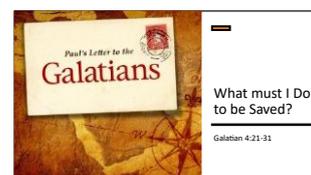
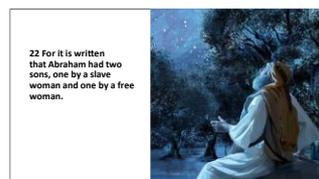


## Preaching Gal 4:21-31

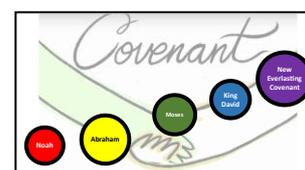
Me	What are you doing?
B	I'm reading Galatians chapter 4
Me	Do you understand it?
B	Not really. It is saying something about an old man and his 2 wives 2 sons.
Me	Why are you reading it?
B	It is a personal letter that a dear brother wrote to me and my friends
Me	Wow. Nobody writes letters nowadays. We use emails, whatsapp, messenger to keep in touch. Tell me more about yourself. Where do you come from? Are you a Christian?
B	I am a follower of Jesus. I lived some 2000 years ago, 30 years the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. I reside in Galatia; this region is known as Turkey today.
Me	Nice to meet you! I come from modern day 21 <sup>st</sup> century and I worship in Jubilee Church. Why is this letter important to you and those in Galatia?
B	We really desire to know God. My #1 priority is to seek God and live. What are some pressing concerns of people in your day?
Me	Not many people in our era devote time on matters of God. We worry about covid and our mortality, We worry about economy recovery because our livelihood is at stake, We wonder who will emerge world leader – USA or China or another? We are concerned about climate change – will the earth self-destruct under own selfishness and negligence?
B	Hey, our concerns are similar. We are just as concerned about our existence and survival. To me, since God is all mighty and in control of all things big and small, It makes a lot sense to get right with God and not incur His wrath.
Me	How true! Are you a Jew?
B	I am not a Jew. My ancestry is Middle-Eastern. I am a Gentile Christian. I want to know: what else do I need to do to be saved by God?
Me	This is the essence of Christianity! The answer in a nutshell is found in the bible Eph 2:8-9 "We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ." In other words, salvation is a gift from God, accomplished by Christ. Humans can add nothing more to this. Only receive by faith.
B	This is what the brother Paul taught when he shared the Gospel to us. We were so moved that God loves us and died for us to save us. Many of us committed ourselves to follow Christ wholeheartedly.
Me	Paul was such a learned man. I wish I could meet him face to face. Prior to his conversion to follow Christ, Paul was a devout Jew who studied the Moses Law and live it out passionately.
B	Moses Law? You mean the Torah?
Me	Yes. During your time, there was only the Old Testament. Today in 21 <sup>st</sup> century we are privileged to have NT documents. The Torah contains teachings and instructions God imparted to Israel. Given Paul's unique background, he held on to a certain mindset about God and salvation.



