Finding the Present in the Past
(Galatians 4:21-5:1)
(preached 9/4/16; Sunday AM)

Introduction

My grandfather was very committed to helping me understand the world around me even as a little child.

Though he would tell me about the dangers of the world for a 3 year old, he would also show me those dangers as well…

For instance, he would tell me to stay away from chemicals that we use in the house, and then he would take me to the cleaners under the sink, and he would show them to me and even let me hold them under his supervision.

The same was true with the guns that he owned.

He would tell me to stay away from his gun cabinet, and then he would take me to it and show me the unloaded guns under his supervision…

My granddad understood that a 3 year old may hear something, but he learns better when he sees it as well…

There is that same challenge in preaching.

My job as a preacher of the gospel is to take the word of God and explain it to the people of God, but to use illustrations and and stories to help your understanding of it..

And there should be a balance in the use of illustrations and stories and example in preaching…

You can use too many illustrations and stories, and the people leave remembering the story or joke or illustration more than the truth it was meant to teach….

But you can also use too few illustrations and leave your people with nothing to help them better understand difficult Bible truths…

So, you must be balanced.

However, our decreased attention spans due to TV and phones and internet have caused people to admire preachers who are good story tellers rather than Bible teachers…

So, we now live a church culture that loves a good story because it keeps them awake, when they should be kept awake by the proclamation of God's truth…

Your kids and grandkids will have even shorter attention spans than you because of the advances on technology that leave the glued to a phone or TV..

I saw all that to say…

Train yourself to be good listeners to sermons, and bring your kids to church and expect them to be active listeners…

Coming and listening to sermons is very important.

Not only are you exposed to truth; you train yourself to be a listener, and in case you didn't know, God has chosen preaching to be his method of taking truth to the world…

And getting back to the point, good preaching and teaching uses illustrations not to dominate the sermon but to help people understand it better…

However, God also uses illustrations within the Bible to give us examples of important truths…

For instance, Hebrews 11:1 defines what faith is, and te rest of Hebrews 11 are examples of people with great faith in history….

In the book of James, he is writing about patience and he uses the illustration of Job…

And the master of illustrations is none other than Jesus Himself, who often taught the people by giving a truth and then a parable to illustrate the truth…

Well, for 2 chapters now, Paul has talked about the difference between the a gospel where salvation comes through good works versus a gospel where salvation comes through faith…

And today, Paul is going to wrap up this important discussion with an illustration showing why a gospel based is wrong…

Now, to do this, he is going to take his audience in Galatia and us back to the OT and the story of Abraham and Sarah…

So, you are going to get a 2 for 1 this morning because we first need to understand the story of Abraham and Sarah before we dig in to what Paul is going to write…

Therefore, take your Bibles and turn to Gen 16…

We are only 14 chapters into the Bibles, yet much has happened in those chapters…

God created everything in Gen 1&2…

Adam and Eve sinned in Gen 3…

Cain killed Abel in Gen 4…

The population grew and became more and more evil until God destroyed everyone but Noah and his sons in Gen 5-9…

The earth repopulates and becomes evil again in 10 until God separates the nations in Gen 11 at the tower of Babel…

And that brings us to chapter 12, where God goes to man named Abram out of all the men of the earth and calls Abram to obey him and promises to bless him as a result…

Abram does that and in Gen 15, God promises to bless Abram with a huge family line that would be as numerous as the stars of the sky…

However, there was one huge roadblock to that….

Abraham had no children…

So, in Genesis 16:1, we read this…

6 Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will [a]obtain children through her."

And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 After Abram had [b]lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 He went in to Hagar, and she conceived…

Stop right there for a second…

Abraham was getting frustrated with God's promise to give him a son, but his wife Sarai was more frustrated, and the simple reason is this…

Abraham was 86 at this point and Sarah was 76, which is well beyond child bearing years…

So, Sarah came up with a plan…

Abraham was promised a son, so she would make it happen…

She calls on her servant named Hagar and tells Abraham to have a child with her, and he listens and Hagar gets pregnant…

Needless to say, Hagar gets mad at Sarai, and Sarai gets mad at Hagar, and Hagar runs off..

The Lord tracks her down and sends an angel to her to tell her to go back to Abraham's house…

Verse 9…

9 Then the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself [h]to her authority."
10 Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your [i]descendants so that [j]they will be too many to count." 11 The angel of the Lord said to her further,
"Behold, you are with child,
And you will bear a son;
And you shall call his name [k]Ishmael,
Because the Lord [l]has given heed to your affliction.
12
"He will be a wild donkey of a man,
His hand will be against everyone,
And everyone's hand will be against him;
And he will [m]live [n]to the east of all his brothers."

