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Sermon

Fruit of Promise

Galatians 4:8-31

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The Galatians had been pagans. They had worshipped false gods things that were not God nor divine beings but were treated as if they were. “Weak and miserable principles that were by nature not gods.”

This is the state of some in Kondoa district. They are animists. They believe there is a distant creator God who is unreachable. However, they also believe that there are malign spiritual powers associated with physical objects. Trees, mountains, streams and animals have demons associated. These must be controlled and appeased by offerings and worship to keep life safe. They live in fear and superstition. The gospel brings them freedom, an assurance of salvation and hope.

Paul had visited the Galatians and led them to a faith in Christ. The similarity to Kondoa is amazing. Paul visited Galatia, preached, stayed a short time and moved on having appointed elders in the new congregations. In 1990, there were no Christians in the Kondoa region apart from a few government employees who had been moved there from elsewhere in the country.

The missionary movements had not come there. The Lutherans had come from the north and stopped short of this semi-arid region. The Anglicans had been strongest to the south in the heartland of Central Tanganyika, but had not until then penetrated into Kondoa region.

In 1990, a young Church Army officer newly out of college was sent to the remote village of Tarwa. He had nowhere to live, no contacts, nothing. He lived without shelter in the forest at first and tried to reach some of the locals. He did make some friends and some Christians. When we visited Tarkwa, some of those men were sitting in the back row of the church. Then a New Zealand missionary couple arrived having been sent by the Bishop of Central Tanganyika to work in the area. David and Jen Pearce heard of this young man and drove out to fetch Capt Given Gaula. And so was formed a partnership in the gospel which was significant and fruitful. As you know over the next 10 years, 10,000 came to Christ. They were converts from animism and Islam. They are in the churches to this day. David, Jen and Given are the apostles of Kondoa. When the Bishop comes to his clergy they are excited to see him because he is the one who led many of them to Christ. It is lovely to see.

Paul’s words to the Galatians are relevant to our culture. Having as a culture turned from pagan beliefs to Christ, our culture is now turning back to “weak and miserable principles that are by nature not gods.” We reject anything relating to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and fall over ourselves to embrace anything Eastern, mysterious and ‘spiritual’. So often it is unthinking longing for something more. In the 1980s, I had a work colleague who was doing divination by *I Ching*. Divination is trying to find guidance for

the future through spiritual means apart from God. The Bible strongly warned against it. In *I Ching* a set of random numbers is used to reference a text in the *I Ching* book, which is the wisdom for that day or question. My colleague, who was a computer programmer and not in other ways a fool, was trying to use this to make important decisions. I put to him that either it was truly random and therefore resulting texts were of no significance indeed dangerous for his decisions or else there was a spiritual intelligence involved and in that case he should find out more about the intelligence before trusting himself to it. The same logic applies to any other form of divination – horoscopes, tea leaves, palm reading etc. All of them are condemned by the Bible and in practice we find they lead to deception and affliction with demonic powers.

In the case of the Galatians, Paul was afraid they were being turned to Judaism. This would have them put their trust in keeping the Law of Moses as the means of salvation rather than trust in the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Amazingly, Paul lumps this in with turning back to paganism: “Now that you know God and more importantly known by God, how could you turn back to those old inferior things?” If we add anything to our trust in Christ for salvation, then we are saying his work is not enough. That is the error of the Mormons and the Jews. They say he is not God and his work was necessary but insufficient – you still have to earn salvation by your good works.

When we were in Mrijo village, we met this young man an evangelist. He was bright, spoke some English and keen to talk. His name is Isaiah. He is a convert from Islam. At one point in a discussion, when a woman had talked about the difference between the RC and Anglican churches, he passionately jumped up and proclaimed to the gathering the value of being Christian and how they wouldn't want to go back to Islam. As Christians they have spiritual freedom in Christ, freedom from the fear of demons, freedom from the oppression of the Islamic Law. If you have experienced the difference it is stark and you would never want to go back.

Paul has already argued by several methods that they must not succumb to the Judaisers. In Chapter 3, he argued that Abraham was accepted by faith in God's promises and that was reckoned to him as righteousness. He did not earn salvation it was a free gift when he trusted what God said. Alternatively, those who trust in the Law are under a curse.

He argued from the nature of the covenant with Abraham which was established before the Law was given. That covenant promised descendants who would be saved.

