

The Allegory

Galatians 4:21-31

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 11, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

In order to understand the allegory we need to review some basic Sunday School from the book of Genesis.

Abraham is approximately 2000BC. He lives in Ur of the Chaldees in what we would call Iraq today. He and his family move from Ur of the Chaldees to live in Aram at Haran. They live for a while there until God calls to Abraham and tells him to leave his extended family and go to the land that God would show Him. Abraham left his family and went to the land that God showed Him. He brought his wife, Sarah, with him. He also brought his nephew, Lot.

With these people and the slaves that they owned Abraham left everything that he had known and moved to what we today call Israel. Once they were there God promised Abraham that God would use Abraham to bring a blessing to the other nations of the earth. God promised Abraham that he would have descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. God promised Abraham that these descendents would inherit the land which He had shown to Abraham and in which Abraham was then living.

These promises may sound like fortuitous oracles except for one practical problem. Sarah had always been barren throughout their marriage. She was unable to have children. Abraham and Sarah were a childless couple. To compound the problem by the time God makes His promise of descendents for Abraham, Abraham and Sarah are elderly. In other words even if Sarah had not been barren, she still would not be having any children. So in the face of barrenness and age, God promises Abraham children. Eventually God makes clear that he is promising Abraham and Sarah a son and that from this son would come the numerous descendents of which He had spoken earlier.

Then like many things when it comes to God there was a waiting period between when He made the promise and when He fulfilled the promise. Such periods are literally nothing to God, but to Abraham and Sarah the waiting period seemed like a long time. Several years elapsed since God had promised them a son and still no son was in the offing.

Like all of humanity when they doubt God's promise, they take matters into their own hands. Since God was not forthcoming with a son that He had promised Sarah decided to give her maidslave to Abraham. Perhaps Abraham could conceive a child with the maidslave. If Abraham did conceive children by Sarah's maidslave, the children would belong to Sarah since Sarah owned the maidslave. If the children belonged to Sarah, then they would be Sarah's children. As it turns out from archaeology this was a common practice amongst the peoples of the east at this time. So when Abraham and Sarah doubt God's promise they result to social convention to get the job done for God.

Sarah's maidslave was a woman by the name of Hagar. She was Egyptian by birth. Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham. Abraham fathers a child by Hagar. Hagar bears Abraham a son and names him Ishmael.

Abraham felt certain that Ishmael could live under God's blessing, but God rejected Ishmael because this was not the means by which God wanted to fulfill His promises. God wanted to fulfill His promises the way God fulfills promises, miraculously. Therefore God made clear to Abraham that the son that God had promised Abraham would come from Sarah.

Finally, Sarah did conceive a son. When she gave birth Abraham named him Isaac. By the time Isaac was born Ishmael was already a young boy. When Isaac was old enough to be weaned Abraham

gave a feast for the weaning of Isaac. At the feast Ishmael was making fun. The Bible is not real clear on what it was that he was making fun of, but Sarah did not take kindly to Ishmael. Since Ishmael was the son of Hagar and Hagar was Sarah's maidslave Sarah had Hagar and Ishmael ejected out of the household. Sarah said that the son of the maidslave would not inherit along with her son.

It is this much of the account of Abraham and Sarah to which Galatians chapter 4 is referring in its analogy. There is more to the account. God does take care of Hagar and Ishmael once they get thrown out of Abraham's home. The blessing of the nations though passes to Isaac not Ishmael.

It is with this in mind that God runs His analogy in Galatians, chapter 4. He does not run a complete analogy. He expects you to fill in the blanks. So let us do our best to fill in the blanks.

There are people who want to live under law. They want to be justified by their good works. These people are just like Ishmael. They are the son of a slave. They are enslaved to the law and to their own pride thinking that they can actually be good enough to keep the law. They work really hard to keep the law just as a slave works really hard to please his master. Such people are children of the slave woman. They are slaves themselves. They are like Ishmael.

