

Sermon Series: *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*

When the Fullness of Time Had Come, God Sent Forth His Son

Galatians 4:1-7

1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,

2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, *Abba! Father!*

7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

We are six days away from Christmas. I'm sure I do not have to remind the children of this fact. We are six days away from celebrating the birth of Jesus. For those of us who are Christians, the birth of Jesus is the is one of the highest days on the calendar. [I would say it is second only to Easter.]

While Christians may be celebrating the birth of Jesus, many people will not be celebrating the birth of Jesus, but will still be celebrating nonetheless albeit for very different reasons. For many people Christmas is the high point of the year. For retailers it precipitates the year's greatest economic activity. For others it brings a spirit of goodness and joy that they do not otherwise have. For others it brings an opportunity to get more stuff. For others it represents a time to be with family that is not possible at other times in the year.

Four Reasons to Celebrate Christmas

Christmas brings many reasons to celebrate. As Christians the deepest reason we celebrate is the birth of Jesus. Christmas represents the incarnation of the beginning of our salvation. In the text we just read, we discover four aspects of God's work in sending Jesus that give us cause to celebrate. We can celebrate God's **power**, His **purpose**, His **personality**, and His **provision**.

Power, Purpose, Personality, & Provision

We can celebrate His **power** because we discover that He has complete control over time. We can celebrate His **purpose** in sending Jesus because His purpose was to bring freedom to those who were enslaved. Third, we can celebrate God's **personality** because God is a personal God who desires a family. Fourth, we can celebrate His **provision** because He sent His Son and He sent His spirit to guarantee the invitation into His family.

1) Celebrate God's Power: Control Over Time

The first reason to celebrate is because of **God's power over time**. The Bible teaches us that God is completely sovereign over all things (examples??? 1 Cor 15:27) even over time. God controls the rising and setting of the sun. The coming and going of the day is in His hand. The Psalmist put it this way,

Psalm 31:15

My times are in your hand.

God rules supremely over all the events of the day. If the Lord willed it, the day could be longer than 24 hours. Remember what He did for Joshua when Israel was fighting against the Amorites who hated God?

Joshua 10:12-14

12 *At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,*

“Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.”

13 *And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.*

Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.

14 *There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD obeyed the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel.*

The sun and moon obey God’s commands. God is powerfully in control of time. We see this teaching in Galatians 4:4. We also see that God was in control even over the timing of Jesus’ birth.

When The Fullness of Time Had Come...

Galatians 4:4

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son... When all was prepared, God sent Jesus into the world. When the time was right, God said to Jesus, “Go.” God had control over the exact date that Jesus would be born. He had predicted through the prophets hundreds of years before that He would send Messiah. God announced from the beginning of time that He would send Messiah. God first gave notice of this all the back in the garden of Eden just after Adam and Eve sinned. God said to Satan,

Genesis 3:15

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

God promised to send one born the offspring of woman who would wound the head of Satan and whose heel would be wounded by Satan. God decided the time of Messiah’s arrival on earth. He decided when His Son would enter this world. So that we might praise Him for His power and recognize His Son, He announced beforehand through His prophets hundreds of details that would surround Messiah’s birth. Matthew especially makes note of all that was “fulfilled”¹ (in about a dozen instances quoting from the Old Testament) in the coming of Jesus. One example comes from the first chapter of his gospel.

¹ See Matthew’s use of πληρώω, “fulfill,” at 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9 as noted by Richard N. Longenecker, vol. 41, *Word Biblical Commentary : Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 170.

Matthew 1:22-23

22 All this took place to *fulfill* what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.

All the prophetic predictions had pointed to a particular time when Messiah would arrive. So when all was ready from God's perspective, He sent Jesus into the world. When the time was ripe and the world was ready for Jesus to accomplish all that God had intended, God gave the command and set salvation in motion beginning with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

Romans 5:6

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Ephesians 1:9-10

9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The timing of the birth of Jesus came about exactly as God had planned it. It was a plan for the fullness of time. When the time was right, God sent His Son into the world. God was and still is in complete control over time.

Until the Time Set By the Father

Not only do we see this in verse 4, but we also see it in v.2, “**...until the time set by the father.**” In verses one and two Paul uses an illustration to compare the superiority of living **in Christ** over against living **under law**. He compares life lived under law with life lived as a child who is governed by guardians or managers. Though the child may be the heir of the family estate and the family fortune, the child is no different from a slave so long as he is young and immature, **until the date set by the father**.

