

Christmas GRACE (Galatians 4:4-7)

Preached by Pastor Phil Christmas Eve 2023 (www.gcb.church)

Why did Christ come at Christmas? Scripture says it several ways, part of the answer is Heb 2:
¹⁴ *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things* [‘he too shared in their humanity’¹], *that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,* ¹⁵ *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

- It says He became like His brothers in every way, mercifully experientially in temptation He can help
- v. 9-11 says by the grace of God Jesus tasted death for us to bring many sons to glory.
- He calls us brothers who had been slaves all our lives

This is one of the glories of Christmas grace for us to ponder and treasure in our hearts

In the 1800s there’s a story of a rich man at a slave-market before Christmas.

- A new slave who didn’t speak English was being sold by auction.

His life of abuse seemed about to go from bad to worse from evil men to more wicked men.

- The wealthy master chose the slave, paid in full and by chains took him to the courthouse
- The master with the judge paid to redeem and release but the slave couldn’t understand.
- An interpreter helped explain his chains are gone, he’s set free of those bad men!
- No longer their slave, realizing what the master did, he said “Master, I go with you!”
- It was through an interpreter, “I’ll stay with you and be with you and serve you for life.”
- The master said, “I’ll let you serve me in my house, but you need to do it as my son. Judge, I’m asking you to declare this slave as adopted, with my name and inheritance.”

If you’d turn to Galatians 4, that story may be fiction but the true Christmas story is behind it.

- In biblical law, we’ve seen there were times slaves were to be treated as a master’s child
- There were times a slave was set free but chose to serve a master he loved for life.²
- And there were times a rich Roman ruler adopted a slave to be his son (Ben Hur story).
- If you already had a son and heir, though, no man ever sent a son to die for enemy slaves.
- But that’s the Christmas story for us slaves of sin, all our lives lawbreaking to God’s face.
 - o He gave His Son to make sons

Gal 4:4-5 in church history was part of a Christmas liturgy, maybe sung in early church?

Gal 4:4 *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.* 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.*

- Not a slave of sin anymore, the heir=full inheritance rights as a son (and full intimacy with the Father)

That same word *slave* is used of Christians in this same book.

We’re to be slaves of Jesus in ch 1 v. 10: *For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a **servant** of Christ*

- word *slave* in ch 4 where we’re not a slave of sin or fear in Heb 2

People-pleasing is a slavery we need to be free from to live to please God, for His approval.

- I’m not living as His bondservant owned by Him if I let opinions of others control me
- Don’t live in the fear of man, Christ came to redeem/free you from that owning you.
- He’s our Master we slave for, but not in fear or as mere slaves.
- We’re adopted slaves, sons, heirs to His riches!

Paul writes this letter to Galatians turning away from that gospel to legalistic bondage

Last week we looked at the concept of slavery in salvation, in doctrines of grace. One acronym:

T – Totally enslaved to sin (needing grace)

U – Unconditionally chosen from the slaves

L – Lovingly particularly redeemed (not general or universal, the word redeemed is limited to the saved)

I – Irresistibly called from death to life

P – Preserved by God so they persevere (TULIP acronym, I said I'd tweak some of the adverbs)

Those are the doctrines of grace we teach here but I like the word grace/gracious in each point: graciously chosen, graciously redeemed, graciously called to life, graciously preserved to serve.

Today I have another acronym for Christmas GRACE that will help us walk through Gal 4:4-7.

Think of GRACE as **God's Redeemed Adopted Child Eternally**. By grace that's what we are.

G - God's – Gal 4:4 starts with God and what He did with His son to make us His

R - Redeemed – v. 5 says He legally redeemed under the law

A - Adopted – v. 5b ...*that we might receive the adoption as sons*

C - Child – v. 6: ...*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

E - Eternally – v. 7 ends with sons being heirs, that's our eternal inheritance with Christ

We start with **God**, who v. 4 says in the fullness of time sent forth His Son, born of a woman.

- 4,000+ years earlier Gen 3:15 prophesied a seed of a woman to crush the serpent's head.
- Isaiah said He'd be born of a virgin and called Mighty God, Prince of Peace (7:14, 9:6).
- Messiah had to be fully man but also fully God, God sending His Son born of a woman.

[In fullness of] **time, behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb ...**

Rise, the woman's conqu'ring Seed, Bruise in us the serpent's head ...

Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die³

That's what the heralds sing. Heb 2 says He took on flesh so by death He'd defeat sin and Satan

Gal 4:4 ends with '*born under the law.*' No man is above God's law, not even the Son of Man.

- We've been studying God's moral law in the 10 commandments that we've all broken.
- We've all let other things other than God be #1, we've let careless words about God slip.
- You've lied or lusted or looked with coveting at what neighbors have or just not loved.
- Gal 5:14 says the law is summed up in love others like you love yourself, but we don't.
 - o We're all lawbreakers.

