

The Love of the Father

Galatians 4:3-7

Listen to that phrase in verse 4 - ***“When the fullness of time had come.”*** Just as the time came for Mary’s baby to be born - just as every baby approaches full term and then has a set time to make that first appearance - so there was a set time for the arrival of Jesus. Just as expectant mothers feel like eight months is pretty much the fullness of time and why don’t you go ahead and be born already, so the Jews must have felt that it was long since time for Messiah to come. 400 years had gone by since the last prophecy was spoken by the prophet Malachi. 400 years of silence.

But then, in the perfect, sovereign timing of God, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.” Let’s be encouraged by this and remember that **God’s timing is always perfect.** We often feel like it is long since time that Jesus came back - how much worse can this world get? How much more can we endure? How much more can our culture reject and dishonor God and His Word?

But since Jesus has not yet returned, we must conclude that the fullness of time has not yet come. And in Romans 11:25 Paul actually tells us why: ***“a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”*** Romans 11:25

That’s the same word we have here in Galatians 4:4. Just as there was a date and time when God determined the time was right to send Jesus as Savior, so there is a date and time that God has determined to send Jesus as Judge. The only reason He is waiting is that the full number of Gentiles has not yet come in - there are more people still to reach with the Gospel. “God is not slow to keep His promises,” He is patient, continually giving people more opportunities to hear and respond to the Gospel.

Yes, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son.” Praise the Lord for His perfect timing!

Now, all four of our boys decided the perfect time to be born was right around dinner. But the older three all wanted from 12 to 24 hours of labor before they would make their appearance. My wife is a true super hero! We named our firstborn **“Seth” because the name means “appointed one.”** We did not get married and say, “let’s have a baby on our first anniversary!” But he was born - spot on - six days before our first anniversary. That was GOD’S appointed timing for us - not ours. But we praise the Lord for Seth, as we are thankful for each of the boys God has given to us in His perfect timing.

On this second Sunday of Advent our theme is **the Love of the Father.** Last week we reflected on the importance of faith in the promises of God. Today we see the Love of God as He keeps His

promise and sends His one and only Son. Our lesson today is simple: ***God has proven His love - once and for all - by sending a Glorious Savior and offering a Glorious Salvation.***

Anyone who questions God's love needs to look more closely at Jesus. The final test of God's love is not in your circumstances, however difficult they may have been. God has His reasons for allowing us to go through various trials and it's not for us to question those but to trust Him. ***If you want to understand evil and suffering, don't look at your circumstances, look at Jesus.***

Look at Jesus' suffering. Look at the injustice He endured - FOR YOU. Don't stew over what you think YOU deserve, reflect on what Jesus deserved. Did He deserve to be brutally beaten and killed? Did He deserve to endure the outpouring of God's wrath?

Look at Jesus and you'll begin to understand God's love. It will only be a beginning for we will need all of eternity to experienced how wide and long and high and deep the love of God actually is. But to make a start - look at Jesus, the Glorious Savior who provided a Glorious Salvation.

First, look at the three perfections of Jesus that made him the all sufficient Savior. He was fully divine, fully human and full righteous. We see each of these points right there in Galatians 4:4 ***"When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law."***
Galatians 4:4

Think of it. All three of these perfections had to be embodied in One Savior to provide a single sacrifice that would pay for every sin of all people throughout all of time.

- Because Jesus was fully divine, His sacrifice was SUFFICIENT
- Because Jesus was fully human, He could serve as our SUBSTITUTE
- Because Jesus was fully righteous, God's requirements were fully SATISFIED

Jesus is the all-sufficient sacrificial substitute who satisfied the righteous requirements of the Law on our behalf!

- If Jesus had not been fully divine, his sacrifice would not have had infinite value - it would not have been sufficient.
- If Jesus had not been fully human, his sacrifice could not have applied to humans - he could not have been our substitute.
- If Jesus had not been fully righteous, his sacrifice would not have been acceptable to a holy God - God's just requirements would not have been satisfied.

So all three of these perfections were necessary - which is why Christmas was necessary. What a mystery - that God sent his own Son to be born of a woman. The only mystery on par with this

one about how Jesus was 100% divine at the same time that he was 100% human is the Trinity itself - that God is One at the same time that He is three distinct persons.