	Then, sometime after Jesus' death, Paul met the risen Christ on the road. The Jesus who was crucified died is alive! How can it be? Paul was totally shaken! It was a life-changing encounter for him! After this, Paul's view about how God saves mankind changed entirely.
B	How so?
Me	Paul realizes that salvation has culminated in the life, death, resurrection of Jesus. God's intent from start has always been to redeem <b>all</b> humanity. Whatever your ancestry, nationality, race, background - God loves you. God wills to restore you and give you a new life. Salvation is available to one and all freely.
B	Wait. Some Jewish Christians told us that believing in Jesus Christ is not enough. We were told to convert to be a Jew: To undergo circumcision and adhere to all the Jewish regulations and customs. Do modern day Christians practice these?
Me	No way! This is some serious wrong teachings! If you do that, you miss out the entire blessing and freedom that God offers in Christ. Look at how Paul summarizes the Gospel in Gal 3:15 "In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles; we receive the promised Spirit through faith."
B	Tell me more. How does this relate to the story of Abraham, his 2 wives and 2 sons?
Me	Let's go through verse by verse. You read, I will explain
B	V21 Tell me, you who wish to be under the law, have you been listening to the law?
Me	The law refers to the Moses Law, embraced by Judaism. Its origin dated way back to Exodus era when God freed the Israelites from being slaves in Egypt. Moses was the great leader who led them out of Egypt. While the people were wilderness, God gave Israel the Law through Moses. The Jews believed that only those who carry out the Law can enter God's presence.
B	In our time, these traditional Jews were also called Judaizers. They were the ones who told us to circumcise.
Me	You go look at see what Paul writes to you!
B	V22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. Who is Abraham?
Me	This guy is significant. The 3 major religions of today – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – all regarded Abraham as the forefather of their faith.
B	O, this is how these 3 faiths were connected.
Me	Way before Israel came into existence, before Moses was even born, there was just Abraham. How did one man, an old one, birth an entire nation and people? By the power of God. God had made a covenant with Abraham and promised to bless him with many descendants to become a "father of many nations". Through Abraham and his offspring, the world will enjoy God's blessings Gen 12:1-3.
B	Ah, this is the Abrahamic covenant.
Me	Yes. Now you know some ancient Israel history as well. Sarah was Abraham's original wife. Paul depicts her as the free woman. Years went by. There was no son in sight. Sarah could not get pregnant. In a moment of weakness, the couple took it upon themselves to act instead of waiting upon God. Sarah let her maid to serve as a surrogate and bear offspring for Abraham.



	Hagar was Sarah's maid. Paul depicts her as slave. The son birthed by Hagar was Ishmael.
B	Congrats Abraham! What's wrong with this?
Me	The problem is this was not God's intent at all! Still, despite Ishmael's birth, God reaffirmed His promise to Abraham that Sarah herself would bear the child of promise.
B	<b>V23 But the slave woman's son was born according to the flesh, while the free woman's son was born through promise.</b> Tell me more about this!
Me	14 years later, Sarah gave birth to the promised son who was named Isaac.
B	What's the significance?
Me	This goes to show that it is <i>God</i> who powerfully brings His promise to fulfillment. It did not matter that both Abraham and Sarah were already well advanced in years, long past the child-bearing age. Indeed, they struggled to believe. While Ishmael's birth was by natural means, Isaac's birth was miraculous in the sense it necessitated God's intervention. From this, we begin to see that in matters pertaining to salvation, it is God one who initiates and accomplishes. Man and woman are co-laborers, Ultimately it is God alone who brings redemption to fruition.
B	I see. <b>V24 These things are an allegory, for these women are two covenants.</b>
Me	Paul uses this account to elaborate on God's promise to bless all nations. The 2 women symbolize two types of covenants. By comparing them, Paul sheds enlightenment on the Gospel.
B	What do you mean by allegory?
Me	Allegory is something – say a picture or story, that is interpreted to reveal a deeper significant meaning.
B	Got it. <b>V25 Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.</b>
Me	At Mount Sinai God reconfirmed the covenant with the people of Israel and gave them the Law. Moses received the Law inscribed in tablets by the hand of God. Subsequently this is described as the Mosaic covenant.
B	I see, that's how the Mosaic covenant came to be known.
Me	Hagar represents the Mosaic covenant. This Moses covenant came later and was expounded by the Law. It was not the original intent of God's salvation. It resulted from situation when Abraham's offspring deviated from God and ended up being slaves in Egypt.
B	Was there a problem with Moses Law?
Me	The problem does not lie in the Moses Law. God's given Law is good. It establishes the standard for right living with detailed instructions. It also delineates boundaries for people to approach and worship God, without defiling God's holiness and incurring His wrath. If the people of Israel obey the Law in their personal and communal living, it brings life and blessings. When the people fail, God has set out means of restitutions so that they need not bear the brunt of God's condemnation.



