

Text: Gal.4:4-7

Title: "Mission: Christmas" Pt.2

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your copy of the Scriptures with me to Galatians 4:4-7 (pg. 1153). Read text.

We're spending these Sundays in December talking about "Mission: Christmas" ... God's grand mission in sending His Son Jesus into the world. God was on a mission to save the world, and He sent His Son to be born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. Verse 4 says "God sent His Son..." And after Jesus died and rose again He ascended to heaven. And v.6 says that "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts..." Two times Paul uses the word "sent" ... commissioned or delegated. And it all started when Christ was born.

This is behind our mission as the Church. God sent Christ, and Christ sent us. It should become personal to us as we think about the opportunities for us to go on mission this coming year. The Missions Passport is still available in the Welcome Center. Also we're reminded of our 5000+ IMB missionaries around the world whose ministry we support through the Cooperative Program in our church budget, as well as through the World Missions Offering that we receive throughout the year. Remember them this time of the year in your praying and giving.

Now we need to know *what* happened, and the Gospel accounts give us those details of the birth of our Savior in Bethlehem. We also need to know *why* it happened, and the rest of the New Testament shows us the reason God did what He did.

I want you to think today about what God gave us at Christmas ... and it's more than you realize. This Christmas you must know that God has given to you ...

1. THE GIFT OF CHRIST (v.4)

v.4 - But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,

"when the time had fully come..." - God is in control of times and seasons. God knew exactly when His Son should enter history. God's timing is always "the fullness of time." Things don't go off early or late with God. He always acts in the "fullness of time." You need to know that.

And God timed the birth of Christ, the coming of Christ, so that the conditions would be perfect in every way. The world was providentially ready for the birth of the Savior. It's amazing how perfectly God timed the birth of Christ. Let me give you a little history:

OT HISTORY. Think about all the preparation that had been done before the Messiah would come. The entire OT is part of this preparation. The promises to Abraham pointed toward the coming of Christ. The requirements of the old covenant given through Moses all pointed to the One who would fulfill those requirements. All the prophecies of the Suffering Servant and the hopes of the Messianic King all pointed to Christ. Anticipation was great.

GREEKS. The Greeks helped to pave the way. When Alexander the Great conquered lands stretching from Greece to India he gave to that vast expanse a common language that would serve to communicate the truths of the Scriptures ... the Greek language, the language of the New Testament.

ROMANS. The Romans had helped pave the way. Stop to think about the world into which Jesus was born. The Romans had constructed an elaborate system of roads connecting various parts of the Roman Empire. Roman laws protected the rights of citizens, and Roman soldiers guarded the peace. While Christ could have been born at any time in history, like no other time the conditions were perfect for the message of redemption through Christ could spread throughout the world most rapidly.

JEWISH DISPERSION. The Jews, unknowingly, had a part in paving the way for the Messiah. Because of religious persecution the Jews were scattered all over the world of that day. And everywhere they went they established synagogues where they would gather to worship the God of the Hebrews and to practice the faith of the Jews. It was into these synagogues that the New Testament missionaries carrying the message of the coming of the Savior would go to preach the gospel and win converts.

SPIRITUAL CLIMATE. There was a darkness of paganism and legalism that lay heavy over the world. Greek and Roman mythology were losing their allure to the masses. It left people with a paganistic emptiness.

And so Christ's birth was no accident ... it was an appointment.

Can you imagine that moment in the halls of heaven when God looked at His Son and said, "Alright Son, it's time!"

v.4 - "God sent his son..." - Jesus came into this world with a mission. Jesus is "His Son." This points to the deity of Christ.

v.4 - "born of a woman..." - This tells us about the nature of Christ. It points to the genuine humanity of Christ. As fully human, Jesus experienced the weaknesses of humanity. And Christ did this without surrendering an ounce of His deity. One of our most important convictions as believers is that Christ was born of a virgin Mary so that He could be perfectly God and completely human.

v.4 - "born under law..." Why was this essential to the mission of the Savior? Jesus lived under the same standards and demands of the Law like everyone else. The difference is that He fully met the standards and demands of the law.

So we have been given this gift of Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Perhaps you have seen gifts that come and when you open them up, there's another gift inside, and inside that is another gift. Well that is the way it is with the Incarnation. So God has given us a gift in Christ. But when you open that gift there's another gift inside...

2. THE GIFT OF REDEMPTION (v.5a)

v.5a - "to redeem those under law..."

Redemption means to set someone or something free by paying a price. And that's what God did for us when He sent His Son to live, die and to live again. At the Cross God purchased us off of the slave market to sin. This means we have been forgiven.

