

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Galatians 3:23-4:7 ²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. ¹ I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

The need for laws is a mark of immaturity. Think about baby seats as an example. My son Aaron, I consider it a minor miracle every time I'm able to get him buckled into a car seat. The second his back rests against the seat, these internal sirens must start going off in his head because he immediately will contort his upper body into any position that makes it impossible to buckle him in. He hates sitting in there for any length of time. The seatbelt is annoying to him because it's repressive, he can't move at all in there. But what he doesn't understand is that he needs it, it's for his safety; and because he's immature, because he can't protect himself, the seatbelt exists as his own personal law—one that he hates.

There are certain laws that we have when we're younger which frustrate us: "Don't go outside by yourself, don't touch the stove, don't go in the street"—laws that go away when we become older. When you're young, maybe it's due immaturity or ignorance, you need such laws in place to keep you safe. As you grow old, you don't require them anymore simply because you've matured.

In our text this morning, the topic of discussion is the law of God. What it's purpose is and who it applies to; and in our text the Apostle Paul describes the law with a rather interesting picture, he says, "**The law was our guardian.**" And then a little later he explains what he means, he says, "**The heir, as long as he is a child, ... is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.**"

The Greek word used there for "guardian" is describing a very specific type of servant. In rich households in ancient Greek culture, there would be one servant whose sole purpose was to follow the heir of the family around all day everywhere they went, serving as his personal custodian. The purpose was two-fold: first of all, to keep the heir safe, to ensure their survival. Second: the guardian was there to enforce morals on the child. So if the child said something wrong or did something out of line, the

guardian was right there to immediately discipline them and set them back into line. Could you imagine how annoying that would be? All growing up, having someone there all the time, always needing their permission, getting smacked every time you did anything remotely wrong, never being allowed to get into any mischief at all?

Well, Paul says, ***“Before faith came”*** we were under just such a relationship with the law, it was our guardian, and it was an annoyance. And by the way when Paul says, ***“Before faith came,”*** he’s talking about Jesus. “Before Jesus came.” That’s why in the following verses it says, ***“Then the fullness of time came.”*** When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, and everything changed. When Jesus came, that spelled the end of the law, at least in the way God intended it in the Old Testament. One of the intentions of God’s law for his Old Testament people was just for it to be super annoying, to be repressive, to be irksome. But it was given with two goals in mind: to keep them safe, and also to direct them to Christ—it pointed them to Christ by telling them what they could not do.

Have you ever been at a basketball game, probably a high school basketball game is where you’d hear this, where the fans of the opposing team were yelling out the most annoying cheer that anyone can do in my opinion? Maybe you’ve heard it before. It’s where your player travels or kicks the ball or steps out of bounds or something like that, and then the other fans will cheer, “YOU CAN’T DO THAT!” And then they’ll do this clap—SUPER annoying.

Well that’s essentially what the law does. God uses it as a mirror to show us exactly what we are like; God says, “Do this, don’t do that, do *this* and don’t do *that*”; and if we’re being at all honest, when we read these laws we all have to say, “I’ve kept none of this.” When we read God’s Law properly, then we are confronted with all the ways in which we simply fail to live up to God’s standards every single day. And that’s exactly how it’s supposed to work. God gives us these lofty standards so that when we might be tempted to think that we’re good enough people to make God happy, good enough people that God loves us, when we’re tempted to think that as long as we go to church we should be able to get in to heaven—the law shouts out, “You can’t do that!” It tells us, “You can’t save yourself—in fact, you can’t do anything to please God, not by yourself.”

Instead of enabling us to save ourselves, the law enslaves us. It says, “You must do this!” And at the same time, it says, “You cannot do this!” In His law, God says, “Do this or die,” but then you have no ability to follow. In the law we find hope, and then that hope is dashed to pieces by who we are.

In that way, the law of God is kind of like a rescue helicopter. Imagine that you’re lost at sea, being tossed about in the waves, in peril of drowning, suddenly a helicopter arrives, a beam of light narrows down upon your head, the ladder lowers with a rescue crew, and it stops ten feet above your head. They shout, “Jump and you’ll live! Just grab on and you’ll live!” But it’s not even remotely possible. This is what God intends his law to do for us. To give us the promise, “If you can only follow through, if only you can love God with your whole heart and love your neighbor as yourself, if you could just be perfect as God is perfect, then you can be saved.” And you can’t.

We see then, if we want to get to heaven, we need another way. We cannot be saved by following God's law, or by anything that we do no matter how God pleasing it may seem to be. There's no amount of good that we could do where we could stand before God and say, "I've always tried to be a good person!" It won't work. So instead, God gave us another way; He gave us baptism.

In the old baptism liturgies—I read through a traditional baptism liturgy for Katelyn's baptism today, but if I had chosen an older Baptismal liturgy to read through, it would have referred to Katelyn's baptism as an exorcism. That might hit our ears as very strange, but it's the perfect description of what happens in baptism. Since the day we are born, we are demonic in our nature.

Think about our Gospel reading, about the man possessed by a legion of demons. Those demons tormented that man and sought to ruin his life. Jesus saved his life by driving the demons out, and what did they do next? They went into a herd of pigs to destroy a farmer's livelihood. This is what the devil does! He takes those things which God gives as very good, and he twists it and ruins it and corrupts it.