Skip down to verse 15…

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to [s]him.

Needless to say, Hagar's child with Abraham was not God's plan at all…

Ishmael and his descendants will be wild donkeys and will be the enemies of everyone, and guess what?

Pick up a paper today and you will find a wold donkey named ISIS wreaking havoc in the world as everyone's enemy…

These are the descendants of Abraham and Hagar under the plan of Sarai…

Now, God's perfect plan and promise is not thrown off track by man's stupidity…

So, turn to Genesis 17:15…

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but [l]Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will [m]come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" 19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name [n]Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his [o]descendants after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall [p]become the father of twelve princes, and I will make

him a great nation. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year." 22 When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Now this scene happens 13 years later…

At this point, Abraham is 99 and Ishmael would be 13, but God had not forgotten his promise…

So, he tells Abraham once again,…

You and Sarah will have a son, and once again, Abraham laughs in disbelief…

Now turn one more time to Genesis 21, which happens one year later…

Abraham is now 100 years old and Sarah is 90 years old…

Verse 1 of Gen 21…

21 Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had [a]promised. 2 So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight

days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh [b]with me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."
8 The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

God honors his promise and brings forth a miraculous birth for an elderly couple…

This son is named Isaac, and he is the son that God was going to bless, and that forms the background for the verses that we will look at Galatians 4:21-5:1 this morning…

I have entitled this…

Finding the Present in the Past…

Because what we see in our world today, and what Paul saw in his world 2000 years ago are simply the outcomes of what happened 4000 years ago in the life of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Ishmael..

Sides were chosen in Genesis 15, and those sides exist today, and everyone in here in on one of those sides…

So, let's take brief look at Galatians 4:21-5:1 in three simple sections…

I. Two Children (4:21-23)

Let's read verse 2 of chapter 4…

21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?

Now remember, we are in a section of Galatians were Paul is trying to convince the Galatians to stop listening to a group of false teachers called Judaizers….

Who are teaching that salvation comes through keeping the Jewish law and customs…

They don't oppose faith in Christ, they simply add good works and following the rules to faith…

And so Paul has been trying to show the Galatians that the gospel of faith alone that he preached to them was the true gospel because it came from God who taught it to him….

And so, he is going to finish his argument today to those who are wanting to be under the law….

Verse 22…

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.

And so Paul takes the Galatians to the story of Abraham and his children..

And since we just read it, we know what happened…

Abraham had two sons…

The one named Ishmael, whose mom was the bondwoman named Hagar, who was in bondage in the home as a servant to Sarah….

And one by the free woman named Isaac, whose mom was the free woman Sarah…

So, we are all together….

Paul continues in verse 23..

23 But the son by the bondwoman [r]was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

Since both boys were birthed naturally, they were both in a sense born by flesh….

But what Paul is getting at here by saying flesh and promise is this..

Ishmael was born through human effort and human wisdom…

It was Sarah's and Abraham's idea to oppose the plan of God and try to have a child in their own plans…

Isaac on the other hand was God's plan based upon his promise to give them a child, even though they were well into their old age…

In fact, Isaac means laughter, because God's fulfillment of his birth caused Sarah to laugh at how God had kept his promises even though she was 90 and Abraham 100.

And os that is the first section of this passage….

You have 2 children and two moms and two ways of going about having those children…

One was by human reason and the other by the keeping of God's miraculous promise…

And so now, we must move to verse 24, where Paul the good preacher takes that illustration and explains it…

This is called the two covenants…

II. Two Covenants (4:24-27)

Verse 24…

24 [s]This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants:

An allegory literally means to say something another way…

Lets say you want to teach your children about the importance of sticking to something and being consistent over the long haul…

You may allegorize that with the story of the tortoise and the hare, where the hare gets out to a fast start but loses because the slow and steady turtle ends up winning the race…

Well, Paul is taking a story and then teaching a truth…

We have the story of Abraham's two sons, and now here comes the truth…

These two women and their tow sons represent two covenants or two agreements…

In this case, these two women represents two agreements between God and Man…

Now, let's read on….

one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children [t]who are to be slaves; [u]she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; [v]she is our mother. 27 For it is written,
"Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear;
Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor;
For more numerous are the children of the desolate
Than of the one who has a husband."

Let me give you Paul's argument in a nutshell…

Let's take Hagar first…

Her son Ishmael was born according to human wisdom, where Abraham and Sarah did not fully believe the promise of God and sought to do things their own way…

And their human wisdom led to the birth of Ishmael from the slave woman and what does Paul connect to the birth of Ishmael…..

