

## **“Children and so blessed!” Galatians 4:4-7**

**“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

This is the last Sunday we gather in 2025. One more year is almost gone. How do we say this? We can say it with sadness and a sense of loss: “One more year is almost gone...” Or we can say with joy and hope: “One more year is almost gone!”

How shall we say it? We heard what Paul the apostles had written to Christians in Galatia. These few verses will tell us with what emotion we should say – one more year is almost gone. For what Paul wrote helps us to reflect on the central message of the Bible, on what difference being a Christian makes in our lives.

Let’s hear Paul’s words once again: **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”**

Do you remember this daily? Do you believe this with your whole being? It’s likely we will say: “Yes, sure, I do!” But is that true? Do we really live like we believe it? Do we? Let’s reflect on this a bit more, for this is so important.

If we say we believe that we are children of God, but then this so-called “belief” doesn’t shape our lives and attitudes and actions much, then we can say that, in fact, in our hearts we may believe something entirely different.

Paul speaks about this radical, foundational change that God brings into our lives. To illustrate the point, Paul uses an analogy that was easy to understand for his listeners. He speaks about the unfathomable transition from being a slave to being adopted as a child into a new family, about being made an heir.

What is that about? We could say that this is about two very different relationships, or about two very different arrangements. One is between the slaves and their masters, and the other is between the father and his children.

What are the relationships between the slaves and their masters? Too often we may get a simplified and distorted picture when we hear the word “slave”. In Roman times it didn’t necessarily mean misery and poverty.

Even though most slaves were war captives, they could occupy different positions, some highly skilled, some of them could be very wealthy and influential. However, those relationships were based primarily on cold, pragmatic, economic benefits. Slaves were considered not as people, but as property.

Those relationships were performance based. The life and well-being of the slaves was dependent on their masters' favor and good will. If the masters were satisfied with how their slaves performed, they could make their lives quite pleasant, and vice versa.

From the slave's perspective, everything in their lives, their well-being, security, their very lives depended on the unpredictable favor of their masters. You had to do your best and hope for the best, but you would never know if you have done enough, you could never predict what mood swing your master may experience.

Utter dependence. Uncertainty. Unpredictability. No real hope for a better future. Constant fear. That's how those relationships function. And you couldn't change a thing. You couldn't free ourselves. Unless someone pays the price for your freedom.

As Paul says that was our situation before **“God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”** This is what Jesus does, He redeems us from our slavery and He grants us freedom. But what slavery, we may wonder?

Earlier Paul speaks about our slavery to elementary principles of the world and to the law. Simply put, Paul speaks about our slavery to those things in creation on which we believe our very life and well-being depend.

About those things from which we expect all good in our lives, and which we hope will help us with all our troubles. About those things which we believe can threaten us the most and take all good away. Those are our masters. We will talk about them more.

But it is from them that Jesus redeems us. From that fear and uncertainty about the future, from that dependence on your performance and the capricious attitude of those masters. But Jesus does something far greater than that.

He not only sets us free, but He bestows upon us a new status, a new identity, the greatest and the most honorable that there is, He adopts us as God's children, as God's sons and daughters. It is not only that you are freed from the whims and fear of your slave masters, but you are also adopted into God's own family. You are His. You belong to Him. You are under His divine authority and protection. Do you see the difference?

This arrangement is not based on fear. It is based on our Father's love and affection. It is not about our performance; it is about who we are in the eyes of our Father who is in heaven. It is not about earning the favor of those capricious masters; it is about rejoicing in the warm embrace of our gracious and faithful God.

What does this new status – not slaves anymore, but children - change for you very practically? Let's look at a few examples. What is the greatest threat and the ultimate enemy for every human being? Death. For it takes away everything.

This is one of our most powerful masters. It makes us fear tomorrow, it makes us toil and save and gather as much wealth as possible just to create that sense of security, just to feel protected. This master is the daily cause of our anxieties and worries, for we can never be sure when he may come to snatch or destroy our lives.

This is why we struggle to be generous; how can we give away if our very life may depend on how much we have, how can we freely use our time and possession to serve others, if we need to be concerned about our own existence. We can't... If some of that sounds familiar, this master may still want to control you.

