

Galatians 4: 28-31; “The Child of Promise”, Message # 30 in the series – “Christ has Set us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 9th, 2022, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

What we find here in these verses is a symbolic allegory; an Old Testament narrative which the Apostle Paul shows us is something used by the Holy Spirit to portray to us pictures of New Testament, New Covenant spiritual realities. The spiritual reality that is being portrayed by Abraham’s concubine wife Hagar is a picture to our minds of those people who are born of the flesh. They are still under curse of the law and they are in bondage to sin and to the law because they have never been born of Spirit.

Abraham’s true wife Sarah is the picture of a free woman; she who was given the promise of bearing Isaac, even though she had been barren for so long. The Jerusalem above, we saw in our last study, is the mother of all those who are true believers; those persons who are trusting in the promise of what God will do for them to bring them salvation from sin and eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. They are born from above by the Holy Spirit.

When a person is trusting in Christ, they become a child of promise. God has promised that He will save each one believing in the promise of the gospel. The person who has faith in Jesus Christ is set free from the law. Abraham and Sarah’s son Isaac’s birth and his experience as a young child are a picture of the difference between those born of the flesh and those who are born of the Spirit. Those who are born of the flesh are legalists, and they are represented by Hagar and Ishmael. And those who are true Christians, who have been set free by grace, are represented by Sarah and Isaac.

At this time we want to further examine these spiritual realities by means of the following statements: 1st – Those who are born according to God’s working are children of promise. 2nd – Those who are born according to the flesh persecute those who are born according to the Spirit. And 3rd – The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

1st of all – Those who are born according to God’s working are children of promise.
(verse 28)

Turn with me back to Genesis 15, verse 1. “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram.’ “I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” “But Abram said, “Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.” “Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!’ “And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” “Then he brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ “And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

We need to remember that Abraham had first been given the promise of having many descendants back in chapter 12, verse 2. I will make you a great nation.” And Genesis 12, verse 7: “To your descendants I will give this land. At that time he was 75 years old. Here in Chapter 15, Abraham is 85 years old and Sarah was 75 years old. There was still no child who had been born to them. And so Abraham says to God that he was really quite skeptical about the fulfillment of the promise that God had given to him. “Look, You have given me no offspring”, (as you promised that you would). And so he says: “If I were to die tonight, the heir of my house would be my servant Eliezer of Damascus.”

This is nothing but unbelief and fleshly thinking. The Lord knew this, and that is why He said to Abram that He was Abram’s shield and His exceedingly great reward. And so the Lord further explains His promise to Abraham by telling him that “one who will come from his own body shall be his heir”. Abraham believed this, and it was at this point he was formally declared righteous.

But the just person shall not only be justified by faith, but the just person should also live by their faith in the promise of God. This, Abraham was going to have to learn the hard way. We must ask ourselves this question: What part of the promise given to Abram should have allowed him to believe that Sarah would also be included in this promise which God had given to him, that they would someday have a child? The answer is found in Genesis Chapter 3, verses 21-25. “And the Lord God cause a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.” “Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.” “And Adam said” “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

You will notice here, that the two become one flesh in God’s institution of marriage. This is “one flesh” in the sense of the physical body. There are 2 different Biblical definitions of flesh. One refers to the body, as it does here. And the other refers to a person’s trying to do, or to bring about, that which God has commanded or promised, by their own strength and their own wisdom. When God promised Abraham that he would have a child who would come from “his own body”, God meant that the child would come from Sarah’s conceiving that child with Abraham. By faith, Abraham should have remembered this. He should have thought more carefully upon the promise which God gave to him. For –

In the 2nd Place – Those who are born according to the flesh persecute those who are born according to the Spirit. (verses 29 and 30)

“But as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.” “Nevertheless what does the Scripture say?” “CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREEWOMAN.” We need to remember what being born according to the flesh, and being born according to the Spirit means. He who was born according to the flesh is Ishmael. Ishmael was Hagar’s son, but he came to be born as a result of the fleshly strategy of Sarah with Abraham; their falling into thinking that God would not supernaturally give them a child of their own, even though God had given them a promise that He would.

Isaac would be born according to the promise of God. Salvation and the giving of physical life and eternal life are all of God. The real problem which led to Sarah’s taking this desperate measure of giving her maid Hagar to Abraham to be a surrogate wife, was the length of time that had transpired between when the promise had been made, and when it was actually fulfilled. Abraham and Sarah had believed the promise in general, but they did not believe in God’s timetable in relation to the promise.

Turn with me over to Genesis 16, verse 1. “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children.” “And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.” “So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children.’ “Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” “And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.” “Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.” “So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.” “And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.” “The Lord judge between you and me.” “So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please.’ “And Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.”

