

**Galatians 4: 3-6; “The Fullness of Time”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 7th, 2014
In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The time of all events great and small is in the hands of God the Father. The Father is not arbitrary in His decisions of the timing of things. Rather everything that happens in this life is part of a pre-concerted plan and purpose which He has had from all eternity, from before the foundation of the world. It is part of God's infinite greatness that it is so. It is so in relation to all the generations of people who have ever lived. There is a time and a purpose for everything under heaven. And there was a time, which is termed here the fullness of time, that God saw was right to send forth His Son. In accomplishing the redemption of all of His chosen people, the time of God's sending of His Son was important to Him; and it is important to us as well. God's time is always the perfect time, although it may not seem so to us. And so let us ask ourselves, “In what ways is the timing of God's sending His Son important to Him and important to us?” For the timing of God's sending His Son was Holy and Wise in His waiting and in His sending. His timing was Holy and Wise in 4 ways.

1st – It was Holy and Wise because, in God's mind, there was a time for men to be under the elemental things of the world. (Verse 3)

There was a time of waiting before God sent forth His Son. You ask, “Why was this so?” “Why could not God have sent forth His Son in the beginning right after Adam's fall into sin; that fall that plunged our whole race into sin and misery?” I answer you: God did manifest His deep and abiding concern for man's eternal welfare at that time. He did manifest His love for fallen Adam by coming into the garden to seek him when he was lost, and to clothe the shame of his nakedness. Indeed it was the pre-incarnate Son of God who came “walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” and saying, “Adam, where are you?” But that was not the fullness of time that is talked about in our text. Adam was given a promise, and perhaps the greatest of all promises, in the world before the Flood. When God addressed the Serpent with words of judgment and prophecy, He said, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; and He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” But in the giving of His promise of Christ's coming, God was not indicating that that was the right time for the promise to be fulfilled. No, in God's Holy mind it was necessary that there should be a certain period of time that would go by; quite a bit of time actually, between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of it in the Savior. The Son of God, the 2nd Person of the Divine Trinity, would not assume human nature or take upon Himself human flesh for four thousand years yet. And so that long time period of waiting was spoken of, in terms of all the people that lived before Jesus Christ's 1st coming, as a time of “bondage under the elements of the world.”

God would have all men to understand that only He could save them from the consequences of Adam sin; He who was our representative head. He would have them to see also what they had done to themselves, as those who every day confirm Adam's sin by their own sins. Not one of Adam's race can save themselves from the bondage of sin. Back there in the garden, Adam was hiding from God. He was not seeking for God after his sin of eating the forbidden fruit. And so, God would need to order all things in regard to his salvation. And He would have to order all things for the whole human race coming after him; that He would show all of mankind that He alone could provide salvation. And He would show them that He alone could sovereignly bring that salvation to all those whom He would show mercy to. He would do this in accordance with His purpose in Election. He would do this in accordance with His promise of mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. God knew that it would be for the good of His people and for His own

glory, that the way that this wonderful plan would unfold, would be by His bringing it about in a way that would show the preciousness of it to all mankind. He would put His ancient people, the Jews, through a waiting period of thousands of years, knowing that He would eventually give them the full inheritance of what would be purchased through His only-begotten Son. But in that waiting time He would reveal certain aspects of this great salvation in such a way as would make them feel, it would cause them to understand and know, that sin in every person and in every generation was a very evil thing. And so also, it would be the case that in every generation, His showing mercy and His bestowing saving grace were not something that each of these people could will for themselves, or attain by their own efforts, but it would only be found by faith in Him.

This great truth of what this salvation would require on God's part, would be demonstrated to all of God's chosen people in many ways, through many generations, with a common theme. It was apparent to God, and it would become apparent to men, that in this childish state of the Church, before Christ came, that the blessings that He came to purchase, could only be communicated to His people in a simple, direct and profound way of His devising. Adam would try to cover his sin with fig-leaves. But God would sacrifice animals and make tunics of skin, and clothe them with their skins. God would give the knowledge of what an acceptable sacrifice was; and in doing so, He would point to what the only acceptable offering would be. It would take the greater sacrifice of His Son. God clothed Adam and Eve the skins of the slain animals. And He indicated what He would be acceptable for Abel, for Abraham, for Isaac, and Jacob. He gave Moses and the children of Israel the law with all of its ceremonies and rituals, and commandments, to make sure that they understood that He was Holy; and that He could not be approached except by faith in His better way in the sacrifice of Christ. Christ would be set forth in types and pictures and the various kinds of sacrifices offered. He would be known by men and women of His choice; all those of ancient Israel whom He had set His love upon, would live by faith in His word and promises. They would offer the sacrifices which He commanded. And all of those sacrifices would be pointing to the great sacrifice of the Christ who was coming – in God's perfect time. God's grace was at work in that time accomplishing His purpose. But these ancient shadows and types and commandments of the ceremonial law were a kind of bondage to those who had to wait for the greater fulfillment.