In ancient culture the father decided the date that he would hand over authority to his heir to rule the household. When the father decided that the son had reached mature manhood and that he was ready and able to handle the responsibilities of the estate, then he would set a date. A ceremony would then follow in which the young man was formally and publicly acknowledged as rightful heir and possessing full authority to conduct the affairs of the father.

In Roman culture this ceremony involved the boy bringing his toys and burning them as a sacrifice to the gods symbolically ending his childhood and entering into mature adulthood. It was to this ceremony that Paul referred in 1 Cor 13:11 when he wrote, “When I became a man, I put away childish things.”

God knew exactly what He was doing when He sent Jesus at the time He did. Rome had established its rule over almost the entire known world. This provided a kind of political stability for the gospel. The government of Rome was tolerant of many religions as long as they remained peaceful. This allowed a religious environment in which the gospel to thrive. Rome had constructed roads throughout the empire which allowed ease of travel throughout the world. This allowed the gospel

to travel to regions that Judaism had not. With the unification of one official language, the time was ripe for the transmission of the gospel to many and diverse people groups.

The time had come. The world was ripe for the gospel and so in the fullness of time, God sent His Son into the world. For this, we can celebrate and praise God for His power over time. This is first reason to celebrate Christmas. God still retains His control over time. God still reigns supreme to this day, though many do not acknowledge His reign. This season is a time when people are more willing to listen to the story of Jesus' birth. Redeem the time this season. Make good use of these next six days. Point people trust in God's power over time.

2) Celebrate God's Purpose: Freedom to Slaves

The second reason to celebrate Christmas is the purpose for which God sent Jesus. This passages tells us that Jesus came to bring freedom. In verses 4-5 we see a two-fold application of that freedom—to **release** and to **redeem**. He came **to release** those enslaved to the “elementary principles” of the world and **to redeem** those under the law.

Galatians 4:3-5

3 *In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*

4 *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

Released & Redeemed

It appears that Paul has both Gentiles and Jews in mind. The Gentiles needed to be **released** from slavery to the elementary principles of the world, while the Jews need to be **redeemed** from the curse of the law.

Released From Slavery to Elementary Principles

The word *stoicheion*, which is translated “elementary principles,” can also be translated as “elementary spirits” of the world.² In light of verse 8, which refers to their “former enslavement to those that are not gods,” “elementary spirits” may be the better translation (cf. Col 2:8, 20). Paul may have in mind the pre-conversion idol worship of the Galatians who previously may have thought they were worshiping God (or “gods”) when in reality they were offering sacrifices to demons (Dt 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20-21). The Gentiles needed to be released from this kind of spiritual deception.

Our world stands under a similar kind of slavery only from the opposite angle. First of all we are enslaved by the fact of our own self-induced spiritual blindness. We see ourselves so far advanced beyond the ancients that we no longer even believe in the reality of demons. This may be Satan's greatest victory. How can you wage a battle against an enemy that you do not even believe exists.

The enemy has enslaved us by causing us to embrace in the name of freedom all things that God condemns as sin. Our minds have been enslaved by the thought that whatever God forbids, He forbids in order to keep us from having fun. And so we are drawn to do all that God forbids because we are enslaved by the small minded view that we know better than God knows.

² Frank E. Gaebelain, Everett F. Harrison, W. Harold Mare et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Romans Through Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 472.

John 8:34

Jesus said, “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”

John 8:36

“But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Sinning is not freedom. Sinning is slavery that leads to death. Jesus is the only way to escape sin and death. God sent Jesus into the world to **release** us from this kind of spiritual bondage.

Redeemed From the Curse of Law

The Jews however needed to be **redeemed** from the curse of the law. The Jews stood under the curse of the law because they as a nation had made a covenant with God that they would obey all of the law. When God gave them the law on Mt. Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt, they made a promise to God.

Exodus 19:8

All that the Lord has spoken we will do.

Yet in a very short time they had broken their promise, shattered every command, and crafted a golden cow to worship instead. And this was only the beginning. Israel never fully obeyed the law. They could not keep all that the law demanded and so they stood under the curse of the law.

Jesus came to redeem Israel from the curse. Jesus came and He **did** fully obey every precept of the law. He bore the curse of the law by dying on the cross and He redeemed Israel from the curse by rising from the dead.

Jesus came to release all people from all forms of spiritual slavery, whether Jew or Gentile. The freedom from sin began in Bethlehem with the birth of Jesus. We can celebrate Christmas this year by remembering God’s purpose in sending Jesus—to bring true freedom. God’s purpose in sending Jesus was to bring freedom from all forms of slavery. Jesus came to bring **release** from slavery to sin and to bring **redemption** from the curse of the law.

