



Text: Galatians 4:1-7<sup>1</sup>  
Series: Paul's Christmas Gospel  
Title: Part 2 – Jesus, Born to Redeem  
Date: December 6, 2009  
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Last week we began our Christmas journey with the Apostle Paul and we discovered that Christmas and Easter in his mind were one event that proclaimed one, unified message...

***God has come to save us through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ!***

That is essentially ...

### **Paul's Christmas Gospel.**

This week we're looking at another of Paul's Christmas Gospel messages and it's found in his letter to the Galatians. Paul wrote...

**3** <sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...

**4** <sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. <sup>3</sup> In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

And now, here is Paul's Christmas Gospel...

**4** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



There was a night two thousand years ago in Bethlehem when the course of human history reached a decisive moment in God's eternal plan. Mary and Joseph, the angels and the shepherds met together at the centre point of history, gathered around a baby lying in a manger. That moment changed everything forever. Philips Brooks, a pastor in Philadelphia in the nineteenth century, had the opportunity to worship in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, 1865. The experience moved him deeply and a few years later he wrote what has become one of the most loved Christmas carols. He captured the decisive nature of that night in Bethlehem with these words...

**“O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”**

“Hopes and fears,” Brooks wrote, met in Bethlehem that night but what Paul tells us suggests that there were many more fears than hopes in the air that night. Before Jesus' birth that night, the essential character of human life could be summed up in one word...

**Slavery!**  
***Before Christ came, we were enslaved to self-salvation!***

Paul tells us that on the night Jesus was born...

**“we ... were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” Galatians 4:3**

You might notice a footnote in your Bible attached to the word “principles.” The footnote will tell you that the word can also be translated as “spirits.” Paul seems to be suggesting that the “elementary principles” or “spirits” of the world are spiritual powers that hold us down and enslave us.

Paul also describes the condition of the world as being...

**“held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.” Galatians 3:23**

The law Paul is speaking of is God's law, the Old Testament law with its commandments and rituals. He's speaking of the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath laws. He's talking about the rite of circumcision and the keeping of Passover. He's saying that before Christ was born the law made prisoners of us.

So, outside of faith in Jesus, are we enslaved to “spiritual powers” or are we captives of God's law? John Stott, a great British Bible teacher, explained Paul's meaning this way...



*But how can a bondage to the law be called a bondage to evil spirits? Is Paul suggesting that the law was an evil design of Satan? Of course not. He has told us that the law was given to Moses by God not Satan, and mediated through angels (3:19), good spirits, not bad. What Paul means is that the devil took this good thing (the law) and twisted it to his own evil purpose, in order to enslave men and women ... God intended the law to reveal sin and to drive men to Christ; Satan uses it to reveal sin and to drive men to despair. God meant the law as an interim step to man's Justification; Satan uses it as the final step to his condemnation. God meant the law to be a stepping-stone to liberty; Satan uses it as a cul-de-sac, deceiving his dupes into supposing that from its fearful bondage there is no escape.<sup>2</sup>*

Our minds and hearts have been so twisted by our sin and by Satan's deceptions that in our hands even God's good Law has been distorted into something that only increases our bondage and alienation from God. In Paul's day, the Jewish people had taken God's Law and turned it into a system of self-salvation. As Paul wrote to the Romans, his Jewish brothers and sisters had...

**“pursued a law that would lead to righteousness” Romans 9:31**

But they had failed in their attempt to attain to God's standard of perfection. Although zealous for God, Paul said of them...

**“I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.”  
Romans 10:2-3**

Without exception around the world, people have devised systems of religion based on the “elementary principles” of their thinking that have only resulted in increasing slavery. We generate multitudes of ways in which we try to save ourselves but every one of them is doomed to fall short of God's standard of righteousness. But like hamsters on a wheel, we run and run and run and run, always striving, always hoping, but always fearing that we haven't, that we can't and that we won't. And we're right. But unless we find another way to make sense of life, we keep doing what the “elementary principles” tell us to do.

Joe Gibbs is a well known figure in American sports. As the coach of the NFL Washington Redskins, Gibbs led his team to three Super Bowl championships. But he is also well known for his ownership of a NASCAR racing team that has

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<sup>2</sup>John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians : Only One Way*, Originally Published Under Title: *Only One Way*. (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986], c1968), 105.



also won three championships on the racing circuit. But Gibbs is also well known for his commitment to Jesus Christ.