Gal 2:16 says by the law no one will be justified (saved, declared righteous by God)

The more we try to keep the law, the worse it gets for us. We can't keep it all, that's our curse.

3:10 *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."*

- If you don't keep all of God's law all of the time, there's a divine curse on all your efforts and works! The law can't save, v. 12, righteousness is by faith in Jesus born under the law
- He keeps the law for us. His righteous life perfectly obeyed God's perfect Ten Commandments.
- He fully loved God and neighbor and took sin's curse for us. ¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—*

Jesus died for our lawbreaking but first He lived as our law-keeper to fulfill all righteousness

Redeemed is the next word and the key word in Gal 4:5: *to redeem those who were under the law...*

- Remember we were slaves, middle of v. 3 says enslaved to this world in its principles.
- In v. 8 a part of this slavery is to false gods or false religion, false beliefs enslave sinners.

- But God sent His son to redeem sinners from slavery and sin and all its effects and curse.
- He became a curse for us, He bore the curse for our sin as He hung on the tree of Calvary.
- As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Jesus lifted up on a cross defeats Satan.
- Gen 3 cursed the serpent to bite the dust in defeat even as it would bite Messiah's heel.
- In the fullness of time, Christmas time, Jesus redeems=sets us free from Satan's tyranny.
- O come Emmanuel, to ransom captives!

Gal 1:4 says Jesus 'gave himself for us to deliver us...'

The ransom or redemption price is life for life (that's Ex 21, our next section next year).

- Moses wrote in Gen 3 how sin brought a curse on this world, thorns, thistles, sorrow, etc.
- Adam failed so we needed another Adam, another man representing us who'd prevail
'God and sinner reconciled' by Jesus, 'Second Adam from above, reinstate us in Thy love'⁴
And we long for the 2nd advent where no more 'sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground
He comes [again] to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found!'⁵

That's redeeming joy to the world for all on earth who receive their King.

- He'll rule the world and judge it, and only those trusting Jesus as their King are redeemed
- Like the wise men, seek the King of the Jews, come to worship Him and bow down.
- Lay down your treasures and make Jesus your treasure, your prophet, priest, and king.
- Repent of your works, receive Christ's work.

Christmas is the dawn of redeeming grace. [GRACE means I'm God's Redeemed Adopted Child](#)

Look again at ch 4, v. 5: *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive **adoption as sons**.*⁶
And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

- Several in this room have been adopted under the laws of the land (some under law of other lands too).
- There can be a great cost in court, great sacrifice, travel, but think of how far Christ came to adopt us.
- Think of the great cost and sacrifice of death and think He did that for us under the law's judgment.
- We weren't cute kids on a fridge being sponsored, we were criminals doing ugly sins deserving death.
- Many fatherless today end up in crime but we weren't victims, we're villains under law's just penalty.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus who chose us and in love predestined to adopt us, Eph 1!

- We were totally enslaved children of wrath *but God* by grace saved us and made us His family, Eph 2!
- God made us alive by faith, and that not of ourselves.

He made us accepted in the Beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and riches of His grace He lavishes⁶

You can study that more in Eph 1-2, God treating as His Son all us adopted sons and daughters

Some hear words like election or predestined in Ephesians and think it makes us robots.

- Either He chooses us seeing who'll choose Him, or they think it's a fatalistic cold idea?
- But adoption helps us understand the doctrines of grace, as we see it on a human level.
- I went to Congo and chose and adopted my son and under the law paid required legal fees

At first my son didn't speak English or understand or trust but over time He loved me back.

- Once he called me 'Papa Wangu,' Didier explained that's Swahili for 'my daddy'/Abba
- In Congo grown men say Baba to someone they love as a father, in Israel they say Abba.
- Paul says by the grace of adoption we come to love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19).
- Not robots, real love but in response to His.

Gal 4:9: now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...

We do genuinely know and love and choose Him now, but because He first did all that for us.

- He doesn't just wipe away sin, He warmly welcomes us home.
- Justification means we're legally right with God, adoption means we're lovingly His!

- It's not just a Judge letting us go, it's a Judge letting us go home with Him as His son!
- God's table grace is for former enemies who are now family
We're not just pardoned instead of executed by justice, we're part of His family by grace

In Exodus we've seen the story of Moses, a slave adopted and raised by Pharaoh's daughter.

- He was seen by the king as an enemy and was under the law in its death order.
- Born in bondage, a compassionate parent rescued and raised Moses in royalty and riches.
- Exposed to the elements, the helpless baby would've died and couldn't deliver himself.
Acts 7:21 'when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.'
- Think the king's table for his kids and grandkids, living in a palace with Egypt's riches.
- But Moses saw greater treasure in Christ⁷

There's other poverty to palace stories like that in the Bible. Esther 2:7: *'...when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter...He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther...'*

- (HCSB *'Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter'*; also Jewish Tanakh, NRSV, NLT).