3) Celebrate God’s Personality: He Desires A Family

The third reason to celebrate Christmas is because of God’s personality. God’s personality moves Him to seek adoption. He wants a family and He is open to adoption. God is not a distant, impersonal being who is untouchable and unapproachable. God is not a dispassionate force who set the world in motion operating according to certain laws and then stepped back to watch how it all unfolded. God is a personal God with personal characteristics and He desires that we experience all the delights of His glory by becoming members of His family.

Galatians 4:5

5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

The reason we needed to be released from spiritual slavery to sin and to be redeemed from the curse of the law was not simply to enjoy freedom itself. Release and redemption in themselves are not the *end* of God’s purpose. Freedom is not the ultimate goal. Adoption into God’s family is the ultimate goal. Release and redemption are *means* to a greater end which is being brought into a personal relationship with God Himself.

God did not send Jesus into the world to release us from sin and redeem us from the curse in order to blindly set us adrift alone on the wide ocean of personal freedom. We were not delivered from bondage simply to be released into the undefined realm of personal autonomy.

Imagine the godless post-gospel press release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freedom Secured for Kidnapped Sinners

An undercover operative infiltrated a terrorist camp and miraculously secured the freedom of hundreds of kidnapped sinners.

The undercover operative, who had been taken into the kidnapper's camp as a baby after being dropped at the gate of the camp, secured the freedom of the captives after an apparent half-hearted, but clever revolt to free the captives. The revolt was quickly squashed and the operative was then immediately shot before a firing squad.

This, evidently, was all part of the operative's unorthodox plan which he had previously worked out in coordination with his father, the king whose subjects these captives were. This intelligence is based upon an eyewitness report of one of the freed captives. After some hours of lying dead, the young man suddenly sprang to life, and freed the captives while the witless kidnappers celebrated their victory.

However, the most unusual aspect of this story was that the king ordered the captives released into a nearby dessert without offering the victims any provisions for their journey. The king was reported to have commended his son for his successful mission, then bid the bewildered captives farewell following a short but enthusiastic speech encouraging them to enjoy their newly secured freedom.

The stunned crowd of freed victims watched in confused silence as the king and his son turned and walked away into the night rejoicing happily at being reunited. One cannot help but wonder how much enjoyment these poor wretches will find as they wander the wasteland of their newfound freedom.

That press release is not the gospel. The gospel is not that freedom from sin is offered to all who will receive it. That is *a* gospel, but that is not **THE** gospel. **THE** gospel is that God sent His one and only Son into the world so that God would no longer have only one Son. God desires many sons and daughters. God wants a big family. God sent his sinless Son into a sinful world in order to free sinners from being slaves to sin by securing their sanctification so that they could become His sons and daughters rather than slaves.

God is not a cosmic employer looking for servants for kingdom. God is a merciful Father seeking orphaned children who are lost. God is not the big boss in the sky who will only hire the strongest and the best workers to help Him build His empire. God is a humble Father seeking the helpless who are willing to be adopted into His family. God is not Santa Clause out seeking the most productive and industrious elves to help him build all the toys he needs. God is a Father seeking to create a family.

The ultimate goal of freedom from sin is so that we can be adopted as sons and daughters. Jesus did not come to earth, live and die, to set us free so that we could enjoy life without God. Jesus came to set us free from the prison of sin so that He could bring us **to** God (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus sets us free from sin so that we can enjoy God, not avoid Him.

God did not deliver the nation of Israel from Egypt so they would be free to enjoy and explore the vast wonders and beauty of the wilderness. He delivered them from slavery so He could bring them to Himself so that they could experience the pleasure of worshipping and knowing the one true God (Ex 3:12; Ex 19:4). How wonderful to know the one true God! True freedom is being brought into a personal relationship with God. True freedom comes from being adopted into God family.

This Christmas as you celebrate remember that God is a personal God. He not interested in hiring workers. He's interested in adopting children. He is not looking for laborers, He seeks those who will love Him. God is a personal Father who welcomes those who do not have a family. This is a fact worth celebrating.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freedom Secured for Kidnapped Sinners

An secret operative infiltrated a terrorist camp and secured the freedom of hundreds of kidnapped sinners.

The vigilante band of evil kidnapers had no idea that the baby mysteriously delivered to the gate of compound was actually the son of king secretly sent to secure the freedom of hundreds of his subjects who had been held captive for generations.

