

Text: Gal. 3:29 – 4:10

Title: “Justified Heirs”

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: Roman Blum was born in Poland, and he died in New York City in 2013 at the age of 97 years. His life was remarkable, in part, because he was a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. But the news story I saw was not written about him for that distinction. Instead, this article was titled, “Holocaust Survivor Leaves Largest Unclaimed Inheritance in NY History.”

Mr. Blum had amassed a fortune selling Staten Island real estate. He left behind an estate worth \$40 million without designating any heirs. That money fell instead into the hands of the Public Administrator whose job it was to hire a genealogist to try to track down family members. The funds were to be held at the New York City Department of Finance for three years while the city waited to see whether a rightful heir would come forward. After the three years, all but a fraction of the money then goes to the state’s general fund if no heir comes forward.

This passage begins by noting that justified believers are heirs of an inheritance they need to claim (3:29). And it is Paul’s concern, much like a Public Administrator dealing with an unclaimed inheritance, to encourage the Galatian believers to understand how to live as justified heirs of that inheritance.

I have titled the message this morning, “Justified Heirs,” and I want us to see three simple things from the passage together.

I. Justified heirs belong to Christ (3:29).

Illustration: The website SILive.com (Staten Island Live) published a news report about the Blum inheritance titled, "One Down, One to Go: Fight for S. I. Man's \$40 Million Fortune Continues." The story explains how an upstate lawyer's claim to the fortune was denied by a court because the will he presented to the probate court was improperly executed. Evidently, he had everything in order except the signature of the deceased.

Application: Paul is very clear in this context about who the justified heirs are. Verse 26 speaks to this question very simply. We become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Those who trust Christ for salvation are His heirs.

Verse 27 talks about the importance of putting Him on through baptism, which is a figure of speech that exhorts us to not be ashamed to wear Christ on the outside where people can see Him in our lives, and not just on the inside where our faith is privatized and not public. But baptism is not how you become a child of God. Faith in Jesus Christ is.

Are you a child of God? Are you an heir of the promise of salvation because you have trusted Him as your Savior? Justified heirs are justified and heirs only if they truly belong to Jesus Christ by faith.

II. Justified heirs are redeemed by Christ (4:1-5a; 8-10).

Application: Just like the doctrine of justification describes our salvation in Christ in legal terms, the doctrine of redemption describes our salvation in financial terms. Two verbs are used to describe what God has done for us, His heirs, in redemption.

First, there is the term *agorizo*, which means *to purchase* or *to buy*. It is used in a passage like 1 Cor. 6:20, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." The emphasis of the passages that use this word is always that because of redemption, the redeemed are now owned by the One who purchases them, their God.

The second term is a related one – *exagorizo*. That is the one used in our passage here. It means *to buy out of*, and the passages that use this word emphasize more the terrible condition out of which the redeemed one is purchased when God saves him. That condition always has something to do with slavery-bondage. Our passage focuses on two conditions of bondage that every sinner must be redeemed from ("under the elements of the world" and "under the law").

1. The justified heir is redeemed from bondage under the law (4:4b-5a).

Now we already know what Paul meant when he said that sinners like you and I need to be redeemed out from under the law. He meant that we need to be redeemed from the law's curse (Gal. 3:13). It is that curse especially that makes the law a source of bondage for the sinner.

Jesus is the preexistent eternal Son of God, our Creator, who was sent by God the Father into this world to become fully human, to live a sinless life under God's law, to be made the one whom God would curse for mankind's breaking of that law. That is how we are redeemed out from under the law's curse. Jesus, God's own Son, was the price God paid to purchase our redemption. He embraced the curse of our law-breaking so we could obtain the bless-

ing of His law-keeping. We obtain this blessing by simply receiving it by faith.

2. The justified heir is redeemed from bondage under the elements of the world, including those in God's law (4:1-4a; 8-10).

What does Paul mean by *the elements of the world*? The basic meaning of the Greek word translated *elements* here is *things lined up in a row* (Bruce, 193). It became a term for the alphabet, because the letters of an alphabet are lined up in an orderly row. Two other meanings come from this idea, which are used elsewhere in Scripture.

First, the word is used in passages like Heb. 5:12, where *elements* refers to the elementary principles of the Word of God or the ABC's of the Christian faith (KJV: *first principles*).

In addition, the word can be used to label things with physical properties, and that is where we find especially the phrase *elements of the world* (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).

In Paul's usage these ideas are combined, so that when he talks about *elements of the world*, he is referring to the physical aspects of religious practice, like ceremonies and special observances. These can be found in God's law as well as in pagan religions.

