

Gospel Driven Freedom

1. Intro

- In 1962 Nelson Mandela was convicted of conspiring to overthrow the state ... and was sentenced to life imprisonment
- For the next 27 years ... he remained behind bars in various prisons including 18 years on Robben Island
- In 1990, he was granted release from prison after the President of South Africa FW de Klerk began the process of dismantling apartheid and freeing ANC members like Mandela
- Within 4 years, Mandela had been elected President of South Africa a position he held for 5 years
- Wonderful story of restoration and redemption
- But can you imagine ... after all that ... he turned around and asked to go back to jail and be locked up again?!
- Seems crazy doesn't it

- Well that's what Paul thinks is going on in the churches in Galatia
 - The Galatians have been freed ... and yet they are choosing to go back to slavery
 - They're trading in their gospel driven freedom ... and becoming slaves once more
- Paul is going to go onto show them
 - Freedom comes through Christ / God's son
 - Freedom comes through God's promise
 - Freedom comes through God's grace

2. Context

- Paul ramming home to the Galatians that salvation comes by faith in Christ alone
 - Galatians have been bewitched
 - They've been foolishly listening to false teachers and have been persuaded that they need more than the death and resurrection of Jesus
 - And that you need to add to Christ ... your good works > you moralism, your religiosity

- Now he's starting to spell out the implications of being saved by faith and not trying to earn your salvation
 - 3:26-4:7 Paul contrasts the difference between being in a household as a slave versus being a son

- He says when you come to faith in Christ ... that means you're an adopted son of God
- Through faith in Christ, God brings you into his family and gives you the full rights of sons ... which means you're an heir with a guaranteed eternal inheritance
- In our passage today Paul continues that theme of being a slave and he contrasts it with the freedom we have in Christ

3. Two Slaverys: Freedom comes through Christ

- Paul starts off in v8-9 saying
 - ⁸ *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.* ⁹ *But now that you know God-- or rather are known by God-- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*
- Need to remember that most of the Galatians would've been converted from paganism
 - They would've been worshippers at the temples of Greek and Roman gods
 - And they would've lived the immoral lifestyles which went along with those religions
 - And Paul says "you were slaves to" them
 - Before I came and told you the gospel ... you were in slavery to these false gods
- And it **seems** like Paul is rebuking them for turning back to their paganism and idol worship
 - After all ... Paul says "you are turning back ... do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? (v9)
- But when you look closely at v8-11 ... what he's warning the Galatians about ...
 - is not to go back to this kind of pagan idol worship
 - rather Paul's warning them not be caught up in religious legalism and moralism
- The false teachers were not encouraging the Gentile Christians to ignore God's Law, as they had in their pagan days
 - Rather, they were urging them to adopt all the practices of the Old Testament Law in order to be justified and pleasing to God

- So what Paul is saying here is ...
 - Trying to please God through moralism and religiosity ... is just as much enslavement as outright paganism with all its idolatry and immoral practices
 - In the end, the religious person is just as much a slave as the irreligious person

- How does this work? What does Paul mean here?
- Even though the false gods and idols don't exist ... we can still become slaves to them
 - For we think that our god or idol is going to save us and fulfil our life and make our life worth living
- And so the people in Paul's time would go to the temples and sacrifice to gods of their culture in order to
 - be blessed with rain or
 - sunshine for their crops or
 - victory in battle or
 - safety at sea

- They're life and well being was totally governed by what they worshipped
- And ... if they didn't get the rains they needed for their crops they were devastated and left wondering what they did wrong
 - If they lost a battle they would be anxious as to whether their gods had abandoned them
 - They were slaves to them

- And Paul's telling the Galatians they're in danger of becoming slaves once more
 - Not to their pagan idols and gods
 - But to the religiosity and moralism that they were being lured to and away from salvation by faith alone in Christ

- By being caught up in obeying the Law ... the Galatians would become slaves to the Law
 - Constantly trying to obey it > constantly seeking to fulfil it
 - Recognising they were unable to fully obey the Law ... and so despairing about their salvation > being ridden with guilt for their failures
- Paul's saying ...
 - You want to try and add to your salvation by obeying the Law ...

- It will make you a slave just as much as you were worshipping your false idols and gods
- So you see ... you can be irreligious or religious and still be enslaved by the thing you worship
- Which is why says v9 "why are you turning back to it? ... do you want to be enslaved all over again!"
 - It crazy! It's illogical
- Uni student
 - Can you imagine a student finally graduated from university after years of education, re-enrolling in primary school?
- Street kid
 - Can you imagine a street kid picked up from the gutter and adopted into a warm, accepting family, choosing to go back to homelessness?
- That's why Paul can't believe that they're doing what they are doing
 - Why go back to that?
 - Why go back to slavery?
- **Application**
- What this means is ... unless you are in Christ ... you are slave to the thing that you worship
 - Like the Galatians ... we'll worship what we think we need to fulfil ourselves and give us life and meaning to life
- And Paul is saying that anything can be worshipped ... and treated as a God
 - Money, sex, family, children, job, success, beauty, possessions, lifestyle
 - And whatever it is we seek to justify our existence ... we'll be enslaved by it
- For example, if we try and justify ourselves in gaining wealth, we'll be controlled and enslaved by it
 - We would be completely under the power of money
 - We would be dreaming about how to get it
 - How we would like to spend it
 - We would sacrifice time and friendships and family and happiness in order to get it
 - If we're not doing well at gaining it, we'll be devastated