Now, as you read these words, it may appear to you that Sarai is the persecutor here. But it is not persecution. It is the angry indignation of a woman who thought that she could obtain what she was seeking, by her own supposed wisdom. She took this out on both her husband and her maid. But actually it was Sarai who made the great fleshly mistake of giving her maid into her husband’s embrace. Why did she do this? It was because she had waited 10 years for God’s promise to be fulfilled, and it had not been fulfilled in her time. And so, since she concluded that

10 years was long enough to wait for God to act, to give her the power to conceive. She would take matters into her own hands! She decided on what she thought was a good plan.

You will notice that when she concocted this plan she did not consult with her husband, or God, beforehand. She simply went ahead with her own plan, thinking that there was wisdom in it. Was this the wisdom of God or selfish earthly wisdom? Well, evidently it was selfish earthly wisdom, for as you look at verse 2, she says – “See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children.” “Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her”. The whole emphasis is upon her being able to have children and thus fulfill God’s promise to Abraham. That’s the best construction that we can put upon it. She correctly saw that the Lord had restrained her from having children. She saw that God is sovereign in this matter of having children, but she incorrectly concluded from that fact, that God does not ever want her to have a child personally. And so she feels justified in using this illegitimate means to obtain a child.

God never authorized this means, nor approved of Abraham’s going along with it. But Abram, the man of faith, did go along with it. He too sinned by using fleshly earthly selfish reasoning. In what sense? Because he “heeded the voice of his wife” instead of trusting that God would, in His own good time, fulfill the promise. Just like Adam in the beginning, he heeded the voice of his wife and fell into sin. When Adam sinned he plunged our whole race into ruin and misery. And even so, he too, was tired of waiting for God to fulfill the promise and so he went in to Hagar. And when he did, immediately the child Ishmael was conceived.

The efforts of the flesh bore fruit. But it was not good fruit. It was not glorifying to God, or pleasing to Sarai who had come up with the idea. “And when Hagar saw that she had conceived, (verse 4) Sarai became despised in her sight.” All these are sinful fleshly thoughts and actions, on the part of all of these people, began with a departure from the promise of God or the word of God. God was never consulted, the marriage covenant and bed was dishonored, and the consequences would stand. Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar and she fled away into the wilderness. Eventually, God did indeed fulfill His own promise to Abram and Sarai. It would be 15 years after this, when Abram was 100 years old, and Sarai was 90.

The lesson that we can learn from this is this: That we as Christians do well to remember that the things which God has promised will always be fulfilled in His time and not ours. But there is more. Turn with me over to Genesis 21, verses 1-3. “And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken.” “For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.” “And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him – whom Sarah bore to him – Isaac.” Now look at verses 8 – 12. “So the child grew and was weaned.” “And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.”

“And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.” “Therefore she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.’” “And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son.” “But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman.’” “Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.”

We see here that the persecution by Ishmael, the one who was born according to the flesh, was his scoffing at the celebration of Isaac’s being weaned. It was the idea that Isaac was going to grow up to be someone great and special in God’s sight and his father’s sight, that he was mocking. Ishmael was about 19 years old now, and he knew that he was Abraham’s first-born son in their family. And because he was so, he thought that he would be able to contest Isaac’s being Abraham’s heir. Ishmael was mocking; he was scoffing, because he knew that he knew his own strength, and that he did hold favor in Abraham’s sight.

Abraham loved him too, and so he wrongfully concluded that he would have a good shot at being the heir. It is possible that this was the way that his mother Hagar talked about it with him in private as well. And so, when Sarah saw that this was what was happening, she insisted that both the bondswoman Hagar and her son Ishmael, be cast out of the family so that there would be no contest in regard to who would inherit. Even so, every Christian must cast out of their mind once and for all, the idea that it is by their own works or their own fleshly efforts at religion that they will inherit eternal life. We are children of promise and we have been forgiven of all of our sins and have eternal life as the free gift of God. And it is because we have believed in the gospel of the grace that comes to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, that we are free. It is good for everyone to understand that the bondswoman and her son were cast out by Abraham, and we must do the same with every legal notion of our being saved by a sacramental or ceremonial salvation.

3rd – The son of the bondswoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

Verses 30 and 31 say – “So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondswoman but of the free.” Here we see the whole conclusion of the matter of Paul’s argumentation. It began back in verse 21 with Paul asking the Galatians whether they wanted to be under law. If they wanted to be under the law, then they ought to hear what the law says. And then he launches into the symbolic allegory that I have just reviewed with you, showing the difference between those under the Old Covenant and those under the New; those who are born of the flesh versus those who are born of the Spirit, and those who are in bondage versus those who are truly free.

I trust that you can see from the way that Paul presented these things, how wonderful a thing it is to be set free from the law of sin and death by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are set free also from being married to the law. Now we are married to the Child of Promise – Our Lord Jesus Christ. May none of us be inclined to the arguments of the flesh; either in terms of our being saved, or in terms of our living our Christian life unto God. Let us believe in all the promises of God; that what He has begun in our lives by grace, he will complete. Let us not seek to be strong in our flesh so that our boast is in ourselves. But let us seek to be strong in the Lord and the strength of His mighty power, and await the fulfillment of the promise by laboring to do what is right; that is, by faith in Christ.