Waiting on the Promises
Galatians 4:21-31 (NKJV)

- In this last few verses of chapter 4 Paul will finish up with one final illustration.
- One final illustration to help us understand our relationship with the law and our walk of faith.
- It’s taken from the Old Testament.
- Let’s read it all and then I will come back and touch on a few points.

Vs. 21-31 – “Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: ‘Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.’ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

- Notice how Paul will exhort the church Vs. 21…

Vs. 21 – “Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?”

- Paul reminds the church, those of you that are being tempted to go back to relating to the Father through your works, wanting to be under the law, do you hear what the law is saying?
• Now you might ask, why would anyone want to be under the law? Why would anyone want to relate to the Father that way, by what you do instead of what Jesus has done for us?
• I like what David Guzik said…

“There are many advantages to being under the law as your principle of relating to God. First, you always have the outward certainty of a list of rules to keep. Second, you can compliment yourself because you keep the rules better than others do. Finally, you can take the credit for your own salvation, because you earned it by keeping the list of rules.” - David Guzik

• Sadly at the end of the day it’s a lot like the fig leaf that Adam and Eve made for themselves to cover their sin to hide their nakedness.
• Just give it a few days and they would realize it didn’t work.
• It was only when God stepped in and made a covering, a sacrificial covering where they were clothed appropriately.
• And so Paul hits this doctrine of grace one last time with an illustration from the Old Testament.
• Often we find a New Testament principle illustrated in the Old Testament.
• And in this case we go back to Abraham, Sarah and Abraham’s two sons.
• Notice…

Vs. 22 – “For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.”

• Paul points back to Abraham again. This time he points to his two sons…

Son #1 – Ishmael, birthed to Hagar the bondwomen.

• Hagar would represent as Paul said the bondwomen.
• She was picked up in Egypt because of a lapse of faith on Abraham’s part.
• She became Sarah’s handmaiden, a bondwomen who served Sarah.
• Paul would remind us.
Vs. 23 – “But he who was of the bondwomen was born according to the flesh…”

- She would give birth to Ishmael who represented the flesh.
- She and Ishmael would represent the works of the flesh. Trying to relate to God by your own works, a performance based relationship with God, the law from Mount Sinai.

Son #2 – Isaac, birthed to Sarah the freewomen.

- Paul reminds us in Vs. 23….

Vs. 23 – “…and he of the freewomen through promise,”

- Isaac and Sarah represents God’s promise that would be received by faith.
- Some of you know the story; we find it in Genesis 12-21.
- In Genesis 12 God calls’ Abraham out of his homeland to follow Him to a country that he would inherit, the land of Canaan.

“Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.” Genesis 12:1-5 (NKJV)

- God told Abraham that He would bless him, make his name great and through Him all his lineage, all the nations would be blessed.
- The only thing He required was faith. To have faith in the Lord’s promise and a faith that is real is going to be an obedient faith.
- And that’s what Abraham did, he stepped out in faith to God’s promise and he moved out of his land to another, Canaan, the land of promise.
Now notice, the Lord knows how forgetful we can be.

So, He reminds him again in chapter 15…

“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’ But Abram said, ‘Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!’ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:1-6 (NKJV)

God reminded Abraham, “Look to the stars, count them if you can, that’s how great your lineage will be, that’s what I am going to do with you and your family.”

When he was without a child God promised that he would have a child from his own body and in chapter 15 Abraham was a believer.

But in chapter 16 we have a problem.

What’s the problem? The promise was taking longer than Abraham and Sarah wanted to wait.

“When God gives a promise, there is almost invariably a gap of time between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. And it is in that gap of time we get impatient. Time is running out we say. I’ve got to make something happen.” – Jon Courson

That’s what Abraham and Sarah did, the promise wasn’t coming fast enough so they decided to help God out, to get creative.

In the next chapter Genesis 16 we read…

“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.” Genesis 16:1-2 (NKJV)
• Here is where it goes wrong, instead of seeking the voice of God, instead of crying out to God and instead of leading his wife to the throne of God; he caved in to his wife’s requests.
• And notice what happened…

“Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived…” Genesis 16:3-4 (NKJV)

• I am sure they looked at their age, Abraham in his eighties and Sarah was in her 70’s and thought, this is not working out like we thought.
• We are not getting any younger, maybe we need to speed things up. Time is running out and we need to make things happen.

