

What Did You Get for Christmas?

Scripture Text: Galatians 4:4-7

Introduction

Merry Christmas...again! Many of us celebrated Christmas last week with family and friends. You may have seen people you have not seen in a while, maybe since last Christmas. You probably exchanged gifts. You may have eaten more food than you should have eaten. What effect did Christmas have on you? Were you stressed? Are you relieved that it is over? What did Christmas really mean to you? Was it about the gifts, the food, and the time spent with family? I think if we are honest, we would say that Christmas is really about some or all of those things. As much as we try to say that "Jesus is the Reason for the Season", the real reason most people celebrate Christmas is to exchange gifts and to spend time with family. Those things are good to do, but what is the real Gift of Christmas? What should Christmas really be about?

Christmas is a special time of year that captivates the whole world. Christmas is a time Christians remember and celebrate God's Gift to mankind. God gave the most wonderful Gift to the world that could not be purchased in any mall or department store. Christmas is the celebration of the event that set the Heavenly Host to declare "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14) Christmas reminds us that at a specific time and at a specific place, a specific Christmas gift, the Gift of all gifts, was given for a very specific reason. That Gift was our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. What does this Christmas Gift really mean for us? What does it mean for God to have sent His only begotten Son to the world? The passage today reveals several things about God's great Gift to us - His Son, Jesus.

The Gift of Christmas Was Timely

Have you ever waited for something and thought it would never come? Have you ever received something at just the right time? Maybe it was a paycheck that came just in time to pay a bill. Maybe it was a gift that came just in time for your birthday. Maybe it was a message you received at just the right time. The same is true for God. God is an on time God. He is never late, though we may wish He would hurry up sometimes. We may wish for God to act on our schedule. God is not required to act according to when we think He should, but that does not mean that He does not act. God has a plan. He has had a plan since the beginning of time. When the time was right, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to come and be the Savior of the world. Look at the following.

Galatians 4:4 *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...*

Most English translations say something like "when the fullness of time came." The New Living Translation renders it like this: "But when the right time came, God sent his Son." At the right moment in history, God sent His only begotten Son to the world. Scholars say that there were several factors that made this such a suitable time for Jesus to

come and for the Gospel to flourish. There was relative peace throughout the Roman Empire. There was an excellent road system that made it easier to travel from city to city. There was also one common language across the empire that made it easier for people to communicate. Because of these factors, the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread across the known world in ways that would not have been possible in earlier times.

These are all important factors for Jesus to be born and for the Gospel to be proclaimed at just the right time. But the most important factor is that God determined that this was the right time to send His only Son. God alone determined when the time was right to send His Son, Jesus, to the world. He had endured mankind's sin with much patience and had sent the *long expected* Savior of mankind Who was promised all the way back in Genesis chapter three. What prophets had foretold centuries before, what Israel had longed to see for so long, came wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. So significant was the birth of Christ in human history that the Church later divided time by this event into a.d. and b.c. The birth of Christ came at just the right time and according to God's sovereign plan.

The Gift of Christmas Is Redemption

One of the lessons that Scripture teaches us is that we are in debt. How many of you like to be indebted to someone else? Most of us do not like it. Debt enslaves the borrower to the lender. Debt puts a person in bondage to the one he or she owes. We are also spiritually indebted — enslaved by sin and unable to purchase our freedom. We are like the unforgiving servant who owed his master ten thousand talents, billions of dollars today, with no possible way to pay his debt. He was to be imprisoned with no hope of release, but only by the mercy of his master was he forgiven his debt (Matthew 18:21-35). Likewise, we are slaves to the righteous requirements of God's Law. None of us is capable of perfectly following the Law, which is why God sent His Son, Jesus Christ — to free us from the bondage of sin and the Law. Look at verses four and five.

Galatians 4:4–5 ⁴ *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,* ⁵ *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

The word “redeem” means to *purchase* or to *buy* one's freedom. Another way to say this is that God sent His only Son to buy our freedom because we were slaves to sin and the Law. More than that, we did not have the means to purchase our own freedom. We could not do enough good works, or obey enough of God's Law to earn our spiritual freedom. None of us goes to heaven based on our own merit. We have a debt we cannot repay. So, at the right time, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to set us free. Jesus came to purchase our freedom. He did that on the cross of Calvary when our sin was nailed to His cross. He took on our sin and God's wrath so that we would be free from the guilt of sin and the requirements of the Law. As a result, we are freed from our debt to sin and the Law. We are like the servant who was forgiven an enormous debt he could not pay. Christ has purchased our freedom that we could not pay ourselves.

How can we be enslaved? One way is through legalism. This is trying to earn favor with God by trying to be righteous through your own actions. Stop doing it. You will fail. Trust in Jesus as the full payment for your sin and the fulfillment of the righteous demands of the Law. Another way is by living like those who are enslaved. While we cannot free ourselves or meet the righteous demands of the Law by our own actions, we also must not live like those who are still imprisoned by sin and the Law. There are those who think that accepting Christ gives them a license to do whatever sin they desire to do. Christ not only saved you from the guilt and judgement of sin, but He also saved you to live an abundant life for Him. Are you living that life or are you living like a prisoner?