*In his new book, Game Plan For Life, Gibbs writes that, as a young man, he'd bought "into some of the biggest myths our modern society has to tell" about what is important in life – money, fame, career success. But he had a nagging feeling that "this life is not all there is." He writes, "I knew there was something deeper, something more important out there than me and my frantic quest to make something of myself."<sup>3</sup>*

On the night Jesus was born the world was in a frantic quest for meaning and hope, and many still are today. Many have their own plans and timetables for life. Many buy into the myths that captured Gibbs' heart for a time – money, fame and career. Many follow the spirits of religion. Many are enslaved by pleasure-seeking and self-fulfillment. Many seek to build a good name for themselves and to be remembered for their good works. All of it, no matter how well-motivated we might think we are, is really a frantic effort at self-salvation.

The only way off the treadmill of self-salvation is to take to heart what God did for us...

#### **“when the fullness of time had come” Galatians 4:4**

God had a plan to save us and his plan had a time table and the time tabled called for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago and to die on a hill just outside Jerusalem thirty-two years later. Between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, between the manger and the cross, God's work of salvation was accomplished by Jesus his Son.

During his ministry, Jesus was keenly aware of the moment in which he stood. His life was “the time” set by the Father for the salvation of the world. It was the time for mankind to put down their religion; it was the time to end their striving; it was the time to take the burdens off their backs; it was the time to break free from enslavement to religion or pleasure or power or wealth. It was the time to believe; it was the time for faith; it was the time for Jesus. Jesus proclaimed...

#### **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15**

The “fullness of time” wasn't completed by the birth of Jesus. Last week we looked at how Paul would be puzzled by our attempt to celebrate the birth of Jesus without also remembering his death and resurrection. The birth of Christ,

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<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Chuck Colson, “Game Plan for Life: Joe Gibbs Playbook for Success,” *Breakpoint*, Dec 4, 2009. ([www.breakpoint.org](http://www.breakpoint.org))



together with his death and resurrection, formed “the fullness of time” in God’s plan. And it couldn’t have come at a better time for us! Paul wrote...

**“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”  
Romans 5:6**

If we want freedom from self-salvation we need to give up our own timetables and agendas, and join with what God did in Jesus Christ “when the fullness of time had come....”

What did God do in Jesus Christ?

**First** of all, Paul tells us...

**“God sent forth his Son” Galatians 4:4**

You might have heard the old piece of wisdom that goes...

**“If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us  
an educator;  
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us  
a scientist;  
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us  
an economist;  
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us  
an entertainer;  
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us  
a Saviour.”**

It’s very true but if you don’t mind, I’d like to add a line or two...

**“If our greatest need had been a message, God would have sent us  
a prophet.  
But our greatest need was God, so God sent us His Son.”**

At the fullness of time all the prophecies and messages that God needed to give had been given. All the promises of forgiveness had been made. All the warnings about sin had been spoken. It wasn’t time for more religion. It was time for God himself. And so God came, in the person of his Son. It was time for Jesus to come and end our frantic efforts at self-salvation.

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17**



I have always enjoyed the scene toward the beginning of the classic Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, where the angels are discussing the need to send an angel down to earth to assist the movie's central character, George Bailey. We never see the angels, we're only shown flashing lights in the heavens that represent them and we hear their voices discussing the need of the poor human they've been assigned to help.

When I watch that scene I can't help but think about how the Father and the Son might have talked together at the "fullness of time" as Jesus prepared to come to earth. Did they sorrow over our desperate, fumbling attempts to save ourselves? Did they speak about our repeated rebellion and our refusal to believe the promises of mercy spoken through the prophets? I don't know if the Father and Son spoke together or not, but if we had been able to listen in, what we would have heard would have been words of love and compassion for us that would have brought tears to our eyes. The Apostle John wrote...

**"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." 1 John 4:9**

God sent his Son for you and me, not out of frustration with our failed attempts to save ourselves, but out of love and compassion. God sent his only Son into a world that would abuse and reject him. God sent his only Son, knowing that his mission would involve not only the humiliation of birth in a stable in Bethlehem, but also the horror of death by crucifixion on a hill outside Jerusalem. God sent his only Son ... because there was no other way to save you and me!

**Second**, Paul tells us that...

**"God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law" Galatians 4:4**

I want us to notice three things about Jesus' birth.

