

**SENT BY THE FATHER**  
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Galatians. 4:1-7

<sup>1</sup> I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,

<sup>2</sup> but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

<sup>3</sup> In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

<sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

<sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

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

The Apostle Paul is here speaking to the Galatians about their freedom in Christ, which includes freedom from the ordinances of the law, such as the required Jewish ordinances of circumcision. He lays down the only law that matters, the law of justification by faith, which he repeats over and over again to them because they are so influenced by the Judaizers who have made it a mission to convert Christianity into a form of Judaism, demanding that all the men who become Christians must be circumcised as prescribed by the *Torah*, the law of Moses. In the middle of all this, when his argument is reaching its height, Paul suddenly breaks into a Christmas Carol and sings the Christmas story in Gal. 4:4-5. With deference to the author of a song by the same name, I call this sermon, *Sent by the Father*

Stanza 1 of Paul's Christmas carol is this: GOD HAD A PLAN FOR HUMANKIND, THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST. It starts with the words, "But when the fullness of time had come..." There was no song before that first stanza, for man had marred the handiwork of God with his sin and his shame that had resulted in his sorrow. That is why the Bible starts with man's sin and rebellion, his darkness and iniquity, as he was cast out of 'paradise' forever, with no chance of going back, with no hope but in that promise that someday, in the far distant future, history would be vindicated by the coming of a Messiah, and man would live in a Kingdom of redemption and righteousness, where swords would become plowshares and spears pruning hooks, and mankind would not learn war anymore.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people are struggling to maintain faith and righteousness, and the world view of the *Bible* becomes crystal clear: without Divine Intervention there will be no salvation, without God's help nothing will change man's condition, without a Divine interruption into the human order, history itself is doomed to self-destruction. That is true of our world today. We have our peace processes, but they rarely bring peace. We have our roving diplomats who sit down around round tables and try to negotiate peace, but there

is no peace. We have our great world forum of the United Nations, but the nations are not, and have never truly been, united. Moreover, our own nation, our own state, and our own county are fragmented and divided and bickering over a hundred different things. Hanging over our nation are huge and skyrocketing debts; and hanging over our world is the menace of world starvation, world depression, and possible world destruction. All our scientific knowledge cannot save us from ourselves; for our real problem is as old as Adam and Eve, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, for we are the enemy of ourselves and we have our rockets and our bombs aimed at us. As plainly and as politely as it can be said, we are sinners, helpless and hopeless, apart from God.

But in this first stanza of our song we see the first glimpses of hope: "But when the fullness of time had come..." This powerful statement tells us that GOD HAS A PLAN for humankind, and, that to fulfill this plan, the Eternal God has to enter history in a new and different way, has to literally step into history, or rather, to be born into history; the eternal has to enter time. God the Spirit has to enter history, and become a living part of history. "Hear, o ye heavens, and give ear o earth, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it! I will send my Son and perhaps they will reverence Him." "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory as the glory of the only begotten Son of God." "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

To come from eternity into history is an almost absolute regression for God from His Divine nature, for it means to come from the absolute into the ephemeral, from pure light into darkness, from Life into death. The Divine plan was not just to deal with the problem of sin from a judgmental distance, but to enter time and history and the temporal. The Timeless one bound Himself to time; the Author became a character in His own story; and the Eternal One gave Himself to time and death. His birth was no accident: "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." He was sent by the Father.

But God the Father did not send His Son until "The Fulness of time..." The Eternal God acted with a specific plan that would start at a specific time. Paul and all Jewish rabbis taught that nothing would happen in the Providence of God until everything was exactly right for that plan to be initiated, fulfilled, completed. The word used here for fullness is the Greek word *Pleroma*, which means that the time was the exact time, the full time, the right time, the perfect time for God's plan to come into existence, because it was the fullness of time.

*The Interpreter's Bible*, speaking of the Jewish understanding of God, says, "He (God) had a time for everything, and everything happened exactly on time." The expositor of the *Interpreter's Bible* writes, "Paul worked toward definite goals; and he believed God's eternal purpose had definite objectives: and all creation moved by a divine agenda. The ultimate aim of divine grace was man's salvation through Christ, but preparation had to be made before Christ's advent. The glory in this preparation, and its triumph in completion, wells up in Paul's thrilling declaration. 'When the Fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son.'"

