

HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS

(Galatians 4.1-7, Matthew 1.18-25)

The Heir Apparent is a term most of us will be familiar with. Unlike the present day we all live in, it refers to a time when only one will succeed, own and claim everything.

We are familiar with people leaving things in their will to be split several ways amongst brothers and sisters, but in times gone past it would only go to the eldest and usually if they were male. We still see this tradition continuing in the royalty and aristocracy when some poor man is left to look after the family's crumbling country pile until his death!

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, is writing not for the first time to a church containing Jewish as well as Gentile believers. Problems did arise, as the Jewish Christians still tried to continue to live under mosaic law i.e. the Law given to Moses.

We might see them as backward thinking but we need to remember some of our own Anglican traditions (and that's all they are) such as standing for the Gospel to be heard, or incense/no incense, these and other weighty matter cause so much division and occupy precious hours of various local and national church meetings but are often based around history and tradition rather than Scripture.

Paul is trying to explain to essentially to the Jewish part of the audience of how God has set them free through his Son Jesus and that includes freedom from Old Testament rules and laws that no longer serve any great purpose, as Jesus has ushered in the new age they have been waiting for.

The issue of freedom is problematic in that Israel has a strong nationhood attachment to having previously been set free from the slavery of Egypt in Exodus as they travelled into the wilderness and the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses where they received the Ten Commandments and Law.

So, to be fair, for his readers to get their head around the concept of being set free *once again* would be difficult, don't you think?

Enter Paul the Super Jew, or as the young and more hipster among us might call him, the Uber Jew.

If you ever wondered why God called Paul just look at his credentials. He had trained under the greatest Jewish minds of the day, top experts in the law of Israel. He would have got full points on Mastermind with his specialist subject of the Tora. There was nothing that he did not know about Scripture or the Torah so when God wanted someone to show that all the promises and prophecies ever made about the Messiah had been fulfilled in and through Jesus, Paul was the go-to man.

Obviously, God had to do a bit of work on him on the road to Damascus to get rid of his bad attitude towards this new Jesus movement, but once he got up to speed he set off like a house on fire preaching and converting Jew and Gentile alike and mopping up the problems likely to be caused by Old Testament rules and Jewish tradition that could slow the Jesus movement down.

In verse 1, Paul explains the fact that Israel, despite the Law, is still held in slavery to sin despite the Exodus from Egypt millennia ago (and notwithstanding exiles to Babylonia and Persia after that).

Obeying and keeping the Law was impossible! If that was what was required to be right with God and share in his kingdom no human was ever going to succeed.

Paul frames this position very positively in the image of a young boy being special within a family but at that stage in his life NO different to those who work on the estate he will one day own but that ownership has NOT yet come to pass.

The boy coming of age and taking what is rightfully his mirrors Israel and all Gentile believers now being able to realise and receive what is there's through the work of the Messiah Jesus.

When we look closely at the Gospels we see an indisputable connection and similarity to the Passover story. Jesus is the new Moses who will lead his people to freedom. Unlike Moses who through sin was not allowed to enter the promised land Jesus goes ahead of his people ready for the time in the future when Heaven and Earth will be re-created and come together when God will dwell forever with his people.

We call Jesus Immanuel, God with us (while then on earth and now through his Holy Spirit).

The sacrificial lamb of the first Passover has been replaced by Jesus the perfect without blemish sacrifice of Calvary. The Passover meal has been replaced by the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

The freedom from Egyptian slavery has been replaced by freedom from the powers that spoil and destroy God's good creation and from eternal death, the sword that dangles over every human.

Paul, in verse 4, says God sent his Son to redeem those under the Law (as well as the Gentiles caught up in the Pagan practices of the time) so that we might receive adoption and sonship (or daughtership) and all can call out *ABBA Father* and become the rightful heirs that God always intended human beings to be.

In effect, to be a free-born son like Isaac to Abraham unlike like Hagar born to a slave woman.

What has been kept ready for us can now be received and enjoyed not through our own actions in keeping any rules, laws or the Torah but through Jesus being born as a baby to a virgin in a lowly stable, growing up as a man, dying on a cross in his thirties then rising to life three days later.

When I became a Christian 35 years ago, I asked my vicar at the time if I needed to be baptized as I had been baptized as an infant (by my grandfather...) he told me to think of my baptism as receiving a cheque and that now as a believer I was entitled to go and cash that cheque and enjoy it.

I obviously went on to confirmation and proclaim my faith publicly but I think this might be half decent example of what Paul was trying to say to the Galatians.

God's intention was always for Israel to be a light to the world, not to stay isolated but to be an attractive beacon to the Gentiles. Like virtually all people, they got it badly wrong, but Paul is saying that now through Jesus we can know real freedom and sonship.

Matthew's Gospel account of Jesus birth that we heard earlier, portrays the events through the eyes of Joseph who, as we would imagine, was highly suspicious of his fiancée's sudden pregnancy. However, in his case through a dream he came to accept and trust in his son, giving him the name Jesus.

Maybe you have been wondering about this Christ child over the past few weeks and wondered who he really is and what he's really done. Is it all true?

If you want to start and trust him and let him set you free, or even just make a no-obligation enquiry, please speak to me or anyone here this morning - or whenever you feel comfortable.