

Christmas **“God's Perfect Timing”** **Galatians 4:4-5”**

Well. Good evening. It is good to be with you this evening. I know for many of you here, this is probably one of your favorite services and definitely one of the favorite ways to spend this time of year getting together with God's people, not only to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior, but to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

You know, as I was preparing for this evening, I couldn't help but think of an old TV game show. It's probably had a couple of newer iterations along the way. So, some of you younger ones might also recognize the name of this game, but it was a game show in which contestants were pitted against each other to see who can name a tune the fastest with the least number of notes. It was called Name That Tune. Well, the reason I couldn't help but think of it was simply this. As I was studying, preparing, and looking at the passage before us this evening, I found Paul, who is known for being a fairly verbose writer. Sometimes his sentences pile up to 80 words per sentence. Suddenly, here is Paul giving us the entire Christmas story in less than 40 words.

If you would take your Bible, turn with me to Galatians 4. We'll be looking at just two verses in our time together Galatians 4:4-5. While you're turning there, I'm going to give you just a little bit of a context, because it helps to understand the verses by knowing what Paul is writing to the church in Galatia as a whole. Paul writes to these churches to help reinforce truths that they seem to, to sort of forgotten the influence of others, in particular the influence of the Judaizers who have come in their midst, has caused them to start to drift away from the truth of the gospel, rather than believing that salvation is by faith alone, through grace alone in Christ alone. Judaizers had come, had actually convinced true believers that they needed to add to their faith. Works well, Paul sets out, as he's writing the book of Galatians, and he begins to dispute that and to refute that completely, saying that if you want to claim that even one work is necessary to be added to the work of Jesus Christ in order for you to truly be saved, then you really have rejected the truth of Jesus Christ, and you must keep every law that was ever written in God's Word. If you're going to ever be in heaven. Well, Paul knew that no individual man could do that other than Jesus Christ. So as he starts to reason with the church of Galatia, he reasons from a firm foundation. And it begins in chapter four. He opens this chapter with an analogy of sorts an illustration. In his illustration he starts talking about a child who is an heir, but the child is still underage.

Therefore, the child does not own everything that the father has to give to him later on in life. Instead, this heir, who is a child, is being tutored by someone who is a slave himself. But a slave has authority over the child. The slave can tell the child what to do, what not to do. The slave even has the responsibility to discipline the child and to keep the child in line. If he gets out of line, it was his job to make sure he got right back and was toeing the line as he should. Well, Paul uses this illustration because the truth he really wants the Galatian church and even us to understand and to believe is that this illustration is really not about a child at all, but it's about how do we come to Jesus Christ?

How do we respond to the truth of the gospel if we wish to go back to the law? The law is just a schoolmaster to tutor us, to keep us in line, to force us to realize, I can't do this. but if we believe in Jesus Christ, then by grace we have turned to him for saving faith.

Then the law takes on an entirely different tone. It's something we no longer have to do in order to be right with God. But it is something that we can do because the Holy Spirit within this becomes the power by which we can do it. Because we have been made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. So Paul wants the Galatian believers to understand that they're no longer slaves, but they are mature, joint heirs with Jesus Christ and in line for all the blessings that he gives.

So look with me now at these verses...

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons hear in less than 40 words. Paul has just described God's perfect timing in sending his son, and then he declared the fact of Jesus birth before going on to give us God's purpose in sending his son.

Take a second and look with me, just briefly at God's perfect timing in sending his Son, Paul begins, he wants us to understand this important truth. He points that there was an exact time that God sent His Son by using the words, when the fullness of time had come. See, the timing of Jesus birth was no accident. Rather, it was the precise, preset, predetermined time that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit had chosen before creation in itself.

Jesus birth took place according to the perfect timing of God. But what was it about this time that made it the time, according to God's divine plan, in which he would send his son? Well, this time was marked in Israel as a time of waiting. Israel had long been under the oppression of Rome, and as they are looking for the Messiah to come, which, by the way, advent is that time of waiting and looking for the Messiah.

Waiting is a key characteristic of what advent is all about. Israel is waiting. They're longing. They're looking. They are hoping. They are studying the scriptures over more and more. They are turning to the scrolls of Isaiah until the words of the other prophets, because they don't want to miss out on the reality that the Messiah might come, even in their lifetime.