Thus, when the time was right for Jesus to come, He came because He was sent by the Father. And when you and I have problems, when we have restless nights of worry, and agonizing days of anxiety, we need to look to God and know that His deliverance will come 'in

the Fullness of time,' at exactly the right time, His time, not yours, not mine, not our time, for He did not send the Christ Child into the world when the Jewish people wanted Him, or even how they wanted Him, but only in His own way and in His own time. So many of us want everything when we want it, and, as we want it; and we are unwilling to accept God's time, the Fullness of time, so we grow anxious and impatient and end up doubting that God will act at all to help us. The *Bible* clearly says,

Hebrews 10:35-36

<sup>35</sup> "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

<sup>36</sup> "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

God always acts in 'the Fullness of time.' This magnificent phrase is the first stanza of Paul's Christmas Carol. Moreover, Jesus promised to return to earth for His church, and He will do so at the exact time in the history of the world. He will return 'in the Fullness of time!'

Paul's Christmas Carol has a second stanza, which is, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, MADE OF A WOMAN,.. Jesus came when the time was perfectly right. In one of his books, James Stewart reminds us of the perfect timing for Jesus and the Gospel. It was the right time for The Christian faith for the people had begun to doubt and to reject their belief in the old gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome; it was the right time for communicating the Gospel, because Greek was the universal language throughout the Roman dominated world; and, it was the right time to travel and preach the Gospel because Rome had built so many roads that the saying was 'all roads lead to Rome,' and the Roman government had made both land and sea safe with the Pax Romana. Because the time was perfectly right, 'God sent forth His Son.' What a word--God sent forth His Son!

This affirmation must bring about a 'shouting time in glory,' and the singing of the herald angels and the blessed saints--God sent forth His Son! Hallelujah! Salvation has come! Let all heaven and earth praise Him who was sent by the Father, even our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! God sent forth His Son! This simple clause makes three stupendous assertions: God is full of compassion and mercy toward humankind and showed that by sending His Son, Jesus, God's Son, is fully Divine; and Jesus, born of a woman, is also fully human. Here are all three players in the drama of redemption, God, Jesus, and a woman. Jesus was sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world.

John 3:17

<sup>17</sup> For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

In this second stanza of His Christmas Carol, mankind, in order to know God, must know Jesus, who is both Divine and Human. As the Son of the Heavenly Father, He was the Eternal Son of the Living God, pre-existent, without beginning or ending, the Alpha and the Omega, not subject to time or decay; and, in the Fullness of time, the Fullness of human history, He was sent forth by the Father to be "born of woman, born under the law..." This, too, is a part of this second stanza: JESUS' HUMANITY.

He was born of a woman. This statement by the great apostle is not necessarily meant by him to declare the Virgin Birth of Jesus, but, to declare the humanity of Jesus, for every man is born of a woman. However, the statement itself declares the Virgin Birth, and Paul, without doubt, agreed with the faith of the early Church that Jesus was born of a Virgin; and although he doesn't here debate the issue, he certainly accepts and believes in the Virgin Birth of Jesus, for without this faith, upon what would Paul rest his faith in the Incarnation? To believe that Jesus was God Incarnate and not to believe in the Virgin Birth makes no sense at all, and strains all credulity, for how could He be God in Eternity, then enter history as man and not be God until He, in history, became God. The *Bible* says clearly that the Spirit of God overshadowed Mary, and that Holy Fetus in her womb was Jesus, God's Son!

