

December 11, 2005

“The Perfect Time”
Galatians 4:1-7

FCF: Need to consider (examine) this salvation carefully

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because God has sent forth His Son at the perfect time,
(anchor) we must now no longer live as slaves but as sons.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes it's just too much to ask someone not to peek. Sometimes you've just got to know what's hidden inside the wrapping paper. Now you've got to be careful. Note how it's positioned. You need to put it back as it was. Examine the paper. There may be clues. Smell the box. Squeeze it gently. Feel for foam inserts. It might mean electronics. Take a measurement. Give it a slight shake. If worse comes to worse, unwrap it. But don't rip the tape. Cut it and then slide the box back into the paper. Tape it over or use glue if you have to. And, then, when they give it to you, act surprised.

Hey, sometimes you need to know what you've been given! Now, I'm not really recommending any of that. But I will say this. If Jesus is the most perfect gift we could be given, if His Father has sent Him to us in our deepest need – if all that be true – then we need to know what it is we've been given. We talked about His coming to the perfect place last week. This morning we're going to look at His coming at the perfect time.

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 4:1-7

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Children have a way of testing their parents. Any of you who are parents know this all too well. I don't mean the testing of our patience. What I have in mind is a testing of our love. Sometimes without even realizing what they are doing, children wound in some way just to see if they will be loved, just to see what sort of response they will get. And for parents who do indeed love their children, this sort of thing brings anguish to their hearts – when their children refuse to rest in their great affection. The child wants to know he is loved. The parent wants him to know he is loved as well.

There's something of that dynamic between God and His children. We want to know we are loved. Whether we know it or believe it, we were made for that love, that relationship with Him. Our lives reflect that desire in so many ways. And He wants His children to know that He does indeed love us. Such is what we see in Galatians 4.

There was a time when we were slaves. But no longer. Now we are adopted sons – sons and daughters. Once we were in bondage. But now no more. The time has come to leave those old ways behind. Why? What reason does Paul give? (**READ Galatians 4:4-5**) Paul is saying that we must no longer live as slaves but as sons and daughters. A sending has taken place – a sending forth “*in the fullness of time*”. Now this expression, “the fullness of time,” is not what you think your Day Timer or Palm Pilot is suffering from. No, what Paul is referring to here is the time when all was ready, when the waiting was over and the preparations complete. It was then this sending took place. And it having happened, we must then no longer live as slaves but as sons and daughters.

But let's unpack this expression a bit more. Let's look at it, think it through, and wrestle with its implications. It's really quite stirring to consider.

I. WHEN HEAVEN WAS READY

The first observation we should make is that clearly this sending takes place at a time set by God. The sending comes about through a setting. Why is that important?

A) *The Setting*

1. The Father's right explained

Perhaps it would be helpful to understand something of the background to this image. Picture a boy – the heir to a great estate. One day it will all be his. But not yet. Until he is of age, he is under the authority of a guardian, no better than a slave. And he will remain in that state “*until the date set by his father.*” So it is here. God has set a time.

2. The Father's right exercised

Long before Jesus' birth, God was preparing the way. We see it unfolding over the centuries of what is so rightly called “redemptive history.” We see it reflected in the genealogies so carefully recorded – especially in Matthew and Luke's Gospels. We see it in the words describing the ministry of John the Baptist (**READ Mark 1:2-4**). God had set a time and was preparing the world for what was eventually to come – a sending.

B) The Sending

1. Of the Son

A sending of His Son (**READ Galatians 4:4**). And why was He sent? First, for our atonement (**READ Galatians 4:5a**). When God sent His Son, He sent Him to die – to redeem us from the curse of the law. But as though that wasn't enough, God sent His Son not only for our atonement but for our adoption as well (**READ Galatians 4:5**). God could have stopped at setting us free but He has gone further and set us in His family.

2. Of the Spirit

But Paul speaks here of a double sending – first, a sending of His Son to accomplish our salvation, to establish us as His sons. But then He sent His Spirit to apply our salvation, to assure us that we are His sons (**READ Galatians 4:6**).

Clearly, in this setting and sending, we see how deep is the Father's love for us and how deeply He wants us to know we are loved. He wants us to know He loves us.

Illustration:

I read recently of a Parisian painter in 1875 named Marcel de le Clure writing a love letter to his beloved. That may not seem so strange. But this is. In the love letter he had three words repeated 1,800,000 times, “*I Love You...I Love You...I Love You.*” No one knows how she responded, so I suppose that's an open question. But here's another which you can answer. What would you do differently if you knew God loved you? What would you do if you knew, really knew, that He loved you, no ifs, ands or buts?

Application:

Listen. There is a time for all things. And God is the “setter” of the times. There was a time for these sendings. And it has come. Now seeing the significance of all that, seeing the depths of God's love for us, what will you do differently knowing God really loves you? He set a time. He sent His Son to make you His own. He has sent His Spirit to let you know. One author I read described the Spirit's work in our hearts as “*the Divine Whisper.*” He loves you. Now what will you do differently? What will occupy your thoughts? Yourself or Him? Recognizing His commitment to you, what needs will you be focused upon? Yours or others? What will you tell those around you? How much effort is worth expending to let them know where beggars can find food? He loves you. He loves you. He's made you His own. Now what will you do differently?

II. WHEN THE WORLD WAS READY

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son. But there's another part to this fullness of time – the readiness not only of heaven but of the world.