In contrast to these people is Isaac. Isaac is a child of promise. Abraham and Sarah could not produce him without miraculous intervention. God produced Isaac by miraculous intervention between Abraham and Sarah. Therefore anyone who is a child of promise is like Isaac.

The children of promise are those to whom God gives His promises and they believe them. Here God has in mind those who receive the promise of righteousness in Christ Jesus. With the promise of righteousness in Christ Jesus comes the promise of everlasting life in Christ Jesus. Those who receive this promises and believe them do not try to justify themselves by works of the Law. They do not justify themselves or even try to justify themselves by works of the law because they are already justified by God's promise. They are therefore liberated from slavery to the law. Rather than keep the law as a ponderous chore to achieve salvation, they keep the law in the freedom of the children of the promise. They know they don't have to. They know that Christ Jesus has accomplished all things necessary for their salvation and bestowed it upon them.

These children of promise, like Isaac, come into being through miraculous intervention from God. Isaac was not born without God's intervention. The children of promise do not believe in the promises of God without a miraculous intervention. God intervened in their lives with His almighty creative word that carried the promises and by the power of that word they believe in Jesus.

Since Isaac was a son of Sarah who was a free woman and not a slave so also the sons of promise are like children of Sarah. The children of promise are therefore the children of the free woman.

Now just as Ishmael mocked Isaac so also the children of the slave woman persecute the children of the promise. If you truly believe in the promises of Jesus Christ that you are justified and saved by His actions and not your own you can expect to be persecuted by those people who believe they are justified by their own achievements and not Christ. The reason that the children of the slave woman hate the children of the free woman so much is because there is a part of their conscience that knows that the children of the free woman are right in clinging to the promises of Jesus Christ, but they refuse in their pride to give up their effort to justify themselves by works of the Law because they want to take pride in their accomplishments. They want to be their own savior. Just by being who they are the children of promise rebuke such arrogant notions among the children of slavery. The result is that the children of the slave woman persecute the children of the free woman.

But the final judgment favors the children of promise. In the end Ishmael and Hagar go expelled from Abraham's home. So it will be with anyone who justifies himself by good works. He will be expelled from God's home. The children of promise will reside in God's home forever.

Now here is the topper.

The children of the Law are the children of Hagar. The children of the Law try to justify themselves by the Law. God gave the Law on Mount Sinai. Therefore Hagar is like Mount Sinai and the covenant that God convened at Sinai. Those who want to treasure the things of the law so that they may save themselves by it treasure Sinai. Hagar is like Sinai.

The children of promise are different. They treasure a different mountain. They treasure Mount Zion. Mount Zion in the Old Testament was the place where God lived in the temple. In the temple was the place where sacrifices were made for the forgiveness of sins so that people could approach God in worship, offer Him their prayers, and receive His blessings.

The reason that the children of promise treasure Mount Zion is because when the Christ came He insisted that He Himself was Zion. He told the woman at the well that the time had come when people would no longer worship in Jerusalem, that is to say, Mount Zion. He told the Jews in the temple that His body was the temple and even if they tore it down, He would rebuild it in three days. Everywhere where the temple comes up, Jesus makes it clear that He is the reality of which the temple was only a shadow.

The temple was the place where sacrifice was offered to take away sin, but the sacrifices offered were inferior to that purpose. Jesus makes the sacrifice that accomplishes that purpose and justified people by promise not by works. The temple was the place where God resided on earth, but interactions with Him were not direct. Jesus is the presence of God bodily and interaction with Him is direct.

Both in terms of the sacrifice offered and the means of the presence of God, Jesus and His body are superior to the temple of old. The children of promise treasure the Mount Zion that is Jesus. That is why they treasure the heavenly Jerusalem.

And then the bitter irony, the earthly Jerusalem which was the genuine shadow of the presence of God in Christ Jesus has now become Mount Sinai. The earthly Jerusalem in this current age is the seat of justification by works of the law. It will not inherit with the children of the free woman. The heavenly Jerusalem is the seat of those who are justified by the promise of God in Christ Jesus. Her children have a permanent place in the family.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.