So it was a time of waiting throughout Israel. But what else set this time apart is the time that God had ordained to send Jesus Christ, His Son. Well, historians have described this era under the rule of Roman Empire as the *pax Romano*. The *pax Romano* was simply a time that meant a time of relative peace.

For over 200 years now, Rome had been ruling the then known World. They had established a governmental system that had given stability. One government ruled, one government protected, one government got you back in line if you got out of line. Overall, it was marked as a time of relative peace. And this stability that the Roman Empire had had created also created with it a time of affluence.

It was an affluent culture. People could trade freely. They could go with the Roman roads and trade from city to city. But even from country to country, region to region. It was also a time of cultural freedom, a time in which men could easily travel and share ideas or philosophies with others, so people could hear and start to follow the different teachings of the day.

It was also a time of open communication. Greek had become the language of the day, and I, for one, appreciate Greek much more than I appreciate Hebrew. I understand Greek a little bit better than I do

Hebrew, mainly because it makes sense even with some English words. But Greek, being the language of the day, became the language of commerce.

It became the language of government and politics. It was used by and large and Greek as a language is fairly well, defined. It's a precise language. I find it intriguing, even in studying the languages, that when you study Hebrew, the Old Testament is more of an earthly language, that you have to understand the context of the passage in order to really get the right translation.

If you're translated from the original language. Yet when it was time for God to send his own Greek was the language of the day, a highly inflected language in which the rules for Greek were really rules most of the time, because God was being precise in what he was communicating to mankind. This was the time in which the truth of God, however obscured, was still being talked.

Jewish synagogues existed practically everywhere, and they were teaching. There is but one God. Not many. But yet it was also a time in which the world had sunk to low levels of depravity so low that, according to James Montgomery, boys, even pagans cried out against their times, and spiritual hunger was evident everywhere, making this the perfect time in which the coming of Christ would take place.

So everything was in place according to God's perfect decree. It was time for God out of his infinite redeeming love. It was time for him to step out of eternity past, into eternity present, to dwell on earth with sinful men. So Paul now turns our attention to the fact of Jesus words after this opening declaration, when the fullness of time had come, he now says, God sent forth his son, born of a woman born under the law.

Literally, this phrase could be better translated. God dispatched his son on a special mission. The second person of the Trinity, who existed forever in his deity, humbled himself, not counting equality with God. A thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Christ came out of the comfort zone of heaven into the cruel reality of fallen humanity. He was born of a woman, not of a man, pointing to the fact that when he added humanity to his divinity, his demand, his humanity was a humanity not like any other, though he was fully God and fully man. He was fully man, yet without sin, because he didn't wasn't conceived by natural generation. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary and then Mary giving birth to Jesus, the baby God's son.

So here Paul, with veiled language has just helped us see, God's perfect timing also meant the white people had to be in place. Mary is described as being a humble young maiden of royal descent. She had great faith and she willingly submitted to God's extraordinary plan. She believed the angel Gabriel when he pronounced, behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and he will be the Messiah. And her response simply was the bond slave of the Lord. Behold this bond slave, may it be done to me according to your word. Joseph. Likewise a descendant of David was a great man of faith and faith. He was willing to go against common sense when Gabriel came and assured him that Mary was pregnant with child, not because she'd been with another man, but because of a supernatural act of God. He took God at His word. Later, he would travel with his wife, who was very pregnant at the time, on a journey of nearly 100 miles, and they would travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and this would end up fulfilling one of the scores of Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus birth. And while neither Joseph nor Mary could possibly know everything that they would that would be required of them as they became the parents to the Son of God, they did know that the child which Mary held in her arms was the promised Messiah, the one who would save his people from their sins.

I think each Christmas it is essential for us to keep that truth central to our thinking. God the son took on flesh and he came to mankind as a baby, born to humble parents rather than in some palatial palace of a king. They laid him in a lowly manger rather than placing him on a bed of ease. And all of this was but part of his humiliation.