**First** of all, **Jesus' birth by a woman fulfilled the oldest prophecy about his coming.**

When Adam and Eve listened to the serpent's temptation in the Garden of Eden and ate from the forbidden fruit from the forbidden tree, God cursed them and the serpent. Adam and Eve were cursed with death and brokenness in all their relationships: with each other, with the created world and with God himself. But God had a special word of condemnation for the serpent, Satan (Rev 12:9), who had deceived Adam and Eve. The Lord said to Satan...

**"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."**  
**Genesis 3:15**



I want you to notice the connection between Christmas and Easter in this very first prophecy of Jesus' coming. The Lord's word about the "offspring" of the woman touches on Christmas and Jesus' birth. Jesus, "born of woman," was one of Eve's "offspring." But notice also that Easter's cross is present here. The language of "bruising" speaks of pain and battle. It was on the cross that Satan bruised Jesus' heel – he wounded him; but it was also by that same cross and his victory over death in his resurrection that Jesus "bruised" Satan's head – Jesus' wounded heel crushed and utterly defeated him!

**Secondly, Jesus' birth by a woman means that he fully shares our humanity.**

The expression "born of woman" is a simple, clear declaration that Jesus experienced our lives with its full range of experience. Paul doesn't say "born of Mary" or even "born of a virgin" because that would be too specific a reference. He doesn't want us to be limited in our thinking at this point. The expression "born of woman" is a simple, broad declaration of our common humanity. Job used it when he said...

**"Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not."  
Job 14:1-2**

Jesus fully shared our human existence. We're hungry, he was hungry; we're tempted, he was tempted; we cry, he cried; we're tired, he was weary. There's a song by Graham Kendrick that says...

**He walked where I walk  
He stood where I stand  
He felt what I feel  
He understands  
He knows my frailty  
Shared my humanity  
Tempted in every way  
Yet without sin**

**God with us, so close to us  
God with us, Immanuel!**

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[www.grahamkendrick.co.uk](http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk)

One of the reasons that we are so attracted to the Christmas story of Jesus' birth is that we can all relate so easily to it. We are mothers and father, aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins, brothers and sisters and we can all relate to a new child in the family. And so we can relate to Jesus, "born of woman." But



more importantly, Jesus can relate to us. We're drawn to celebrate his birth because God intended that Jesus' coming would enable us to draw close to him.

**Thirdly, Jesus' birth means that he is qualified to be humanity's full representative before God.**

Jesus doesn't just share a "bit" of humanity; he is so fully human that he represents us all! And what he does for us applies to us all. Jesus, born of woman, is the only one who can represent us before God.

**"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." 1 Timothy 2:5-6**

As fully human, **Jesus is able to serve as humanity's perfect substitute for sin.**

Jesus is able to stand in our place and "give himself" to pay the penalty that rightfully belongs to the whole human race. As "the man Jesus Christ," his death pays our penalty for sin. And as God's Son come in the flesh, Jesus' death has universal, eternal application for all human sin and every human sinner. He is humanity's perfect substitute for sin.

And secondly, as fully human, **Jesus is able to offer humanity's perfect obedience to God.**

The sin of Adam is our common human heritage but through faith in "the man Jesus Christ" we can gain access to an entirely new heritage, a heritage of righteousness. Paul wrote...

**"For as by the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's [Jesus'] obedience the many will be made righteous." Romans 5:19**

That is the essence of what Paul means when he says that Jesus was ...

**"born of woman, born under law, to redeem those who were under the law"**  
**Galatians 4:4-5**

Jesus, in his identity as the God-man, gives us two gifts when we come to him in faith and trust.

First, **as our sin substitute** who died in our place, Jesus wipes our sin record clean. All the wrath that rightfully belonged to us because of our many transgressions of God's Law was poured out upon Jesus when he "gave himself"



on the cross in our place. The first gift Jesus gives us is a clean record. **Our sin penalty had been paid in full by “the man Jesus Christ.”**

Secondly, **as our obedience substitute**, all of Jesus’ righteousness is credited to us. Our empty record is now filled with the righteousness of Jesus. The second gift Jesus gives us is the gift of a perfect record. When the Father examines the record of your life and mine, he doesn’t find the awful list of our sin; instead, he finds the wonderful record of Christ’s righteousness! **The righteousness of Christ has been credited to our account!**

We have been redeemed from our debt to the law and from our penalty for sin. We have been bought out from under the crushing weight of God’s law against sin and set free!