Like that house you just have to buy now or that boat that is a sweet deal and you get a loan you can’t afford. You sell whatever you can to make it happen, you get creative because time is wasting.

• So Sarah suggested that Abraham take Hagar and have relations with her and she would serve as a surrogate mother.
• And instead of seeking God, instead of waiting on the Lord, Abraham heeded the voice of his wife and the result was Ishmael, the son of Hagar not Sarah.

“So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.” Genesis 16:15-16 (NKJV)

• It was a result of their flesh, not a work of faith, the work of impatience and not the fruit of a promise.
• Let me give a few verses to remind you of the importance of waiting on the Lord.

“Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!” Psalms 27:14 (NKJV)
Notice what happens when we wait on the Lord. He will grant us courage and He will strengthen our hearts.

“knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” James 1:3-4 (NKJV)

- The testing of our faith brings about the gift of patience and patience will bring about maturity.
- And of course my favorite verse…

“But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40:31 (NKJV)

- Notice, again our strength will be renewed, we will run and not be weary, walk and not faint.
- How about this one….

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalms 46:10 (NKJV)

- For some of being still for 5 minutes is a challenge.

I was in a restaurant the other day and for some reason the orders were just not coming out as quick as they usually do. We were all struggling, waiting is not easy when your hungry, but so often it’s worth the wait.

- I heard someone say, “A little delay is always better than a disaster.”
- If you don’t stop and wait on the Lord you might just find yourself creating something in your flesh that God rejects.
- We read that Abraham hoped that God would skip the Isaac deal and accept Ishmael. Why not use Ishmael? Let the Messiah come through his name.
- But God rejected him. Notice when the Lord shows up and reminds Abraham of the promise, Abraham has another plan.

“‘And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.’ Then
Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.’” Genesis 17:16-19 (NKJV)

- God rejected Ishmael because it was the work of Abraham’s ingenuity, his creativity, and his impatience.
- It was not the son that God had promised that would come through Sarah.
- And at the age of 90 Sarah gave birth to the son of Abraham, the son of promise, Isaac.
- Think about that! When it was physically impossible Sarah gave birth to her first and only son, Isaac.

“And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him--whom Sarah bore to him--Isaac.” Genesis 21:1-3 (NKJV)

“And now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.” Genesis 21:5 (NKJV)

- And here Paul relates this to the law and grace.
- Notice…

Vs. 24 – “which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—“

- Paul relates these two events with the two doctrines of law and grace.
- The works of the law have to do with our flesh.

Let’s make something happen, let’s work it out in our flesh. And then present it to God and hope He will take it, hope He will receive it.
• But instead He rejects it.
• It’s a great reminder that the life of the flesh does not produce anything worthy of heaven’s approval.
• Paul would say…

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;” Romans 7:18 (NKJV)

• Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah confessed about our heart.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)

It’s a lot like that fake fruit that we use for the centerpiece of the dining table, it looks good on the outside but on the inside it’s empty and hollow.

• Jeremiah is really confessing that his heart is beyond repair. Humanly speaking there is nothing that he can do in the natural to fix his condition.
• It’s beyond human repair.
• That’s the comparison here, that’s exactly what was taking place with Abraham and Sarah.
• They were way beyond their ability to have a child and God stepped in and gave them Isaac, new life.
• And in the same way we were beyond human repair that’s when God steps in and graces us with the gift of new life.
• That’s what Paul reminds us in Romans 5.

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Romans 5:6 (NKJV)

• Notice “without strength”, in other words we were incapable.

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Romans 5:10 (NKJV)
• We were enemies in our sin, that’s when He reached out and revealed Himself to us, that He might reconcile us to Himself.
• Have you notice that in your life He’s reaching out to you revealing Himself to you, that He might reconcile you to the Father.
• Let’s finish up with the last three verses…

Vs. 29 – “But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.”

• It’s the way of legalism; those in a legal relationship with the Lord are always sour and unhappy. Works is that way and because their unhappy they are going to be upset that your not.
• The best thing you can do when you encounter someone like this is love them, let them see your joy in the Lord, your freedom in Christ. Win them over with love, the love of Christ.

Vs. 30-31 – “Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

• We are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.
• It’s what leads us into chapter 5…

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free…”
Galatians 5:1 (NKJV)