Whatever legal status she had in a Jewish minority community, she later lived in the palace as bride of the King.

- Government leaders saw Jews as enemies to exterminate, but she's at the king's table for such a time!

2 Sam 9 NKJV: *David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness ... [Saul's house had been enemies to David, trying to kill David. They bring Saul's heir Mephibosheth]*

⁷ So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness...and will restore to you all the land of Saul...and you shall eat bread at my table continually."

- In v. 9 he gave all that had belonged to King Saul.
- He repeats in v. 10 Mephibosheth always has a place at the palace table.

Again v. 11: *"As for Mephibosheth," said the king, "he shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons."...¹³ So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet.*

- He was crippled, had to be carried there! That's grace, kindness to an enemy!
- With the greater Son of David, we're not just like the King's sons, we are!
- Mephibosheth got calls to food, we get to call God Father!
- Unlike Esther we can always come to see the King!

2 Cor 6:17-19 *'I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me...'*

And we don't just inherit land like King Saul's in this life, King Jesus said we'll inherit the new earth eternally!

GRACE=God's Redeemed Adopted Child Eternally. This last point means it will last forever.

⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

- Again not just 'like one of the king's sons,' it's the full right of a son as heir to the family inheritance.
- God treats us as His beloved Son Jesus!

James 2:5: *'has not God chosen those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom...'*

Paul knew under the law and in practice, 'an adopted slave was always considered a real member of the family, and his name was registered as such, not only in the family register, but with the other members of the family, in the archives of the city; and the book in which it was so registered was called in Jerusalem "Book of Life"... So the names of all the Lord's adopted ones are registered in the Book of Life of the Heavenly Jerusalem; and the beauty of this is it is also the King's family ... and he is as welcome to the table as the king himself.'⁸

This is the Christmas story where the emperor at the time was adopted, Caesar Augustus.

- Jesus was born during the census of that empire where adopted slaves became heirs.
- Roman law let rulers make slaves their sons, and several Caesars in a row were adopted.
- So the idea of a slave becoming a son of a King/Emperor they knew,

- but the King becoming a slave was unheard of?!
- Rags to riches stories we've heard, but riches to rags?
- Heaven's king from paradise to poverty?!

2 Cor 8:9: *you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.* Phil 2:7 says the highly exalted Master came as the slave.⁹

And because of that grace, we who are slaves can become sons and heirs of His riches!

Jesus didn't just take the chains off us, He puts them on Himself, as "under the law."

- As son of man Jesus came under the law He had inspired as Son of God.
- He was born of woman so men and women could be born of God.
- He was born in an earthly manger, so we can inherit heavenly mansions.

The Judge of the universe came out from behind the bench, laying aside His honorable robes

- and took the place of criminals instead (in the case of Barabbas, literally).
- the Creator took on the nature of a creature.
- the perfect Lord we must obey put himself under imperfect parents and obeyed them!

*'At the age of twelve [in the temple, He] amazed at His insights
[He] Obeyed His parents, even though He created their wind pipes ...'*¹⁰

Brought up by adoptive father Joseph, Jesus brought many to be adopted by our heavenly Abba.

- He had to redeem first on the cross, then after He rose He first spoke of adopted family.

Jn 20:17: *'go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father..."'*

- As He died He redeemed His followers to adoption as sons and as His brothers with the same Father.

Rom 8:14: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* ¹⁵ *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"* ¹⁶ *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* ¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*

- Jesus has the firstborn place, meaning preeminence, and His siblings are heirs sharing His inheritance.
- Rom 8:29 says Jesus is *'the firstborn among many brothers...'*³² *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

That's Christmas GRACE to be God's Redeemed Adopted Child Eternally.

- He's why we're in His family, not us.
- Our standing in God's family isn't based on our performance;
 - o it's based on what Jesus performed for us!

That's the wonder of Christmas, may we never lose that wonder.

- Whatever else we do today and tomorrow, let's praise Him and make much of Him
- And let's show His grace and tell of His grace to others who need it just as we did and

¹ NIV84.

² See Exodus 21:9, 5-6, and sermon from 12/3/2023 at www.sermonaudio.com/gcbc

³ Charles Wesley, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ George F. Handel, "Joy to the World."

⁶ See Ephesians 1:6-8 in NKJV and various translations for the word "lavish."

⁷ Hebrews 11:26.

⁸ John Gadsby, *Slavery, Adoption, and Redemption* (Primitive Baptist Publishing House, 1865), 34.

⁹ LSB, see also v. 9-11 where "Lord" (kurios) is the master counterpart to "slave" (doulos).

¹⁰ Shai Linne, "Mic Check 1,2" Solus Christus album