

Text: Gal. 4:4-5

Title: "What Christmas is"

Time: 12/22/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Time is a precious possession, and we become very much aware of that truth this time of year. Last Monday I flew to Baltimore to retrieve my mother-in-law's car. It was a tightly planned schedule. I would arrive at noon, Kara would pick me up and bring me to the car at her home, and I would drive home. Well, at 1pm my ringing phone finally woke my hard-working daughter out of a sound sleep, and she picked me up two hours late. I thought I might miss men's prayer time the next morning because the timing of our plan was off now. You know what that is like. Time is precious, we are creatures limited by time, and our schedules become very full this time of year.

Our passage begins, "When the fullness of the time was come." What that means is simply this – what we read about here happened right on schedule. Paul may have understood that truth from the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-26. The Lord had a very specific schedule laid out for the appearance of Messiah the Prince, Jesus Christ. So the "fullness of the time" means at least that. It was the time indicated by the prophecy of Daniel 9.

But there is another sense in which that time was full or optimal for the coming of Christ and the birth of His church. The Greek culture of the first century provided a language, Koine Greek, that was wonderfully suited for the exact communication of the truth of God's Word in the New Testament Scriptures. The language was universally understood throughout the Roman Empire.

The *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace, which began with the ascension of Augustus in 27 BC and ended with the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD, provided a unique time in world history. World-wide law and order prevailed, tremendous roads were available, and the empire enjoyed peace from the threat of foreign wars, all of which were conditions favorable to the spread of Christianity.

In addition, the first century enjoyed a restored temple worship in Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt, especially by Herod, and so this shell of restored Judaism, though not accepting of Christ for the most part, did provide Jesus with the opportunity to be obedient to the law of God as our sinless sacrifice. That law required frequenting the temple. This is part of what Paul refers to when he tells us that Christ was “made under the law” (v. 4b).

And so we see some reasons the apostle Paul describes the Christmas miracle with the words, *the fullness* of time. I want us to focus on four other wonderful truths he tells us in these two brief verses that define for us exactly what Christmas is.

I. Christmas is real (v. 4a).

Illustration: Christmas is a wonderful season of classic stories and legends. Santa Claus, Rudolf, George Bailey, Frosty the Snowman, Ebenezer Scrooge, and even the Grinch are delightful tales we tell at this time of the year.

I saw a special that described how the classic, “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” was developed. Charles Schultz insisted on the part of that show where Linus recites the Luke 2 Christmas account as the true meaning of Christmas. His producers were not sure that CBS would go for that, and

they did not, but they were so far behind schedule that the producers did not have time to excise that part of the film.

Application: Well, in all the stories about Christmas, there is something different about the story in Luke 2, is there not? It is the true meaning of Christmas, in part, because it is the one story that recounts what really happened in history. When Paul describes the events of the birth of Christ, he speaks of something that happened *in time* (“When the fullness of *time* was come”). Time is real. It is the fourth physical dimension of our space-time continuum. It can be used in scientific formulas and experiments.

The nativity scene does not depict just another imaginary Christmas legend or tale that never happened; no, as the apostle Paul mentions about twenty years after the death of Christ in this passage, the birth of Christ happened in time. It was a real historic event. Luke is pretty emphatic in this regard about everything he writes in his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). He has this emphasis for a reason – what we believe is based on something real, not imaginary, something that actually happened, not something we invent for ourselves. And so when Luke tells us in chapter 2, “And it came to pass in those days,” we can be sure that it did indeed happen just as he describes.

II. Christmas is a kept promise (v. 4, “When the fullness of the time *was come*” - God’s people saw it coming).

Illustration: One of the challenges of my Christmas schedule is the start of recreational basketball in our town. Each year, I get all these wonderful plans set, and then at the last minute the basketball people finally get a schedule put together and everything is thrown into chaos and confusion.

Application: Well, Mary and Joseph certainly must have experienced the distress of chaos and confusion in those experiences described for us in the Christmas accounts. There was a pregnancy that caused some chaos for Joseph. And then there was the decree from Caesar that they were to be uprooted and sent to Bethlehem for the Roman registration for taxes. There was the donkey and no room at the inn.

Paul looks back on these things with an ability to see what Mary and Joseph must have had difficulty seeing at the time. Jesus was born in fulfillment of God's ancient promise to provide a descendant of Eve and Seth and Shem and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Judah and David, who would be born to save His people from their sins. Christmas is the arrival of the keeping of a promise.