The kidnapers unwittingly took the innocent child into the camp and raised him as one of their own. The child had no apparent contact with the outside world during these years. However, it is suspected that some communication device had been previously implanted within the boy's body which allowed him undetected communication with his father the king.

Apparently at some prearranged time the young man received a communique from his father and set the plan in motion. The undercover son then made a feeble attempt to deliver the captives, which resulted in his capture and no small amount of confusion about the true nature of his identity. After his capture, the young man was executed immediately by firing squad.

However, as one of the freed captives later reported, after lying dead for some hours, the young man sprang to life and freed everyone one of his father's subjects without so much as a shot being fired while the witless kidnapers celebrated their victory.

Then the most astounding occurrence took place. The son led the entire group of former captives straight to the gate of His father's kingdom where the king stood waiting to personally welcome each of them. After greeting them individually, he addressed them corporately telling them that during their captivity he had grown to love each of them so much that he was willing to legally adopt each one of them into his family as his own son or daughter and they could live with him and his son together in the palace, secure forever.

God is a personal God who seeks a personal relationship with His children. He is a loving personal God seeking to build His family and He is open to adoption. This is the kind of person He is and this is truth is worth celebrating.

We can celebrate God's **power** (over time), we can celebrate God's **purpose** (to bring freedom), we can celebrate His **personality** (He desires a family), and we can celebrate His **provision**.

4) Celebrate God's Provision: He Sent Son & Spirit

So how are we adopted into God's family? If God welcomes all who have no family, then do we enter into God's family? We do this through God's **provision**. This passage tells us that God is a God who gives gifts to His children. We are told that He gives two gifts through which adoption is accomplished; His Son and His Spirit.

Galatians 4:4-7

4 *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,*
5 *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*
6 *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!*
7 *So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

As Paul has already made abundantly clear throughout this letter to the churches in Galatia, we are justified (i.e. saved) by faith in Jesus, His Son. When we exercise faith in Jesus, we are united to Him. We are then transferred from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light. It is by faith in Jesus that we are adopted into the family of God. The Son is first gift that God has given us. Faith in the Son is the gate through which we enter God's family.

Then when God adopts us and we are welcomed into the family, what is the next gift God gives each of His children? He gives the gift of His Holy Spirit. We see this in verse 6.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!

Receiving the Holy Spirit seals the adoption. Entrance into God's family happens when God sends His Spirit into our hearts and His Spirit within us causing us to pray! Prayer to God is the privilege of adoption. The Spirit within us then allows us to cry out, "Abba!" Abba is an Aramaic word that little children call their fathers. It is a term of endearment and is equivalent in English to "daddy."

God loves His children so much He cannot bear to be apart from them and so He takes His own Spirit and places Himself within us. In fact, this is the meaning of life. We only come to life spiritually when God pours out His Spirit in our hearts. God provides for His sons and daughters! God gives good gifts to His children. The greatest gift God can give anyone is Himself — His own Spirit.

Luke 11:11-13

11 *What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;*
12 *or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?*
13 *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

The Holy Spirit is THE greatest gift that God could ever give to anyone. The Holy Spirit is the greatest gift that could ever be received. And this great gift if received by all who put faith in Jesus. All who look to Jesus in faith, receive this wonderful, personal gift.

God the Father knows how to provide for His children. He adopts as sons and daughters all who put their faith in Jesus by giving them the greatest gift that could ever be received, Himself — His very own Spirit. When you are unwrapping gifts remember this gift.

Have you received this gift? Has God given you His Spirit? Have you asked Him to give you His Spirit? If not, then ask Him through the name of Jesus to give you His Spirit.

Conclusion

As we celebrate Christmas, celebrate God's power. God is in control of time. Our times are in His hands and none of us knows exactly how much time we have. God does not owe you any time. No one is guaranteed to live until Christmas. Today is the day to be certain you are right with God.

We can celebrate God's purpose in sending Jesus. God's purpose in sending Jesus was to secure freedom. Jesus was born to release us from slavery to sin and redeem us from the curse of the law. True freedom only comes through faith in Jesus and if Jesus sets you free then you are free indeed. That is a reason to celebrate.

We can also celebrate God's personality. He is a Father seeking lost children so that He can adopt them into His family. He is not an employer looking for laborers. He is a Father seeking a family.

We can also celebrate the fact that as a Father He knows how to provide for His children. He knows how to give good gifts to His children. He sent His Son, Jesus, into this wicked world and He earned the right in the flesh to send the Spirit to all who will put faith in Jesus. The greatest gift we could ever receive is the Spirit of God poured out into the heart of man.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.