

Galatians 4:4-7 “Born at Just the Right Time” **

Main Idea: God gave more than one gift to the world in connection with Christmas, a fact we tend to forget. Galatians 4:4-7 tells us about two very special gifts.

I. God sent His Son (4-5).

A. He came at a special time (4a).

1. The promises were right.
2. The political conditions were right.
3. The religious conditions were right.
4. The social conditions were right.
5. The language was right.

B. He came as a special person (4b).

1. The person God sent was fully God.
2. The person God sent was fully man.
3. The person God sent was fully obedient.

C. He came for a special purpose (5).

1. He did the work of redemption.
2. He did the work of adoption.

II. God sent His Spirit (6-7).

A. We possess the rights of a son.

1. He gives us intimacy with God.
2. He gives us assurance.

B. We possess the resources of an heir.

1. What we have now is wonderful.
2. What we will enjoy is beyond comprehension!

What would you think of a birthday celebration in which there was no reference to or mention of the person born on that day? It would seem kind of odd, wouldn't it? Can you imagine celebrating George Washington's birthday but refusing to mention George Washington?

That describes what's happening to Christmas. I went to the store this week to find a Christmas card to send to a relative. Granted, the card section was pretty picked over, but I had to search and search for a card that made any mention of Jesus and His birth. I found plenty of cards with snowmen, winter scenes, Santa Claus, and some with

angels (on the more 'religious' cards), but hardly any that made the connection between Christmas and the birth of the Christ-child.

It's not just here either. Jeff Jacoby of *The Boston Globe* reports that the secularization of Great Britain leads to some dramatic statistics concerning Christmas. Consider this:

"From the land that produced "A Christmas Carol" and Handel's "Messiah," more evidence that Christianity is fading in Western Europe: Nearly 99 percent of Christmas cards sold in Great Britain contain no religious message or imagery.

'Traditional pictures such as angels blowing trumpets over a stable, Jesus in his manger, the shepherds and three wise men following the star to Bethlehem are dying out,' the Daily Mail reports. A review of some 5,500 Christmas cards turns up fewer than 70 that make any reference to the birth of Jesus. "Hundreds . . . avoided any image linked to Christmas at all" -- even those with no spiritual significance, such as Christmas trees or Santa Claus."

The report Jacoby also cites the fact that 75 percent of British companies have banned Christmas decorations "for fear of being sued by someone who finds the holiday offensive."^[1]

In the presence of such neglect of Christ at Christmas, it's vital that we restate the obvious (or the NOT so obvious). Christmas is about Christ!

This morning, my aim isn't to be novel. My aim simply is to open God's Word with you and reflect on the most amazing birth in the history of the world.

There are many places in God's Word to which we could turn. We could go to a Gospel and see *how* Jesus was born. I've chosen an epistle which explains *why* He was born, the theological significance of His birth. Our focus will be Galatians 4:4-7, a text that shows that the Christ-child was born at *just the right time*. It also shows us that God gave more than one gift to the world in connection with Christmas, two very special gifts in fact. Let's listen to our text and then examine it carefully line by line:

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."

Context:

The apostle Paul wrote Galatians in response to a controversy. Certain teachers (Judaizers) were infiltrating the churches that Paul started in Galatia and undermining their faith by insisting that believing in Christ was not enough, that adherence to God's law was essential for salvation. These professing Jewish Christians were insisting that Old Testament ceremonial practices (like circumcision) were still binding on the New Testament church. In short, the Gospel was under attack and Paul, as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, wrote this letter to address that problem head-on.

He identified the source of the controversy in chapters one and two. In chapter three he issued the charge that *faith alone* is necessary for salvation, that the law can't save anyone (3:21), that the law is meant to lead a person to Christ (3:24), and that it's by faith in Christ that a person becomes a child of God (3:26).

This context is vital. As we come to chapter four, remember that Paul's argument is to show the connection between our sonship and The Son. If we have The Son (that's Christ), then we are sons! Nothing else is needed.

Why not? What is it about this Son that makes belief in Him sufficient to set a sinner free from bondage and

furthermore, makes obedience to ceremonial laws unnecessary? Paul gives the answer in the text before us. As Paul explains, God initiated two gift-giving acts that result in true freedom. Here's the first...

I. God sent His Son (4-5).

Verse 4—"But when the time had fully come *God sent His Son.*" God, the Maker of heaven and earth, sent His Son into the world. According to verses 4-5, His Son's coming is special in three ways.

A. He came at a special time (4a). "But *when the time had fully come*, God sent his Son..." When did God send His Son? When the time had *fully come*. When the fullness of time was come, as the AV puts it.

