

What child is this?

The Child who turns slaves into sons!

January 2, 2022

Galatians 4:4–7 (NIV) ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba, Father.*” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Slavery. It’s an ugly word. It conjures up pictures of individuals bound in shackles, turned into pieces of property. It’s an old problem, an ancient problem. The history of slavery doesn’t begin here in America with the slave trade. It’s older than the Roman empire and goes farther back than Alexander the Great taking captives and turning them into slaves. The Persians and Babylonians kept slaves. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites for over 450 years. The people of Israel kept slaves—including the great patriarch Abraham we heard about in our Old Testament reading. The earliest recorded recorded mention of slavery goes back to 3500 BC in ancient Mesopotamia.

Slavery isn’t just an ancient problem. Human trafficking is recognized as a global problem that is not limited to certain cultures or races. It is estimated that almost 200,000 incidents occur within the United States every year.

(<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/human-trafficking-statistics-by-state>)

World-wide, it is estimated that at least 40 million people are subject to some form of slavery. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_slavery) Regardless of who is enslaved, or where, or even when, slavery turns individuals into objects that “owners” can use and manipulate for their own selfish purposes.

Why all this talk about slavery and human trafficking as we begin the New Year? None of us are slaves. We never have been and probably never will. That’s not what we hear in Galatians 3. Paul has been talking about family, and the way in which children become heirs. He compares a son with a slave and points out that “**that as long as an heir is underage, he is no**

different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father” (Galatians 4:1–2 NIV). The son and the slave are alike. They have no control over their lives. They have no control over the property. The son has to listen to his guardians and trustees. The slave has to listen to the master. What point is Paul trying to make? The point comes in verse 3: **“So also, when we were younger children, we were enslaved under the basic principles of the world”** (Galatians 4:3 EHV). Paul calls us slaves, along with everyone else! His words call to mind something Jesus once told his fellow Jews. He said that those who believe him find the truth, **“and the truth will set you free”** (John 8:32 NIV). They replied, **“We are Abraham’s descendants and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be set free?’”** (John 8:33 EHV). We think the same thing—how can we be slaves? We live in the United States. We are free and exercise those freedoms daily. We aren’t slaves!

But we are. Paul said, **“We were enslaved under the basic principles of the world.”** Jesus said it even more pointedly: **“Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin”** (John 8:34 NIV). Ouch. That hits home. Our sins are a harsh master. If we sin once, that sin takes control and comes after us. It pesters. It prods. It demands that we do it again. Screentime can do that, whether we are adults or children. Mom says, “You get a half-hour of Screentime.” She doesn’t pay attention to the time because she’s busy with other things. An hour later she still hasn’t noticed. Screentime prods us to keep going, and we do, until mom finally says, “Stop! You’re way past your time. You’re done for the day.” Screentime comes after us the next day. It’s time to play. Mom limits it to 30 minutes again. Screentime demands more, longer, and we want to give in. We have to give in. After all, mom didn’t notice yesterday.

Screentime does the same thing to adults. We know it’s not healthy to spend so much time on our phones and tablets, but Screentime doesn’t give up. Just one more click, one more swipe—it won’t hurt anything. Before we know it we’ve swiped for another hour and missed out on the tasks or the conversations we should have had. Screentime becomes an even harsher master, dragging us down into places we know we shouldn’t be.

Screentime is only one of the harsh masters that enslave us. We have so many masters, it’s hard to know which way to turn. If it’s not Screentime, maybe it’s Self-medicating time, or Me-time. It might be Food time. What is it that holds you captive? We try to tell ourselves we aren’t slaves. “I can stop anytime I want. I’m in control.” We are fooling ourselves. Jesus’ words are truth. **“Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”**

We are slaves. No, Paul said, **“We were in slavery.”** God had a plan to abolish the slavery of sin and set us free. **“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship”** (Galatians 4:4–5 NIV). An hourglass is a beautiful way to keep time. I love watching the sand slowly fill the bottom half of the hourglass. When the last grains of sand fall, it’s time. In God’s plan, his hourglass had been running since he first promised to send a Savior for Adam and Eve. Can you imagine an hourglass with enough sand in it to cover 6000 years? The sand was falling as the LORD promised Abraham, **“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting**

covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:7 NIV). Sand was falling while the LORD established David’s throne, while the prophets came to tell Abraham’s descendants about their unfaithfulness and to call them to repentance. Sand was falling during 400 years of silence, when no prophetic voice was heard. Sand fell as Zechariah sang about his newborn son, the one who came to prepare the way for the Savior. The top of God’s hourglass was nearly empty when Gabriel appeared to Mary and then to Joseph with the news about Mary’s pregnancy; and as they journeyed to Bethlehem for Caesar’s census. The final grains of sand fell as they found the stable with a manger, and God sent his Son.

