

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:  
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## Galatians 4:4-7          “The Perfect Timing of Christmas”

Intro. The story is told of a famous smith of medieval times that, having been taken prisoner and confined in a dungeon, began to examine the chain that bound him with a view to discovering some flaw that might make it easier to break it. His hope was in vain, for he found from some marks upon it that it was his own workmanship, and it had been his boast that none could break a chain that he had forged.

In vv. 22-23 of chapter 3, Paul pictures all of mankind locked up in the dungeon of sin, awaiting the final sentence of death. Our own sins have condemned us, and on our own we cannot break free from the ultimate sentence of death. Yet, God gives us one hope of deliverance. He promised to send the Messiah, the Savior. Israel knew about this hope, for Isa. 7:14 says, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel, which means, God with us.” They also knew the promise of Isaiah 9:6, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” There were many other prophecies of a coming Savior.

For centuries Israel waited for the fulfillment of God’s promise. Then, at just the right time, the Savior was born. In fact, we read beginning in v. 4 of our text, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law....” The stage was set for our Deliverer to come, pay the redemption price, deliver us from the prison of sin, and bring us out into the sunshine of freedom.

This morning I hope to show you that the evidence is convincing that Jesus is the Savior that God sent into the world. I plan to show you that He qualifies to be our Savior. Finally, I will show you what He will do for you if you believe in Him.

Now let’s consider the first point I want to make from this text:

### I. JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, FOR GOD PREPARED THE WORLD FOR HIM

If God had a plan to save the world from sin, wouldn’t you expect that He would prepare the world for the coming of the Savior? I believe so. God gives us about 9 months to prepare for the birth of our children, but He took thousands of years to prepare for the birth of His Son. It’s not that *He* needed that much time to prepare, but that *the world* needed that much time to be prepared for the coming and birth of Christ. So God moved and acted providentially in history over the centuries of time. Let’s see how He prepared the world for the birth of Christ. First of all, there had to be:

A. Religious Preparation – God chose Abraham to be the channel through whom He would save the world from sin. He worked by His providence to move his chosen descendents down to Egypt, where they multiplied into a great nation. Then He allowed them to become enslaved by the Egyptians. Then as more time passed He delivered them from their bondage. But they were still not ready for the Savior. Next, He prepared them:

1. By Giving the Law – Some time before 1200 BC, God gave Israel His 10 Commandments and other laws. Why did He do that? In 3:19 Paul explains, “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made....” They learned that there was a difference between right and wrong. They were learning that all were sinners, and sin condemns us. In 3:24 Paul said that “the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ....” The law showed us our sin, and that we all need a Savior.

Have you learned that you are a sinner in need of a Savior? Then God has prepared you for salvation as well.

And God prepared Israel not only by the giving of the law, but another spiritual preparation came by:

2. By Allowing Disaster - Almost 600 years before Christ was born, Israel saw their temple destroyed, and their city go up in flames. They were carried into captivity by the Babylonians. To them it was the disaster of all disasters. But they finally realized that their sin was to blame. They had to turn back to God.

Sometimes God has to allow us to hit rock bottom before we will realize how bad our sin really is. There may be some here today who have hit bottom. You don't know why you're here today, but you are yearning for something. God is preparing you to receive Jesus as your Savior.

So God used disaster to prepare His people for the birth of Messiah. God took something that was bad, and turned it into something good. Let me tell you what this disaster accomplished in the lives of Israel. It resulted in:

a) Adherence to Monotheism - Before this time Israel always had a tendency to worship other gods. But after the Babylonian captivity, they were never idolatrous again. From that time on they believed in the one true God.<sup>1</sup>

b) The Canon of Scripture Was adopted and preserved – Before the captivity, Israel didn't pay much attention to the Word of God, but afterwards, they longed to hear God's Word. So following the captivity, Ezra the priest led other scribes to gather together the inspired scriptures into one collection, and they taught the people the Word of God, and a great spiritual revival broke out.

c) The Synagogue System Was Instituted - All over the civilized world synagogues were organized wherever at least 10 Jewish families lived. There the Holy Scriptures were taught. From these Scriptures and from these synagogue services there was created a world expectancy that out of Israel there should come a Savior and a Deliverer for all mankind.