A) World Scene

Think with me of the world scene at the time of Jesus' birth. The mission of the early church was extraordinarily successful. Christianity spread rapidly – in just a few short decades – over a vast area. How? The fullness of time. God had prepared the way.

1. Roman power

Think of the “Pax Romana” – the Roman Peace. A time of political stability, the rule of law, freedom and safety of travel – all vital things for missionary endeavors. Even more, the state religion fostered by the Romans created dissatisfaction all over the empire.

2. Greek culture

Think of the Greek language – the language of the empire – much like English today except even more so in terms of proportions. It was a language with well developed philosophical concepts with ready made theological terminology. “The fullness of time.”

Illustration:

It reminds me of Shasta's reflection towards the end of C. S. Lewis' The Horse and His Boy as he thinks back to all the twists and turns in recent events. Speaking of Aslan, the great lion, he wisely notes, “*He seems to be at the back of all the stories.*”

B) *Weary Hearts*

But we see this readiness in the world not only upon a global stage but in the hearts of the characters on the stage. Here too we see “the fullness of time” having come.

1. Gentile idolatry

Clearly, for all of the energies given over to the false worship of that period, there was a strong sense of discontentment. Paul alludes to this (**READ Galatians 4:9**). The old gods were losing their hold on the common people and they were looking for something real and satisfying. The gods were immoral and unjust. They had become wearisome. So much so that cultic “mystery religions” had sprung up – meeting a need but ultimately unsatisfying. At the same time, there was a move towards monotheism in the writings of the philosophers. And all the while, there was the presence of Judaism seemingly everywhere. And it had its attractions – a high moral code, certainty of truth, freedom of religion, accessible worship. All these things paving the way, paving the way.

2. Jewish law

Yet a readiness within Judaism as well. Look again at verse 3 (**READ Galatians 4:3**). Note the “we.” “*We...were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*” In verse 9, he speaks of the Galatians, prior to their coming to faith in Christ, being enslaved to these things. But here it is the Jews – or possibly Jews and Gentiles. It's the same either way. The point? Paul is saying any faith, any worship, any religion outside of Christ is essentially the same – man invented, ceremonially driven, and under Satan's control. Now this would have been absolutely shocking to any Jew of that time. But Paul is touching on the longing within the Jewish heart as well. The law of Moses had, in a sense, done its job in preparing the people for the Messiah. And they were now longing.

Illustration:

Remember the first line to “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (**READ first stanza**):

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 ever lasting Light;

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

The hopes and fears of all the years had been building up – like weather fronts coming in from all directions, building and building. The fullness of time had come.

Application:

This should bring forth awe and wonder. Our God, our Savior, is the Lord, the Author of history – the One behind all the stories. He knows all the timing. He is behind all the timing. Can we not then trust His timing? Even in the things of today?

But more than that, as we look at how He was orchestrating all human history to bring these things about, as we see how He was preparing the world, Jew and Gentile, focusing their longing, driving their seeking, can we not see He is the answer to all our seeking? Can we not see that our relief and rest must ultimately be in Him? The first line of “O Holy Night” is worth hearing as well ([READ first stanza](#)):

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; it is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary soul rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born!
O night, O holy night, O night divine!*

CONCLUSION:

Back to where we started. We no longer need to live as slaves. We must no longer live as slaves. For the Father set the time, sent the Son to accomplish our redemption, and sent the Spirit to apply it to our hearts. And now we are sons – sons and daughters no longer in bondage but free – free from condemnation by the law, free to live lives in gratitude shaped by the law. Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Let earth receive her King! Let heaven and nature sing! We are no longer slaves but sons!

Do we need to hear this? Oh, how we need to hear this – again and again! It doesn't matter if you're the most pagan, immoral, profligate sinner or the most spiritual, religious, upright one in the room. We need to hear this – again and again. The church in Galatia did. People all through human history have. And so do we. Think of Charles Wesley for a moment – a man once in bondage to his religion ([READ Ryken, p.164](#)):

Before Wesley came to Christ, he was a better Christian than most believers, at least as far as his outward behavior was concerned. During his days at Oxford he helped establish a group called “the Holy Club.” The students in the club went to church, studied their Bibles, fasted, and prayed. They went into the prisons and workhouses to do evangelism. They provided food, clothing, and education for the poor children of the city. Yet all the while they were spiritual orphans, in bondage to their own religiosity. It was not until years later that Wesley finally came to “trust in Christ only for salvation.” As he looked back on everything he had done for God before he came to Christ, he wrote, “I had even then the faith of a servant, though not of a son.”

We cannot rest on the laurels of our lives, on the claims of our righteousness. There's a choice before us – bondage or freedom, the faith of a servant or the faith of a son, trusting in ourselves or trusting in the One who was sent to us in the fullness of time.

“*Oh, but what can I do?*” you ask. Go to the Lord, the Physician of Souls, and let Him search you out with His diagnostic questions. “*My child, do you recognize that the right is mine and mine alone to set the times of your days? And will you trust the setting I have for you?*” Start there. And go further. “*My child, why do you think I sent forth my Son in the fullness of time? To teach you, to help you, to encourage you, or to save you? Do you not know my setting and sending is all you have and all you need? Do you not know who and whose you are? Why do you live as slave when you are a son?*”

Christmas brings the greatest history lesson of all, of the greatest thing imaginable coming about in the perfect time ([READ Galatians 4:4-5](#)). Joy to the world.

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