

THE FULNESS OF TIME

GALATIANS 4:4-7

Text: Galatians 4:4

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⁴ But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

Introduction:

Christmas is a holiday whose original meaning has been buried through the years under layer after layer of traditions, most of which have little or nothing to do with the original intent of the holiday.

Have you ever stopped to consider the strangeness of much of what we do in the name of Christmas? We drag trees into our living rooms, and cover them with electric lights and sharp, shiny objects.

We hang large socks from the mantle, and then fill them with things we are planning on putting in our mouths. We cook more than we can eat, eat more than we can digest, and all of this after spending more than we can afford on presents that no one remembers two months later.

We warn our children to be good, or else the overweight man who is going to break in to our homes,

and eat some of our cookies, will not leave them the overpriced toy for which they have begged for over the last 10 months.

However when we turn to the Word of God, we find that Christmas has less to do with holiday traditions, and more to do with heavenly truth.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians around 57 AD, he could not imagine anything like the holiday we now call Christmas. However, unwittingly, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in two brief statements, Paul gives us a summary of what Christmas is really all about.

(Read Text)

Galatians 4:4-5

⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

These two verses point us clearly to the true meaning of the Christmas celebration. There are three truths that I want to draw from this text that tell us what Christmas is *really* all about. First of all, notice that Christmas is really all about:

1. A SOVEREIGN PLAN

In our text, the Apostle Paul indicates that Christmas was part of God's sovereign plan long before Mary felt her first contraction. Paul says in verse 4, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son..."

I want us to consider that phrase for a moment, and notice a couple of things about God's sovereign plan. Notice first of all that in the birth of Christ, we see:

A. The Will of God Ruling in History

Look again at verse 4, and notice that phrase, "...when the fullness of the time had come..." Literally, it means, "When the time had been filled up..."

God Almighty had planned that on a particular night after years of human history that His Son would be born into the world.

So many times people view God as if He is up in heaven reacting to the events that unfold down on the earth.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

God does not respond to history; He writes it.

Before the first man was formed from the dust of the ground, God knew that one day He would send forth His only Son in the form of a man.

He set the date of the first Christmas before the first day of history, and when time had filled up to that date, Jesus our Savior was born.

When we read verse 4 and we consider the sovereign plan of God in the birth of Christ, we see not only the will of God ruling in history, but we see also:

B. The Wisdom of God Revealed in History

Look again at that phrase in verse 4. Paul writes and says, “But when the fullness of the time was come...” The phrase reveals that the moment of Christ’s birth was exactly the right time for such a momentous event to occur.

As one writer put it, “The first Christmas was perfectly timed.”ⁱ In other words, the world was perfectly primed for the expansion of the gospel.

- Politically

Rome’s rule had united much of the world, and connected it through a complex and developed system of roads – the very roads the apostles would take as they preached the gospel throughout the empire.

- Culturally

The world was closer than ever before, thanks to the exploits of Alexander the Great, who had infused the world he conquered with Greek culture, and more importantly, the Greek language – the language in which the New Testament would be written.

- Spiritually

The Jewish people, though under Roman rule, were back in Jerusalem, and were allowed to worship the one true God. This had brought about a sort of revival, and an expectation of the Messiah.

Looking back at the time and the place of Christ's birth, we can see the providence and wisdom of God's plan.

Notice not only that Christmas is really about *a sovereign plan*, but notice also secondly that its all about:

2. A SUPERNATURAL PROCESS

Galatians 4:4

⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

Notice that phrase, "...made of a woman, made under the law..." In that statement we are reminded that the

true meaning of Christmas centers on a miraculous, supernatural event – the birth of the Son of God.

Notice a couple of things about the birth of Jesus that make it a supernatural process. It is a supernatural process because of:

A. Who It Involves

Paul said that, “...God sent forth his son.”

Christmas is about the birth of the Son of God!

That infant, birthed in a stable, wrapped in peasant rags, and cradled in a feeding trough was not the son of the wide-eyed carpenter looking on in awe. He was the Son of the Highest, the offspring of the Almighty – God in the flesh!

No wonder the angels sang His praises! No wonder the star spotlighted His birthplace!

In 1739, Charles Wesley penned the Christmas hymn, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, and the second verse says:

*Christ, by highest heav’n adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold He come,
Offspring of the virgin’s womb:*

*Veiled in flesh the God-head see,
Hail, incarnate deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel*

The Christmas story is the story of miracle because of who it involves!

Christmas is about a supernatural process, not only because of who it involves, but notice also further because of:

B. What It Involves

Galatians 4:4

⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

“Made of a woman”

There is no explanation for the virgin birth of Jesus Christ apart from a divine miracle.