Finally, by the time Jesus was born:

3. There Was a Spiritual Vacuum - The old religions were dying; the old philosophies were empty and powerless to change men's lives for the better. Religious bankruptcy and spiritual hunger were everywhere. Many non-Jews were becoming monotheists under the influence of the synagogue system, and became the most fertile ground for the preaching of the gospel of Christ. And sure enough, when the apostles went out to preach the gospel, thousands and thousands were ready to turn to Christ from all over the world.

So Jesus was born at just the right time. Both Israel and the world were religiously prepared for the Messiah as in no other time in human history. Don't you think that Jesus is the Messiah? If you are not yet convinced, notice that there was not only spiritual preparation, but also:

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<sup>1</sup> Then the Persians conquered Babylon. And since they were monotheists, they allowed Israel to return to their homeland. And by the way, it was probably Persian, Zoroastrian priests that were the Magi, or wise men, who came to worship Jesus after His birth.

B. Linguistic Preparation - About 350 years before Christ there arose in Macedonia a mighty military conqueror named Alexander. In just about 12 years he conquered the world. Because of that the entire world became Greek in culture and in language. Little did Alexander the Great know that he was preparing the world for the preaching of the gospel of Christ to all men everywhere. When Paul later went from city to city in the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, he did not need to spend years of time learning a new language for each people group. Almost everyone knew and understood the Greek language. The missionary advance that followed the birth of Christ was made easy because almost everyone spoke Greek.

By the way, I believe there is a parallel today. English is becoming the world language. Garret Brink will go to China in a few weeks to teach English, and he hopes to have opportunity to share the Gospel while he is there. As the world was prepared for the first coming of Jesus, even so the world is being prepared for the spread of the gospel in preparation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus.

So the world was linguistically prepared for the coming of Messiah as in no other time in human history. Jesus was born at just such a time. Don't you think that Jesus is the Messiah? If you are not yet convinced, notice that there was also:

C. Political Preparation – After Alexander the Great, the Romans became very powerful. They were disciplined, mighty warriors. The little province of Rome eventually conquered Europe, North Africa, and finally all of the Middle East. They had a genius for government and for pulling differing peoples together. Rome had instituted the Roman peace (pax Romna), which provided economic and political stability. They prepared the world for the coming of Christ and the preaching of the gospel in the following ways:

1. They Provided Good, Safe Travel. You've heard the expression, "All roads lead to Rome." Most everyone knows about the paved Roman roads. They also destroyed both pirates on the sea and robbers on the land. The apostles and other early preachers and teachers could travel freely and safely throughout the empire. Little did the Romans realize that in creating their empire, they were preparing the earth for the coming of the Christ.

The Roman rule provided and prepared for the birth of Christ in another way. They were:

2. Instrumental in Jesus being Born in Bethlehem - As you know, God sent an angel to Nazareth, to a virgin named Mary, to announce to her that she would give birth to the Messiah. But the prophet had said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Well, God providentially took care of that problem, for the Roman Emperor decreed that everyone was to be enrolled and registered for tax purposes. The Roman system of government allowed for local autonomy as much as possible. And so they permitted the Jews to be registered according to their ancient tribes. Since Joseph and Mary were of the line of David, they went to Bethlehem. And it "so happened" that while they were there, Mary gave birth to Jesus. Little did Caesar Augustus realize that when he made that decree, he was carrying out the infinite, sovereign purposes of God.

So through the centuries the measure of time was being filled, until it was completely full.<sup>2</sup> Israel and the world were now ready for the birth of the Messiah. And so upon a day of days, and upon a night of nights, "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son," and the child was born. At that time an unusual star appeared over Bethlehem. We know that at about that time a conjunction of planets occurred. Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars were lined up to form a bright star. This conjunction occurs only every 800 years. (See Edersheim, p.211-212). Oh yes, Jesus was born at just the right time.

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<sup>2</sup> God had even told the prophet Daniel when the time for the coming of the Messiah would be fulfilled. He revealed to Daniel that after the edict to rebuild Jerusalem, there would be 483 years.

