

Galatians 4: 3-6; “The Fullness of Time”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 13th, 2009, 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 our redemption, our being bought back and brought back from our bondage in sin, 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 think together this afternoon and 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 is 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?” And I answer you, “God did manifest His deep and abiding concern for Man's eternal welfare and did manifest His love for fallen Adam, at that time, by coming down 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 when 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 the giving of the promise of Christ's coming is not the same as having come to that time itself. No, in God's Holy mind it was necessary that there be time that went 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 and take upon Himself human flesh for four thousand years. And so that time period of waiting is 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 see and to understand that only He could save

them from what they had done to themselves. They could not save themselves from the bondage of sin. Adam was hiding from God, not seeking for God after his sin in the garden of eating the forbidden fruit. And so, God would so order things in regard to him and to the whole human race coming from him, that He would show man that He alone could provide salvation and sovereignly bring that salvation to all those whom He would show mercy to. He would do this in accordance with His purpose in Election and in accordance with His promise of mercy.

God knew that it would be for the good of His people and for His own glory that the way that this wonderful plan must unfold, would be by His bringing it about in a way that would show the preciousness of it to all mankind. He would put all of His Elect people through a waiting period knowing that He would give them the full inheritance of what would be purchased through Jesus Christ. But in that waiting time He would reveal aspects of this great salvation in such a way as would make them feel, understand, and know that sin in every man and in every generation was a very evil thing. And also, that in every generation, His showing mercy and extending grace were not something that men could will for themselves or attain by their own efforts, but only by faith in Him. This would be demonstrated to all of God's chosen people in many ways through many generations with a common theme. That theme was the promise of Christ. 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 what appears to be a simple, direct and profound way. Adam would try to cover his sin with fig-leaves. God would make tunics of skin, and clothe them with them. God gave the knowledge of sacrifice as an acceptable offering pointing on to the greater sacrifice of His Son. He did this for Adam. He did this also for Abel, and Abraham, 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 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 living by faith in His word and promises, based upon the sacrifices offered which all pointed to the great sacrifice of Christ who was coming- in time. God's grace was at work. But it was also 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, 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. It was a yoke, a form 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." There was a confusion of the ceremonial with the substance of the true faith in Jesus Christ. This was never intended by God, but with sinful man it is always a terrible temptation. These observances and ceremonies were only there for a time, in the childish state of the church before Christ came. They are meant to point to Christ and not to themselves, to be the way to salvation. God was Holy and Wise to give them for a time, but they all must give way before the One who is their fulfillment.

And this is 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 who the people must obey or be destroyed forever. He would be the One prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 18: 15 - "The Lord you 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. 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. "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 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 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. 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 that those ceremonies and ordinances pointed to could somehow by faith be seen or believed. Christ was to be seen and understood 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 1st born of Israel would not die, while those of the Egyptians did, because the blood was not applied to their doorposts. The Passover Lamb being slain and eaten on that night pointed to the death of Christ for sinners and God’s mercy revealed to those who were partakers. 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 every one 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 is sent forth at the time He was sent forth, 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 and all the required perfect obedience of the Moral law in order to see the blessings of that Old Covenant come to the person who would be in covenant with God, were a great obstacle in 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 and the joy and delight in keeping them, loving 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 to impute the righteousness which he worked out on our behalf for us to be redeemed from it; 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 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 bring us into relation with 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 descriptions 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 and to keep His 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. Let us remember this afternoon whether we are contemplating the gospel for the first time, or whether we have walked with the Lord for many years, that God's timing is perfect in everything. He brings all the blessings of the great salvation in Christ in their right order and time. He comforts us and instructs our minds by His Spirit, in accordance with the Word of God in all of our joyful and all of our troublesome situations. He is Holy and Wise in His waiting and Holy and Wise in His sending of His Son, and also in sending the Spirit into our hearts. Let that be an incentive for you to believe and to come to know the privileges of one who trusts in Christ. It is time for you to know the freedom for which Christ died, so that you can be delivered from 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 our Sonship in Christ.