But the very statement 'born of a woman' makes him like all other human beings--apart, of course, from His Divine Nature, which no other human being ever had. But Jesus was also born of a woman, like you and me. He shares our humanity. He has had experiences like yours and mine. And, as a Boy, He must have run and played such as we did; and as a young man, and as an adult, He was a man, a human being like us, subject to all the laws of nature that we are subject to, knowing His mortality as we know ours. But He was different too. He was subject, at the same time, both to his mortality and His Immortality, both to His human nature and His Divine Nature, both to temptation to evil and the love of Righteousness. And He held these opposites in a wonderful and powerful tension that none of us humans could ever know or understand, and showing the tensions so graphically in the Garden when He cried, "Father...remove this cup; nevertheless not my will but thine be done." As Phillips Brooks once said, He was 'the condescension of Divinity and the exaltation of humanity.'

And He maintained both natures in absolute integrity within that tension in which He held them both. Miracle of miracles--Son of man, and Son of God.

That humanness of Jesus is the Door through which we enter to know Him, and He is the Door to Eternal Life through which we may always have fellowship with Him. He knows my humanness, for He was human. He understands my suffering, for He suffered to come to earth, suffered to see the sins of the people, suffered to see the suffering masses, suffered with each sufferer He met, and finally suffered for you and me and died for our sins. The Hebrew writer reminds us in Heb. 2:18 "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." Then in Hebrews 4:15 "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Therefore, when we are burdened or troubled or anxious or tempted, when our burdens are more than we can bear, remember that Jesus took His humanity into Heaven with Him so that He could be a good high priest to us human beings, allowing us to take anything to Him, to tell Him all our heartache, all our secrets and our secret sins, and he will listen to us, hear us and forgive us. Again we can look to Hebrews as we think of His humanness where the writer says, Heb 7:24,25, "But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The second stanza of Paul's Christmas Carol is GOD SENT FORTH HIS SIN, MADE OF A WOMAN...

Now the third Stanza of this Carol is this: GOD'S PLAN INCLUDED YOU. HE CAME TO REDEEM those that were under the law.' Obviously this statement was meant first for the Jews, His own kinsmen according to the flesh, who struggled to be righteous by obeying every ordinance of the *Torah*, and found that whatever they did, they could not be righteous, because they could not possibly keep all the Law. In the time of Jesus, the Law had become so cumbersome and so loaded with absurd and ludicrous ordinances that the people had to find ways around them, such as doubling a Sabbath day's journey by putting their clothing or food in another place, that could be called their dwelling and make them technically legal under the law.. In that way, they could travel twice as far.

The Sabbath day ordinances were so excessive that people couldn't even wear their false teeth without carrying a burden on the Sabbath day, thereby working, and the women couldn't wear earrings or any jewelry of any kind, or hair pins in their hair because that too was considered work, and couldn't even look into mirrors on the Sabbath day for fear they might fix their hair, or do something to their faces that would be construed as work.

Jesus came to redeem the Jewish people, the people of promise, that were under the law by showing them the way of faith and of grace, to show them that they didn't have to bear such heaven burdens, for His burden and His yoke was easy and light, to show them that they didn't have to bribe God with good works to save them and forgive them and redeem them, that all God wanted from them was Faith and Faithfulness. Such a Gospel would free them from the slavery of the law.

Not only the Jews, but the Gentiles were also slaves, slaves to culture, slaves to sin, slaves to false religions, as many are today, and to false gods, still present today, only in different dress. Moreover, the Gentiles were slaves of the law too, since their conscience proved that they knew the good even when they did the bad, and thus being guilty before the bar of conscience, were guilty also before the bar of God. God's plan included you--He came to redeem you.

The word for redeem (lutroo) means to buy back from the marketplace, the slave market, where slaves were sold to the highest bidder. We are all slaves of the law of sin; and Jesus, our brother, sent by the Father, came to die in our place for our sins, came to buy us back to His Father, came to fulfill the righteousness of the law on our behalf, and to pay the purchase price for our redemption with His own blood. His life, lived, was the only perfect righteousness that a holy God could or would accept; and His death the only redemption price for sin.

