



Christmas I - December 29, 2024

Galatians 4:1-7

*4 Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. 2 They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. 3 And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.*

*4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. 5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. 6 And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." 7 Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.*

In this short part of the letter, Paul is desperately trying to convince the Christians of Galatia of the value of the freedom that they have been given by God in Jesus. He tries several different images (with more before and after this passage!) as he pleads with his readers not to abandon the gospel of grace and put their faith in their

own ability to keep the law of Moses. In the homily, Dave approached this passage through three categories:

### 1. What's foreign?

→ The particular threat to the Galatians' faith in the gospel of Jesus.

→ The ancient context for Paul's chosen metaphor: an enslaved person who becomes an adopted child and heir.

Questions:

- a. What *was* the threat from outside that was putting these young churches at risk?
- b. When you think about what God has done for you, do you feel like someone who has just barely been freed, or like a fully adopted child and heir of the King?
- c. When you think about how God sees you, do you trust that God loves you unconditionally like his own child, or do you feel like a pardoned criminal who had better not mess up again?

### 2. What's familiar?

→ The tendency to forget or stray from faith in the free grace God offers.

Questions:

- a. Can you remember a story from your family about a time when someone got "the best gift ever" only to lose it or lose interest in it soon after?
- b. In the moments when you are tempted to run away — tempted to think your identity or salvation is grounded in something other than the gift of adoption into God's family — what is it that causes you to stray?
  - i. Productivity?
  - ii. Legacy?
  - iii. Popularity?
  - iv. Money/stuff?
  - v. Proximity to perfection?
  - vi. Something else?
- c. Do you ever find yourself feeling as though God's love and acceptance of you depend on your performance?
- d. In your opinion, what is the most seductive competing narrative of identity or salvation for American Christians today?
- e. How can we help each other to remember the value of the free gifts offered to us in Jesus?

3. What's for everyone forever?

→ We have been *freed by God* to be *adopted by God*, and *the Holy Spirit has been sent by God* to enable us to call him "Father." And since we have become God's children, we are also *promised an inheritance — by God*.

- Galatians 4:5-7, paraphrased

Questions:

- a. Are some of these gifts easier for you to accept or understand than others? Which ones?
- b. Is it ever difficult for you to believe that the gifts of God given in Jesus are available to *all* people? If not, praise God!  
If so, why do you think that is sometimes hard to believe?
- c. Have you forgotten or strayed from faith in the free gifts God offered to you in Jesus?  
If so, tell him where you've been and that you want to receive his gifts anew. If it will help, tell a friend or a member of our clergy and ask them to pray with you.

