

WELCOME 28th April 2024 – 5th SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B

Galatians 3:23-4:7

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Even though Pastor John is still away on holidays you have **Growing Praise** inserts **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. *Zoom Bible Studies will resume when John get home to Wagga.*

As we move into this week Maybe it was your 21st **birthday**. Perhaps the **day** you got your first full-time job...the one you wanted. Might have been the moment you **said**, "I do." Whatever it was, it was the moment you knew you had crossed the threshold into adulthood. You wouldn't call yourself a child any more. From that moment on, (whatever it was) **YOU** were the one personally responsible & accountable for **YOU**: an adult.

For *you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes."*

Young as you may be or old as you will become, through faith, we are all children. Not like those who must be looked after & watched over so we don't wander into traffic. Not like those who must be constantly threatened or cajoled into being good. But **LOVED** like the Son who gave his life for us; **REJOICED OVER** like the Son who called us to die & rise with him; **SENT** in the Name & mission of the Son who came to this world to reclaim it in love & compassion for the Father. As Jesus' friend John would later write...

See *how much love the Father has lavished upon us that he would call us his children, & that is what we are!...we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.*

We'll experience & delight in our childhood in the Father today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Heavenly Father, open our hearts and minds to once again receive the grace that you so freely pour out...let that grace become action **IN** us as it was action **FOR** us in Jesus Christ...let your grace transform us into people who resemble you in all we are... Make our lives fully yours as you have made us fully your sons & daughters... through Jesus Christ our Lord, Saviour & Brother...Amen...*

Let's hear God's word then sing Glory to Our Great Redeemer

5th SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B – LIVING EXCLUSIVELY...AS GOD'S CHILDREN

Put on your big boy pants! It's time to man **up!** Pull your head **out!** We could probably think of a few more if we tried... Ways of saying to ourselves or someone else that what's needed in this moment is some adult behaviour... some personal responsibility... to "own" whatever mistake failure or hardship has just landed in life & can't be avoided... In that moment, it seems the weight of the world has suddenly settled on our shoulders & the hardest thing is to be the adult in the room.

Throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians, he reminds us that the default mode of the human heart is self-justification. We desperately want to prove the value worth & significance of our lives. We convince ourselves that if we can just do something with our lives, something that matters, then **WE** will matter. If we can just **DO!** Achieve... Acquire... Accumulate... get our 15 minutes of fame... leave our mark on the planet... establish a legacy... Man up! then we've demonstrated our worth.

But therein lies a problem & probably nobody says it better than '80s pop icon Madonna. Listen to someone who has done all of that... **My** drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. It's always pushing me. Because even though I've become Somebody, I still have to prove I'm *Somebody*. My struggle has never ended. It probably never will. Two weeks back we noted that every living one of us at some point wants to believe God owes us a favour... God I haven't killed anybody cheated on my wife stolen anything... you owe me a break here. We ALL try to convince ourselves, God, our boss, our kids, our spouse that we're not as bad as "that guy!" We want God & the guy next door to look at us & think, "What a real hero!"

Everybody drifts toward self-justification... that we can create our own sense of value & worth & an identity forged by our own two hands & our own wisdom. We all choose different ways to do it, but we all want to be able to stand before God & the Order of Australia Committee & hold our heads up high. Deep down, we're all Madonna even if we never go that far.

But Paul takes that head on & uses 3 images for God's Law – the 10 Commandments & all the ordinances & requirements that were given in or grew up around the Sinai Covenant. **1st** he **says**: *Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.* Paul says the Old Covenant was like a prison guard... it was restrictive... It has a restraining influence on us that keeps us from doing the evil we would probably do otherwise. Like a bit & bridle on a horse, the Old Covenant gives us the bare basics of how to live among other people under God without doing harm to one another. It reminds me life in community works best if I don't steal your stuff,

say ugly things about you or have sex with whoever I feel inclined. But even at its best... that's barely above the level of wild animals & nobody really wants to live under protective custody all their lives. It's an unending prison sentence... **AND** a continual reminder that unrestrained I might kill somebody. It always tells me I'm just a wild animal that walks upright & has opposable thumbs.

