

A PURPOSEFUL SAVIOR

INTRODUCTION

Why Christmas? To have presents and Santa Claus? To have family over and a big dinner? To put retail stores in the black (along with Thanksgiving)?

We should look to Christmas as a reminder that our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human flesh, lived a sinless life, became our substitute on the cross, rose from the dead in victory over sin and death, remains fully God and fully man today as our Mediator in heaven, and will one day return to bring this age to an end, exercise judgment over the wicked, and inaugurate the eternal age.

Before creation happened God had already decreed every event and moment of Jesus' life and ministry, as with everything else that has ever taken place. But it was with the Savior's birth that the purposes of God began to be carried out. Let's turn to Galatians 4, and see the purpose of the Savior for ourselves.

Galatians 4:4–5 (ESV) — 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.

In these verses we see

- God's timeframe,
- God's action,
- Jesus' human nature,
- Jesus' spiritual responsibility,
- Jesus' work on earth,
- and the purpose for which Jesus did that work.

GOD'S TIME FRAME

4 But when the fullness of time had come

HISTORICAL

We can think about the fullness of time from a historical point of view, relating to the passing of time in history.

By the decree of God, Jesus' birth was always going to happen exactly when and where it did. Nothing was left up to chance. We might be tempted to think that God's story is being written as it unfolds, but that's not the case. God's story has already been written in complete detail. It's being PUBLISHED moment by moment, and we don't know what will happen next until He publishes it, but it has already been WRITTEN and completed. That's why we can have utter peace in the midst of turmoil; our circumstances didn't take our God by surprise. Not only was He ready for them, He had already written them out. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28, NLT).

The promise of a Redeemer begins early in Scripture, in Genesis 3:15, where God says that the seed of the woman would destroy the serpent. But it's not until Daniel 9:25-26, about five centuries before Christ, that we are given an approximate time in human history. Daniel 9 tells us that the Messiah would be cut off, or put to death, 483 years after the order was given to rebuild Jerusalem. That order was given by Artaxerxes I in 453 B.C., and Jesus was crucified in 30 A.D., a period of 483 years. Obviously, the Savior's birth had to precede His death, and so we have an approximate time for the sending of the Son.

SALVATION

But the fullness of time speaks about more than history, a specific period of time; it also speaks to the fulfillment of God's purposes relating to His plan of salvation.

Jesus wasn't just born at the moment of history that God promised; He was born at the perfect moment in God's redemptive plan.

Romans 5:6 says

Romans 5:6 ESV For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Jesus died at the right time. This wasn't "just in time," as though it was almost too late. It was the right time, exactly when the purpose of God required it. Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2:23 says.

It might very well be that, apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's justice would have required judgment to take place. Thousands of years had passed since the great flood; mankind had proved to be just as violent and perverse as we were in Noah's day, as we are today. God had chosen a people for His own name, but they refused to be faithful. Following their return from Babylon the people of Israel did not become more faithful, they simply substituted foreign false gods for the idol of their own traditions.

Caiaphas, the high priest at the time of Jesus' death, advised the leaders of Israel that it is better for you that ONE MAN SHOULD DIE for the people, than that the WHOLE NATION SHOULD PERISH (John 11:48). Caiaphas prophesied against his will; he didn't know that he was speaking God's truth; the fact that he did speak God's truth didn't validate him as a faithful man of God; it shows God's absolute sovereignty over all things and every person.

So God's timing in sending His Son, and the death of His Son on the cross, was perfect, not just from a historical point of view, but from a salvation point of view.

GOD'S ACTION

God sent forth his Son

The Son was already the Son when God sent Him. Being God Himself, the eternal Word of God, the perfect expression of all that God is, the Son was with the Father and the Holy Spirit for all eternity prior to creation. Redemption had to come through a man, because a man brought death to the human race. But no mere man could redeem all of God's elect in a single act, satisfying God's eternal wrath in a short span of time. God's redemptive plan required that His own Son take on human flesh.

Hebrews 7:26 ESV For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Because Jesus is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens,

Hebrews 7:27 ESV He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Because the Trinity works in perfect agreement and harmony, the Father had to send His Son. The Son didn't slip away unnoticed, redeem mankind, and then return to heaven and say, "Guess what I just did!" God decreed all these things. The Father elected a people for His name's sake, and sent His Son to redeem them. The Son obeyed the Father's command, and redeemed those very people by His holy life and substitutionary death. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, came to make salvation actual in our lives, carrying out the Father's will and applying the Son's work to the elect.

