



March 16, 2014
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

RADICAL: relationship Galatians 4:1-11

This morning is our last sermon in the *Radical* sermon series based on the first half of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Next week, it's Josh McDowell, and then the series on the second half of Galatians called *Ergo*. This stuff is so important; it is the foundation of our faith. So once more, let's review, okay? You've been working so hard. Press in with me one more time this morning. Paul was called to preach the gospel in an area called Galatia. Many became Christians, but after he left, hyper-religious gatecrashers showed up. They impugned Paul's authority and his message. They said that Jesus was not enough—that you had to be Jewish, too; you had to be circumcised, eat the right food, wash properly—if you wanted to be a Christian.

Paul went bonkers! He called them bewitched fools. He pronounced a curse on false teachers... that's why I call this series *Radical*. You never see a more radical Paul. But here's another reason: Galatians lays out radical good news. Paul declares that the Law can't save you. Obeying the rules—being good—isn't going to save you.

If not, then how are we saved? By faith... by believing that God will keep his promise! And who was the perfect example of this salvation by faith alone? Abraham! Before there was a Law to obey, before he was circumcised, the Father of the Jews, was saved because he believed! God promised to take him to a new land and bless him with offspring that would bless the world. And more than a thousand years later, God made good on that promise when he sent Jesus, the sinless Savior.

When we respond to the gift of Jesus, he wraps us up in his righteousness... remember?... like a cold little kid wrapped in daddy's bathrobe. God looks down and sees only his spotless Son, and in that moment, declares us forgiven! What is that called? Justification! How long does that take? An instant! And then the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us and begin changing us from the inside out... making us more like Jesus. What is that called? Sanctification. How long does that take? The rest of our lives!

Paul's radical gospel is all about grace! God, in his grace, has done all that is necessary to save us through his Son, Jesus. All that is left for us to do is to trust Jesus and surrender obediently to his Spirit. He does the rest. Whoever heard of

such a thing? We are not saved by our rule-keeping! We are saved by God's grace.

But then, that raises an important question: what good is the Law? After all, God gave us the Law. If the Ten Commandments and Leviticus can't save us, what good are they? Is the Law bad? No, not if we use it as God intended... as a Guard and a Guide. Let's re-read verses 23-25.

²³Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. *[Remember Pastor Megan's baby crib illustration? We don't put bars on our cribs to be mean. We put bars around our babies to protect them—to guard them—until they are old enough to climb in and out of their bed on their own. The Law put protective moral bars around us to guard us from sin temporarily...]*

²⁴So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. *[That's the second intended use for the law: it guides us to Christ. When we look at what the Law requires to live righteously before God, we realize we can't do it! We realize how desperately we need saving. So the Law guides to the one who can save us.]*

²⁵Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. *[When Paul says "faith" here, he means Jesus. Now that the object of our Faith has finally arrived, the Law has accomplished its purpose. It protected us from the ravages of Sin and guided us to the only one who can truly save us from Sin.]*

Okay, that's review. But here's the huge question for today: Why? To what end? Why has God gone to all this trouble for us? What is God's end game? Let's pick up where we left off last week, at verse 26, and read through 4:7.

Okay, this is a proud father alert. If listening to a dad brag about his kid makes you nauseous, cover your ears until I wave at you. Last week, Rachel, a theology major with a minor in Greek and Hebrew, turned down a full ride to Duke Divinity School to go to Gordon Conwell Seminary. God willing, she will come under care of our Session in April and then under care of our presbytery in May, on her way to becoming a pastor in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Okay, welcome back those of you who cannot stand braggadocios parents. Rachel is a young woman of many words. But you know what my favorite word from her is... still? Daddy. My accomplished, self-assured little girl still calls me Daddy. I love it.

When you read the word "Abba" in Paul's letter, that's what you are reading: "Daddy." But notice: the Galatians were Greek-speaking non-Jewish Christians. But "Abba," was not a Greek word. It was Aramaic... the language spoken by Jesus and the rest of the people in Palestine. Hebrew was their religious language, but

Aramaic was their daily language. “Abba” is an intimate Aramaic word meaning “Daddy.”