	<p>The end goal of the law points toward Israel becoming a great and holy people in the promised land.</p> <p>Jerusalem would be the capital city of this glorious earthly kingdom.</p> <p>Jerusalem would be the place all people come to worship God.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Law was never the means to earn one's place to God's salvation.</p>
B	<p>During my time, Jerusalem was ruled by the larger Roman empire.</p> <p>I won't call it a glorious sight.</p> <p>The Jews were subjects of the Roman emperors.</p>
Me	<p>Jerusalem was never the end goal.</p> <p>In God's plan, there is a kingdom that surpasses earthly aspects.</p> <p>Please read on.</p>
B	<b>V26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother".</b>
Me	<p>To talk about a Jerusalem 'above' points to a coming Kingdom of God that transcends the world we know.</p> <p>Sarah represents the original God-intended covenant.</p> <p>You see, salvation is and has always been God's initiation and action, not of man.</p> <p>The only thing man can do is respond to God by faith; to trust that God will keep His word and deliver what He has promised.</p> <p>It is a decision made without coercion.</p> <p>A deliberate and determined choice out of trust and love toward God.</p>
B	Please elaborate.
Me	<p>Abraham is the best example.</p> <p><b>"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" Gen 15:6.</b></p> <p>God's salvation was given to Abram <i>before</i> he performed anything worthy.</p> <p>There was no Moses Law then.</p> <p>By divine favour, God accepted Abraham because he put his faith in God.</p>
B	<b>V27 For it is written, 'Rejoice barren woman who does not bear. Break forth and shout, you who are not in labour. For the children of the desolate are more than those of the one who has a husband".</b>
	What strange things to say!
Me	<p>These verses are quoted from Isa 54. Remember, Paul is well-versed in scripture.</p> <p>Long ago, prophet Isaiah had foretold the future glory of Jerusalem.</p> <p>The Israelites looked forward to a future King who would liberate Jerusalem and reign there.</p> <p>In the context, the promise involves a Messiah who would come to powerfully accomplish this.</p>
B	<p>Yes. In my era, up till Jesus' time, my Jewish friends held fast to this hope of a powerful King returning to rebuild a glorious Kingdom in Jerusalem.</p> <p>They called him Messiah, or Christ. Meaning the Anointed One.</p>
Me	<p>The wonderful news is the Messiah has come!</p> <p>Jesus Christ is the long-awaited One.</p> <p>Paul preaches and shares this good news that God has fulfilled His promise.</p> <p>In the new kingdom, God reigns in human hearts.</p> <p>Jesus has dominion and power to re-create and transform lives anew.</p> <p>He breaks the bondage of sin that separates us from God.</p> <p>The Holy Spirit in us empowers us to worship and obey God freely and joyously.</p> <p>Not out of fear or coercion.</p>
B	Wow, Jesus' kingdom is more meaningful than an earthly empire.
Me	It is indeed a time of great celebration and rejoicing.
B	<b>V28 Now brethren you are like Isaac: children of promise.</b>
Me	<p>Today, everyone who puts his faith in Jesus joins Abraham into God's covenant.</p> <p>This includes you and me who are not Jews or birth descendants of Abraham.</p>