But think for a moment about what it means that **Jesus was God's Son**. Some have used this fact to argue that Jesus was less than God, subordinate to the Father and therefore less in power, authority and glory. But to be the Son of God is to be of the same divine being, the same essence or substance as God. C.S. Lewis said it well.

“To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself...What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

When God created the world He made something other than Himself. That is largely what we mean when we say that God is holy - that He is other, different, separate from us as He is distinct from all that He has made. But the Son of God, the eternally begotten Son of the Father who had no beginning and will have no end - He was not created by God but always was, is and always will BE GOD. So Jesus is not less than God but is fully God. And because He is fully God, his sacrifice is sufficient, his payment is enough, for its value is infinite!

Secondly **Jesus was fully human**. He was truly born of a woman, just as he truly and really died on a cross. Neither the way Jesus' human life started nor the way it ended were acts of fiction just for appearances. Both were very real, very physical. Jesus was born of Mary when the time came. She carried him for nine months in her womb. She labored with him and it was painful. When he was born he wasn't this beautiful, pristine, shiny plastic Baby Jesus toy that came out all clean and sparkling. He was like every other baby that has ever been born - purplish-blue and covered in slime.

Three of our boys were born by ***C-section*** and some parts of the process I was able to watch. When Seth was born I didn't know any better so as they were yanking him out of my wife's abdomen I stood up to watch the glorious moment of birth. I very nearly passed out. Everything went all black and splotchy and the anesthesiologist had to stop watching the mom giving birth and take care of dad for a minute. But what got me was how shockingly disgusting the birth process is. Here is a huge slimy, purple head, emerging just like an alien from what I can only assume is my wife's lower abdomen. Then his body comes slurping out, blotchy, bloody, dripping with goo and attached with this long weird looking cable that they offer for me to cut and I groggily pass on that privilege.

There were no C-sections in the first century - at least not any that the mother survived. So Jesus was born as the result of painful labor - a long and difficult process without any painkillers and

obviously without the modern convenience of an epidural. Natural birth may sound like a pleasant idea until you attempt it. Then women tend to scream for drugs, to pass a lot of pain on to their husbands and eventually to demand an epidural.

Jesus was fully human. The silliest line in any hymn is in Away in a Manger when it says, "The little Lord Jesus no crying he made." Crying is not sinful for a baby, it is the only way a baby can communicate. Jesus was fully human. He was not born with advanced cognitive processes that allowed him to ask for food or a clean diaper with a wink and a hand squeeze or the voice of Alec Baldwin in Boss Baby.

Because Jesus was fully human he is an appropriate substitute for humans. Animal sacrifices could never really cover sin or redeem sinners, which is why they had to be continually offered. But Jesus is the all-sufficient Savior precisely because he was both fully divine and fully human. And his third perfection, which was also necessary, is that **he was fully righteous**.

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law." There are two conditions a person can be in - and only two. Either you are under the law or you are in Christ. This is true of everyone on the planet and has always been true throughout history. Anyone who is not IN CHRIST is UNDER THE LAW.

This means they are under the oversight of the Law and therefore under its judgmental stare. Paul compares the law to a trustee or guardian - we might think of a strict governess. Paul says this is not a warm family relationship but is more like slavery. The Law doesn't care about your feelings. It doesn't care about your situation, your reasons why, your excuses. It only cares about truth and justice: guilty or not guilty.

As Javert sings of the stars in the heaven giving order and light in the darkness, every season they return and return to their assigned places, "keeping watch in the night." "And so it must be, for so it is written on the doorway to paradise that those who falter and those who fall must pay the price!"

Javert is right. It is written, very clear in the Old Testament Covenant of the Law, that there are blessings for obedience to God's Law and curses for disobedience. Paul says it this way in Galatians 3

"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.'" Galatians 3:10; citing Deut. 27:26

To be under the law is to be under this curse if you do not abide by ALL THE THINGS written. James says it in a similar way: ***"Whoever keeps the whole law yet fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."*** James 2:10

Micah memorized that verse last year. (It's risky to have your kids memorize the Bible, btw.) I was driving with Micah in the back seat and didn't exactly make the most full and complete stop at a stop sign. My 7 year old pipes up from the back, "Dad! You failed in one point - you have become guilty of breaking all of it!"

To be under the law is to be under the constant supervision of a strict governess or a cruel nanny who never sleeps and always sees everything you do. And will she discipline you? Oh yes, she will. In fact, the Law cannot do otherwise. It always sees sin and it has to punish sin. The job of the law was threefold: to reveal sin, to restrain sin and to punish sin. Notice that the law has no ability to REMOVE sin. Only Jesus can do that, because He is the all-sufficient Savior.