***We don’t need to save ourselves; Christ has done it all!***

But as they say on TV, “*wait, there’s more!*” -- with God there always is! Salvation is his gift that keeps on giving!

God doesn’t only rescues us from slavery, he makes slaves into sons! Jesus was born to redeem us...

**“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!’”**  
**Galatians 4:4-6**

God sent his Son to make us his sons. When Paul refers to believers in Jesus, whether male or female, as “sons” what he has in mind are the inheritance practices of the world in which he lived. In Paul’s day, only sons had inheritance rights. His point isn’t that we all become “God’s male children” but rather that we that we all receive “sonship” – the legal status of “son” in God’s family through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. We all receive, as the NIV puts it, “the full rights of sons.”

What are our “rights” as sons of God? There are many but this morning I want to highlight one in particular. Paul tells us that our “sonship” begins the moment the Spirit of God’s Son enters our heart and that moment is the moment we accept Christ as our redeemer from sin (Romans 8:9-16). And notice that Paul tells us that as the Spirit enters our hearts he is “crying”! He is “crying” out to the Father, to Abba!

In Jesus’ day, people spoke the Aramaic language. “Abba” was the common Aramaic word for “father” that a child would use. It’s an expression of intimacy and warmth. It assumes a family relationship and that is exactly what we are given through faith in Christ. We are given the full rights of the family.



*Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of evangelist Billy Graham and his wife, Ruth, was interviewed on CNN in December of 2001. She was asked about those who died on September 11th. If they were not saved by accepting Christ, the reporters wanted to know, would they go to heaven? She replied, a little tongue in cheek:*

*In my little book, Heaven: My Father's House I tell about people who want to visit my father's home in western North Carolina. They drive up the long drive and come to the gate. They knock on the gate and say: "Billy Graham, let us in. We've read your books; we've watched you on TV; we've written to you; and we want to come to your house."*

*And my father says: "Depart from me, I don't know you. You're not a member of my family, and you've not made any arrangements to come."*

*But when I drive up that same driveway and knock on the gate, I say, "Daddy, this is Anne, and I've come home." The gate is thrown right open, and I go inside, because I'm the father's child.*

*Jesus said that heaven is his Father's house... Because heaven is God's house, he has the right to decide who comes in and who stays out. He says he will welcome anyone inside his home, anyone can come, but they have to be born again into his family through faith in Jesus Christ.*

*That gives us a wonderful hope, that when the time comes—whether death comes as a thief in the night as it did for those in the [World Trade Center] towers, or comes as an angel of mercy after a long illness—we can be assured that at the end of the journey, we'll step right into our Father's arms. We'll be welcomed there, because we're our Father's child.<sup>4</sup>*

When the Spirit of Jesus enters our life, we are immediately given access into the Father's presence to pour out our hearts to him. But this access had a price. Our access to the Father is free, but it wasn't cheap! It came at the cost of the death of the Son of God.

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane...

**“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Mark 14:36**

The Spirit that empowered the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane is the very same Spirit the Father sends into our hearts to make us his very own! Think about this: at Christmas, God sent his Son into world, “born of woman,” so that Jesus could

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<sup>4</sup> © 2009 PreachingToday.com Anne Graham Lotz, "Finding Meaning in September 11," *cnn.com* (12-11-06); submitted by Ted de Haas, Bedford, Iowa



become one with us. But it was his death for us that enables us to receive the Spirit of sonship so that we can be one with Him! Again in Paul's Gospel, Christmas and Easter fold into one.

Philips Brooks' carol, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, that I mentioned at the beginning of the message, ends with these words...

**“O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend on us, we pray.  
Cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today.”**

Unless Jesus is born in us today, his birth in Bethlehem is merely an historical marker that has sentimental value but has no eternal consequence for us. Unless the Spirit of His Son has been born in our hearts, we are still outside the family of God.

How is it with you this Christmas? Are you still working at saving yourself or are you willing to accept God's Son as your perfect substitute and Saviour? Will you accept his invitation to trust in him and allow him to save you? Will you receive him as your Saviour and allow him to bring you home forever? Will you allow Christmas and Easter to meet in your heart?

Let's pray.

- Invitation to the Lord's Table
- Songs of Communion:
  - There Is A Redeemer
  - Joy Has Dawned
- The Lord's Table
- Benediction