And we do the very same. We take the law of God, we hear how He expects us to live as his children, and we twist it and we ignore it and we destroy it in pursuit of our passions. And then we make excuses for our actions! And then we take it and twist it again and say, "Well, I'm certainly not perfect, but I try to be a good person!" And we feel like maybe God will accept us for that; but this is just a twisting and a distorting of God's law. He gives it to us to tell us, "You can't do that! You can't save yourself!" And we say, "I sure would like to try. I think I can, I think I can." This proves our demonic nature that we have even from birth. As God said in Genesis 8, ***"Every inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth."*** (Genesis 8:21)

And seeing this in us and knowing that every child that would be born to man would have the same corrupt heart, God decided to change the relationship. He did it through baptism; baptism, which connects us to Christ—As Paul says, ***"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*** And a few verses before that, ***"Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."***

Think about how the relationship would change between the child-heir and the guardian when the child comes of age. No longer can that guardian discipline him and follow him around if he doesn't want him to. The son has now become the master in his father's house, and that is exactly what Paul is saying about you who have been baptized into Christ Jesus.

Being baptized connects you to the victory Christ won on the cross. It means that you have been redeemed and that the devil has been cast out, that you have been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ, the devil defeated by it. That all of your sins have been forgiven, that you have been made one with Christ. It means that Christ the Son of God became your brother in order to make you his brother, in order to make you sons of God. It means that you who had nothing to look forward to but eternal wrath now have eternal life, because you are God's matured children.

Now, you cannot be bound or attacked or defeated by the devil. You can now boast to the devil as we did in our hymn just a bit ago. "Satan, drop your ugly accusation." You can speak out against your own

sin because it has no hold on you, for Christ has borne its curse. For, ***“When the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son,”*** and He made you His sons and daughters—heirs of His kingdom and masters of the law.

But that doesn’t mean the law is now worthless to you. Think again about that child. When the child comes of age, he could cast out his guardian, “I always hated you anyway!” But if that guardian has done his job well, and the child has grown up and matured, the child will understand the purpose that that servant had. The child-now-become-master will want to keep the servant around for help and advice and wisdom.

Similarly, in Christ, we have all matured, and the law can no longer condemn us, for we are its masters! But as our guardian it directed us to Christ. And we can now use it for help. It can still teach us the way we should go. We can and ought to use the law of God to show us when we’ve begun to stray in sin, to reprimand us and bring us to our knees in repentance. Because the truth is, even though we’ve been baptized, we still have our sinful flesh clinging to us.

That’s just one of those truths that a lot of people have a hard time reconciling. That you can be a baptized child of God, a saint, and yet still struggle with sin. There was an ancient church Father, named Jerome—not a good church Father, very bad theology anyways—and he had an answer for this predicament. He was writing about “Penance,” the Catholic idea that if you sin, you can do all these different steps and make up for your sins before God. And Jerome says that penance is the second plank of safety after baptism. The idea is that when you were baptized you were put on the boat of God’s church, but then perhaps you shipwreck your faith because of some terrible sin. And then Jerome says, “Now you need something else, baptism doesn’t help you anymore. Now you’re lost at sea, you’ve been knocked off the boat, so now you have penance, a little piece of driftwood to cling onto to stay afloat and avoid hell.”

This idea makes sense in the catholic mindset because the way they think of baptism is that it takes care of the sin you’re born with and whatever you’ve accumulated till that point, but then the rest of your life you’re on your own. In fact, I read about a certain Catholic King from a long time ago—and I can’t remember who it was and I couldn’t find him again, but I remember reading about him—but this particular king waited to be baptized until the day he died. He figured he could just take care of all his sins that way in one fell swoop, get more out of his baptism.

And I think we’ve probably all wondered something along the same lines in connection with our baptisms. Maybe you were baptized as a baby, maybe it was older, but in any case, I know that you have sinned since then, countless times, probably even some that still just weigh on you heavily today. And then when you think about your baptism, and what you’ve done since, “Boy, maybe you should get it again! Maybe it didn’t work the first time! Maybe you need something else.”

Well, when Martin Luther was responding to Jerome’s ideas about penance being the second plank next to baptism, he spoke about how awful it was, because not only does it elevate something manmade to being of the same status as a God-given sacrament, but it also ignores the entire blessed

comfort of Baptism. He said, "If you are in the water because you shipwrecked your faith, don't look for a little plank in the water to hold onto. Turn around! The boat is still there!"

And that is the truth of your Baptism! It is a forever promise for you! It is an eternal grace. Notice what Paul says: "**As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**" Finished. Job already done. That's why we sing in that hymn, "*I AM baptized into Christ.*" Not "I was," but "**I AM.**" It's a state that we exist in, and it is a promise from God that you always can and MUST turn back to. For always, there will be God, saying, "You have been forgiven. You are my heir, the law has no hold over you. You are my child, and you will be with me in paradise."

Today, we witnessed God giving these same promises specifically to one tiny infant in our congregation. She was brought into God's Family through the waters of baptism, having the greatest change that she will ever experience in her life; and it will stick with her until her dying day. And though none of the rest of us were baptized today, our baptisms are still just as valid as Katelyn's. Through our Baptisms, whenever it was, we were joined to Jesus Christ. Every day of our life we are able to turn back to Him in repentance and receive the same assurance that Katelyn did today: "All of your sins have been washed away through the blood of Christ."

So as baptized, mature Sons of God in Christ, be masters of the law now. No longer let it warp your mind into thinking that you just need to try harder and then you can be saved. It can condemn you no more. Instead, make use of it, use it to see your sins and your failures, and then as God's children, know that you can always turn to your Abba Father daily in contrition and repentance. Daily drown that sinful nature, and daily receive the promise of baptism, that as "**Many of You as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**"

You are all sons of God and heirs of His promise. This is already done. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord and Brother. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

July 12, 2020

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh