

Children of Christmas

Scripture Text: Galatians 4:4-7

Introduction

Christmas was last week. Many of you celebrated Christmas with family and friends. You may have seen people you have not seen in a while, maybe since last Christmas. You exchanged gifts. If you were like me, you ate more food than you should have eaten. What was the effect of Christmas on you? Were you stressed? Were you relieved? Did the gifts you received produce a lasting impression upon you, or are you struggling to even remember what you got? Christmas is not just an annual holiday on the calendar. It is not a day to glorify materialism. It is not about putting up a tree. It is not about decorating with tinsel and lights. It is not about exchanging gifts with one another. It is even not about eating the fatted calf with every side of the family you may have. Christmas is not about those things.

Christmas is a special time of year, but oftentimes we forget just how special it is. Christmas is a time for us to remember and to celebrate God's Gift to mankind. God gave a most wonderful Gift to the world that could not be purchased in any mall or department store. Christmas is the celebration of the event that set the Heavenly Host to sing "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14) Christmas tells us that at a specific time and at a specific place, a specific person was born Who was the best Christmas gift ever given. That person was our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But, what does that Christmas Gift really mean for us? What does it mean for God to send His only begotten Son to the world? This passage from Galatians reveals several things about the first coming of Jesus Christ.

The Gift of Christmas Came at the Right Time

Have you ever waited for something and thought it would never come? Have you ever received something at just the right time? Maybe it was some money, or a message, that came at just the right time. God is an on time God. He is never late, though we may wish He would hurry up sometimes. God has a plan. God has had a plan from the beginning of time. There is no plan B. There is only God's plan. When the time was right in God's plan, He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4:4 *⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...*

Most English translations say something like "when the fullness of time came." The New Living Translation renders it like this: "But when the right time came, God sent his Son." At the right moment in history, God sent His only begotten Son to the world. Scholars will say that there were several factors that made this such a suitable time for Christ to come: worldwide peace made through the Roman Empire, an excellent road system for easier travel from city to city, one common language across the empire. Because of

these factors, the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread across the known world in ways that would not have been possible in earlier times.

These are all important factors for Jesus Christ being born and the Gospel being proclaimed at just the right time. But the most important factor is that God determined that this was the right time to send His only Son. God alone determined when the time was right to send His Son, Jesus, to the world. He had endured mankind's sin with much patience and had sent the long expected Savior of mankind Who was promised all the way back in Genesis chapter three. What prophets had foretold centuries before, what Israel had longed to see, came wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. So significant was the birth of Christ in human history that the Church later divided time by this event into a.d. and b.c. The birth of Christ came at just the right time and split human history in half.

The Gift of Christmas Came to Redeem Us

One of the lessons that Scripture teaches us is that we are in debt. How many of you like to be in debt to someone else? Most of us do not like it. Some really do not like it. Debt enslaves one to the lender. Debt puts a person in bondage to the one he or she owes. We are spiritually indebted — enslaved by sin and unable to purchase our freedom. We are slaves to the righteous requirements of the Law of God. None of us are capable of perfectly following the Law, which is a reason God sent His Son, Jesus Christ — to free us from the bondage of sin and the Law. Look at verses four and five.

Galatians 4:4–5 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.*

The word "redeem" means to *purchase* or *buy* one's freedom. Another way to say this is that God sent His only Son to buy freedom for us who were slaves to sin and the Law. More than that, we did not have the means to free ourselves. We had a debt we could not repay. And so, at the right time, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to set us free. Christ came to purchase our freedom. He did that on the cross of Calvary when our sin was nailed to His cross. He took on our sin and God's wrath so that we would be free from the guilt of sin and the requirements of the Law. As a result, we are freed from our debt to sin and the Law. We are like the servant in one of Jesus' parables who was forgiven an enormous debt that he could not pay. Christ has redeemed us, He has bought our freedom because we could not free ourselves.

We read about our debt to God every time we recite the Lord's Prayer. I know many people are used to praying to God "forgive us our trespasses." Indeed we have trespassed against God. We have done things we should not do. The thing is, Jesus did not say that in this prayer. He did not say, "Forgive us our trespasses." Jesus said, "Forgive us our debts." If Christ has forgiven your debt of sin, if He has freed you from the bondage of sin and the Law of God, why would you go back to it? If you were in

prison, and the Governor of our state set you free from your imprisonment, would you want to go back to your imprisonment after receiving your freedom? Of course not!