“God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4 NIV). As impossible as it seems, God became man. He stepped off his eternal throne and into Mary’s womb. The Holy Spirit knit him together in that quiet place—covering him with our humanity. He grew. He developed. He struggled through the process of birth and entered into the world. The Creator became a creature. Not only did he become one of us, but the Law-giver put himself under the same laws he placed over the universe. Jesus was subject to the laws of gravity and motion. Jesus was subject to the ceremonial laws God had laid out in the Old Testament. Mary and Joseph presented him at the temple and had him circumcised on the 8th day. Jesus celebrated the Passover every year with his family and eventually went through his Bar Mitzvah. Jesus was also subject to God’s moral law – the 10 commandments. His divinity did not exempt him from keeping all of God’s requirements, and he did it all perfectly!

Jesus had a specific purpose for being born of a woman and born under the law. **“To redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship”** (Galatians 4:5 NIV). The Greek word for “redeem” is ἐξαγοράζω. It means “to buy or buy back something.” It was the word used in the slave market when someone bought a slave to release them from their owner. They paid the full price, whatever the master had set.

That’s what Jesus came to do for us! We were slaves to sin. The price sin demanded was death. Paul shared that truth with his Roman congregation. **“The wages of sin is death.”** Jesus paid the price. Sin had no hold on him. When he paid the price, he cut off the chains that held us down. Sin is no longer our master. We are perfectly free!

Thanks to Jesus, we are not just set free **from** sin. He set us free **for** something special. Back in November we received some exciting news. Our nephew and his wife were going to have a baby! They weren’t pregnant, but they had the opportunity to adopt a baby girl. When they arrived at the hospital they found out that the tiny preemie had been come into the world two weeks earlier but still didn’t have a name. She didn’t have anyone to love her and care for her. They gave her a beautiful name, baptized her, and took her home as their own.

That’s exactly what Jesus has done for us! He bought us back so **“that we might receive adoption to sonship”** (Galatians 4:5 NIV). ***“This is a legal term. In the Greco-Roman world, a childless, wealthy man could take one of his servants and adopt him. At the moment of adoption, he ceased to be a slave and received all the financial and legal privileges within the estate and outside in the world as the son and heir. Though by birth he was a slave***

without a relationship with the father, he now receives the legal status of son. It is a new life of privilege.” (Tim Keller, Galatians for You, p.98)

We have received a life of privilege, not entitlement. We have become God’s sons and daughters when we were washed with water and the Word in baptism. God put his name on us and we belong to him. God has even given us the privilege to talk to him and bring him all of our cares and concerns: **“Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’”** (Galatians 4:6 NIV). Our voices cry to God the Father like a child calling out during a scary thunderstorm. “Dad? Daddy?!? Dad!?!?!” His voice answers with tender concern and love, “Yes, my son, yes, my daughter?” That’s the freedom that we have, thanks to Jesus. We were slaves who have become sons and daughters, **“and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir”** (Galatians 4:7 NIV).

Once a slave became the legal son of the master, it didn’t mean he could eat, drink and be merry. His responsibilities had shifted. He no longer did the manual labor required of a slave, but he had to manage the estate and care for everyone and everything entrusted to him.

How will we manage our Father’s estate and care for the people entrusted to us? We work hard at our jobs. We care for our families. We maintain the blessings God has given to us—our homes and vehicles and all our possessions. Here at Christ the Rock we can work hard to manage the estate that our Father has entrusted to us. We’ll take a step to do that next Sunday after church. We’re going to work through our ministry plan for this year and see how we can best take care of this building and property, and what we need to do to support reaching out to people in our community.

We are no longer slaves, but God’s sons and daughters. We have this incredible privilege! Let’s celebrate the family connection that Jesus bought and paid for with his innocent suffering and death. Let’s share the connection with someone else, so they can become part of our family too! Amen!

To God alone the glory! Pastor Jon Brohn