What does this mean? I believe all of this gives strong evidence that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah that God promised. Have you put your faith in Him? Have you accepted Him as your Savior?

So Jesus is the Messiah, for the world was prepared for him. Now let's consider my next point:

## II. JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, FOR HE HAD UNIQUE QUALIFICATIONS

Not just anyone could be the Savior. Last Sunday I shared with you from Isaiah 9:6 that the Messiah was to be both human and divine. That truth is confirmed in our text. Surely, the true Messiah would have unique qualifications. Notice first of all that He was:

A. Sent by God – In v.4 Paul says, “God sent forth His Son.” He was not an ordinary baby because He was not just born, but sent. This clearly implies:

1. The Son's Preexistence - The birth of Jesus is not to be regarded as the beginning of the Son. God “sent out” (*exapostello*) His son from heaven. He was already living in heaven or He could not have been “sent.” Jesus said in John 8:58, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Jesus existed even before Abraham was born. In fact, He is the eternal Son of God. Furthermore, the fact that He was sent implies:

2. The Authority of His Mission - Often, the original Greek word (*exapostello*) means “to send out on a mission.”<sup>3</sup> Everything that Christ did was done by commission and authority of His Father. Friend, when you lean on Christ, you are not relying upon a self-appointed Savior, but upon One who was sent from the Most High, and therefore is authorized in everything that He did.

He was sent by God. But He was also:

B. Unique in His Nature - He was not an ordinary baby because of who He was:

1. Divine - God sent not an angel, nor any exalted creature, but “His Son.” Being God's Son, He is divine. Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecy that He would be Immanuel, “God with us.” But He was also fully:

2. Human - Note that He was not only the Son of God, but He was also “born of a woman.” The Son of God became the son of a woman; from His mother He drew a true and complete humanity in body and soul. Christ was really and truly of the substance of His mother, as certainly as any other infant that is born into this world. He is therefore human like us. In fact, one of the most common designations He used of Himself was “son of man.” He became one with us that we might become one with Him.

One reason He was fully human was in order to identify with us. Heb. 4:15 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Jesus qualifies as our Savior for He was one with us.

There was a historian who was seeking to illustrate why the soldiers of Alexander the Great loved him so much and followed him so faithfully. The historian said that when the soldiers marched, Alexander always marched before them. He shared their hardships and suffering. And the historian said that marching through Asia Minor (Turkey today) in the dust and heat, they all suffered with thirst. When they finally came to water, the first refreshing drink was brought to Alexander himself. Was he not their king and their general? But as always Alexander took it and

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<sup>3</sup> See Acts 7:12; 11:22; 12:11; 17:14; 22:21.

asked, Is there one of the soldiers who is sick? Alexander will not drink until the cooling water is first shared by that soldier who is sick.” Even so, Jesus Christ has identified Himself with us. He is one with us. He experienced hunger and thirst with us. He experienced exhaustion. He even experienced temptation with us. Will you not love Him, and follow Him?

So Jesus was both divine and human. The fact is that, in order to save us, Jesus Christ had to be both. He was divine in order to live a perfect life, and to give His sacrifice infinite value. If He had sinned, He would have merely died for His own sin. But because He was sinless, He could die in the place of others. On the other hand, it was necessary that He was fully human, since it was man who sinned, and therefore only man can bear the penalty for the sin of other men. So He had to be God to have the power of a Savior, and He had to be man to have the position of Substitute.

Don't you believe that Jesus was the Son of God? How else could He have performed mighty miracles? How else could He have lived such a pure life? How else could He have patiently endured such suffering without retaliation? Don't you believe that Jesus was sent by God to be your Savior? I believe He is the Savior of the world! Won't you join me in believing in Him? But if you are still on the edge of commitment to Him, consider with me my last point from this text:

### III. JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, FOR HE ACCOMPLISHES A GREAT SALVATION

V.5 states a two-fold purpose for the coming of Christ. He came to redeem us and He came to adopt us into His family. And the order is important here. For there must be redemption from sin before there can be adoption as sons. So we see that the first purpose of the coming of Christ was:

