, in these events in Abraham's life we have an allegory, meaning a type. And he explains them. He shows the correspondence. He says the two women signify "two covenants"—that is, two great agreements that God made: The covenant God made with Abraham, (which was really a promise in Genesis 15), and the covenant that He made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant. One is of grace; the other is of works.

Hagar the slave represents what proceeded from Mt. Sinai. She could only bear slave children. And the Law can only produce spiritual slaves. It has rules; “Thou shalt”; “Thou shalt not”. But it doesn't give the power to obey those commands and to follow those rules. And so it is a heavy yoke that people strain under.

Paul knew from personal experience that no one can follow the Law perfectly. No one can keep the Law, and the Law put people in that way in bondage. It shut them up to their sin and it didn't let them out. The Law condemns people but it doesn't provide release from the verdict. It holds people captive as slaves, to constantly walk the treadmill without arriving or achieving.

Hagar could only produce a slave child. And the same is true of Judaism, with its interpretation of the Law as the means of salvation. In verse 25 Paul makes the connection—makes that connection that he has been referring to here, when Hagar, he says, “corresponds” to Jerusalem, which represents Judaism. It is the capital of the Jewish legal system. And like Hagar, it can only produce slaves—spiritual slaves. So Paul traces out a line of slavery from Hagar, to Mt. Sinai, to the city of Jerusalem—and to the people of Jerusalem; “for,” he says, “she” (Jerusalem), “like Hagar is in slavery with her children.”

But there's another Jerusalem, “...the Jerusalem above”; and it “is free”, Paul says in verse 26, “she is our mother.”, meaning the capital, or source of God made religion. True religion is heaven. These legalists who had come to Galatia claimed that Abraham was their father and that it was necessary to be a child of Abraham in order to be saved: Which they would become by circumcision and following the Law. But Ishmael was Abraham's son and he was circumcised—and he was a slave and not an heir.

No, the real issue is, “Who is your mother, Hagar or Sarah?” In other words, are you born from above or born from below? Was your birth purely human or was it divine? Was it only natural—or was it supernatural? Does it come from heaven, or does it come from earth? Have you been born again?

Those whose mother is “the Jerusalem above”, meaning those who have been born from above, are free, Paul says—like Isaac.

Now it's worth noting that Paul contrasts the present Jerusalem with the Jerusalem above—and not the Jerusalem to come as we might have thought a strict contrast would lead him to make. But he doesn't do that. He speaks instead, not of the Jerusalem to come—but the Jerusalem above. And the reason is because it is a parallel reality with the earthly Jerusalem.

It is a city to which we presently belong. It's not just a future hope. It is a future hope but it is a present reality as well. In Philippians, chapter 3, verse 20 Paul said, "Our citizenship is in heaven." That's a present reality. So as believers, we now live with all of the privileges and the power of heaven while we are living here on Earth. We're connected with heaven and the power of heaven. And that Jerusalem above, where Christ is, is presently producing spiritual children that are true children of Abraham, spiritual children and heirs of the promises.

So there are two realities—two parallel worlds, as it were; one natural and one spiritual; one natural, one supernatural. Divide the world any way you want, but basically, spiritually, there are only two kinds of people—those who are of faith and free, and those who are of works and enslaved.

Paul supports this division from Scripture with a quote in verse 27 from Isaiah 54, verse 1, where the prophet also finds a spiritual lesson in Sarah as a picture of God's life-giving grace. So Paul may have been inspired to make the allegory that he did from Isaiah and his reference to Sarah.

Now it's interesting, this quote in Isaiah 54, verse 1, obviously follows chapter 53, the great passage on the Suffering Servant. And toward the end of that passage, in verse 11, Isaiah wrote of the Suffering Servant, "My servant," (God is speaking here), "...My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities." In other words, there is a Suffering Servant who will be a substitute and bear the iniquity, (the sin), of His people. And through that sacrifice they will be justified; they will be saved.