So why would Paul use an Aramaic word in a letter to a group of Greek-speakers and expect them to understand what he was saying? Obviously, Paul taught them this word when he was with them. And why did Paul teach this of all Aramaic words? Because, it was the word Jesus used when praying to the Father. As far as we can tell, no one ever called God “Abba-Daddy” until Jesus did.

But you might say, “Well, he was the perfect Son of God. If anyone had the right to call the Father “Abba” it was Jesus. But here, finally we come to the punch line of Galatians. The point to which Paul has been leading us all along: Jesus is not the only one who can call God “Abba.” Who else can? You can! I can! Why? Because we have been adopted by God. We, who were in slavery to Sin and the Law, are slaves no longer. God the Father has adopted us; he is now our Daddy—just as He is Jesus’ Daddy—and we have the right to call Him, “Abba!”

And notice, this is not some future event... some carrot dangling in front of us so that if we live a life of obedience, then when we die and go to heaven then we will be God’s children. No, it is right now! ⁶“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”

We might be tempted, in this age, to translate this, “sons and daughters.” But if we do, we miss the radical affirmation this was for all Galatians... and especially women. In that day, women were nobodies; they had no rights. They were under the thumb of their father until they married and then under the thumb of their husband. Their job was to birth more sons so that the bloodline could be continued, but they had no rights. Only the sons had rights of inheritance. If a man had no children—or only daughters—then he would adopt a slave and make him his new son and heir.

But Paul, just after he has declared that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, makes an audacious pronouncement: even the women—those who have no rights in society—even they have been adopted into son-ship of the Father. Even those whom society considered second-class citizens are now joint-heirs with Jesus!

This is the “why” of the gospel. This is what the gospel points toward. This is why God went to the trouble to call Abraham, create a people, raise up a Son from within those people who lived perfectly and died and rose again... so that all who are clothed in his righteousness may become his adopted sons, joint heirs with Jesus! Did you know that’s what you are? Everything Jesus has coming to Him as the perfect, obedient Son of the Father, you have that coming to you, too! God

wrote his living will and said, "Everything I possess will be equally divided among all my beloved children! Forever!"

May I ask this: how many of you are adopted? I realize that adoption doesn't always have a fairy tale ending, but it strikes me as such a powerful illustration of God's love. You were no accident! Your parents chose you on purpose. A child can be created in the backseat of a car in a moment of mindless passion, but you who were adopted... your parents said, "We want you—on purpose—to be a part of our family."

Many of you know the Hall family. Tally and Gail are faithful members of this congregation. They have been involved in Agros and in our Mexico mission with our high school kids for years. They have three natural children, but they are among our many Chapel Hill foster families who open their homes to kids with no parents... or with parents who are incapable of caring for them.

One of those kids was Liz Smith. Liz was a hard case. She bounced from foster home to foster home... eleven in all! Can you imagine? Liz had two brothers whom she loved and cared for like a mother, but the state, in its wisdom, decided it was not healthy for her. So they separated her from her brothers in order to give her a more "normal" childhood. It was devastating. Her birth mother had given her up because she could not care for her, and her beloved brothers were taken from her. She was bounced from family to family, and Liz became hardened and cynical and rebellious.

Then she landed at the Halls. It was rough at first. She pushed the boundaries; she lied and snuck around. After all, it was only a matter of time before she would be moved again, right? But the Halls loved Liz. They parented her—they dealt with her rebellion, they set boundaries and consequences—they treated her like she was one of their own, and after a while, it dawned on Liz that this place was different. She began to catch a glimpse of what it felt like to be a real daughter.

So when Liz turned 18—the age when she would be on her own—she came with a remarkable and gutsy request: "Will you to adopt me? Will you make me your real daughter?" As far as the Halls were concerned, Liz was their daughter, but she wanted this. So they talked about it; and they talked with their children. Among other things, this meant the inheritance would be split four ways instead of three. Were they okay with that?