We all struggle with sin and guilt. We all live with the burden of a guilty conscience from time to time. We all feel like crying with Paul, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But we must also be able to affirm with the great Apostle, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ the Lord!" At such times we resolve to be better people, and to do more good deeds. But that is our problem; for instead of goodness, we need grace, instead of resolutions we need redemption. Only Christ can deliver us. That is why, the very reason why, Jesus was sent by the

Father. God sent His Son in the fullness of time to redeem us; and if you will place your faith in this Heaven Sent King, God's plan will be more complete:

2 Peter 3:9

<sup>9</sup> "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Praise God, when the Father sent the Son, He sent Jesus to planet earth to live a perfect life in human flesh, and to die for you and for me that we might come to repentance, that we might be saved, that we might have life abundantly, that we might be resurrected from the dead when Jesus calls our name and cries, "Come Forth!"

But the last stanza of Paul's Christmas hymn is found here, and it involves us too: He was sent by the Father

Galatians 4:5-7

<sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

<sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

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

Jesus was sent by the Father into history; and the Spirit of Jesus was sent by the Father into our hearts to make us His Sons and Daughters. Our fourth stanza of Paul's Christmas Carol is this: ...CRYING ABBA, FATHER! WE NOW HAVE A SONG TO SING! And the song we have to sing includes three important elements: it is a song of freedom; a song of fatherhood; and a song of family, which we must sing to the world. We must tell them: In Christ you are not a slave. In Him, you are sons and daughters of God!

Those early Christians knew that their song was the song of freedom. In the Book of Acts we find Paul and Silas in stocks in the prison, having been beaten mercilessly by the Philippian Jailor. It is midnight, and a strange thing happens. Perhaps Paul says to Silas, "Silas, we were called to be witnesses of Christ here in Phillipi, so let's witness. Let's sing and praise God and of His Christ to the top of our lungs. Those other prisoners may be asleep, but we will get them awake. And perhaps that wicked jailor will hear and know that God loves him too." And there in jail, aching from their recent wounds...well, listen to Luke's account:

Acts 16:25

<sup>25</sup> And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

Then came a mighty earthquake. Then the jailor tried to kill himself, thinking all the prisoners had escaped, and without Paul's restraining command would have done so, for the Apostle cried, "Do thyself no harm. We are all here." And that Jailor, that strong, sadistic jailor in Phillipi, cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And he humbled himself as a little child and got saved by faith in Jesus, and later washed the wounds that his lash had made, and he

and his family were baptized into the Philippian Church that very night. Really the question he asked could just as easily have been, "What must I do to be free?" This jailor, who held the keys to the jail, was himself in jail, himself a prisoner, himself enslaved. The Apostles were in jail, but they were free, free indeed! And, thank God, the jailor found true freedom, also. That is our song too.

Our Christmas Song about the Nazarene who was sent by the Father, is a song about the Fatherhood of God. Sent by the Father, Jesus came and died and rose again, and ascended back to the Father. But the same Father who sent Jesus into history, redeeming us by His blood, sent also His Spirit into our hearts, adopting us as Sons and Daughters of God.

Our Christmas Carol is about our Salvation, our Heavenly Father, and our New Life, the gift of His Spirit. But it is more. It is also about Family, our Family, the Family of God. As Family, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. As Family, we are God's children. As Family, we have brothers and sisters in every Christian Church in every nation on earth. We have Family; we are Family.

But we now have a song, and we cannot but sing it. Jesus was sent by the Father. The Spirit was sent by the Father; and we must be sent by the Father also. In John 3: 17 we read: <sup>17</sup> "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Jesus came to earth to save humanity. That is our Christmas song.

In His Great High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed:

<sup>Jn. 17:18</sup> As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

Then He told His Apostles:

<sup>John 20:21</sup> Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

Then, just as Isaiah had heard God say, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' ; and he answered, 'Here am I; send me!' Let us hear the word of God to us, the word of the Resurrected Christ! "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you!" Paul's song can be summarized in these words:

God had a plan. In the Fullness of time, that plan was revealed to man. The Son of God was sent by the Father as a human baby to become a man, and be our Savior, to die for our sins and rise again, and to redeem us by His death and resurrection. The Father sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying Abba, Father!

Paul's Christmas carol is our song too, our story, and as that old hymn says, "This is my story, This is my song, Praising my Savior, All the day long." Amen!