The Gift of Christmas Is Adoption

Redemption implies a basically negative situation. We are redeemed *from* the curse of the Law, *from* the slave market of sin, *from* the clutches of hostile elemental spirits. We were once in bondage and Jesus came to set us free. But, Paul did not stop there. He went on to show the positive purpose for God sending Jesus to us. Jesus came *and died* in order to redeem us from the Law so that we might receive “the full rights of sons.” Not only are we free from the bondage of sin through Christ, but we are given a new family *in Christ*. Look at the following passage earlier in the letter.

Galatians 3:25-26 ²⁵ *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,* ²⁶ *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

Do you have a perfect family? Have you ever wanted a perfect family? Many people do. Many children long to have just a family, a place to belong. Many wait year after year in foster care or being homeless longing to have a family, longing for someone to want them, for someone to adopt them. There is a beautiful truth in Scripture of people becoming part of God’s family. Many believe that all people are God’s children. We are all created by God and therefore we are all His creation. But the special privilege of becoming a child of God, of being adopted into His family, is reserved to those who have accepted God’s Son, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Think about what God tells us in John chapter one. Jesus is the living Word of God Who was with God and Who was God. He came to His own people, the Jewish people, yet, they did not receive Him. But, those who do receive Jesus, those who believe in Him, they receive *the right to become children of God*. Those who are in Christ are children of God. When you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are adopted into God’s family. You become one of His. If you long to be part of a family, then you can. That is the gift of Christmas, the gift of family, the gift of being a part of God’s family.

The Gift of Christmas Is Inheritance

Because of Christmas and by God’s grace we have been delivered out of slavery unto sonship, out of bondage in sin and the powers of darkness into the glorious liberty that belongs to the children of God. Through the blood of Christ we receive special privileges for being in God’s family. Look at the following verses.

Galatians 4:6–7 ⁶ *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”* ⁷ *So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

Because Christians are children of God, they are in a position to receive the Father’s inheritance, beginning with the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sign and pledge of our adoption. When we become His children, God dwells within us through the Person of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit’s presence in our lives we are truly convinced that God is for us, not against us, that indeed He is our Heavenly Father. The evidence for this wonderful assurance is not through miraculous works and spiritual gifts. Rather, the basic indication of our adoption is that we address God differently. The Spirit invites us to cry out to God by saying, “Abba, Father.” We should sense this connection every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer which begins with these wonderful words, “Our Father in Heaven.” The Spirit confirms this connection.

The person who tries to be justified before God by works is a slave to God’s Law. But the one who is justified by faith in Christ is no longer a slave, but a child, with full rights as an heir to God’s infinite treasures. We are declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, not through works of the Law (Galatians 2:16). Those who rely on works of the Law to be justified with God are under a curse (Galatians 3:10). Therefore, once you are freed from the curse, do not be enslaved again. Do not go back to slavery. God has set you free through His Son. God has made us co-heirs with Christ. Do not be enslaved to a legalistic system of trying to earn favor with God. Live like free people trusting in the Gift of Christmas, Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Live like an heir of the King.

Conclusion

So, what did you receive for Christmas? Was it a new toy or gadget? Was it a piece of clothing or a new tool to do work? Was it something neatly wrapped with a bow or a bag? Or, was it *someone* who could not be wrapped, except for some old, swaddling clothes and who was not laid under a tree, but in a manger bed? Did you receive a Savior Who was sent at just the right time to save you from your most desperate plight? Did you receive the gift of redemption, of salvation, of escape from eternal damnation that could not be earned or bought? Did you receive the gift of family, not the family you are accustomed to spend Christmas every year, but the spiritual family of God that endures for all eternity? Did you receive a divine inheritance, not of money or property, but of the Holy Spirit, of God’s presence, and of eternal life with Him? These are the true gifts of Christmas, not the things we purchase from a store, wrap in paper, or exchange with each other on Christmas Day. If you have never received the Gift of Christmas, Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to receive Him today.

For those who have received Christ, how should you live as a result of that Gift? I suggest four things:

Be Patient. Remember that God’s timing is not the same as ours. When the time is right, God will do what He plans to do. We just need to be ready and obedient.

Be Thankful. Are you thankful for God redeeming you, for purchasing your life at the expense of His Son's life? Think of the bondage you were in prior to Christ. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude for the freedom you have as a result of God's Gift of His Son.

Remember Who You Are. God sent Jesus in order to adopt you into His family. Maybe your earthly family is not that good, or maybe you do not really have a family. Through Christ we are all brothers and sisters in God's great family. Celebrate your adoption!

Live Like a Free Child of the King. If God has adopted you into His family, live like a free child of the King. Trust Christ completely for your salvation, but do not straddle the fence. Christ redeemed you for you to become His. He did not free you so that you will remain in sin.

This is Good News. Thanks be to God. Amen!