Old Testament prophecies are promises that tell us when this birth would happen, as we saw from Daniel 9, and they also told us where: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2).

And so we read from Luke: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee ..." (recite Luke 2:4-5). In all of the chaos that was that first Christmas for Joseph and Mary, God's promise was being kept. We need to see His providential care in our lives, even during times of difficulty and hardship, and trust that God's promises to care for us are being fulfilled right on time.

III. Christmas is a miracle (v. 4b, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman").

Illustration: I am thankful that we are not looking for a hotel room in the midst of a state-wide power outage this year. We have celebrated parts of the Christmas season that way before, and each time we were turned away from a hotel, we learned a little about what it is like to be told that there is no room in the inn.

Application: In the case of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, of course, they ended up in a stable with animals, and after giving birth Mary laid Jesus in a manger, a feeding trough. As Paul looked back on these events he wrote these amazing words: "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman." The baby laid in that manger was God's Son sent by God.

He preexisted his human nature. We all got our start in our mother's womb, but not this One. He never had a start. He is the eternal Son of God who was sent by God to become man, and this happened through an amazing miracle - He was made *of a woman*; not of a man and a woman, but of a woman. Isaiah explained the miracle of Christmas hundreds of years before that night in Bethlehem, "Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." *Immanuel* means *God with us*. That is the miracle. God became man to be with us and to save us from our sins. And so Luke wrote: "And so it was, that while they were there. . ." (recite Luke 2:6-7).

IV. Christmas is a solution (v. 4b-5, "made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons").

Illustration: It is one thing to know that something has happened, but another to know why. I do that sometimes at home. I will go upstairs for some reason, get up there, and

forget why it is that I went upstairs. I know that I went upstairs, but I forget why.

Application: That seems to be the problem with the typical person's approach to even the true story of Christmas. We remember that it happened, but we cannot remember why. Why did God send forth His Son, made of a woman? The reason is summarized by the phrase, "to redeem them who were under the law."

Man has a problem called *God's law*.

God's law says, "You shall worship the Lord thy God," and we fail to worship Him.

God's law says, "You shall not make up your own gods to worship," and we make up our own gods to worship.

God's law says, "You shall not take God's name in vain," and we treat the name of the Lord with disrespect in our cursing and levity. We treat the assembly times in His name as optional and bothersome.

God's law says, "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy," and we forget that Sunday is the Lord's Day.

God's law says, "Honor thy father and thy mother," and we disobey and dishonor them.

God's law says, "Do not commit murder," and we wish people harm with hatred and malice.

God's law says, "Do not commit adultery," and we lust after those who are not our spouse.

God's law says, "Do not steal," and we steal.

God's law says, "Do not lie," and we lie.

God's law says, "Do not covet," and we constantly wrestle with contentment always wishing for something better.

And God's law says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

There is a penalty for breaking God's law - eternal death.

That is our problem. We are sinners condemned by the law

of God. But Christmas is the solution: “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Jesus Christ obeyed the law for us, and then He suffered the penalty of our violation of the law in our place. He offers freely to us His righteousness and His eternal life, the adoption of sons, having taken our sin and our death upon Himself. It is as though the condemned criminal in the court of heaven becomes the son of the Judge and Law-giver rather than going to jail. That is the solution of Christmas.

How do we make it ours? Very simply, we *receive* (v. 5). The solution is freely offered to all. The angles put it this way to the shepherds, “And there were in the same country, shepherds. . .” (recite Luke 2:8-11). Unto you is born a Savior. He can save you from your sins if you receive Him by faith. The Apostle John put the solution of Christmas this way: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Conclusion: Do you need the solution of Christmas this morning? Do you need a Savior from your sin? Do you see the problem, that you are condemned as a sinner before the law of God? Will you trust Christ and look to Him for salvation from sin today?

Illustration: On Christmas morning we are all going to be asked to open some gifts. None of us would think to insult our kind family members by refusing to open a gift freely given for our good this way. But what must the Lord do with the one who refuses the gift of eternal life, redemption from under the law of God, and the adoption of sons in

Christ, when it cost Him so much to offer that gift? Fail to open that gift, and the doom of the law's condemnation and penalty will remain, and it will remain for failure to believe (John 3:17-18). There is no other solution but the Christmas solution, the Savior born to die for our sins and risen bodily from the tomb for our life. Receive Him today, and in Him redemption from the law and the adoption of sons.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*