- And even if we do get enough, we will be disappointed, and seek more
- You see how, if we treat things that are not gods as though they are, we become slaves to them
 - This is as relevant to the irreligious person as much as the religious person
- So for the religious person ...
 - Going to church, daily devotions, taking communion, being on a roster, being moral, giving money, helping charities
 - If you do these things in order to be right with God other than faith in Christ ... you're making the things you DO the means of your salvation
 - And as a result you become a slave to them
 - I must do this > I must do that
 - I must give this > I must be on the roster > I must be good
 - Your life is governed by your religiosity and moralism ...
 - You become enslaved to them
- You become so preoccupied with being religious and moral that it destroys you
 - Constantly anxious about whether you've been good enough
 - Constantly worried whether you've ticked enough of the religious boxes
 - Have no sense of assurance about your eternal salvation ...
 - Life becomes a treadmill of doing enough to keep God happy
- And then when you fail ... what do you do?
 - Say to yourself ... "I must try harder" ... and with gritted teeth you end up grinding yourself into the ground in obligation, duty and guilt
 - Or you just give up and say ... "this is too hard > this is soul destroying"
- You see friends ...
 - Anything that you are chasing to justify your life ... either to yourself or to God ... then that thing will become your slave master
 - Without Christ, you will be enslaved by it
- So how can we be freed from our slavery?
- Paul says in verse 9 ... it is when we are **known by God**
- The Galatians were redeemed from their slavery to their pagan idolatry when they were known by God
 - To 'know' in the Bible means more than intellectual awareness
 - To 'know' someone is to be in relationship with them

- You see when you know ... you're known by God then it frees you from the slavery of having to justify yourself
 - You no longer have the need to justify your life through money, sex, family, children, job, success, beauty, possessions, lifestyle
 - You no longer have to justify yourself to God with your religiosity or moralism
- Why?
 - Because in Christ ... you're in relationship with the creator of the universe
 - If you're known by God ... you're a son of God, and that makes you an heir and gives you a guaranteed eternal inheritance
- So you can let go of having to justify yourself or your life
 - You no longer need to fret about
 - being good enough, rich enough, moral enough, successful enough, religious enough
- Because God thinks you are so precious and lovable and valuable to him ... he was willing to send his one and only son ... to go to the cross, die for you, and redeem you ... so you don't have to do a thing
 - All you need to do is trust him and put your faith in him
 - And when you do ... you are free from all that
 - You'll no longer be a slave

- To the extent you and I understand that our knowing of God depends not on what we do ... but on what Christ has already **done** ... then we're released from the burden of slavery ... and are truly free

- Friends if you begin to grasp that you're known by God ... then you won't need to seek to bolster yourself image or you standing before him through your works
- You are free to love him and live for him ... because you're no longer a slave, but a son

4. Two Sons: Freedom comes through God's promise

- To help the Galatians see the foolishness of what they're doing ... Paul shows them from the OT scriptures how the Law actually teaches them that what they are doing is wrong
- He says in v21 ...
 - You who want to rely on the Law to be right with God ... let me show you from the Law that this was never the case

- Then he recounts the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael
 - *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.*
- We need to familiarise ourselves with this part of the Bible if we're to make sense of what Paul is saying here

- Abraham ... the forefather of God's people
- When God called Abraham he promised him three things
 - Give him a land of his own
 - Make him into a great nation
 - Bless him and bless all the nations through him

- Sometime later Abraham is doubting whether God is going to come good on his promises and make him into a great nation because at this stage he and Sarah are still childless
 - Yet God reassures him that he will have as many descendents as there are stars in the sky

- None-the-less Abraham and Sarah take matters into their own hands
 - Abraham is now 85 yrs old, Sarah is 75 yrs old, she's barren, they're both old
 - So Sarah offers Abraham her maidservant (her slave woman - Hagar) to Abraham to sleep with, in order for him to conceive a child through Hagar and start building this family God had promised
 - Hagar conceives and Ishmael is born

- Yet this was never God's plan ...
- 14 years later ... God turns up and says to Abraham ... this time next year Sarah will give birth to a son
 - Lo-and-behold ... at the ripe old age of 99 and 90 ... Abraham and Sarah give birth to Isaac

- And as you read through the rest of the Bible ... we see it was through **Isaac** and his descendents that the promises of God would flow and be fulfilled ... not Ishmael

