

The Great Christmas Rescue

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Well, grab your Bibles and let's go to Galatians. Galatians chapter 3. We'll begin in verse 29 and we'll go through chapter 4, verse 7 as I have an announcement to make to you, exciting announcement that I have finally discovered the meaning of Christmas. I hope actually I've known it before now, but I've never known a text to spell it out so vividly and explicitly as this one does, and as I studied it this week, it just filled my soul with joy and excitement afresh. And I entitled the unpacking exposition of this section of Scripture, "The Great Christmas Rescue." Not that we are rescuing Christmas, it needs no rescue but that Christmas is the story of God rescuing us. Galatians 3, beginning in verse 29.

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Heirs according to promise.

1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But [the glorious conjunctive word] But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that [to this end, that is,] He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

I. A pledge with divine assurance. I actually want to put a modifier at the beginning, a sacred pledge of divine assurance. Look back up at 3:29 as we're going to find here, going through 3:21 down through 4:7, and actually all through Galatians, but particularly here, analogy upon analogy, metaphor upon metaphor, as Paul wants to give us these analogies and metaphors so that we might better understand what God's done for us in Christ. Now, these analogies aren't perfect. There's never a perfect analogy. So don't try to take these analogies and make every little syllable or word mean some special spirit of

truth. You'll miss it if you do that. It's the general picture that we want to get from these analogies. So Abraham is something of an analogy, a parallel to our experience. And so, how did Abraham become a child of God? How did Abraham become the father of the nation that is God's particularly and uniquely Israel? We're here at verse 29, chapter 3, "And if you belong to Christ," in like manner, "you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to promise, heirs according to promise." The word promise there, and that's why I used that Roman numeral, the wording I used, it's a divine, or a pledge to you backed by divine assurance, or you might even say divine power. God made a pledge to Abraham, a promise, "You're gonna be My child, you're gonna you're gonna have a great nation after you, and I'm gonna bless you, and through you I'll bless all the nations of the earth." You know, it's interesting, I've never found anyone Calvinistic or Arminian that disputes the sovereign election of Abraham in Israel. I mean, everybody gets that. God chose Abraham. God speaks to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees and says, "Leave your land, leave your relatives, leave your people, go where I'm gonna show you and I will make you the father of a great nation." It was a pledge with the divine assurance behind it.

Matter of fact, let's look at it there just a second. Genesis 12:1 through 3. Genesis 12, "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation.'" What a pledge he's making to Abraham. "I will bless you, I will make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Then later on in Genesis 15:6, after the election, the calling, the pledge, then Genesis 15:6, "And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Interesting. The belief came after the calling. The belief came after the pledge to Abraham. The belief on Abraham's part came after the initiative of God to make this pledge to Abraham of what he would do for him and through him. And then we get down to verse um 9 of uh of uh 3, yes. Galatians 3:9. So then, analogy that parallels over to us, "So then those who are of faith," that's us today and the Galatian believers of this day, "are blessed with Abraham the believer." So Abraham is a type of the believing Christian. We come in and we are Christians by the pledge that God has given us that is backed by divine assurance.

Now let's come down to our situation and talk about how God worded this pledge to us as Christians and let's remind ourselves, God is not making a pledge to us the same way he did Abraham. To Abraham, he was forming a nation of people. By the way, God's always been about individual conversions to the end of forming for himself a people, Israel. But God's not today forming a nation of people. God is not today establishing a theocracy in the earth, that'll happen when Jesus comes again, by the way. But today, he's establishing a people in the earth made up of local churches. We are the people of God in the earth today, in parallel with the people of God in the Old Testament, which was centered in the nation of Israel, which is a type or a picture of this church age. But here's the pledge to those of us today, Romans 8:29 through 31. A sacred pledge with divine assurance in it is this, Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew," he knew you before you were born, "He also predestined," he marked out you for himself, he marked out what you would be

before you were born, "to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn," here he goes, "among many brethren." God wants to save you because he loves you, but to the end that you would be formed together with other people like you and form a people. In today's dispensation, that means local churches. Verse 30, Romans 8, "and these whom He predestined, He also called." In time and space history, the gospel is preached, the Spirit of God came on you and he called you to belief, repentance and faith. "Pastor, I don't understand how that works." Well, your brain's not big enough.

I just thought of a little humorous story that Dr. Adrian Rogers uh used to talk about when he took over the pulpit of the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis and Dr. R. G. Lee had been the famed pastor there for decades. And Dr. Rogers said, "Dr. Lee, as I become the pastor, can we take your brain out of your head and put it in my head?" Dr. R. G. Lee said, "Son, that'd be like putting a grand piano in a broom closet." Well, your brain's too little. We grasp these things and we rest in these things and we glory in these sovereign truths by faith. Aren't you glad the Bible is bigger than your brain because God is bigger than your brain.

Well, verse 30 again, "and these whom He predestined," marked out for a particular end, "He called," in time and space history, "and these whom He called, He justified," gave them a just standing before the holy God through the merits of Jesus Christ, "and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" That is our sacred pledge with the divine assurance. "You're gonna be Mine. You're gonna be My people. I've marked you out for Myself. I will keep My pledge to you." Wow. That's what Paul is trying to get over to the Galatian believers in writing this letter because even though they were truly converted, they were immature in their understanding, and they were drifting back toward embracing law, works, rituals...man can do to quote save himself or to keep himself saved. Now, if you're not used to this kind of preaching, I'm not sure what kind you're getting, but I would say this, certainly we hold that every man is responsible and held responsible by God to repent of sin and place his faith in Jesus Christ, it's just that the Bible gives us the back of all of that and in back of all that is the sovereign work of God. It's mysterious in many ways. We can't grasp it all, but we won't get to heaven and walk into heaven and the angels applaud God for the great work of grace and mercy he had in saving you, then the angels will ask you to take a bow and the angels will applaud you for the great work you did in believing on God and trusting God and saying the sinner's prayer, walking and aisle, all the things you may have done to get yourself saved. That's not gonna happen. All of heaven will know what God's trying to tell us now, God does it all. And God says, "I want to give you a pledge." The word promise here, when he says God made Abraham an heir of promise and therefore makes us an heir of promise, the promise is a sacred pledge from God backed by divine assurance.