In its basic sense the word "fully" or "fullness" (*pleroma*) means "that which fills up." It carries the idea of completeness and fulfillment, that which is brought to completion. You might think of a glass into which you are pouring ice tea. When the tea reaches the top of the glass you say it is *full*. Fullness is the state of being full. Once the glass is full you stop pouring! Now it's time to start drinking.

Paul speaks of the 'fullness of *time*.' The Greek word for time is *chronos*. We derive the English word *chronology* from it. Chronology speaks of sequence. *This* happens, then *this*, then *this*, and so on.

When God sent His Son into the world He did so when the time was ripe, at just the perfect time. "What made the time so right?" you ask. The fact is, God had been preparing the world for the birthday of His Son for centuries (and He Himself had been preparing for it from eternity past!). Allow me to point out five evidences that He sent His Son at just the right time.

1. *The promises were right.* Scan the Old Testament and you'll discover a thread of promises beginning in Genesis. Pull on that thread and it will take you to Bethlehem .

A promise to Adam and Eve—Genesis 3:15

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

A promise to Abraham—Genesis 12:1-4

"...all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you."

A promise to Jacob—Genesis 28:14-15

"...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."

A promise concerning Judah —Genesis 49:10

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."

A promise to Moses—Deut. 18:18

"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers."

A promise to David—2 Samuel 7:12-13

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

A promise to Isaiah—Isaiah 7:14; 9:6

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

A promise to Micah—Micah 5:2

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

A promise to Daniel—Daniel 7:13-14; 9:25

“From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’”

Those are just a sampling of the promises God gave to His people centuries beforehand, to prepare the world for the arrival of His Son. Galatians 4:4 can say, “When the time had fully come,” because the promises were right.

2. *The political conditions were right.* Jesus was born around 4 B.C. (one suggestion for the reason it’s *four* instead of *zero* is because the calendar creators failed to account for leap years). At any rate, who ruled the world at that time? The Romans did. The Roman Empire was firmly established. If Jesus had come four hundred years earlier or later, he would have encountered a world in political turmoil. But in 4 B.C. there was political stability and security. *Pax Romana* was popular, Roman peace by military control.

What’s more, the Romans developed an elaborate transportation system throughout their empire (parts still in use today!). Why was this important? For missions. Once Jesus returned to heaven, His followers would be able to take the Gospel world-wide because of the road system and the absence of war and political turmoil.

3. *The religious conditions were right.* This was true in two ways...

For the Jews: Tremendous changes took place in Judaism from 400 B.C. to the time of Jesus’ birth. The Old Testament canon was settled. There was great interest in matters of theology, such as angels, the resurrection, life after death, the coming kingdom, and the Messiah. There were also a host of Jewish divisions or sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Samaritans, Zealots, Herodians, and more (almost like the denominationalism of today!)—and it all created a void, an emptiness in the hearts of people. What’s more, the spread of Jewish synagogues throughout the world would later give the New Testament missionaries a beachhead from which to begin their evangelistic efforts.

For Gentiles: The Romans were polytheists, as were the Greeks before them. But after centuries of worshiping many gods, there was growing dissatisfaction and emptiness. What’s more, this created an openness to new religious teachings.

4. *The social conditions were right.* Tensions were great between Rome and Israel. It climaxed in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. Roman persecution would eventually turn on the Christians as well, forcing them to scatter throughout the world, but of course, God used this as the fleeing Christians took the Gospel message with them wherever they went.

5. *The language was right.* The official and common language throughout the Roman Empire was *Koine Greek*. That meant you could travel from northern Africa to Jerusalem, to present day Turkey, to Greece, to Italy, even to Spain, and communicate with people. What’s more, in 170 B.C., the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek in a translation called the *Septuagint (LXX)*. The Septuagint was developed because so many Jews no longer understood Hebrew, but that translation meant that the early church now had a Bible that anyone in the Roman Empire could read! Furthermore, the common language meant that as New Testament Scriptures were written, they were immediately readable—no translation needed.

Yes, indeed, the stage was set. God had prepared the world for His Son. He sent His Son at a special time, at just

the *right time*. By the way, this same God is in control of your life, of your chronology! You can trust Him fully. Something else made His Son's coming special...

B. He came as a special person (4b). "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law..." In that short statement we learn traits of this person that God sent.

1. *The person God sent was fully God.* "God sent *His Son*." As His Son He possesses the very nature of His Father. See the deity of this special person in those words. Jesus Himself would later say, "I and my Father are one (John 10:30)."

2. *The person God sent was fully man.* "Born of a woman," Paul declares. To use the Greek word, "born of a *gynaikos*," a term which distinguishes human gender, "born of an *adult female*." A human being, a woman, gave birth to God's Son. The fact that He was *God's* Son reveals His deity. The fact that He was born of a woman reveals His *humanity*. God actually became a man. And that man continued to be God. He was 100% God and 100% man.