But Jesus, like every one of us, was Himself born under the Law. He walked under constant supervision of the Law's watchful eye. He carried the full weight of the Law's heavy demands. He felt the full strength of every temptation. He had the opportunity for every possible misstep. ***"He was tempted in every way as we are... and yet was without sin!"*** He did not fail at even one single point. If he had, his sacrifice would have had no value for he would have died justly for his own sin. Only because he perfectly fulfilled the Law - doing everything the Father expected of Him and leaving nothing undone - was he able to satisfy the requirements of the Law on our behalf.

Because Jesus is the glorious Savior, he alone can offer this glorious salvation!

There are four gifts of grace here in Galatians 4. The first is **freedom from slavery to sin**. Look at verse 3: ***"In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son... to redeem those who were under the law."*** Galatians 4:3-4.

Sin enslaves the sinner. All of us are born with a natural inclination to sin. And every time we choose to sin we lock another chain around ourselves. When you interact with a non-believer you should imagine them like the Marley brothers, weighed down by heavy chains of sin. But for the believer, Jesus has redeemed us from this slavery! He has paid the price to set us free!

The word redeem comes directly from the slave market. If you were a slave you were the property of a master - you belonged to that person just as he owned a house, a horse and a wagon. He could sell you, whip you, do with you what he wanted. But if a family member or other benefactor came along to redeem you - paying a hefty price - you would be free. You no longer belong to that master.

This is what Jesus has done for us! ***"We were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."*** We were controlled by the law of sin that permeated our hearts, minds and bodies just as it

darkens and poisons our world. But Jesus entered this dark and twisted world precisely so that he could set us free from it.

And he not only set us free from sin, he also gave us **freedom from the condemnation of the law**. ***"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed."*** Galatians 3:23

This is what the Law does: it pins you down and locks you up, holding you for judgment. Forgive me for this visual, but it's just like when you see a roach in your house and trap it in a plastic cup and then leave it there until your husband comes home to slip a postcard under it and take it over to flush it away. That little beastly is stuck until judgment day. He is trapped with nowhere to go until his fate is sealed.

That is what the Law does to everyone. It shows you God's perfect requirements, like a measuring stick that shows how tall Dad is - whoa, he's a trillion feet tall! Then the Law holds up a mirror so you can see just how far you fall short of His stature. The Law reveals our sin and then slams shut like a trap over us, locking us up as we await trial and the inevitable verdict: GUILTY.

But listen again to the good news in Galatians 4:5 "God sent forth this Son... to redeem those who were under the law."

We are no longer under the law if we are IN CHRIST. ***"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."*** Galatians 3:25 The strict governess has been fired. The inescapable trap has been sprung. We are free not only from the death-grip of sin on our hearts and lives but also from the enormous weight of the just condemnation of the law that was looming over us like criminals sitting on death row. ***"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."*** Galatians 3:13

The curse of the Law's perfect knowledge and justice should have fallen on each and every one of us. ***"Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, and do them."*** Galatians 3:10; Deut. 27:26

We have not earned God's blessings for obedience to His law, therefore we are under the law and that means we ought to be under its CURSES. But Jesus stepped in front of us, unworthy and wretched slaves that we are, and paid the ransom price to redeem us from our slavery to sin and to rescue us from the curse. The only way for him to protect us was to absorb that curse himself, full in his chest, like Lily Potter standing in front of her infant son, Harry, and shielding him with the power of her loving sacrifice. That is precisely what the Law inflicts on everyone who is under it: a killing curse.

And the only way to not be under the law is to be IN CHRIST - protected in Him, sheltered by him because you belong TO HIM. Listen to this whole section in Galatians 3.

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:25-27

Do you see those key words? IN Christ Jesus... baptized INTO Christ. There is no such thing as being near Christ or next to Him - you are IN or you are OUT. You are HIS or you are NOT HIS. You are under the Law and its just condemnation or you are in Christ, forgiven and free.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” Galatians 3:28-29

Hear that enormous IF in v. 29. IF YOU ARE CHRIST'S. IF you belong to Jesus, then you are an heir of the blessing promised long ago to Abraham. If you belong to Jesus, then you are a son of God and no longer a slave. If you belong to Jesus, then you are free from slavery to sin and free from the condemnation of the law. IF... you are Christ's.