And yet I find that oftentimes this is the part of God's incarnation that humbles me the most. I love when I drive, and I see a manger on someone's porch or out in their yard as part of their Christmas decoration, because I believe they want to get the main point, the main point, and keep it focused. Every Christmas at our house. We've done this now for over 30 years. Pam's dad years ago made a manger for us out of wood. A small manger. And every Christmas when our children all are gathered around, rather than putting the presents under a tree, we set the manger in the middle of the room and all the presents are around the manger. Then one of the grandchildren gets to choose a baby doll. Yes, it's just a representation, but they get to choose a baby doll to put in the manger on Christmas Eve night to represent the birth of baby Jesus. We do this with hopes of two things. We want them to see that the greatest gift of all is not the presents around the manger, but the one represent it in the manger itself. And we also want them to understand that whatever the gifts are, whether they're great or small, we have simply as a gift from God and His gracious hand. Well, Paul tells us Jesus was born not only of a woman, but also he was born under the law. In his humanity, Jesus was subject to every one of God's laws and Jesus himself.

Throughout his public ministry, he would teach. I did not come to do away with the law, but I came to fulfill it. All of God's righteous demands were commands which fully applied to Jesus in his humanity. Had he failed to obey even one of the least, as we might think of them, one of the least of the commands of God, he would have been disqualified from being our substitute.

But Jesus fully met the law's righteous demands through his complete submission to the father. Through his absolute obedience to all the law's demands, he did what God required of us. As one author put it. To paraphrase him, he was duty bound with the duty to which he voluntarily bound himself to satisfy the laws, demand of perfect obedience, and vicariously to bear the lost penalty against sin on our behalf. So Paul now is ready with his closing words of these verses, to now reveal to us God's purpose in sending the son. When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law y to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.

See, in God's perfect timing, Jesus was born to die, so that he might redeem or buy back with his own blood. All who by faith were turned to him. He came to save those who, being under the law themselves, had no ability to keep it. It's impossible for us. All you have to do is look at the Ten Commandments.

Look at the first commandment. You shall have no other God before me. Anyone here pulled that one off? We cannot in our own power obey the law of God. But Jesus obeyed it for us. Jesus came, of course, to redeem sinners, but he came for more than just redemption for us. He came that we might be redeemed, that we might be forgiven, that we might be restored to right standing with God and know peace with God through Jesus Christ the Son.

But he came also that we might get the outcome of his redeeming love. We might be called children of God. I love this concept of adoption. He goes back to this same analogy that he started this chapter with, talking about the heir and the adoption. See, in Roman custom of the day, if a Roman master did not have a natural born son, when a slave in his house that was trustworthy as an adult man was that age,

he would pick that slave to become his son, and that son, being fully adopted, would receive the full rights of sonship belonging to the house, and he would become the heir to everything. The master owned. Again, Paul is trying to help us understand exactly what Jesus has done for us. Again, this imagery of adoption, I think, is so, incredible for us to comprehend. It teaches us about God's redeeming love. It helps us to understand that God chooses those who don't belong, and he makes them belong fully to his own family. He takes those who are in bondage to sin, and he buys them back with his own blood. He removes their filthy garments and then puts his righteous robes on them, his royal robes on them instead.

And then repeatedly, he declares over us, so you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God. And this Christmas Eve is my hope and my prayer, that we each have been reminded that God's timing always is perfect. There are times that we bump up against things in our lives, and that really is difficult to believe, isn't it?

But God's timing is perfect always, no matter what it is that we're facing, whatever it is that you may be facing, even tonight, do you believe that God's timing is right for you? You know, it's possible someone's here tonight. Maybe it's a guest or maybe even as a long time member of our world. But you're here tonight, and you really don't have the peace with God that passes understanding.

That comes only by faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps his timing tonight is perfect for you, that you would understand who he is and what he did, so that you could be a son and not a slave. And perhaps you're here as a believer. You already are part of God's family, but yet the difficulties you are facing. Or maybe it's the joys, maybe the successes.

Maybe it's the crazy aunt on your father's side that's going to be sitting across the table from you at tomorrow's Christmas dinner that you can't get along with. But God is using all things, and his timing is perfect to soften our hearts, to draw us close to him, to make us see the necessity of Christmas every day that God interrupts our lives to come to us, to rescue us, to take all of our lives and turn it into something that glorifies him.

Father, we ask that you would increasingly do that for us. Soften our hearts, O Lord, and let us know that through the trials and the success and the joys that we face, that you are at work always. Sometimes we see how you're working. Other times it's less clear. But let us still trust you and follow you, knowing that the trials would do nothing but help purify us as purified gold. And then, Lord, as we trust you, may we honor you, may we glorify you, and may we praise Jesus name. It's in Jesus name. We ask this. Amen.