We see this is in verses 1- 3 of Galatians 4, if you will turn with me there. "Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father." "Even so we, when we were children were in bondage under the elements of the world." Now, by the "elements of the world" Paul evidently is referring to the Galatian believers trying to observe days, and months, and seasons and years. All of these elements or rudiments were commanded in the Mosaic ceremonial law to be observed, but they were all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They were fulfilled in His coming, and by His perfect obedience to God's law, and His sacrifice for sin. After they had received Christ and the gospel, they had no business going back to those weak and beggarly elements, being bound to observe them, because they thought that they were still in force. No, this was a yoke of bondage. And so Paul tells them in verse 9, "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?" He says, "You observe days and months and years." "I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain." I hope that you can see that in their minds there was a great confusion. They were attempting to mix the ceremonies of the law with the substance of the true faith in Jesus Christ in order to be assured that they would be saved. In doing this they were placing themselves back under law, and if they held to this, they could not be saved.

This, their trusting in their participation in the ceremonies of the law, was never asked for by God either before or after Christ finished His work of redemption. When Christ came He fulfilled the law perfectly and He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. But even those who lived before Christ were not instructed to trust in their ceremonial works of the law. I want you to see that with sinful man there is always a terrible temptation to think that being religious and observing ceremonies is somehow the substance of what it means to be a true Jew, or a true Christian. But I want you to see from this text, how false this is. These observances and ceremonies were only given for a time, in the childish state of the church, before Christ came. They were meant to point to Christ as the true way finding salvation. God was Holy and Wise to give them these ceremonies for that time, but they all had to give way before the One who was their fulfillment. And even after Christ came and commanded the baptism of disciples and the observation of the Lord's Supper, He commanded the observances of those sacraments as a means of the believer's showing forth their union with Himself, and their feeding upon Him by faith; not the way to obtain salvation, in and of themselves. In applying this, let me ask you whether you are able to distinguish between the ceremonies of your Christian faith and the substance which is Christ? Are you able to see that neither the act of being baptized or participation in the Lord's Supper can, in and of itself, save your soul? It is only a true and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus alone which will save you.

And this leads us now to the 2nd point – There was a time for Christ to be sent forth. (Verse 4)

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son...” It was the fullness of time when the ruling power of the Jewish nation was dwindling. Their kings ruling in righteousness, their witness for God as the one people that He had chosen in all the earth to be His people; the wisdom and power of their being a godly people as a nation was greatly diminished. They needed their Messiah to come, even as it says in Genesis 49: 10 that He would come. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. He would come when the rule of the tribe of Judah was greatly corrupted and diminishing. He would be a King in perfect righteousness and judgment. He would be the One whom the people must obey, or they would be destroyed forever. He would be the One prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 18: 15 - “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” and Verse 18 - “I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” “And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” The words “require it of him” are used by Peter in Acts 2: 23 in this way. “And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” Christ was sent first to the Jews. But now their rulers had added many of their own traditions and man-made commandments to the pure word of God. They were in great danger of completely leading the people astray with false conceptions of how to know God and walk with God. So the Lord Jesus came when this time was full.

But the phrase, “the obedience of the peoples” in Genesis 49: 10 points on further to Christ's greater acceptance by the Gentiles after His first coming. For most of the 4,000 year period of time that we have spoken of, before Christ's coming, God “allowed the nations to walk in their own ways” as it says in Acts 14: 16. Yet, “He didn't leave Himself without witness,” it says there. “He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” But Paul also says in that passage in verse 15, “We also are men with the same nature as you, and we preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and things that are in them.” And also in Acts 17, after looking over all the different gods that the Athenians worshipped, and their ignorance of the true and living God, Paul says in verse 29, “Therefore since we are the offspring

of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." "Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." "He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

We see from this that now that Christ has come, things have drastically changed. It is the dawning of a new day because of Christ. It is a new "year." It is "the acceptable year of the Lord." God is not just going to deal with men through the witness of creation, and He is not going to confine Himself to having the Jewish nation be His only people. He is commanding all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. This is what happened in God's mind when Christ was sent forth. God was Holy and Wise for waiting before, but He was also Holy and Wise in the time in which He sent forth His Son. He sent Him when the religions devised by the wisdom and art of the World were taking over the world. But in sending His Son He was saying, "I will not let this happen." "It is time for the World to know." "I will turn the world upside down by the sending of My Son." "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" "Darkness is threatening to overcome the world, but here I give you Christ, the light of the world, Who will shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome Him." (John 1: 5)

3rdly- God's timing in sending His Son into the world was Holy and Wise because it was the time to receive the adoption as sons.