2nd Paul says the Old Covenant is akin to a nanny - a live-in babysitter. **The** law was our *guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith.* Paul has in mind Roman households where a slave would be made responsible for the children's care & training. They would do some basic teaching & discipline & work to weed out bad behaviours that might embarrass the parents in public or cause the child to hurt themselves. Again, this special slave can only do so much & the relationship was always temporary **AND** if the child was particularly rebellious, the "guardian/disciplinarian" might punish but they couldn't transform the heart or thought process of the child. Like the prison guard the Old Covenant always & only had its effect on the externals of human existence.

3rd Paul uses the example of a trustee who oversees the assets of a child before they come of age. *Think of it this way. If a father dies & leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set.* You see the common word across all 3 examples from Paul: guardian. The Law implies by its very existence that we can't be trusted... that on our own we'll hurt ourselves or someone else. My friend Peter always used to laugh about his school report from like year 4... "Peter can be a bad influence on himself & others." A bad influence on himself? How do you do that? But that's precisely how we live under the Old Covenant Law. That's precisely how we live leaning into proving ourselves... justifying ourselves... creating or determining our own identity & self-worth. We view our lives like a heavenly bank account. As long as I make more deposits than withdrawals, I'm in good shape. But according to the Law itself, my first withdrawal puts me into overdraft & the judge condemns me.

For as long as we're trying to "man up" & "stand on our own two feet" before God & the people we live with, we have to realize there's really no hope. We don't have freedom. We're under bondage. The law can hold us in check & point out where we're wrong, but it can't give us life. It doesn't give us access to the standing before God that we long for. This is the picture Paul paints for us. Human history, is the story of living apart from God's desire of a full joyous relationship with him & freedom to love & find delight in one another. You can almost hear Paul say, "Why

in the world would you want to return to that? Why would you not want to escape from that “trying to be somebody kind of living once & for all?”

But then he writes this...& you can feel yourself start to breathe again & your heart beats faster in excitement...*But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.* At just the right moment, God himself became one of us...like us in every way, fully human, except without sin...with no desire to prove his worth or worthiness...to make himself somebody. He's born under the law, but unlike any human ever, he kept the full obligations of the law & took all the curse of the law that we deserve in his death. By his dying & rising he therefore frees us from the obligations of the law...from the rat on a wheel chase of trying to make something of ourselves...so that we can become simply what he is: a child of the Father.

By the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ you have been adopted into God's family. You have the intimacy of relationship with God – the oneness with the Father that Jesus shared. You are *blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because you are united with Christ* (Eph 1:3). Everything of Jesus is now yours. The Bible says you share the glory that belongs to Christ. You are an heir of all of God's blessings. It means that you are loved by the Father just as Christ is loved. Dutch priest Henri Nouwen writes:

The Father has no desire to punish his children. They have already been punished excessively by their own inner or outer waywardness. The Father wants simply to let them know that the love they have searched for in such distorted ways has been, is, & always will be there for them. The Father says to them, “You are my Beloved, on you my favour rests.”

Throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians, he reminds us that the default mode of the human heart is **SELF**-justification. We desperately want to prove the value worth & significance of our lives. We convince ourselves that if we can just do something with our lives, something that matters, then **WE** will matter. But in Christ that striving meets its end. “...because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his **heir**. Paul really gets personal here. He says “you” over & over again – you! **You** are not a slave. **You** are a true child of God. **You** are an heir of God's promises. Everything that belongs to Jesus is now **yours**. Young as you may be or old as you will become, through faith, we are all children...daughters, sons & heirs of God who sit in the Father's presence with Jesus.

The life gripped by grace & made God's child will possess the “eager expectation” that as the power of Christ's resurrection lives in here, in here will be changed, made new, transformed; & that transformation will bear fruit in the world. That newness will show itself in my relationships, in my work, in the way I deal with conflict, in the way I view the people around me...the life claimed as child of the Father will not be a perpetual victim of circumstance, situation or past. John would later say, “...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.” Life in grace is in a perpetual state of repentance, seeking the presence & guidance of the Holy Spirit...pursuing the purpose of God for His Kingdom to be made real & manifest here on this earth.

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.”

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TAKE IT HOME – take a minute or two & share with your neighbour...then we'll pray

How can you help a friend or family member experience their belovedness before God as his child?

How will you live that out this week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Heavenly Father, perfect your love in me. Keep me close to you so I forgive as I have been forgiven, love as I have been loved & give as freely as I have received. By your sacrificial love for me and naming me your child strengthen me to live sacrificially for others and to serve without regard to cost...In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.