

In the Fullness of Time

Galatians 4:1-7

Intro: Well boys and girls, it's Christmas time. Most of you will open your Christmas presents this week. Maybe you've seen them already, wrapped in beautiful paper and placed under the tree. Isn't it wonderful to look under the tree and find a package that has your very own name on it? Especially if it's a big present and really especially if it looked like it might be exactly what you are most hoping for. Well boys and girls, I want you to imagine the best possible Christmas present you could hope for – and then multiply that value by a gazillion. Because that's the value of the present God has for us in Jesus. It's the greatest, most magnificent present God could ever give to mortals. And it has our very own name on it.

Gods' gift to us in the birth of Jesus is the gift of adoption. It's the gift of being brought into the forever family of God. It's the gift of an eternal inheritance with Jesus Christ.

As I was studying for the message, I wanted to see what the experience of adoption looks like. So, I looked up some "adoption surprise" videos on YouTube. They are videos of adoptive parents surprising their chosen child with the news that they are going to adopt them. The videos I saw were of children between 7-12 years old – old enough to fully understand what was happening.

Do you know what the experience of finding out that you've been adopted looks like? It looks like initial disbelief when you don't dare believe it could be true. And then overwhelming joy - usually expressed in tears. It look like the most amazing thing conceivable happening to you. Like the thing you longed for more than anything in all the wide world has just come true. I vividly recall one young girl named Shayla – she looked about 10 years old. She had big glasses and a red sweater, and when her foster mother told her that she was going to adopt her – this little girl gasped and put her hand to her mouth. And there was a look of astonishment filled with such longing it just broke your heart. She didn't dare believe it was true. Her lip trembled and tears filled her eyes. She said, "Really??" "Your lying" – she just couldn't believe it was possible. But her new mother's joyful laughter assured her it was true, and she put her face in her hands and sobbed with joy.

I would submit to you that this is what Christmas should feel like. The central idea of our text is that God sent Jesus into this world to accomplish our adoption. To bring us into the family of God. Into the reality of our Father's love and eternal riches.

What makes an adoption story beautiful is the “before” and “after”. In other words, the hardship and heartache of a child without a family – and the love and joy and richness that child gains when they find their forever home.

Well, as Paul writes to the Galatians; he reminds them precisely of these things – their life before and after their adoption. Verse 1-3 depict life “before”. Then, in verses 4-7, he tells them, and us, the story of Gods’ adopting love for us in Jesus. It’s the greatest story of our life.

I. In the Former Time

In chapter 3, Paul has reminded the Galatian believers and the Jewish false teachers of life under the law. It was a hard life – a life of captivity and imprisonment (3:23). It was life of failure and shame. It was a life “under a guardian”.

Paul continues that theme in chapter 4.

4:1 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, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

Once again, Paul is pointing out the hard reality of the past. And that reality is true both historically – for the Jews – and personally for every Christian believer.

Let me explain. The Jews in the Old Testament were heirs of Abraham’s promise – but could not access it. They were like young children under a guardian – with no more rights than a slave. Children couldn’t own property. They couldn’t even set their own bedtime! They were heirs without any access to their inheritance.

The experience of life before Christ is like bondage, like slavery. That’s what Paul says.

:3 we were “enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.”.

There is a great deal of discussion concerning what exactly Paul means here. The word “elementary” in the Greek is very close to what it means today. A synonym is “basic”. Boys and girls, some of you are in “elementary school”. That means you are learning the basics. The ABC’s. And how to do addition. The basic, elementary things.

Paul is reminding his Jewish readers, that life under the law was life in spiritual elementary school. The law taught the ABC’s of the gospel. But it didn’t reveal the full glory of it. And the law was unable to provide righteousness or salvation.

Notice, in verse 9, he identifies these “elementary principles” as “weak and worthless”. The KJV has “weak and beggarly”. The law was weak – it had no power to make us righteous. No ability to bring us out of our enslavement. And it was worthless or beggarly. It had no wealth to give to us. No help to afford. It could not make us children of God.

One of the most heartbreaking tendencies of a child in a foster home is to look to the law to gain love. In other words, that little boy or girl may try their very best to be good, hoping they will be good enough to be loved, good enough to be wanted. Good enough to be adopted. Isn't that the saddest thing? It's heartbreaking. And it is its own kind of desperate bondage. It is its own kind of enslavement – always trying, never succeeding. Always hoping, never experiencing.

Tragically, yet many Christians are trying to do the same thing. Nothing is sadder than a Christian looking to the law to gain love. Professing Christians can often act just like a little foster child - doing his very best to be good enough to be loved. Always hoping, never experiencing. That's bondage. And it is precisely this bondage that God has broken in Christ Jesus. God sent his son to make us sons of God and heirs of eternal life. And He sent us His Spirit so that we will know it!

II. In the Fullness of Time

In verse 4 Paul tells us what God did. And then, in verse 5, he tells us why he did it. And both are critically important for our experience of Christian faith and life.

A. What God Did

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,

This is the magnificent good news of the incarnation. The “fullness” of time reminds us that God had appointed this time before the creation of the world. All of human history was ordained and sovereignly designed to prepare the world for this very occasion – the birth of Jesus and the day of our adoption.