HE connects Mount Sinai to Hagar and Ishmael…

Now, what happened at Mount Sinai?

Well, that is where God delivered the 10 commandants and the rest of the law to Moses and Israel…

And Paul also ties Jerusalem in his day to Hagar and Ishmael and Sinai…

In Paul's allegory…

The law that came down at Mount Sinai was still keeping people in bondage in Jerusalem in his day and was threatening to keep the Galatians in bondage if they turned back to it…

In other words, the law of God was not the plan of God in the world…

He planned to save people through his promise of sending a Savior to crush the serpent….

The Law was just meant to remind people that they needed a Savior…

It wasn't meant to be kept as a way to being saved…

Yet, ever since it came down at Mount Sinai, people had turned the law into the way of salvation…

And in doing so, they were doing exactly what Abraham and Sarah were doing….

They were trying to do God's will in their own human wisdom…

The world got Ishmael because Abraham and Sarah were impatient and couldn't wait on God's promise…

And the world got a works salvation because people were not patient enough to wait on God's promise of a Messiah to make them right with Him….

So they invented a whole system of laws to get right with God, but all those laws did was keep them in bondage…

And so one way to God in people's mind is to use your own wisdom to get to Him….

And if you are that line of thinking, you are in the line of Hagar and Ishmael and everyone else who does it in their own wisdom…

On the other hand, in verses 26-27, the other way to God is through believing in His promise…

Paul links that way of thinking to Sarah, Isaac, the Jerusalem above and to freedom….

In this way of thinking, Abraham and Sarah waited on the promise of God after tying to do it their own way, and God eventually gave them Isaac, who was the child of promise…

I put all this on a slide to make it clearer…

And there you see the split that began back in Genesis and continues today between Hagar and Sarah's children…

That leads to one last section in verses 4:28-5:1…

III. Two Choices (4:28-5:1)

Verse 28…

28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Paul has now left his story and like a good parent, returns to the point of telling the story…

Ok, son, you need to be like the turtle and be consistent and diligent and stick to it…

So, Paul says…

"Galatians, stop acting like sons of Hagar by going back into bondage of slavery under the law of God."

When you were saved by faith in Christ alone apart from your good works, you showed yourself to be children of Isaac, who was the child of promise.

You are not in bondage but are free, so act like it and stop listening to these false teachers who want to enslave you to their rules in order to be saved…

And then in verse 29, Paul drops a bombshell….

29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

Once Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 21:1-8, listen to what happens in verse 9…

9 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, [c]mocking.

After Isaac's birth, Ishmael begins to mock his little brother…

Ishmael would have been 14 at the time, which is the time of life when boys can be the cruelest…

And he begins to take out his frustration on Isaac, who was just a baby…

Maybe he realizes that the baby is now getting all the attention…

Maybe he realizes that his birth was not God's plan…

Maybe he is hearing Abraham and Sarah talk about how he was the son of human effort but how Isaac was the son of God's promise…

And so the mockery begins, and it continues even today in the world…

And let me give you a little insight into Ishmael's descendants haters and mockery of Isaac's descendants…

And here is what it boils down to….

Children of work verses Children of faith…

And this mockery and anger isn't confined to just Arabs and Muslims…

Jehovahs' Witnesses mock Christians for this same reason…

Same for Mormons or Buddhists and every religions based upon a works salvation….

The source of their mockery and anger toward Christians is this…

Their religion makes them work for salvation, but ours is based on faith in Christ alone…

Think about it this way…

How did you feel when the rich kid at school got the brand new Mustang and he never lifted one finger to earn it…

When you had to work a job and go to school in order to afford your used little car or truck?

Well, you didn't like it and you talked about that boy or girl and you were ill and bitter because they didn't ever lift a finger while you worked yours to the bone…

That is why members of false religions hate Christians…

Their religions makes them work to be saved, but our simply calls for faith in Christ alone….

Ishmael was the product of getting to God through human effort and wisdom, and his descendants in every false religion of all time believe just as he believed…

And they resent and are bitter against anyone who says that salvation is not the results of works but faith….

The ISIS terrorist may kill you for whatever reason he says, but the root of his hatred of you is that his religions enslaves him to law and rules….

While our religions frees us from the law because Christ fulfilled it in our place…

Then, let's read what happens to those who are descendants of Ishmael and the slave woman…

Verse 30…

30 But what does the Scripture say?
"Cast out the bondwoman and her son,
For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir
with the son of the free woman."
31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a
bondwoman, [w]but of the free woman.