It says in verse 5 that He sent Him forth "to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Now this takes us a step farther yet in terms of what Christ was sent forth from God for. We have seen that the law with all of its ceremonies and ordinances could not bring men to God. It could only bring men into bondage unless the Christ who those ceremonies and ordinances pointed to, could somehow by faith be seen or believed. By faith, Christ was to be seen in God's redeeming Israel from their bondage in Egypt. He was seen in the sprinkling of the blood on the door-posts and lintels so that the firstborn of Israel would not die; while the firstborn of the Egyptians did die, because the blood of the typical sacrifice was not applied to their doorposts. The Passover Lamb being slain and eaten on that night pointed to the death of Christ for sinners. It was God's mercy revealed to those who were partakers of grace through faith. This was the way that God was to be served because this is how God redeemed those people as a nation to Himself. Their individual salvation, however was not to be found in the observance of external ordinances. It was to be found by faith in what God had revealed of Christ to them through those ordinances. So, all those who were under the law had to be redeemed from under the law, that they might receive the adoption as sons. They had to be able to see that Christ was the "end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10: 4) This meant that without Christ's saving grace, all the ordinances of the Mosaic law which they observed outwardly, would not necessarily lead to favor, acceptance, righteousness, or becoming adopted full-grown sons who would have all the privileges of being adopted, accorded to them.

But this is why Christ was sent forth, this is how each one of us is bought back from the kind of thinking that we are describing here and which we all are prone to. It is the kind of thinking that says that if we have been baptized, if we go to church, if we are diligent in the observance of all the ceremonies and sacraments and ordinances of our own particular religion that we will be saved. But it shall never stand in the sight of God, either in this life or in the judgment that is coming. Christ was born of a woman, that is the Virgin Mary's flesh and blood. And He was born under the law, that is the Mosaic law, because man's perfect and complete obedience was the issue. He was sent forth at the very time of God's choosing, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. This applies to both believing Jews and Gentiles. Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law so that not only Gentiles would not have to be

under it, but also that all Jews could be redeemed from it as well. All the ordinances and ceremonies of the Mosaic ceremonial law; all of them required a perfect obedience to the moral law in order to see the blessings of that Old Covenant come to the person who would be in covenant with God. They were a great obstacle in the people's truly coming to experience what is termed here, "the adoption as sons." It is not as though they did not have promises of forgiveness or the reality of God's blessings of God grace and help coming to them in accordance with what was written in the books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. It was just that all that was laid out in the law of Moses did not of itself bring the privileges of a being a full grown spiritual son of God. It would take Christ's coming to do that.

The observance of the law had its privileges, but they were burdensome privileges, a yoke so to speak. It was something that hemmed in the soul and the spirit of a person trying to perform everything that was written and required of him in God's holy law. Take Leviticus 18: 4, 5. "You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." It is not as though these were not good commandments worthy to be observed. It was just that the hearts of men were not strong enough to keep them. By nature they did not have the joy and delight in keeping them that would glorify God. They could not love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, in keeping them as they should. It would take Christ's coming to perform this; and then God could impute the righteousness which Christ had worked out on behalf of each one having faith. It would take Christ's dying for us to be redeemed from the law; the perfect obedience required by it, and the curse of it. It would take His grace coming to us to give us a right spirit, and not a legal spirit, in our obedience to God.

But then 4thly- God was Holy and Wise in the timing of His waiting and sending is seen in that there is a time when the Spirit of God's Son is sent forth. (Verse 6)

We who believe are no longer a slave to the whole Mosaic system; we are no longer in bondage to the elements of the world, the principle that ordinances and ceremonies are going to point us on to how we could be in right relation to God. Something a thousand times more wonderful has happened to us who have received the adoption as sons. God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. What a great description of our salvation. It is a description of everything that we have we have received. We receive the adoption as sons because of the work of Christ in fulfilling the law and dying for our sins. God sends the Spirit of His Son, who enters our heart and gives us an understanding of His will, and faith, and the ability to pray and to cry out to God that He would help us to do that which is pleasing to Him. It is God's Spirit who gives us grace and wisdom on how we should keep God's commandments.

The timing of His coming to us so that we know His help, and comfort, and strength is when we believe. But when we believe we come to realize that the Spirit's work in us began before we believed; and thereby we come to understand that now we have received the adoption and are sons of God, all because of Christ. Please remember, whether you are contemplating the gospel for the first time, or whether you have walked with the Lord for many years, that God's timing is perfect in everything. He brings all the blessings of this great salvation in Christ in their right order and time. He is the One who comforts you and instructs your mind by His Spirit, in accordance with the Word of God, in all of your joyful, and all of your troublesome, situations. He is Holy and Wise in His waiting until just the perfect time, to bestow all of these, His best blessings, just as He was Holy and Wise in His sending of His Son. So, you too must trust that He was holy and wise also, as to when He sent the Spirit into your heart. Let that be an incentive for you to trust in the Lord at all times. His timing of all events in your life is perfect. Will you not believe this, and thus glorify His holy name. And if you have never trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, now is the time for you to come to know the freedom for which Christ died; so that you can be delivered from all of your sins, and be set free from the bondage of a legal mentality.

I pray that you will see that “now is the acceptable time and now is the day of salvation”. Cry out to Him for this salvation. Cry out to the Father to send Christ’s Spirit into your heart. And then cry out for more of the Spirit’s working that Christ may be glorified in the way that you live and the way that you speak. And remember the words of Romans 8: 15. “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry out “Abba, Father!”, a full realization of your sonship in Christ.