B	I see. All along there is just one everlasting covenant that God: Man is saved by believing in God's word and promise. In Jesus, we become inheritors of the divine promise and blessings given to Abraham, along with Isaac.
Me	In accordance to the Gospel, we have received the right to be child of God. You must not deviate from this understanding to do what the Judaizers are telling you now.
B	Thanks for explaining everything through Paul's allegory. Those who come to God through faith in Christ are the true heirs of Abraham.
Me	Nevertheless, being followers of Christ is never a bed of roses. It was not the case for Isaac; it was not the case for the people of Israel. Read on.
B	<b>V29 At that time the son born of the flesh persecuted the son born of the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.</b>
Me	Throughout history, descendants of the old covenant have persecuted those of the new covenant. Jesus was crucified by Jewish leaders who refused to embrace the new covenant. After Jesus' death, these teachers of Law continued to persecute Christians and the churches. Now, some Jewish Christians were persecuting Gentile converts by insisting they keep Moses Law.
B	What was their motive?
Me	Read what Paul wrote in 6:12-13. Their insistence on the Law has less to do with genuine concern for Gentiles to be saved. It has more to do with increasing converts to Judaism, as grounds for boasting in good works.
B	Woah, if this were propagated, glory goes to man rather than to God. How should new believers respond rightly?
Me	Paul referenced to the struggle between Sarah and Hagar.
B	<b>V30 What does the scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son shall not be an heir with the free woman's son".</b>
Me	These were the words Sarah said to Abraham when Ishmael did not respect Isaac. "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son shall not be an heir with the free woman's son!" Eventually, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away. What came about through human effort had no share in the divine inheritance.
B	What's the point?
Me	Paul encourages believers to persist in their new-found faith in Jesus Christ. As heirs of promise, they may suffer misunderstanding and persecution for now, but they must never give up. Eventually falsehood will be cast out, truth shall reign.
B	<b>V31 So, brethren, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.</b>
Me	Jesus has set us free. The Kingdom ushered in by Jesus is radically new.
B	Jesus once said, "You can't put new wine in old wineskin."
Me	In today's lingo, we are now living in the "new normal". We do not to back to old practices anymore. Paul exhorts Galatia believers to live out their identity and liberty as God's children. As recipients of God's grace and salvation, we are set free to worship Him.

29 At that time the son born of the flesh persecuted the son born of the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.



30 What does the scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son shall not be an heir with the free woman's son".



31 So, brethren, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman".

	Paul is adamant that “having begun by the Spirit”, believers do not regress to old mindset, living in bondage and falsehood that man must work their way to earn God’s favour.
B	What is the relevance of this message to you in 21 <sup>st</sup> century?
Me	First, I am in awe to know how, over time, God’s promise advances purposefully. God keeps His word and fulfils what He has promised. This is a God that I can fully trust and depend on.
Me	Second, I appreciate my new life given by God. It blows my mind that God would look upon me with favour to accept me, regardless of all my shortcomings. The Gospel speaks of God’s abundant mercy and grace. He seeks and blesses ordinary individuals, And gets these ordinary folks to carry on His mission to bless the world. Boundaries are broken down for one and all to come into the presence of God. Regardless of background, past and present misgivings. I wish many people would just come to God and receive His blessings freely given. I will do my utmost like Paul to share this amazing message to those willing to hear.
Me	Third, I need to apply this true freedom in Jesus Christ anew in today’s setting. I must learn alongside the church and its leaders to discern what are the Gospel non-negotiables vs religious traditions. Certain practices are “good-to-have” but not the means for salvation. Be careful not to fall into similar dilemma as the early believers. When we insist and enforce that X-Y-Z rules must be adhered “for the sake of Christianity”, it is necessary to differentiate “good practices” from Gospel essential. Salvation is accomplished in Jesus Christ alone. What does man do? Repent and receive.
B	What would you do with your freedom in Christ?
Me	Freedom to approach God without shame and guilt. Freedom to receive mercy and pardon from God. And freedom to extend grace and forgiveness to others. Freedom to live authentically before God without the need to please people. Freedom to act for God without fear of failure. Because I’m assured that God’s good purpose will carry on, no matter if I fall short. Freedom and courage to extend love and kindness without holding back. Because God has loved me unconditionally and His love is big enough to see me through. Freedom from anxiety and worry of the uncertain future, trusting that God is fully in control for the good of all. Do you join in this wonderful journey of freedom in Jesus Christ?
B	I do. Hallelujah! Let’s pray together.