The answer was a resounding Yes. So, shortly after Liz turned 18, there they were, in a courtroom surrounded by parents with babies waiting to be adopted. Liz was the only young adult in the place. It was so unusual that the judge said, "I've never done anything like this before!" But in a moment, Liz Smith became Liz Hall, and she was one of the family. Really...forever... joint heirs with the rest of the kids.

But that's not the end of the story. Last November, Liz died tragically and unexpectedly. At her memorial, I preached on adoption; the wonderful illustration of God's love for us. Here is what I said:

"For most of us, it is impossible to understand what the first 16 years of Liz's life were like. Liz didn't have parents that treasured her. She didn't have a father she could call "Daddy." She didn't have a home she could call her own. She bounced from one foster home to another to another to another... eleven different ones. Can you imagine? How horrible to have no place to call your own... no one who wants to be your parent... no father to call Daddy"

It was then that something strange happened. At that point in my message, a woman stands up in the back of the chapel and begins shouting at me: "I can't take it anymore. You call yourselves Christians and say things like this. I can't sit here while you continue to tell these lies. I have Liz's birth mother right here next to me (she had her stand up)... and she loved Liz and I can't let you go on speaking like this."

As you might imagine, the place got very quiet. This was new. So what would you have done, hmmm? Here is what I said: "I'm so glad you are here. And I'm sorry for the things I said that are wrong. Because I know you want to honor your daughter, could I ask you to sit down so that I can finish my message?" And they did. It ended fine... but it was very exciting!

But one of the things that went through my mind was this: "I'm not telling lies; I'm telling the truth. For all kinds of reasons—many of them of your own making—you were not there for your daughter. You gave her up, and she bounced around life feeling unloved and unwanted until she landed with the Halls. You may have birthed her, but it wasn't until she met the Halls that she discovered what it was like to have a Daddy and Mommy and a family that adored her and accepted her. You may feel badly about what I said, but that doesn't make it less true." That's what I felt like saying.

Here is what strikes me about this story: the woman who interrupted me was like the voice of the Law crying out to us in protest. It claims to care—claims to want to provide a way into God's family, claims to have our best interests at heart—but the truth is, the Law is not capable of bringing us into God's family. It can protest all it wants—it can stir up feelings of guilt and play on our sinful instincts to try harder, to do good enough—in order to earn God's love. But it's not true. We do not become God's children by obeying the Law... by keeping the rules. We become God's children because he adopts us out of His love and for the sake of his Son Jesus. Do you get that?

Listen to more of what I said in Liz's message: "We have been adopted into the Family of God by the Spirit of God through the Son of God, Jesus. Jesus spoke up for us! He was in a perfect relationship with his heavenly father and when we say

to him, “Jesus, I want that kind of relationship with God, too,” he says to his father, “Abba, they are with me! They belong to me. Receive them the way you receive me. Love them the way you love me. Make them your children as I am your son. In fact, everything I have coming to me— everything I am due because I am your loving son—I want to share it with them. I want to make them joint-heirs with me. Every good thing that is mine, now and forever, I want my brothers and sisters to have, too.”

That’s what it means to have God as our Abba... because we have Jesus as our brother. That’s what it means to be adopted into God’s family. Did you know that? That you have been adopted into God’s family and that you are a joint-heir with Jesus? It is the radical punch line to a radical gospel. Not only have you been saved—not only have you been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, justified by the Father, sanctified by the Holy Spirit—you have been adopted into the family of God. You have a heavenly Abba and a heavenly big brother, Jesus. And everything He possesses belongs to you, too! If that isn’t radical, I don’t know what is!

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don’t teach! Listen and reflect on God’s word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. We have been dealing with some pretty thick theological principles in the study of Galatians. A pop quiz in review: Why did Paul write Galatians, what was the key issue he was facing and what are some of the key theological themes we have dealt with? (Hint: remember the robe and the butcher paper!)
 2. If the Law (translate that “being good...being a rule-keeper”) cannot save us, what use is it? (Hint: guard and guide)
 3. When Paul teaches that we have been adopted as sons, what are the implications of that? Especially for you, personally?