

Galatians 3:23-29 – In Christ we are free from religion's constraints

We put on a new identity, in which we receive the honour of sons and heirs

23-25 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

"Custody under the law... our guardian" — Paul contrasts God's people under old covenant law, with His new covenant freedom. Release from sin's guilt comes only through personal faith in Christ.

26-27 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

"Children of God" — lit. "sons" with rights of

SUMMARY Elijah found freedom by drawing close to God, and the demonised Gentile man similarly drew close to Jesus. This teaching is about the new identity of freedom revealed by the Holy Spirit, that changes our nature and clothes us like a new uniform when through faith we make a decision to belong to Christ.

APPLICATION When we take that faith decision to receive Jesus and the salvation He has paid for, and to submit to Him as Lord, it costs us our independence — but it gives us freedom from the religious constraints needed to limit independence. Knowing who we are in Christ sets us free to join Him in His ministry and mission.

QUESTION *How does all being one in Christ Jesus address our human tendency to judge others of different race, denomination or lifestyle?*

PRAYER Father, You created us for life, and life in abundance.

Help us to grow unhindered by guilt and fear, and to play our part in releasing others. May we be free to join You in Your mission, prayerfully and practically as You show us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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inheritance, a major new covenant distinction.

"Baptised into Christ" — associated with personal faith and choosing the death of the old life and birth into the new. "Baptised" was used for textile dying, the sense of being saturated and taking on the colour or characteristics of Christ.

"Clothed... with Christ" — literally, "put on Christ", like putting on a new uniform and new identity.

28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

"You are all one" — distinctions exist but all are embraced on the same terms, 1 Cor. 12:13, Col. 3:11.

29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

"Abraham's seed" — Jews had a proud heritage. Gentiles now share that same sense of belonging.

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PRINT EDITION

Bible readings for June 19, 2022 commentary & references

Non-denominational Bible study for **Sunday, June 19** using Revised Common Lectionary readings

• Read the Bible passages beforehand. • Reflect. • Re-read later to think about the message preached

Theme: **God's order brings freedom from oppression**

1 Kings 19:1-15a – Elijah flees after his bid to set Israel free

Psalms 42-43

Luke 8:26-39 – A demonised Gentile from Gadara is set free by Jesus

Galatians 3:23-29 – In Christ we are free from religion's constraints

1 Kings 19:1-15a – Elijah flees after his bid to set Israel free

The Lord quietly shows him how He is bringing change

1 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

"Jezebel" — King Ahab's wife, a Baal worshipper, regularly has had the Lord's prophets killed. A threat to be taken seriously.

3-5 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he

might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

"Elijah was afraid" — or "saw the danger". Reacting in shock at Jezebel's resistance after the power encounter at Mount Carmel, he runs 120 miles to the southern edge of the territory and on into the Negev desert.

• For further study: *Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal*, 1 Kings 18:18-46.

"Broom bush" — white broom, the only vegetation offering shade in the desert, can grow to 10ft.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

Psalms 42-43 excerpt – Setting the scene

42:1-2 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

43:1 Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation. Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked.

2 You are God my stronghold. Why have You rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

3-4 Send me Your light and Your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy mountain, to the place where You dwell. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise You with the lyre, O God, my God.

5 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God.

7 The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."

"The journey is too much" — God is aware of his distant destination.

• **Further study:** God earlier directed Elijah to Kerith, Zarephath and to meet Ahab, 1 Kings 17:2-3, 8-9, 18:1

8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

"Horeb" — the Mount Sinai region, the same place that Moses encountered God in the burning bush, Exodus 3:1. "Forty" is symbolic of full testing.

9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"What are you doing here" — implies it was Elijah's idea to travel there, not the Lord's.

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

"Rejected Your covenant" — under the unrelenting persecution by Jezebel, victory feels like defeat.

11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

SUMMARY Elijah has seen God move mightily against the pagan priests, but has felt the vicious persecution of King Ahab's wife Jezebel, a Baal worshipper who has already had other prophets killed. So he resolves to make the long journey to Horeb to meet God there. And God reveals how He has been working unnoticed.

APPLICATION The prophetic call is a precarious one, both in God's empowering and also being a target for opposition. The encouragement for us is the way God restores His disillusioned prophet, revealing Himself quietly — and symbolically.

QUESTION *How does this speak to us about God's work of salvation? A choice and an event — or a continuing experience of mercy?*

Luke 8:26-39 — A demonised Gentile from Gadara is set free by Jesus

Others are fearful but he insists on telling what God has done for him

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

"Wind... earthquake... fire" — like Carmel. signs of God's presence. But God reveals Himself in quietness, to show Elijah that He is quietly working in people's lives even if it didn't seem like it. A new king has been chosen...

13-14 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

15-17 The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram."

"Gerasenes" — or Gadarenes or Gergesenes, Gentile Gerasa around modern-day Khersa.

27 When Jesus stepped ashore, He was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this

man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

"Demon-possessed man" — in Matthew's gospel, two men. Luke focuses on the one doing the talking. Demonic influence gains entrance through sin and carnality, even in Christians; demon possession, overtaking a person completely, is rare.

"The tombs" — there are several caves in the area.

28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at His feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do You want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, don't torture me!"

29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

"Jesus had commanded" — indicates that the principal demon did not leave immediately.

30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

"Legion" — a Roman legion could be 6,000 men.

31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

"They begged Jesus" — the demons tried to resist being sent to the place where Jesus confines them, Rev. 9:1-12, 11.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and He gave them permission.

"Herd of pigs" — unclean for Jews but this was the largely Gentile Decapolis region.

SUMMARY This story of freedom is remarkable for two reasons: it concerns a man who was incapacitated by multiple demons who had completely taken him over; and he was a Gentile. He was completely set free. The demons craved any living being to inhabit, but the herd of pigs was a bad choice.

APPLICATION There is a spiritual dimension to life and demons gain a measure of control of our thoughts and actions through unconfessed sins, our own or ancestral. The story illustrates that to the extent Jesus is Lord of our life, this can be reversed.

QUESTION *How can we invite Jesus to take back influence in our thoughts and life, that the devil and his minions have stolen?*

33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

"The herd...was drowned" — demons by nature are cruel, destructive and lacking any imagination.

34-36 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.

"Sitting at Jesus' feet" — saved and showing his willingness to follow Jesus.

37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So He got into the boat and left.

"Fear" — these Gentiles didn't know the Jewish tradition of prophets, but knew they had lost their valuable livestock.

38-39 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with Him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

"Return home and tell" — making the Good News known and sharing personal testimony is part of every disciple's mission.