He argued from the basis of our sonship – that in Christ we are made sons of God and heirs – not slaves to the law.

Now he throws in his last two arguments. One to the heart and one to the head.

First, he appeals to the relationship they have with him in verse 12. Stand with me because I stood with you. He says he became as they were so he could win them to become as he was. This is the ideal missionary method. First task is to go out and be like them in everything except sin. That is what Jesus did – he was tempted in every way as we are yet without sin.

Paul left his Jewish scruples and became like a gentile in order to reach gentiles. C.T. Studd and the Cambridge Seven grew pigtailed when they went to preach to the Chinese. It caused great offense in England but opened doors in China. How can you become as they are in your local mission field? Who are you seeking to reach? How do you need to meet them to make it possible?

Paul reminds them of their great love and acceptance of him and his message. Where has it gone?

In verse 15, he says “You would have plucked out your eyes to give them to me.” It is often asserted that Paul had an eye condition – and it may be so. However, there is also research which has uncovered that it was a verbal expression used to indicate deep commitment to say you would give your eyes for someone else. So it may be an idiom rather than a literal statement.

As he reminds them of their love for him, the mother-heart of Paul shows. He is not the harsh unfeeling character his modern detractors wish to portray.

He uses the travail of childbirth as a metaphor for intercessory prayer. When Elijah prayed for rain, he climbed to the top of Mt. Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.¹ That was his posture for this deep prayer. It is the traditional position a woman takes in childbirth. Elijah laboured in prayer. Here Paul says, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."² He was labouring in prayer for them corporately that Christ may be formed in their lives.

Paul's other argument is a scriptural one which sounds odd to our ears. Again he goes back to Abraham. Abraham is the source of identity for the Hebrews. He is the first Patriarch – the one with whom God made covenant. It was from him that they were descended.

In John 8:39, there is a debate between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, "Our father is Abraham!" they declared. "No," Jesus replied, "for if you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example."

He was showing that there is a difference between physical and spiritual inheritance. That is what Paul is referring to. The way he explains it is that it matters who your mother is! Are they descended from Sarah or Hagar.

Paul uses it allegorically. Analogy is a comparison to illustrate a point but it is not a story. Allegory is a story which has an underlying meaning. So *The Lion the Witch and Wardrobe* is an allegory – Aslan represents Jesus, the children are the disciples, the stone table is the cross etc. Paul treats the birth of the two sons of Abraham as an allegory which explains the physical and spiritual descent. Perhaps we need to recap on the Old Testament story.

Genesis 16:1-4 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

Genesis 21:1-12 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." ⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." ¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

There were two sons of Abraham. God had promised a child to Abraham and Sarah through whom Abraham would have many descendants who would also be part of the covenant. When no child came they became impatient and found another way for a child – a sort of surrogacy. Sarah's maid would be the surrogate mother and carry the child but they would regard it as theirs. The maid was Hagar and the child was Ishmael. However, that was not what God had meant and years later in her very old age, Sarah fell pregnant and bore Isaac.

Allegorically, Paul tells us that the two women represent the two covenants. There was a covenant made on Mt Sinai which established the Law. Hagar represents that covenant. It is a covenant of slavery to obedience to the Law; it corresponds to the physical city of Jerusalem with the Jewish people.

¹ 1 Kings 18:42

² Galatians 4:19

<i>Hagar</i>	<i>Sarah</i>
Hagar Covenant	Sarah Covenant
Ishmael (Flesh)	Isaac (Promise)
Persecutor	Persecuted
Children are slaves	Children are Free
Mount Sinai	Mount Zion
Earthy Jerusalem in slavery	Heavenly Jerusalem in freedom
Judaisers	Paul
Old Covenant	New Covenant

Sarah represents other covenant based on God's promise and brings forth the children of faith. If you come to God by faith you enter that covenant. So you are not bound to the Law of Moses but inherit the promises of God's covenant with Abraham. This covenant corresponds with the heavenly Jerusalem.

Who are the descendants of Sarah and Hagar today? It is the division between faith and works, grace and law, being born of the spirit and born of the flesh; children of God and children of disobedience. That line runs right through this church, this suburb, this city, country and the world.

How do I become an Isaac? Receive Jesus! That he may give you new life. He became as we are, so we may become as he is.