- Paul uses this as allegory / illustration to show the Galatians that our inheritance as sons of God comes through promise of God ... not through our efforts
- He's turning the tables on them by reminding them that, Abraham had two sons ... one by the slave woman the other by the free woman
 - One son received God promises and inheritance
 - The other didn't
- He's making the point there are two ways of being a child of Abraham ... one right way and one the wrong way
- For Ishmael ... Abraham tried to get his son through his own efforts
 - By sleeping with Hagar, Abraham was choosing to rely on his own capabilities
 - He was opting to work and gain his son
 - He was acting in faith ... but the faith he had was with himself
- Yet God never directed his promise to his son through Ishmael
- Abraham's bid for self-salvation failed
- Abraham tried to obtain the blessing of God through his own efforts rather than rely on the promise of God
- Paul's point to the Galatians is for them to see
 - You're a child of God through the grace and promise of God ... not through your own efforts
 - The story of Ishmael and Isaac show you that
- To try and obtain God's blessing through your own efforts will make you like Ishmael's > still a slave and with no inheritance
- But when you trust in God for your salvation ... then you're like Isaac > true sons of Abraham who share in the blessing and the inheritance to come
- The irony of course is ... that in trying to be religious and earn their inheritance from God ... it was actually pushing them further away from what they are trying to achieve
- **Application**
- Again Paul is ramming home that there's no other gospel other than faith in Christ alone for our right standing before God

- True freedom comes through faith
- Here's the great paradox of the Christian faith
 - You try and earn your standing before God
 - You try and contribute to the promises of God
 - You try and work for your eternal inheritance ...
 - You will remain a slave and end up with nothing
- The great joy therefore of the Christian faith is ... you're free from the slavery of having to justify yourself before God through your moralism and religiosity
 - You're no longer bound by the chains of being good, being moral, being religious that constantly ...
 - Leaves you feeling like you have to do more, because you don't know if you've done enough
 - Leaves you feeling guilty and without hope because you've failed
- Because freedom comes through the promises ... not through your efforts

5. Two Mothers: Freedom comes through grace

- When you look closely at this account of Sarah and Hagar that Paul recounts ... we see a story within the story
 - His main point is to show that the promise and blessing of God come through God's work ... not Abraham's or our work
- But within this story ... we see the story of two mothers
 - Really it's a story of comfort for those of us, especially for mothers, who think they are weak and imperfect and helpless and failures
 - It's a story which highlights the grace of God who still blesses people despite being weak and imperfect and helpless and failures
 - It's a story that highlights for us the grace of the gospel
- To make his point ... in v27 he quotes Isaiah 54:1
 - *"Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labour pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."*
- This was spoken by the prophet Isaiah to the Jewish exiles in Babylon around 1200 years after Abraham's time and about 600 years before Paul
- The Israelites in exile thought
 - that their national life was over
 - that they would never return home

- or have their own country again
- They seemed like failures ... barren, weak and helpless ... while other nations seemed strong and able
- But God says to them through Isaiah ..
 - now that you're helpless, you will see that it's the weak in whose lives my grace works
 - Even though it seems you're barren now ... I will restore you and make you numerous and great
- And Paul shows how God used the old and barren woman Sarah ... not the capable and fertile woman Hagar, to save his people and save the world
 - For it was through the family of Sarah that the Lord Jesus would come and bring about the promised blessings and eternal inheritance given to the sons of God
- Paul wants them to see the grace of God flows right through history >
 - From Sarah, to Israel, to those in Christ now who are part of the heavenly Jerusalem
- It doesn't matter if you're barren, weak and helpless
 - God's grace overcomes that
- If salvation is by our own efforts, then only the fertile are successful
 - Only the
 - morally able and strong
 - the people from good families
 - the people with good records
 - can be spiritually fruitful
 - enjoy the blessing and promise of God
- But if the gospel of grace is true ... then it doesn't matter who you are or who you were
 - You may be a spiritual and moral outcast
 - You may be as marginal as a barren woman was in those ancient days - it does not matter
 - You will share in the promised blessing of God
- The gospel says ...
 - grace is not just for fertile Hagar's, but for barren Sarah's

- If Sarah can have a future, anyone can
- In fact it goes deeper even then this ... because Paul is saying that the gospel of grace is especially for the barren
 - The able and the fertile think they justify themselves without God ... and so they reject the gospel of grace
- Sarah is a huge encouragement to those who see themselves as failures
 - In those ancient times, a woman's worth essentially consisted entirely in their ability to be a children
 - Ancient cultures told a woman that her worth and justification for life were her ability to produce children ... and if that she couldn't bear children ... her life is useless to society
- But the story of Sarah shows us that being the ideal women
 - Having children
 - Being the perfect mum
 - Don't actually determine your value and justification before God
- If that's the way you think ... you will be a slave to being the perfect mum
 - And you'll cripple yourself with impossible expectations
- You might be a failure in societies eyes ... or in your own eyes like Sarah
 - But you're not a failure in God's eyes
- Because he doesn't look at
 - how good you are
 - how successful you are
 - how attractive you are
- God saves by grace
 - He looks at what Jesus did for you ... not what you do
- And when you look at what Jesus did for you ... on that cross in Jerusalem 2000 years ago
 - And you how Jesus Christ gave up his freedom ... so you could be free
 - How Jesus became a slave ... so that you would no longer be a slave
- To the degree you and I understand that ...
 - We won't need to justify ourselves through our children or our parenting any more than we justify ourselves through our career or money or possessions or success

- Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery
 - It is for freedom that Christ has set you free

PRAY