Notice one more truth we find in this text besides a sovereign plan, and a supernatural process. We see:

3. A SAVING PURPOSE

Galatians 4:5-7

⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁶And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁷Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The celebration of Christmas is not just about *what* God did. It is also about *why* He did it. In verse 5, Paul reminds us of the saving purpose behind Christ's coming to this earth.

Notice a couple of things that make up the purpose of God in sending His Son. Notice first of all, Jesus was born into this world:

A. For the Redemption of Sinners (vs.5)

Notice it doesn't say that He came to give us a home in Heaven, He came to redeem us.

The word redeem means to buy back.

Illustration:

In the days of the Roman Empire, slavery was legal and common. This word that is translated "redeem" in verse 5 is a word that would have been used in the slave market. When a person went into the slave market and bought a slave for the purpose of setting

them free, they were said to have “redeemed” that slave.

Now couple that with what Paul says in verse 5. God sent His Son into this world to buy us out of the slave market, and set us free from our bondage.

Note what the angel said in Matthew 1:21:

Matthew 1:21

²¹ And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

The angel was referring to the redeeming work of redemption.

Christmas is ultimately about the redemption of sinners. Notice also further that the saving purpose of Christmas is not only the redemption of sinners, but it is also:

B. The Adoption of Sons

Galatians 4:5

⁵ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Notice carefully that last phrase, “...that we might receive the adoption of sons.” There is an interesting truth revealed in these two verses.

God gave up His only Son so that He could adopt a multitude of sons.

I am reminded of what the letter of Hebrews 2:10

Hebrews 2:10

¹⁰ For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Christmas is about the birth of one Son and the adoption of many sons! That little baby in the manger is the “firstborn among many brethren” – all of them adopted because of His sacrifice!

Illustration:

Several years ago a great Canadian pastor named T.T. Shields made this statement while preaching on this text: “Someday we are going home for Christmas.”

There is coming a day when all of the redeemed and adopted children of God are going to be home for Christmas. It is all because, “...God sent forth his Son...that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Close:

I read a tragic story once about a wealthy family in Boston who hosted a Christening party for the newborn baby. They invited all of their family and

friends to their large home for the celebration. When it came time to bring out the baby, the mother made a horrifying discovery. The bed on which the baby had been sleeping was piled high with the coats of the guests. The infant was smothered to death by the weight of all the garments.

Christmas is supposed to a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. However, I fear that too often we have smothered Him out with all of the trappings and traditions of the modern Christmas.

It is good to be reminded that Christmas is not about trees and presents. It is about the plan of God to miraculously send His Son to this earth to redeem us from our sins and adopt us into His family. That is what Christmas is really about!

Notice:

1. THE MISSION OF HEAVEN'S GIFT

Galatians 4:4-5

⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

A. The Origin of His Mission

His mission was conceived in Heaven and carried out on this earth. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus Christ did not have His beginning in Bethlehem! He was born there as an infant, but He has been around for all eternity.

His mission was planned before the world was created.

Revelation 13:8

⁸ And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

1 Peter 1:18-21

¹⁸ Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as silver and gold*, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; ¹⁹ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: ²⁰ Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, ²¹ Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

The fullness of time:

- The time was right religiously – the Jews were free from idolatry, they were looking for the Messiah.

- The time was right culturally – the common language of the day was Greek, a very expressive language, known around the world.
- The time was right politically – the Roman Empire was the dominate power in the day. The Roman law gave the citizens living in the Empire many rights that also helped spread the Gospel. The Roman roads served to aid in the spreading of the Gospel message.

B. The Objective of His Mission

Galatians 4:5

⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

This was His clear statement and the sole passion of His life.

Luke 19:10

¹⁰For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

He did not come to this world as a great teacher or leader of men. He did not come as an example for us to follow. He came "to give His life a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

⁴⁵For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

C. The Outcome of His Mission

When He went to the cross for the lost, He paid a price that no one else could have ever paid.

He declared:

John 19:30

³⁰ When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

His sacrifice on the cross was and is sufficient to save you and keep you saved forever!

He was born to die.

2. THE MINISTRY OF HEAVEN'S GIFT

Galatians 4:4-5

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A. It Was a Personal Ministry

Galatians 4:5-7

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The ministry of Heaven's gift was very personal in nature.

B. It Was a Peculiar Ministry

The Lord did what no other Person could have ever done! Any of the billions of people who have ever lived could have been nailed to that cross and not a single sin would have been paid for; not even their own! However, when Jesus went to that cross and died, He was able to pay for the sin debt of the whole world. Why? Because He was different than any man that had ever lived before or have ever lived since: He was sinless and He was God in the flesh!

C. It Was a Powerful Ministry

It delivered us from the authority of the Law we could never keep.

ⁱ MacArthur, John, God With Us: The Miracle of Christmas, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), p. 98