Now based on that work of redemption, Isaiah writes just two verses later, of a glorious future,

"Rejoice, barren woman, who does not bear;
Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor;
For more numerous are the children of the desolate
Than the one who has a husband."

Well, he's referring to the same events and persons and relationships that Paul does here in Galatians 4. It is in Isaiah, a prophecy of future blessing for Israel. But Paul interprets it, or he broadens its meaning, as already being fulfilled in the church with Gentile salvation.

It's what he describes more fully in Romans 11, verses 11 through 24 with the parable of the olive tree and the wild branches of the Gentiles being "grafted into" Israel's blessings. He doesn't displace Israel's blessings and the future of Israel because Paul then goes on to say, in verse 26, that "all Israel will be saved". And in verse 29, "for the gifts and the calling...are irreversible." God's gift, His promise to the nation Israel, will be fulfilled. But in the process, He's saving Gentiles and grafting them into Israel's blessings.

And both Isaiah and Paul make it clear that this salvation, this salvation of the Gentile, this salvation of the Jew, is all of grace. "The barren one" will have numerous children—just as Sarah did, who was barren and gave birth to the child of promise. And a great nation came from that. And did so, (again), because of God's supernatural intervention.

That's the lesson of the two women and the two sons. It is the triumph of grace and the failure of works. And Paul applies that to the Galatians in verse 28. He says, "You brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise." They're supernatural people. Just as Isaac was born physically by divine intervention, so is every believer, every one of you who puts your faith in Jesus Christ. Everyone, from the beginning to the end, who are saved, are saved and become believers because they've been spiritually born again as a work of God.

And since their spiritual birth is like Isaac's birth, they should expect that their lives will very much follow the path, or the track, of Isaac's life. His brother persecuted him. And they, too, would be persecuted, these Galatians. In fact, Paul's point is that they were actually being persecuted at that time by these legalists. But he says, in verse 29, "But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also." In other words, 'so it is with you Galatians.'

Paul here, when he speaks of the one of "the flesh persecuted him *who was born* of the Spirit", he's referring to that incident in Genesis 21, when Isaac was weaned, and Ishmael, at the age of 17, laughed at him, mocked him. It is natural for the flesh to persecute the spirit. And we should expect that the world will be hostile toward the church. The two are fundamentally different from one another. The LORD was persecuted by the unbelieving religious and secular authorities of His day. Paul was persecuted by both, as have God's people down through the ages, from the Caesars to the Communists.

But it happens in tolerant times, as well. And in peaceful places. It happens at work when co-workers are ostracized for being Christian, and perhaps speaking of their faith; or living the life before others; and it becomes a kind of convicting thing to those around them. And it happens in academic institutions.

Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper, wrote that in Europe, few Christians had professorships in the sciences. And the reason is because those who appointed people to those positions are, as he said, "as a rule inclined to exclude the sons of palingenesis." Kuyper loved that word, *palingenesis*. It's a biblical word. It's a Greek word, and it's the word for *new birth*.

He wrote that over a century ago—and it's only changed for the worst. The West... the World, is secular. And the more secular it becomes, the more hostile it becomes to the faith and to the supernatural. It's hostile toward the sons and daughters of the new birth—and so we shouldn't be surprised. And that's really what Paul was

telling these Galatians. These people aren't your friends. They're really persecuting you. They are Ishmaels coming after you. And we can expect the same.

John Stott wrote, "Isaac is always mocked and persecuted by Ishmael," meaning you and I are going to be persecuted by Ishmael. Those who follow legalism, the religion of redemption by human effort, will always oppose grace; because they want to point to their own achievements. And grace robs them of that—strips it from them. There's nothing for them to boast about. And they will always persecute those of faith by trying to bring them into the bondage of the Law or some legalistic system...put the 'yoke of the law' on our necks.

So Paul gives the Galatians some decisive instruction in verse 30. Since they are like Isaac, they must follow the council of Isaac's mother, and remove the legalists. That's the command of Scripture; verse 30, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son. For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."