3. *The person God sent was fully obedient.* Verse 4 concludes, "born *under law*." Fourteen centuries prior God had given His Law through Moses to His people. His Law revealed His glory. It also showed His people how they could reflect His glorious character to the onlooking world, by obeying that law, by living under that law. Israel failed, but this Son did not fail. He was born *under law*—He entered the world as a Jew. He lived *under law*—by His righteous life this Son fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law established by God, something sinful human man is unable to do for himself.

Jesus had to possess all three traits. He had to be divine in order to give His sacrifice infinite value. He had to be human for since human beings sinned, a human being had to bear the penalty for sin. And He had to be born *under law*, for it was God's law that sinners had violated and it was the righteousness of that law that needed to be upheld.

He came at a special time. He came as a special person. Something else is true...

C. He came for a special purpose (5). Verse 4 states that God *sent* His Son. The verb is *exapostello* which means "to send out for some purpose." In verse 5 that purpose is identified: "...to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Note the purpose indicators. God sent His Son "TO redeem," and "THAT we might receive." God sent His Son to accomplish two very specific works which Paul here identifies for us.

1. *He did the work of redemption.* The Son was born *under law* (verse 4) in order to *redeem those under law* (verse 5). The word *redeem* is *exagorazomai* which means 'to buy,' 'to buy up,' literally 'to buy back.' One definition states: 'to recover by payment of a price from the power of another.'

That raises the question. From whose power did Christ set us free? To whom were we slaves. Other passages speak of man's enslavement to the devil (Heb. 1:14). But here Paul refers to those who were enslaved to *the law*. He says that Christ died to *redeem those under law*.

You might be thinking, "I didn't know that God's law was a master that held people in bondage." Indeed, it was. Let me illustrate. We enter this world as sinners, and as sinners we by nature think this world exists for us. It's our bent. Furthermore, we live that way. That's why when we're but three-years-old we get upset if our toddler friend takes our toy. That's also why as an adult, if we're late for an appointment, we convince ourselves we have the "right" to drive whatever speed we need to drive to make our appointment. And we feel pretty good about our efforts... *until* we see something. We notice along the side of the road a posted sign that reads: '35 mph.' Then we see another one: '55 mph.' Each time we see a sign a master speaks to us, a master called *the law*. The law says, "Don't drive faster than this. If you disobey there will be a penalty."

But there's a big difference between civil law and God's moral law. I can obey the civil law regardless of how I feel about the law-maker (I can make myself go 35 mph even if I'm grumbling while doing it—Uncle Sam doesn't care my motive as long as I obey). But obedience to God's law requires a proper heart as well as obedience. Indeed,

obedience to God's law is supposed to be a reflection of my love for God and others.

And there's my problem. As a sinner I don't naturally love God and others. I love myself. My tendency is to try and use God and others to get what I want out of life. But every time I open the pages of God's Word and read the 'road signs' of God's law, I'm reminded of my shortcoming, my bondage. I cannot keep God's law. The problem isn't God's law, for it is good. The problem is *me*. I am a slave to the law for I am a slave to sin.

But here's the good news. God sent His Son *to redeem those under law*, that is, 'to recover by payment of a price from the power of another.' And what was the payment price? What did it cost this Son to redeem prisoners like you and me? Paul answered that question in the previous chapter. Galatians 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" After living a perfect life, this Son allowed wicked men to nail Him to a wooden cross where He became a curse in order to redeem sinners from the curse. He died in the place of sinners. Three days later God made it clear His Son's redemption price was sufficient by raising Him from the dead.

That's why the Son came to earth. And that's what He accomplished by virtue of His coming. He did the work of redemption. The second purpose is a consequence of the first.

2. *He did the work of adoption.* "God sent His Son...to redeem those under law, *that we might receive the full rights of sons.*" The NIV uses the phrase, 'the full rights of sons,' but that's one word in the Greek text, *huiiothesia*. It means 'adoption' or 'sonship.' One lexicon offers this definition: "to formally and legally declare that someone who is not one's own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one's own child, including complete rights of inheritance."^[2]

If this weren't God's Word I would say, "No way! How could God formally and legally declare me to be His own child and now treat and care for me as such? I don't deserve that. I was a slave, a disobedient slave at that!" And I don't deserve that. Nor do you.

But that's what we have if we have the Son, my friend. We've been redeemed, and therefore we've been adopted into the family of God. That's our identity now. We are redeemed. We are adopted. That's true of us now and of every other person who has received this gift the Father sent, the gift of *His Son*.

As good as that is, there's more! Did you ever finish opening your gifts Christmas morning, get busy with plans for dinner, and not discover until later, during cleanup time, that you had missed a gift? Well, there's another gift associated with Christmas, one that's often neglected. Let's unwrap this second package...