In Luke's gospel we read that the fullness of time was in the days of Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. It was a time when a young peasant couple from Galilee made their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered. And there, in a stable, Mary, the virgin, gave birth to her firstborn, Jesus the very Son of God. God the Father had sent forth His Son.

There are several essential things we learn about Jesus in this one verse.

1. Jesus is the Son of God – He is fully divine. One with the Father in power and glory from all eternity.
2. Jesus was fully man – born of a woman. In the birth of Jesus, God Himself took on our very humanity, never to set it aside. He became man to save man.
3. He was born under the law. He joined us in our enslavement to the law. He took on himself the commands and the curses of the law. But he turned the bondage into victory by keeping the law. He never once violated a single command of God – but rather fulfilled them in every way, at every moment, even unto death. I love what William Still says in one of his sermons,

"The most victorious thing that Christ ever did was to die sinless...Get that deep into your heart and mind."

This is what God did – God sent forth His Son. Born of a woman. Born under the law.

B. Why He Did It

"To redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as son."

The divine purpose of the incarnation was adoption through redemption.

When a child is adopted two critical things must take place. First of all, the legal bonds which binds the child to the state, or to their birth parent must be revoked. Then the new legal bond with the new parents must be formed. This revoking and recreating usually costs money. The money is the redemption price. Your payment sets the child free from the legal bonds of the state – and opens the way for a new legal bond with you.

This is exactly what Paul is describing. Jesus was born precisely to pay the price of our adoption. Notice the critical importance of the words "so that" in verse 5. God sent forth His Son to redeem those under the law SO THAT we might receive adoption as sons"! The goal of redemption is adoption. God's purpose in sending His Son Jesus was to make you His son in Jesus. It was his purpose all along.

Ephesians 1:4b "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ."

2 Corinthians 6:18 "I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Redemption is for adoption. Jesus didn't come to this earth simply to die to pay for our sins. That's a truncated gospel. That won't transform your life. There is little joy in being

forgiven if you believe you are still an orphan. Jesus didn't die simply to pay for your sins - he died to pay for your adoption!

When Jesus rose victorious from the grave, having accomplished our redemption, one of the very first things he said, he said to Mary.

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, "...Go to my *brothers* and say to them, 'I am ascending to my *Father* and *your Father*, to my God and your God.' "

Isn't that terrific?!

1 John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!"

John Newton cherished this thought. His own mother died when he was a young boy of 7. He ran away to become a sailor at the age of 11 and lived for years in the wicked, lost world of the sea. He sank so low that he became the captain of a slave ship. But one night, in the midst of fierce storm, in which he was sure he was going to die and be sent to hell, Newton pleaded to God for mercy. And he received it. He was profoundly converted and transformed and spent the rest of his life as a minister of the gospel. If you walked into John Newton's study, you would see a large banner placed over the mantel of the fireplace. Newton placed it there as a constant reminder of his adoption.

Deuteronomy 15:15 "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman (a slave) in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

This is why the Father sent the Son. This is what Jesus came to accomplish. He came to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons.

C. *What it Feels Like*

Galatians 4:6-7 "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."

What does it feel like to be an adopted child of the Living God?

In verse 6 we see that it feels like an intimate relationship with God as your Heavenly Father. The Spirit teaches us to cry "Abba". That's the intimate name for Father.

John Stott, "God sent His Son to give us the *status* of sonship. He gave His Spirit to give us the *experience* of it."

Jesus came to accomplish our adoption. The Spirit came to affirm it, to teach us the joy of an intimate, personal, prayerful, relationship with - our heavenly Father, who sent both.

The Father's desire for you and me is to live in the unshakable conviction that we belong to Him. To live in the joyful knowledge that the Living God is our "Abba", our Father. Jesus is our elder brother. The church is our forever family.

Do you? You see, there is a great deal of difference between the lived experience of a foster child and an adopted child.

- The foster child doesn't know if this relationship will last.

The adopted child knows that it can't fail.

- The foster child is afraid to ask for great things, fearing they might be a burden.

The adopted child asks extravagantly, knowing they are loved.

- The foster child wishes they could have a father who loves them, cares for them, protects them and claims them.

The adopted child knows they have a father who does all these things.

- The foster child desperately wishes they could belong to a family.

The adopted child is deeply thankful that they finally do.

What does your Christianity feel like? Does God feel like your foster parent or like your loving, precious, devoted, Heavenly Father.

- Do you run to Him when you are afraid – confident that He will protect you?
- Do you trust His provision, even when life is hard, confident that He loves you?
- Do you relish the fact that you belong to His family?

Friends the gift God has for you in this Christmas is the gift of adoption – both the *objective reality* of it and the *subjective experience* of it. His desire is that you know Him as "Abba". His desire, for all those who believe, is a deep grasp of this truth: you are no longer a slave, but a son. All the rights and the rewards of sonship are forever yours.

Let yourself believe it. What the Devil promised could never be true has come to pass. What your guilty conscience convinced you could never happen – has. God sent His Spirit, as the laughter of heaven, to assure you it's all true. He is the proof of your new adopted reality. The guarantee of all the blessings of life in the family of God. The Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. You are promised all the privileges of the children of God, including an eternity with God in a new heaven and earth. That's the gift of Christmas. In the fullness of time, the Father sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, to make all those who believe in Him, His adopted sons. In Jesus we have found our forever family and gained an eternal home. Merry Christmas.