But now, you are free. Jesus has freed you. Now you belong to God who has authority even over life and death. He is the very source of life. Of true life. Eternal life. And He has united you with Himself. He feeds you with true life in His holy meals.

Death has lost its sting; she can't be your master anymore. She can't rob you of anything. She can only serve you as a doorway to your reunion with our Lord Jesus. She can't harm us; she can only bless us. Everything serves the children of God.

Or think about the law, about its annoying voice in our hearts, our conscience. It keeps reminding us that we are accountable, that we will be judged, that our performance will be evaluated. We are always under scrutiny so demanding that we can't satisfy it.

We are born as slaves to the law. As everything in the creation, we are supposed to bear fruits intended by our Creator. If we fail, if we are fruitless trees, we will be cut down and thrown into fire. We may do our best, we may strive to be decent people, to lead good lives, pray, read the Bible, attend Services, give, pray, etc.

But the better we know the will of God for our lives - that we shall love Him with all our heart, and our neighbors as ourselves - the clearer we see how shockingly we fail Him. Daily. The harder we try to be good the more we recognize how badly we fail, the more desperate we become. The law is a never satisfied master. If some of that sounds familiar, this master may still want to control you.

But now, you are free. Jesus has freed you. Now you are God's children. Now your relationships with your Creator are not those of slaves and masters, but of loving Father and His beloved children. Master will judge the slaves according to their performance. God as your Father loves you because of who you are, His child.

We don't have to excel in our goodness, or to satisfy the law before He begins to love us. He loves you because He has made you His child. You are free from the burden of trying to show that you are worthy, that you are good enough. No need. Your loving Father assures you: "My dear child, with you I am well pleased!"

It doesn't mean there are no expectations for our lives. Every parent wants their children to live wisely and well, according to their best instructions. So also, our Father who is in heaven. He loves you not because of how you perform, but because He is your loving Father, and that is why He instructs you in His wisdom for how to lead your lives so that you could bring joy to Him and bless those around you. But you don't have to earn His favor. You have it. Just enjoy this life!

Or think about all the most important things in our lives, or as we call them in our Bible Classes, our universal human longing. We want our lives to matter, to be somebody, we want to belong, to be connected, we want to lead meaningful lives, we want to feel secure, at least somewhat in control, we want to be inspired and guided by hope.

These deep longings of the human heart drive our lives. Even if we don't know it. And then the things that we believe will satisfy those deep longings become our masters. We may believe that our success, our achievements will make a name for us.

We may believe that pleasing people, that saying yes to everything will earn us love and acceptance. We may believe that achieving self-chosen goals will bring us lasting fulfilment. We may believe that we can create such safety nets that will enable us to live happily ever after. If that is what we believe, those things become our masters.

They enslave us. They demand our loyalty, time, sweat and blood and they never fully deliver what we hoped they would. They suck us dry and leave us hanging. If some of that sounds familiar, these masters may still want to control you.

But now... you are free. Jesus has freed you. God the Father has adopted you as His child. That is your everlasting identity. Nothing in the entire creation will make you more honorable, more worthy than your status as God's child and heir.

Nothing will give your life clearer direction and deeper satisfaction than living out God's purposes for you, flourishing daily in joyful gratitude for all His blessings, and striving to love everyone in your life as Jesus loves you. What a beautiful life!

And not a thing visible or invisible will grant you a greater sense of peace and security than knowing that you are in your Father's arms. Not to mention that there is no more empowering hope than to finally meet our God face to face.

These are the Father's gifts to you. Because Jesus has redeemed you from all your slave masters. Because the Father has adopted you as His own. Because you are no longer a slave, but a child and if a child then also an heir of God. That's you! Yes, you!

So... one more year has gone! What shall we say? Thanks be to God! For you are now one more year closer to seeing our God as He is and rejoicing with all the saints in your inheritance, in His eternal Kingdom of life and blessedness.

May the Spirit of God keep you and guard you that you never lose sight of this wonderful reality but remember it daily and believe it with your whole heart. For that is who you truly are. Enjoy it! Amen.