So in what sense must we be justified heirs who are redeemed out from under bondage to the physical aspects of religious practice, including those found in God's law? Paul says we need that in this sense – just like a son no longer has to live like a slave now that he has been blessed through adoption to the full privileges of an heir, so Christ's redemption in our lives means that we no longer have to practice a religion that is focused on physical ceremony.

Instead, now we can practice a religion that is focused on our personal relationship to Christ. The problem with the physical aspects of even biblical religion is that they can become completely emptied of a loving relationship with God in Christ, and this makes even biblical religion no better than false religions when practiced this way (vv. 8-10). Paul still practiced biblical religious ceremony, but he kept it in its proper place.

Justified heirs are redeemed out of the bondage of the law's curse and out of the bondage of a religion that is limited to physical ceremony and practice. The result of this redemption is our adoption.

III. Justified heirs are adopted by Christ (4:5b-7).

Illustration: When we think of adoption today, we think of a couple making orphans their own. My optometrist has adopted a number of children from all over the world. Perhaps some of you know someone who was blessed to be adopted into a good family. We admire the love expressed in adoption.

Well, hopefully we can see that our passage is talking about something slightly different from that when we say that justified heirs have been adopted. Archeologists have found among the papyri of Egypt a will dating to AD 126. It was drawn up by Eudaemon of Oxyrhynchus for his two sons. It reads, "If I die before the said Horus and Eudaemon [Jr.] have completed twenty years, their brother Thonis and their maternal grandfather Harpaesis, also called Horus, son of Thonis, shall be guardian of each of them until he completes twenty years" (quoted by F. F. Bruce, P. 192).

Application: That is the kind of arrangement Paul uses to teach the Galatian believers some important truths about

the sense in which justified heirs are adopted by Christ. What Paul means when he speaks of God's children as heirs who are adopted is that we are sons and not slaves, and it is our reception of adoption through our Redeemer that helps us live with Christ like sons instead of like slaves.

Illustration: I had the joy of having lunch with fellow preachers on Wednesday, and one of the men there was Rand Hummel of the Wilds of New England. Rand brought up an interesting topic of conversation by asking whether we noticed that many young people today address their prayers to "God" rather than to "Father." He has noticed it as one who is privileged to minister to thousands of kids each year, and he has wondered about what that means for the way our young people perceive their relationship to God. It was a good question.

Application: You may remember our Sunday school study of the Trinity discussing this question. Our God is a Trinity, one essence but three persons. So to get to know God as a person is especially to get to know Him as the Trinity, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a relational intimacy available to us in our worship of God and our prayers to Him, and we experience that intimacy in the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. We grow to know Him personally as Father and as Son and as Holy Spirit, three persons.

Paul is telling us that Christ redeemed us from bondage to the physical aspects of religion to give us a warm and loving relationship with our God. For those who are not redeemed, religion can only be bondage to religious ceremony and practice. The redeemed are sons, not slaves. Do you see yourself as the slave of a religion or as the son of a loving Father this morning? If the latter, it is only because of a miraculous work of God's Spirit in your heart.

God sends his Spirit into the heart of every child of His with a special cry - "Abba, Father." This Spirit is the Spirit of Christ himself, and this cry is His cry (see Mark 14:36). We have the same level of intimacy with God the Father that Jesus has with Him because Jesus has redeemed us from the distance that bondage to religious formality creates between us and our God.

Do you have that cry in your heart this morning? Are you worshipping a person you know, or are you practicing a religion you know something about? You have come to church, but have you met with the Lord here? You have sung hymns, but did you sing to Him and for Him? You have heard this preacher explain God's Word, but has your Father spoken to you such that your heart cries out with thankfulness for His redemption? Are you a justified heir of the promise of salvation? If not, you can be. This gift of grace we simply receive by faith.

Conclusion: Paul believed the Galatian church members were justified heirs who had this Spirit in their hearts, this redemption in their history, and this cry for their Father on their lips.

But still, even for them, the physical formalities of religious ceremony were creeping in and distracting them from the One who should be our First Love. Religious duty was no longer a tool bringing them to Christ, but a barrier that was keeping them from Him.

The same can happen to us. He asks them and us this morning, "How turn you again to weak and impoverished things?" "Where is that Spirit of Christ that cries out 'Aba, Father'?" How shall we answer him?

If you are an heir according to promise, redeemed and adopted, you can answer the Lord in response — “Lord, forgive me for turning to things that are less than you.” “Lord, your Spirit is right here in my heart.” “Lord, you are my Aba Father, and I love you and want to know you and live for you more each day.”

“A man came — I think it was actually in Philadelphia — on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction — the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

— David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching