

“Fulfilled” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Circumcision and Name of Jesus
January 1, 2023

- I. **Galatians 3:23-29** – Previously read
- II. **What’s with all the special days in the Christian Church?**
 - a. In the next few weeks, we recognize the circumcision and naming of Jesus, Epiphany (and the wise men visit to Jesus), and the baptism of Jesus... not to mention days set aside for apostles like John and Paul...
 - b. We kind of have to pick and choose which days we recognize, otherwise we might be in church every day of the week.
 - c. The point of all these special days is that they are about special people and events that mean something in our lives of faith –
 - i. Whether it be learning about the person (especially Jesus and His followers) and their lives as they stayed faithful to God
 - ii. Or an event that fulfills a prophecy or helps us to see how God is faithful in bringing about His plan of redemption
 - d. Today we read the shortest Gospel lesson in the entire 3-year lectionary, and the one verse that gives us our topic, “And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.” (Lk 2:21)
 - i. In Genesis 17, God changes Abram’s and Sarai’s names to Abraham and Sarah – and then He commands all males from that point forward to be circumcised as a sign of the everlasting covenant He made to bless the offspring of Abraham.
 - ii. This circumcision was a sign that they were set apart as God’s people and was also sealed with blood.
 - iii. The tradition of naming the child after this circumcision seems to come from the fact that Abram was given his new name along with the command to circumcise all males.
 - iv. The significance of all these events remind us that God is faithful to His promises, and that He calls us His own and sets us apart to be blessed as the offspring of Abraham...
 - v. However, I will venture to guess that none of you can trace your ancestry to Abraham through genetics...
 - 1. The only answer to becoming part of Abraham’s family is Jesus
- III. **Jesus is the New Covenant or Testament.**
 - a. As most people were brought into Abraham’s family (and thus God’s covenant to be blessed) through birth – God brought us into the family by faith.
 - b. The day of Epiphany and the visit of the wise men gives us some understanding of God’s plan to open the door for even outsiders to become

a part of the salvation plan – that the Gentiles, or those outside the Jewish faith, were called to Jesus as well.

- c. On this day of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus, through His parents' Joseph and Mary, Jesus fulfills the obligation of the Law of Moses (or the commands given to the Jewish people in the first five books of the Bible).
 - i. Jesus not only shed His blood for the first time but was also given the name the angel shared as a sign that He would save the people – Jesus means, “Yahweh saves”.
 - 1. Just like when Jesus was baptized, He did not need to be forgiven or to go through it – but He did it as the one who would bear all sins... and it's the same for circumcision.
 - 2. Jesus fulfilled all the obligations of the Law of Moses – so that He could take this perfect walk under the Law and credit it to our account.
- d. Therefore, as God's people today, we are not obligated to celebrate the Passover, or the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Weeks... nor do we offer sacrifices of animals at the temple... nor do follow any of the ceremonial or civil laws that were required of the Old Testament people...
 - i. Jesus is the only Person ever able to follow the Law in perfect accordance to God's will – and through our faith in Him, He passes along that work on our behalf.
- e. So Jesus is the New Covenant between God and humanity – fulfilling the Old Covenant demands and making us God's children not by our works of the Law but by our faith.

IV. **St. Paul writes Galatians to confirm this New Covenant.**

- a. Unfortunately, people in the region of Galatia were teaching that the Old Testament Law must continue to be fulfilled in order to be saved and be a true child of God.
- b. These false teachers would have Christians saved by grace go through circumcision, eat kosher foods, and observe the ceremonial laws...
 - i. Paul sees this as a terrible falsehood, because he understands that living out all these demands always leads to failure.
 - ii. So he explains that the Law of Moses was simply a custodian, to get us to the time when Jesus would come to fulfill it for us.
 - 1. In the ancient Roman days, a child in wealthier Roman households would be brought up under a pedagogue.
 - a. Usually a slave of the family, the pedagogue was not just a teacher, but was essentially in custody of the child to discipline and raise them up (and much of the time to discipline the child harshly).
 - b. This seems to be the idea with Paul calling the Law a “guardian” – a sort of disciplinarian that was difficult to live

under with the idea that it wouldn't last forever, but one day we would be free.

- iii. For Paul, it was terrible to return to the Law because it was already fulfilled in Jesus – from the beginning to the end.
- c. Now, I need to address that we may not follow the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Testament – but we do follow the 10 Commandments, or the moral law to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.
 - i. However, it is not the same thing as the heavy burden placed on the Jewish people trying obey all the Law of Moses – which turned out to be over 600 obligations.
 - ii. Jesus summed up the moral law as love God and love your neighbor – which is exactly what the 10 Commandments instruct us to do.
- d. So the point Paul makes in our epistle lesson today is that we are free from carrying out the Law so that we can be forgiven and go to heaven – Jesus saves us from that as we are baptized and receive faith... as a gift.

V. **Faith is why we are part of God's family.**

- a. Being part of God's family in the Old Testament almost always meant that you were in the family line of Abraham – and you were circumcised and followed God's instructions to the best of your ability.
- b. Being a part of God's family after Jesus and the New Testament means that we are called God's children by grace through faith.
- c. Paul says that those who are baptized are brought into the kingdom...so tell me baptism doesn't matter, or that you should wait to baptize until a child is older!
 - i. No, Paul even claims in Colossians that baptism is like circumcision – as it places a mark on us as God's child in the heart – in other words, even bringing babies to the font makes them children of God with faith (Colossians 2:10-13)
- d. The gift of faith through the Word of God and baptism is our heritage – and as our Christmas Day reading from the Gospel of John said, “¹² But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)
- e. We are no longer under the curse of the Law with the inability to fulfill it – Jesus makes us children of God who walk in with Him through faith.
- f. Jesus gives us the right to be children of God because He went through it all perfectly on our behalf – even completing the final, once-for-all sacrifice on the cross so that no more sacrifices ever need to be made for our sins again.
- g. This is the good news of our salvation – Jesus fulfilled the Law and all its demands – nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:14)

- h. Walk in freedom in this new year – as a child of God – a part of the family – knowing that Jesus has secured your salvation... by HIS work! Amen.