

CHILDREN OF A PROMISE**Galatians 3:26-4:7****(Read Galatians 3:26-4:7)**

Intro: Yesterday was Sweetest Day. Word has it that it came about so that men could have a holiday for themselves, since Valentine's Day has pretty much become a day when men are to romance their ladies with flowers, chocolates, dinner at some expensive place like Melting Pot, diamonds, or some other extravagant proof of love and devotion. My cynical observation is that Sweetest Day has been similarly hijacked. So, I Googled it to make sure I was correct and found that I'm somewhat accurate. I found that the original Sweetest Day was first celebrated in in 1922 in Cleveland, when candy maker C.C. Hartzell organized the distribution of 20,000 boxes of candy to young orphans, the elderly, and poor people in the city. Then in 1937, The National Confectioners Society petitioned to have the holiday added to the list of other recognized holidays like Valentine's Day. They bribed local charities and other organizations with another 10,000 boxes of candy. I'm betting they were in cahoots with local dentists too. It has worked, to an extent. As a result, we sort of recognize the holiday, but Sweetest Day is nowhere near as celebrated as Valentine's Day – but I'm not whining. My sweetest is worth it and has been for over 40 years.

I'll spare you having to hear the story again, but I've been smitten by her from the very first time I saw her on July 3rd of 1977. She was not smitten at that first meeting, quite the opposite as a matter of fact. It was almost a year later that I saw her again and I knew I was in love. Within a month, I had worn her down with my charm and I think she was beginning to be in like with me. All the while, I considered her the most gorgeous creature to have ever existed. And this was a girl who used no makeup or wore no jewelry. Her hair was long in the style of the day, but other than getting it trimmed from time to time, it was nothing fancy. Then came the Messiah College Christmas Special in December of 1979. We had become engaged the summer before and, of course, I would be Kathy's escort for one of the biggest events of the year. My friends and I got all gussied up with our best suits and shoes (except for my friend Todd who wore his Converse) and we walked from our dorm over to the Sollenberger dorm where Kathy and her friends were housed.

I'll NEVER forget the creature of rapturous beauty that came into the lobby to greet me. The girl that I never dreamt could be more beautiful (after all, how can you perfect perfection?) walked toward me and I was googly-eyed. Kathy's friends had dressed her in a drop-dead beautiful blue formal dress with gold print that accentuated her beautiful blue-green eyes. They had swept her hair up in a very fetching do and they had very tastefully applied the first make-up she had ever worn, along with lovely earrings. My friends had to hold me up and maybe even hold me back.

Forty years have hardly changed my perception. My sweetest is still my most beautiful girl. But I'll never forget how she was transformed that evening. And in case you're wondering where I've been going with this, it's a picture of the transformation that comes to Christ Followers.

Let's look at the text I read earlier and take it section by section, and you'll see what I mean. First . . .

In Christ Jesus we are all children of God through faith

- Paul has been hitting this hard all through his letter to the foolish Galatians, but now he's getting down to specifics. They needed to hear it and so do we. Just two days ago I had a phone call from a man I know to have received Christ. We had even been talking about me baptizing him a few years ago. He's had his ups and down, but right now, even though he's not a poster boy for holiness, he's on a bit of an up. As we talked he mentioned to me that he's "going to hell anyway." I was shocked by such an admission. How could anyone look forward to an eternity like that? He had enough faith to know that if he continues in rebellion, hell will be his destination, but not enough faith to know that when he received Jesus on faith, he was transformed from a slave of the world in a full child of God through faith.
- The Galatians were just like my friend. They had received Christ, but they had gone back to their old life. I really understand Paul's shocked response. There is nothing new under the Sun and we still make it so hard on ourselves. Remember this: we are full children of God through faith – let's not walk away from that and let's realize, we don't have to work for it, the adoption process is done and Jesus has done all the work.
- Speaking of baptism, maybe it would have helped if my friend had gone through with baptism. Look how Paul brings into the discussion by showing how . . .

We are clothed anew in baptism

- This is where I was going with my description of Kathy on that Friday night in December of 1979. She was transformed and I was blown away. My eyes were opened. I realized all the more what a beauty I had.
- Maybe it's lame, but baptism is the moment of faith in which our adoption as the as a child of God is realized more fully. And while we know what God had done through Jesus, the full realization soaks in as we go under the water. It's where we know "THIS IS REAL!". That's why the Book of Common Prayer says and we as BIC have long taught that baptism is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Not only does it speak to us, it is our witness to other that we have made a faith commitment to Christ. It's accountability. We make a statement in baptism that we are in Christ and have entered into him as the waters have wrapped around us.
- Like Kathy, we have made a garment change as it were. In the early church, this was acted out in baptism. When the new believer approached the baptismal waters, he shed his old garments and put on completely new and brilliantly white garments when he exited the water. He put off the old life and put on Christ. Paul is imploring the Galatians – don't put on the old rags. You have new clothes. And while you're at it, realize...

There is no place for distinctions in Christ Jesus

- The old pecking order is gone because there is complete equality in Christ. Barclay writes, "*In the Jewish morning prayer, which Paul must all his pre-Christian life have used, the Jew thanks God that "Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." Paul takes that prayer and reverses it. The old distinctions were gone; all were one in Christ.*" I've heard versions of that selfish prayer that say "Thank you God that you have not made me a dog, a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."
- This manmade distinction showed the low regard the Jews had for non-Jews and non-males. It did not come from God. There was no proof-text for it. And neither can there be as far as gender, race, nationality, or religion. Everyone is eligible to become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For that reason, any kind of racism or bigotry is completely contrary to Scripture and has no place in the life of the Christ Follower. Because...

We are heirs according to the promise

- No matter our race or gender or station in life, we share a family resemblance. We have our Father's eyes. Paul wrote to the Romans that *we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ* (Romans 8:17) We are children of a promise. Who needs a rich relative – we inherit abundant life now and eternal life later. It doesn't get any better than that.
- That's why its crazy to go back. That's why Paul was shaking his head. Don't walk away from the fact that...

Conclusion: Our conclusion will encompass the final 7 verses of our text. We have been adopted to full sonship and are no longer slaves.

- Paul is shouting through his letter. "LIVE AS SONS – not slaves!" Don't go back into bondage. Don't slip back into childhood. You have all the rights and privileges of a fully mature, fully free son or daughter of God.
- He is using imagery from the adoption process in his culture. When one was adopted, all vestiges of your former life was wiped away and you were brought into full sonship with your adoptive parents. There were no second-class adoptive children – you became a child with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. You had a full birthright and nothing could change it.
- So, call God what he is, he is Abba. He is not some distant and difficult father, but a loving and affectionate Daddy and we have the right to call him that. Don't walk away from the promise.
- We are children of the promise. Live it and live in victory. Amen.