Two more gifts of this great salvation we have in this glorious Savior. We have the **filling of the Holy Spirit** and full access to the Father and His Kingdom.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son... to redeem those 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.” Galatians 4:4-7

Here it is all summed up together. Jesus, the fully divine Son of God, the fully human Son of man, the fully righteous one who fulfilled the law - this Glorious Savior - accomplished this great salvation! He redeemed us from being under the law and shelters us from its judgmental stare and the weight of its condemnation, he frees us from the fear that once controlled us. And - hear this - he paid the price of our ADOPTION. So we are no longer slaves on the estate - no longer children, even, awaiting our full rights. We are sons and daughters of the king!

And the ultimate gift that comes with belonging to Jesus is not heaven - as wonderful as that will be. The gift par excellence that comes with our forgiveness and justification is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Son of God Himself has been sent into our hearts just as God sent His Son into the world. Jesus came into the world to save sinners so we can shelter IN HIM. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts to help us grow and to lead us home to Papa.

Do you know that still small voice of the Spirit who cries in your heart, “Abba! Father!” It’s easy to know the Holy Spirit because His sole purpose is to glorify Jesus Christ and draw us to our loving Father in heaven.

For we are His children and ***we have the full rights of sons and daughters***. We don’t need to wait for an invitation to come to the King - for He is our Papa and the door is always open for His kids. Have you ever been in a meeting with a really important person - a high up in a company and you waited like 30 minutes to see him or her? Suddenly the phone vibrates on the desk and the boss glances at it and apologetically says, “Sorry, I need to take this - it’s my son,” or “it’s my daughter.” We all understand, there are some calls you take; some interruptions you always allow.

Those are the rights of sons and daughters. And ***we are also heirs*** - we have an unimaginably wonderful inheritance waiting for us. The main gift of that inheritance is access to God Himself, but there is also the blessed hope of our eternal rest and our unending joy in the new heaven and new earth - that will, no doubt, contain more surprises and twists and turns and projects and events and adventures and discoveries than any of us could possibly imagine. I expect God is thinking, “the Grand Canyon, Mount Everest, the Moon, - you ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

Let me close with an excerpt from the Pilgrim’s Progress as one final reminder of the difference between being under the law and being in Christ.

“Now when I had got about halfway up the Hill of Difficulty, I looked behind me, and saw someone coming after me, swift as the wind. He overtook me just about the place where the Arbour stands,” said Faithful.

“As soon as the man overtook me, he hit with a word and a blow, for he knocked me down, and laid me for dead. But when I was a little come to myself again, I asked him why he served me so? He said, Because of my secret inclining to Adam the First: and with that he struck me another deadly blow on the chest, and beat me down backward, so I lay at his foot as dead as before. So when I came to myself again I cried him mercy; but he said, ‘I know not how to show mercy;’ and with that knocked me down again. He would have doubtless made an end of me, except that someone came by, and bid him stop.”

“Who was it who told him to stop?” said Christian.

“I did not know him at first,” said Faithful, “but as he went by, I noticed the holes in his hands and in his side; then I concluded that he was our Lord. So I went up the Hill.”

“That man who overtook you was Moses: He spares none, neither does he know how to show mercy to those who transgress his Law.”

"I know that very well;" said Faithful. "It was not the first time that he has met with me. 'Twas he who came to me when I lived securely at home, and told me, He would burn my house over my head if I stayed there." Pilgrim's Progress, Part 1, section 5

The Law cannot give mercy, it can only give justice. The Law of God - pictured here as Moses the attacker - sees everything and knows everything, even the thoughts and secret intentions of the heart. And it closes on all of us like a trap, holding us for judgment and inevitable condemnation. But there is a man who can hold up his hand and stop Moses by showing him the nails in his hands, the wound in his side - the price that was paid so that the curse of the Law could be absorbed in Him.

God has proven His love by sending a Glorious Savior and offering a Glorious Salvation. May the love of the Father fill our hearts and minds this Christmas season as we look to Jesus - the all sufficient sacrificial substitute who perfectly satisfied the requirements of the law and so can offer to all who come to Him in faith freedom from slavery to sin, freedom from the curse of condemnation by the law, filling with His Holy Spirit and full access to the Father and His eternal Kingdom.

Let's pray.