Sarah's action may seem harsh, but it was necessary. Ishmael was a danger to Isaac and to the family of promise—and to God's work of salvation. Isaac was Ishmael's rival and he would have overthrown him had he been given the opportunity—just as Cain did Able. Sarah recognized that. Her judgment was the judgment of God. And here, by application to the Galatians situation, Paul was giving God's judgment on the legalists. They could not live with men of faith and grace. They would seek to undermine God's work. So he gives this counsel that these men were to be thrown out. There's no middle ground.

Now we should be clear and I want to make this clear—I don't want there to be any misunderstanding which may have come over the weeks of our study in this subject and this book—Legalism does not mean, **does not** mean the recognition of spiritual standards and rules. The New Testament is filled with principles of conduct. It is filled with instruction. It is filled with examples that we're to follow—and genuine believers obey them. We have lots of moral and spiritual guidance in the New Testament. In fact, we are instructed from the Law of Moses, as well. The whole of the Bible is instruction

for us, rightly discerned and rightly used. So we have principles of conduct that we must follow.

Legalism is not that. Legalism is not principles of conduct. Legalism is the belief that following rules in our own strength gains merit with God; and is the way to salvation. It is natural religion—and completely contrary to grace and the Gospel. So Paul said, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son."... 'Get rid of the legalists!'

Then he concluded by summarizing his argument in verse 31. "So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." Believers in Jesus Christ are not under the Law of Moses. We are free from the Law through Christ. And Paul was telling the Galatians that was true of them. So they were to live as free people.

Again, there are only two kinds of people in the world. We can describe them as free and slaves, as believers and non-believers, children of heaven and children of the earth. But what divides the world into two groups is the grace of God. We are all either sons of the *palingenesis*, children of the new birth, or children of natural genesis. Either born again—or not.

At the end of chapter 3, Paul calls believers, "...Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise". It is not a natural birth that makes a person Abraham's spiritual offspring and heir; or religious rituals; or ceremonies; or deeds. —It is grace. And Isaac is the great illustration of that. He was born by God's power, born according to the Spirit according to verse 29. And the Christian is born of the Spirit, according to John chapter 3, verses 1 through 7; "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."

Abraham and Sarah were well past the age of producing children, but God told Abraham that it would be through Sarah that he would have a son and an heir. And so Abraham believed God. He acted in faith and conceived a son by his wife, who had been made alive by God. And in that, Abraham is a picture of faith and Sarah a picture of grace. That is how salvation occurs. And by grace through faith, the result is joy. Isaac means *laughter*. He brought joy to his parents—and salvation brings joy to us.

The Law can't do that. The Law can't give that. The world can't give that. Life and joy, laughter of the soul—they're found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone—and we have Him through faith alone. And having Him, we have the power now to live a life of obedience, a fruitful and orderly life. And we have a life with hope—the hope of the heaven to come and glory that is forever. So, that should make us rejoice.

If you have believed in Him, you have every reason to rejoice, and to take great joy in your life, and great joy and thankfulness, having that toward God, who brought it all to be. Rejoice in that. Rejoice in the salvation that God has given you, and live for Him.

But if you've not believed, if you're one of those others on the other side of the divide, then look to Him. Cast out the bondwoman. Throw away the Law. Throw away the very notion that you can gain any acceptance by God by the things you do; and trust in Christ. Come to Him. Believe in Him and be saved. May God help you to do that, and live a life to His honor and glory.

LORD Jesus, God the Father, and Spirit, we hunger by Your grace. You create that hunger within us to desire You and come to You. Otherwise we would not be seeking and searching. We'd be dead in our sins.

But we thank You for that sovereign grace that quickens us and gives us that hunger and thirst for righteousness and truth and salvation. And we thank You that You in Your goodness and grace have provided that salvation and obtained it through the work of Your Son. We thank You for Him.

We are dependent upon You every moment, so Father bless us throughout this week and bless us now as we will take the LORD's Supper in the next few minutes. May it be a blessing to our soul as we reflect upon Your Son and all that He's done for us. We thank You for Him.

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And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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