JESUS' HUMAN NATURE

born of woman

Jesus was born of woman. He was truly and completely human. John 1:14 tells us

John 1:14 ESV And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The angel Gabriel told Mary,

Luke 1:35 ESV And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

The child to be born – human in every sense – will be called holy, the Son of God – deity in every sense.

Jesus did not pretend to be human; neither was He a man who pretended to have some enlightened understanding. Truly God, He became truly man, two natures in One Person. He became tired and slept. He became hungry and thirsty, and ate and drank. He felt the pain of torture and crucifixion, and cried out. He wept at Lazarus' tomb. He was moved with compassion for some, and became angry with others. Because of this,

Hebrews 4:15 ESV For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Whatever you have suffered, He knows and has experienced, yet He remained utterly faithful to the Father in the process. He did not live simply as an example for us to follow; He lived IN OUR PLACE, pleasing the Father as we should have pleased Him.

JESUS' SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY

born under the law

Jesus was born with a significant spiritual responsibility: to live sinlessly under the Law of God. He wasn't on vacation; He came to work. This doesn't just mean that He was Jewish, but that He observed every prohibition and prescription of the Law.

I hope you remember Matthew 5:17, where Jesus says,

Matthew 5:17 ESV "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus took faithfulness and obedience seriously at all times.

John 8:29 ESV And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

The things that are pleasing to God cannot be separated from His Law. God LOVES His Law. Jesus LOVES the Law of God. We ought to love the Law of God as well. Instead, it terrifies us, because we can't keep it, and it condemns us. Jesus came to live under the Law of God, and obey completely, in our place, so that we would be justified, receiving credit for HIS perfect, faithful obedience.

JESUS' WORK ON EARTH

to redeem those who were under the Law

Why did God send His Son? Why did the Word become flesh? Why did Jesus give up His divine privileges, take the humble position of a slave, be born as a human being, humble Himself in obedience to God, and die a criminal's death on a cross (Philippians 2:7-8)?

It wasn't to build buildings. It wasn't to start a religious club. It wasn't to relieve the suffering of the poor, or to guarantee civil rights, or to save the earth. It wasn't so that sinners could feel good about themselves, and have happy, satisfying lives while immersed in their sin. He didn't come to liberate women from men, minorities from whites, the poor from the rich, or the weak from the powerful.

He came to redeem those who were under the Law, so that instead of facing eternal condemnation we would receive eternal blessing.

Luke 19:10 ESV For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Luke 5:32 NLT I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent.”

Matthew 20:28 ESV even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

John 10:10 ESV The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

1 Timothy 1:15 ESV The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Jesus came to redeem sinners. That was the focus of His entire life, increasingly so during His public ministry, and specifically so in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. And now, having ascended to heaven, Jesus is our High Priest, our Mediator, interceding for us at all times, praying us all the way home.

JESUS' PURPOSE

so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Why did Jesus come to redeem us? It was not simply to forgive our sins, but to make us God's children. We do need forgiveness; no one is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10). But our problem goes much deeper than acts of sin. We are born with an Adamic nature, which means that we are born children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). We have inherited Adam's sin and death (Romans 5:12). As long as we are children of wrath, we are children of the devil (First John 3:8), not children of God. Forgiveness alone doesn't make us fit for heaven; we must be born again as children of God; we must receive a new nature – Christ's nature; we must be adopted by the Father.

2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home.

What a wonderful God we have! We don't deserve redemption or rescue; we deserve judgment and condemnation. But in Jesus Christ we receive the eternal life that we don't deserve – that's grace – and don't receive the eternal judgment we do deserve – that's mercy.

Our forgiveness did not come because God shrugged His shoulders and decided to just let our sin go. He is holy and just, and a just penalty had to be imposed for our sin. His wrath could not simply be set aside; it had to be satisfied. And so

Galatians 4:4–5 ESV But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

If Jesus is not your Savior, then claim Him! Believe in Him! Call upon Him! Look for His mercy and forgiveness and grace! Repent of your sins and throw yourself upon Him!

If Jesus is your Savior, then worship Him! Glorify Him! Serve Him with all your life! Sing to Him! Pray to Him! Exalt His name as the greatest name ever given! Surrender yourself to the fullness of His redemption and sanctification! And then, keep your eyes open for those who know that they are sinners, and know they need a Savior. And when you find them, when you see them, tell them that there is a Great Physician for their spiritual cancer; there is a Savior for their sin. Tell them about Jesus, and urge them to go to Him for salvation.