A. To Redeem Us – In v.5 Paul says that Christ came “to redeem those who were under the law.” The word translated “redeem” is a word that literally means “to buy out of the market place” and referred to the ancient practice of buying a slave from the slave market, sometimes in order to set them free. Here Paul states that Christ came to redeem us from “under the law.” We were under the curse of sin, and under the condemnation of the law of God. Back in 3:10 Paul quoted the Old Testament to say, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” So by paying the redemption price, we are set free from the condemnation of sin. And not only are we set free from the curse of the broken law, but also from the burden of trying to be saved by keeping the law. Oh, how we need a Savior to redeem us, to set us free from sin, and from the curse of the law.

Can you have confidence that Jesus provides redemption? Yes indeed. Notice from our text how Christ accomplished our redemption:

1. By Fulfilling the Law – Notice in the last of v.4 that when Christ came, He was “born under the law.” Jesus, as God, was the Law-giver, and yet He Himself came under the law. Like other Jews, His parents took Him and circumcised Him according to the law as a baby. Thus, it was publicly declared that He was under the law. However, unlike any other Jew, He satisfied the requirements of that law by living in perfect obedience to it. He obeyed the law completely and fully. It was the man Jesus who summed up His earthly life by saying, “I always do the things that please Him.” No one could discover a flaw in Him. Jesus was guiltless, and it was necessary that it be so. For only by a sinless life could He die in our place. He did not suffer and die on the cross for His sins, but for our sins. This point leads us to the next point. He redeemed us, not only by keeping the law, but also:

2. By Bearing the Curse of the Law - Again, the word translated “redeem” means that a price had to be paid for our redemption. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). So in order to redeem us, Jesus paid the ultimate price. He gave His life on the cross. As the Christmas song says, he was “born to die, that men may live.” He is the Savior, for He accomplishes redemption.

When the Brooklyn Bridge, which connects Brooklyn to Manhattan, was completed in 1883, it was the first steel suspension bridge in the world and justly regarded as a magnificent accomplishment—though the project cost the life of its architect, John Roebling, and twenty-seven others in its construction. In its early days it eliminated long ferry rides for multiplied thousands of commuters.

For thousands of years man was conscious of a wide gap between us and God due to our sin. We needed a bridge to God. So about 2,000 years ago, God accomplished His plan. As 2 Cor. 5:18 says: “[He] reconciled us to himself through Christ.” By one Man’s death, a cross-like bridge paved the way to our Creator. The redemption bridge, which was bought at great price, spans from you to a loving God. The only toll is repentance from your sin and full acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice. Will you cross on the bridge that God has provided?

You should believe in Jesus because He came to redeem us. The price has been paid. You can now be free from the prison house of sin. Why not accept it?

Jesus came not only to redeem us, but also:

B. To Adopt Us - In v.5 Paul also says that Christ came “that we might receive the adoption as sons.” The word translated “adoption” literally means, “to place as a son.” It is an allusion to a Graeco-Roman legal device which permitted a wealthy man who had no child to take into his family a slave youth or child and make him a son and heir. For you see, by nature we are not children of God. We are sinful people, and sin shuts us out, separates us from God. But notice what we have here. We can combine the two figures of speech and see that the redeemed slave is now placed into a great, loving family. What a salvation! Jesus became the son of a woman in order that we might become the sons of God!

Furthermore, adoption into the family of God brings several great privileges. Now we all know that Christmas is a season for giving. This is because of God’s great gift to us. I’m sure there are some children here today who are very excited about the gifts they expect to receive at Christmas. Well notice the gifts that we all can receive from Christ by virtue of adoption into His family:

1. We Share His Spirit – In v.6 Paul said, “And because you are sons, God has sent<sup>4</sup> forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts....” What a blessing the Spirit is! He gives us assurance of salvation. In this verse we see that the proof of sonship is possession of the gift of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9). Rom. 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the sons of God.” He changes us. A human father cannot give his own nature to an adopted child, but God can and does by sending His Holy Spirit to dwell within the hearts of believers. Furthermore, He leads us. And since we are led by the Spirit, we no longer need the law as our primary moral guide.