Ephesians 1:7 - In (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...

What a wonderful gift forgiveness is! And by God's grace redemption and forgiveness have come to us through the gift of Christ. But there's another gift inside.

3. THE GIFT OF ADOPTION (v.5b)

v.5b - "that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Though the NIV doesn't use the word "adoption" in the original text this phrase "full rights of sons" literally means "adoption as sons or daughters."

ILLUSTRATION - When we think of adoption today we think of a child who was not previously part of the family, becoming part of that family through a legal action called adoption. Many of you have adopted children and some of you are adopted children. And what a great thing that is!

In ancient times some slave owners became very fond of certain slaves and appreciative of their talents. And often they would legally adopt them. This sometimes happened when the owner was childless and wanted an heir to whom he could pass his belongings. This is what happens to us when we receive Christ.

We are children of God by faith in Christ, born into God's family through regeneration. This is how we enter the family of God. But the way we enjoy the full privileges of being in God's family is through the process of adoption, of becoming an adult member of the family.

ILLUSTRATION - Some families I know have a special tradition at the various birthdays of their children. At particular birthdays a child is given a little more freedom. At one birthday they get the freedom to go to bed when they want. At another birthday they get the freedom of talking on the phone. At another birthday they get the freedom of staying out a little later. At another birthday that get the freedom to spend their money however they like. At another birthday they receive another gift of freedom. Gradually over time they, hopefully, assume the full freedom of an adult, and the responsibilities to go with that freedom or privilege.

In Christ, we receive the full privileges of a mature child the moment we receive Christ. The good news is that we do not have to wait for those privileges. While you may be a new Christian, just recently entering the family of God, you already have all the privileges of being in the family.

But there's another gift we receive in Christ.

4. THE GIFT OF HIS SPIRIT (v.6)

v.6 - Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Here's what happens:

God sends the Spirit of Christ into our hearts. (Note: Here's one of those places in the Bible where we see the concept of the Trinity ... Father, Son, Spirit.) The presence of the Holy Spirit in our heart is a tremendous gift. He is given by God to seal and signify our new relationship with God.

Romans 8:16 (NIV) - The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Turn back just a page or two to...

Ephesians 1:13 (Pew Bible pg. 1156) - And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

When we receive Christ as our Savior, we receive the Spirit who makes us new persons within. The Holy Spirit gives a witness to our hearts that we are in God's family.

v.6 - the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

A new relationship is born. "Abba" is the Aramaic word for father, but it was used by Jewish children in an affectionate way. It means "daddy." It describes the privilege of familiarity that you and I have as sons and daughters of God.

Some of you are thinking, "I could never have that kind of relationship with God." Many of us live with a kind of spiritual inferiority complex. It keeps us from approaching God boldly, accepting opportunities of ministry, and we avoid spiritual intimacy.

The challenge becomes are we going to believe what we tell ourselves about ourselves, or are we going to believe what God's Word tells us about ourselves.

This gift of a relationship with the Father is awesome. But there's another gift we receive in Christ.

5. THE GIFT OF AN INHERITANCE (v.7)

v.7 - So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

There's another aspect to this relationship. We are made heirs. God has graciously given us an inheritance. What is this inheritance?

This inheritance has to do with our place in God's eternal kingdom. It means that there's more to our redemption ahead in eternity. There's a glorious future awaiting those who are in Christ.

Remember that we studied this in I Peter.

1 Peter 1:3 (NIV) - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:4 (NIV) - and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,

Now when we think about an inheritance today we think of something that we have to wait for in the future. But this inheritance we have in Christ is ours now ... we can begin to draw upon that inheritance. We are rich in Christ. We have received every spiritual blessing in Christ.

CONCLUSION

J.I. Packer has been one of the most significant theologians of 20th and now the 21st century. I was reading recently about his conversion experience ... how Christ changed his life. He said that he knew that there was a party going on inside this house. He wondered what it would be like to be able to be a part of that celebration. But he was on the outside looking in, watching others experience and enjoy the party. Is that what you've been doing? Looking in from the outside, watching others experience and enjoy the Christian life, but not experiencing it and enjoying it yourself.

God invites you to the party. Don't stay on the outside looking in through the window.

If you're already a Christian, you belong in that party. You don't have to stand around wishing you could be part of it ... you are part of it. Start experiencing it ... start enjoying it.

ILLUSTRATION – It's amazing all that God gave us at Christmas. It's like several gifts wrapped up in one. There is the gift of an inheritance ... the gift of the Spirit ... the gift of adoption ... the gift of redemption. And all of this is found in Christ.