II. God sent His Spirit (6-7).

Verses 6-7 "Because you are sons, God sent [that's the same verb used in verse 4 referring to the Son] the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."

I must hasten to say that these two gifts are inseparably related. God sent His Son. God likewise sent the Spirit of His Son, a reference to the Holy Spirit who came just days after the Son returned to heaven. The moment we become God's sons through faith in His Son, we receive the Holy Spirit. Paul says that God *sent the Spirit into our hearts*. If you have the Son, you then have the Spirit of His Son living in you, the wonderful Holy Spirit.

Sadly, it's possible to have something and yet not know the value of what you have. So what do we have if we have the Holy Spirit? Two amazing privileges...

A. We possess the rights of a son. One Thanksgiving several years ago, my sister, who was at the time a college student, brought home some friends to enjoy the holiday with our family. Have you ever been the guest of a friend

during a holiday get-together? How did you feel? Depending on how well you knew the family, probably at little awkward at first, maybe even confused at the way they did things, quite possibly you felt out of place (like when they took the ‘family’ picture which did not include you!).

We used to be on the outside of God’s family, but no longer! Because of the Son, we are sons. Because of the Spirit, we can experience the rights of a son. Paul mentions two.

1. *He gives us intimacy with God.* Verse 6—“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘*Abba, Father.*’” The Spirit ‘calls out’ in our behalf. The verb ‘call out’ is strong. It (*krazo*) means to shout, to scream, to cry out, to exclaim. And what specifically does the Spirit cry out? *Abba, Father.*

Abba. That’s the Aramaic word a little child would use when jumping into his father’s lap, “Daddy!” If you’ll recall, that’s also the word Jesus used when He prayed this prayer from Gethsemane in Mark 14:36, “‘*Abba*, Father, he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”

Since God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, it’s not surprising that He is now calling out the same from within us, “*Abba, Father!*” That’s one of the greatest privileges families enjoy, *communication*. We enjoy sharing personal, meaningful, and significant thoughts with those we trust. We laugh together. We cry together. And the Spirit enables us to do that with God. He enables us to experience personal and intimate communion with the Almighty God.

2. *He gives us assurance.* Note again what the Spirit calls out. *Abba, Father.* He enables us to call God *our Father.*

I can’t give you assurance of your salvation. You can’t give it to me. But the Holy Spirit can and does! Paul elaborates in Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of **sonship**. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba, Father.*’”

Unfortunately, some people have assurance that ought NOT have it. They’re convinced they’re in God’s family, but the basis of this conviction is what the preacher says, or what their signed prayer card says, or what the church says, or what momma says... But there’s one voice that’s silent, and it’s the one that matters.

My friend, if you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit will make it clear to you that you are a child of God, using His Word to give that assurance. If you lack assurance, study the Scriptures, particularly the book of 1 John. In so doing the Holy Spirit will do one of two things: 1) He may show that the reason you lack assurance of sonship is because you are not a son. Or... 2) He may use His Word to take away your lack of assurance and give you assurance that you are indeed a son because you know the Son!

Because God sent His Spirit to us we possess the rights of a son. What’s more, we enjoy a second privilege.

B. We possess the resources of an heir. Verse 7 again, “So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.” We used to be slaves, but now we are sons. That’s our position. And with the position goes the possession. We are *heirs*. The word means “a receiver.” An heir is one who is entitled to receive something.

What is an heir entitled to receive? Paul answers that question in the related text of Romans 8:17, “Now if we are children, then we are *heirs*—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also *share in his glory.*”

There is the inheritance that the sons of God may anticipate. It’s the very inheritance that The Son possesses. Suffering now, glory later. We can expect to suffer now, and we will certainly share in *His glory* later.

We’ve been talking about two gifts the Father has given in connection with Christmas. Now please ponder a couple of questions...

One, have you received the Father's first gift, namely His Son, Jesus Christ? If so, then you are a member of royalty. You are a child in God's family.

And if you have received the first gift, then you already possess the second gift the Father sent. If you have the Son, then you also have His Spirit living in you, the Holy Spirit. You are a member of God's family. But that brings us to a second question...

Two, are you experiencing what the Spirit offers? He offers family intimacy in the family of God, and He offers assurance of sonship. He assures us that God has declared us to be His heirs. These are ours because the Spirit has come.

To sum it up, if we possess these two amazing gifts, then we can be assured of two things...

1. *What we have now is wonderful. However...*
2. *What we will enjoy is beyond comprehension!*

******Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Albert Mohler, <http://www.albertmohler.com/blog.php>

[2] Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, c1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (LN 35.53). New York : United Bible societies.