2. We Have a New Father – In v.6b Paul states one result of the gift of the Spirit. We cry out in prayer,<sup>5</sup> “Abba, Father!” *Abba* is a diminutive form of the Aramaic word for father, similar to daddy or papa in our language. It was Jesus that taught us to call upon God as Father.

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<sup>4</sup> Notice that the same word (*exapostello*) is used with reference to the sending of the Spirit as was previously used in connection with the sending of the Son.

<sup>5</sup> The word “crying” (*krazo*) translates a word which denotes an audible and earnest prayer (cf. Lk. 18:7).

Jesus spoke Aramaic, and it is probable that the word “Father” that He used was the word found here, “Abba.” So the bestowal of the Holy Spirit gives us a consciousness of our relationship with God the Father. The law inspired a wholesome fear and respect of God, but with the coming of Christ we can have a loving confidence in God our Father.

Do you have that kind of a relationship with God? Do you see Him as a loving Father, whom you can address with the affectionate term, *Abba*, papa? Some of you have an absentee father, or perhaps an abusive father. Or perhaps you have lost your earthly father. Well I want you to know that God can become your Father, and He is a wonderful Father indeed. And Jesus makes it all possible.

3. We Share the Same Inheritance – In v.7 Paul says, “Therefore you are no longer a slave [redeemed!] but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” What a great gift! Of course, this means that we will share in a future inheritance. The New Jerusalem will be our eternal home. Some day we will walk through those gates of pearl, and walk on those streets of gold. We will behold the walls of jasper. Not only that, but the entire universe will be ours as well. What an incomprehensible truth: that by giving ourselves to Jesus Christ in faith, God gives us everything His Son possesses!

But there is also a present application here. The time appointed by our Father for us to start enjoying the inheritance is now. I wish believers would freely accept the promises and blessings of their God. Help yourselves, for no good thing will the Lord withhold from you. All things are yours (1 Cor. 3:21): you only need to use the hand of faith to receive them. We can draw upon our Father’s wealth and exercise all the wonderful privileges of sonship. It may seem too good to be true, but by faith accept it. Will you accept it? For some reason some do not.

While a student at Yale University, Eugene F. Suter, Jr.'s father died, leaving him an estate of \$400,000. When Eugene refused the inheritance, the trustees of the estate insisted he take it, and even took him to court to force him to accept the money. In an unprecedented case held in New York City, Judge William T. Collins reluctantly ruled that the young man had a legal right to reject the \$400,000. The order legally cut off the 22-year-old student from all future interest in the family fortune, leaving him without an income.

There are a lot of people in this world who are refusing a far greater inheritance than Suter did. God has offered us the opportunity to be joint-heirs with Christ and heirs of eternal life, and so many are refusing to believe in Christ and be born again. Like Suter, they will be cut off from all future benefits from their Father's estate. Will your inheritance go unclaimed?<sup>6</sup>

Conclusion: Have you come to realize that you have sinned against God, and that your sin condemns you, and separates you from God? I have good news for you this Christmas season. God sent a Savior at just the right time. Don’t you believe that Jesus is the Savior that God promised? Don’t you believe that He died to redeem you? He paid the redemption price. Now you can be free from the condemnation of sin. You can become a child of God, and an heir of God. All that God asks of you is that you repent of sin, and believe in His Son Jesus. Will you do that today? Turn from sin, and turn to Christ. What better time than this Christmas season?

Sources: Notes from author’s sermon tape of 12/23/90; W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians & Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968); Martin Luther, *World’s Great Sermons*, p.346ff; Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New*

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<sup>6</sup> Pulpit Helps Illustration Collection II, Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1999 by AMG [Illus.#C-637].

*Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Christmas Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976 reprint), 127-138 [25G.41]; Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944, 1973). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Next time read & add notes from \_\_\_\_\_ (notes from his sermon on this text dated 12/13/92); Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1962); Alvah Hovey, *An American Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887); J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957); Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: Galatians* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957); notes from A.T. Robertson's, *New Testament Word Pictures*, and Matthew Henry *Unabridged Commentary in Online Bible*.