5 1[a]It was for freedom that Christ set us free;
therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject
again to a yoke of slavery.

If we take one last look at Genesis 21, listen to what happens to Ishmael and Hagar after Sarah sees him mocking Isaac….

10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this
maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be
an heir with my son [d]Isaac." 11 The matter
[e]distressed Abraham greatly because of his son.
12 But God said to Abraham, "[f]Do not be distressed
because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells
you, listen to her, for through Isaac [g]your
descendants shall be named. 13 And of the son of the
maid I will make a nation also, because he is your
[h]descendant." 14 So Abraham rose early in the
morning and took bread and a [i]skin of water and
gave them to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder, and
gave her the boy, and sent her away. And she departed
and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Long story short, Sarah sees the mocking and tells Abraham to throw them out because Ishmael was not going to an heir with her son of promise…

And in this case, God tells Abraham that Sarah is exactly right, and Abraham sends them packing with bread and water into the wilderness…

And let me tell you, Hagar and Ishmael and their descendants are still walking lost in the world….

And with that, Paul simply says to the Galatians….

When you depart the gospel of faith and head back to a gospel of works….

You are put back into bondage with Ishmael and his line and give us the freedom that came though faith alone in Christ alone…

Paul then tells them in verse 1 of chapter 5 to resist that temptation and simply stand in their freedom in Christ…

Conclusion

Now where does this hit the people in Pine Grove this morning?

And I will tell you where in case you wondered…

As good red blooded Americans, we fight against injustice in the world and we stand for freedom…

Therefore many of you this morning are saying to yourself…

Those terrorists are simply descendants of Ishmael and Hagar and you would be right for the most part…

And you rejoice in the fact that you aren't as evil as them…

And you love the fact that God cast them out of Abraham's house…

And you will leave here this morning talking about how the Bible helps us see the truth of the world around us, and where Arabs come from and terrorists…

And how it helps us to see why people don't like Christians…..

And you will sit down and eat lunch and be glad that you are one of them terrorists that will be cast out of heaven….

Yet, what some of you will never see is that you are one of them…

No, you don't make videos of your slaughter and plan attacks around the world that murder 1000s of people…

You a good ol boy who loves his church and his mama and his job and deep down inside is a good person….

And you will pat yourself on the back and turn on Fox News and continue to fuss about the terrorism in the world….

And yet you will never see yourself in the verses of Galatians 4:21-5:1 until you get to heaven and face God and he asks why you get in?

And you say, "well, God. I'm not a terrorist like them folks in the Middle East. I always paid my taxes and went to church and loved my family."

So, you need to let me in…

And God will say, "Depart form me, you son of Ishmael who thinks that you can get to heaven based upon your own wisdom and goodness."

“You are not an heir to the promise that came through Isaac.”

“You believed in a gospel of doing good, and now you must be cast out of my presence because you are not an heir who has come by faith alone in Christ alone.”

And let me tell you this morning, there are 1000s of people in churches this morning basing their final destination on the that they are as bad as an Islamic terrorist…

Yet, 1000s are actually sons of Ishmael and not sons of Isaac…

Wake up this morning you who sleep before it is everlasting too late…

Trusting in your good works put you in the line of Ishmael, and his line has been cast out God’s presence forever…

There is but one way to be a son of Isaac and that is to trust in the Son of God, who is the reality of God’s promise to send a Savior from sin…

If you want to be a son of Isaac and a son of the promise of God, trust alone in the Son of God by turning from

your sin and putting your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you…

Abraham and Sarah tried to make their own way, and it led to agony for them and for the world…

But they came to their senses, and God kept his promise to give them a son…

This morning, God is offering His Son to you….

Regardless of your culture, skin color or nationality, you are either of Ishmael or Isaac this morning…

Freedom is found in Isaac's line, but bondage now and forever in found in Ishmael's line….

Throw off that bondage this morning and come to Christ…

This morning, we are going to gather around as Christ's children and eat at His table….

It is a special time for believers to celebrate the fact that we are his Children by faith in Him through His death for us…

This table is not open for the sons of Ishmael…..

If you are here trusting in good works to save you, you cannot participate in this celebration…

This meal is only offered to those who know that all their good works were done by Christ in his life, death and resurrection…

If that is you this, please join us as we celebrate the Lord's death until He returns….

I would also remind Christians that this Lord's Supper is not to be taken with serious examination of your own life as well…

If you are living in a state of unrepentant sin, the Bible forbids your participation until you repent…

You should also counsel your children before allowing them to take part….

With that said, I will invite the men forward to help us serve the bread and the juice to people…

As they come forward, let us pray together…