How can we be enslaved? One way is through legalism. This is trying to earn favor with God by trying to be righteous through your own actions. Stop doing it. You will fail. Trust in Jesus as the full payment for your sin and the fulfillment of the righteous demands of the Law. Another way is by living like those who are enslaved. While we cannot free ourselves or meet the righteous demands of the Law by our own actions, we also must not live like those who are still imprisoned by sin and the Law. There are those who think that accepting Christ gives them a license to do whatever sin they desire to do. Christ not only saved you from the guilt and judgement of sin, but He also saved you to live an abundant life for Him. Are you living that life or are you living like a prisoner?

The Gift of Christmas Came to Adopt Us

Redemption implies a basically negative situation. We are redeemed *from* the curse of the Law, *from* the slave market of sin, *from* the clutches of hostile elemental spirits. We were once in bondage and Christ came to set us free. Paul went on to show the positive purpose for God sending Jesus to us. Jesus came and died in order to redeem us from the Law so that we might receive “the full rights of sons.” Not only are we free from bondage through Christ, but we are given a new family. Think about our Advent reading this morning from John chapter one. Jesus is the living Word of God who was with God and Who was God. He is the Word that came to His own people and yet, they did not receive Him. But to those who do receive Him, who believe in Him, they receive the right to become children of God.

Do you have a perfect family? Have you ever wanted a perfect family? Many people do. Many children long to have just a family. Many wait year after year in foster care or being homeless longing to have a family, longing for someone to want them, for someone to adopt them. There is a beautiful truth in Scripture of people becoming part of God’s family. Many believe that all people are God’s children. We are all created by God and therefore we are all His creation. But the special privilege of becoming a child of God, being adopted into His family is reserved to those who have accepted God’s Son, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When you accept Christ, you are adopted into God’s family. You become one of His. If you long to be part of a family, then you can. Accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and become a part of His great family.

The Gift of Christmas Came to Make Heirs

By God’s grace we have been delivered out of slavery unto sonship, out of bondage to sin and the powers of darkness into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Through the blood of Christ we receive special privileges for being in God’s family.

Galatians 4:6–7 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.*

Because Christians are children of God, they are in a position to receive the Father's inheritance, beginning with the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sign and pledge of our adoption. When we become His children, God dwells within us through the Person of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit's presence in our lives we are truly convinced that God is for us, not against us, that indeed He is our Heavenly Father. The evidence for this wonderful assurance is not through miraculous works, such as speaking in tongues, or dreams and visions. Rather, the basic indication of our adoption is that we address God differently. The Spirit invites us to cry out to God by saying, "Abba, Father." We should sense this connection every time we pray the Lord's Prayer which begins with these wonderful words, "Our Father in Heaven." The Spirit confirms this connection.

The meaning here is that the person who tries to be justified before God by works is a slave to God's Law. But the one who is justified by faith in Christ is no longer a slave, but a child, with full rights as an heir to God's infinite treasures. We are declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, not through works of the Law. (Galatians 2:16) Those who rely on works of the Law to be justified with God are under a curse. (Galatians 3:10) Therefore, once you are freed from the curse, do not be enslaved again. Do not go back to slavery. God has set us free through His Son. God has made us co-heirs with Christ. Do not be enslaved to a legalistic system of trying to earn favor with God. Live like free people. Live like an heir of the King.

Conclusion

Because of the first Christmas, those who receive God's Gift become children of Christmas. If you have never received the Gift of Christmas, Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to receive Him today. For those who have received Christ, how should you live as a result of that Gift? I suggest four things:

Be Patient. Remember that God's timing is not the same as ours. When the time is right, God will do what He plans to do. We just need to be ready and obedient.

Be Thankful. Are you thankful for God redeeming you, for purchasing your life at the expense of His Son's life? Think of the bondage you were in prior to Christ. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude for the freedom you have as a result of God's Gift of His Son.

Remember Who You Are. God sent Jesus in order to adopt you into His family. Maybe your earthly family is not that good, or maybe you do not really have a family. Through Christ we are all brothers and sisters in God's great family. Celebrate your adoption!

Live Like a Free Child of the King. There is an expectation for how the royal family lives. You would not expect them to live like commoners. Likewise, if God has adopted you into His family, live like a free child of the King. Trust Christ completely for your salvation, but do not straddle the fence. Christ redeemed you for you to become His. He did not free you so that you will remain in sin. Turn to Christ, trust in Christ, but also follow Christ. This is Good News. Thanks be to God. Amen!