2. He placed the children under guardians awaiting the promise. He placed the children, those who were his foreknown, predestined, chosen, elected children, he placed them under guardians until the promise came. Now, if you would look at it there for two sub points here. First of all, he says in this season before we come to Christ and in the season of this age 2,000 years ago before Christ came born of the Virgin Mary, he says you were

under these, these are analogies again, he's painting a picture from the basic Greek Roman household of how they raised children to show how we were spiritually before we came to Christ. Are you with me? These are the analogies. First of all, he says, you were like children without adult privileges. What he's saying is you were in the family because God gave you a divine pledge, "You're Mine, I foreknew you, I predestined you, I've elected and chosen you, and I called you at the right time, made you Mine in time and space history and experience, but you were Mine before that." And in that season before you actually come to faith, if you will, are the Galatians in the season before Christ came to you, born of the virgin and dying on the cross for you. You were like children in the household, but without adult privileges.

So what he means there in verse um 2 when he says, "but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father." The idea here, you were one who was not of adult age. This is the analogy that lays beside our spiritual experience. It helps explain our spiritual pilgrimage and experience. You were one who was still immature and he says in that situation, though you're fully a member of the family, you were really no better than a slave in actuality or in experience. Now you differed from a slave because you were in the family, you bore the family name, you're the blood lineage of the family, you're a rightful heir, your name is on the inheritance deed to all that the family has, but yet being a child, you're placed under these guardians or managers until the age established by your father. And that's what the Greek and Roman households, particularly the more wealthy Greek and Roman households did in this day. Child would be born, little boy's born, he's fully a member of the family, he's fully an heir of the family, but the father appoints a slave, an adult slave, to be his guardian, his manager, and he has to walk the line under that guardian and manager, obey him, do what he says to do, be trained by him, tutored by him, educated by him until the day he gets his new toga, the toga Virillis, which means he's now into adulthood. He said that's the way you were before Jesus came. You were like one who's under the authority of a of a burdensome guardian, fully in the family, but not yet enjoying the blessings and privileges of the family.

Secondly, in these intertwined, he said, not only you were like a minor child who hadn't grown up to enjoy the the blessings and privileges of the family you're in, he said, you were like a slave in bondage. Look at verse 3, "So also we, while we were children," if you don't agree, if you don't understand sovereign election, you won't get this. You were children, you were considered in God's eternal mind God's child before your conversion. So while you were children, yet you "were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world." Now the analogy again is before your conversion you're lost, and like the immature child of an ancient Greek household who hasn't reached the age of adulthood, you were under the bondage of your guardian and you functioned according to the elementary principles of the world.

Now when he says you were functioning according to the elemental or elementary principles of the world, I want to elaborate some here because this is where most of the professing Christian world is. They profess Christ, but they still function under the elementary principles of worldly thinking. So elemental principles of the world are the

basic conclusions, the basic principle that the world naturally comes to without any divine aid. Go all over the world and study the religions and the philosophies of antiquity and what naturally comes out over and over and over again is this: men can save themselves. Men can form a group of works, a group of rules, a set of ordinances they observe, a set of rituals they perform, some religious ceremonies, whatever it may be, it's all based on the external of what you do, and that's just natural in men's thinking. You don't need God at all to come to that conclusion. It's just in you. It's elementary. And so that's why the world thinks that way. That's why the era of Roman Catholicism has been so successful throughout the world. They just come in and say, "We have a better set of rules than you have. We have a better set of works than you did in your old religion. So just embrace our works, our rules and our system." Again, that's elementary. That's all putting on of externals, if you will.

So this is where he says though you're really God's child in the sense of God's eternal understanding of you, and you're really a part of the household, and you really are heir to everything, you don't yet get it because for a season you're still like you're under the old elementary thinking of the world. Spiritually speaking, Ephesians 2:1 says you were dead during that time. Spiritually speaking, your hearts were desperately desperately wicked and could not be trusted during that time. Spiritually speaking, you would not seek after God. The Bible says none seeks after God. You seek after your system, your rules, your philosophy of how it works, but you don't seek after God. That's where we all were. Therefore, it's not only improbable, but impossible that you could ever get to God in that situation, under the guardian, the burden, and the bondage to law, rule keeping, the elementary things of the world and in this lostness, in this spiritual darkness and blindness, we naturally concluded that we can figure it out, we can find salvation through our own wisdom, ingenuity, and abilities, maybe put on some religion. It's just so elementary. We just so naturally think that way. In so many aspects of professing Christendom, that's exactly what they are. They use Christian terminology, they use biblical words, they use biblical verses, but when it boils down, it's them doing something, listen to me, let's go back to our first point, instead of resting on the pledge that God gave them. "No, no, no, wait a minute, wait a minute. It's not what I'm doing or not doing. It's not what I join or don't join. It's not rituals I perform or don't perform. It's not morally, ethically cleaning up my life. I'm basing my all on the pledge that God would come and save me." Are you getting the difference, church? He's telling the Galatian believers that's where we all were for a long, long time.

So that's the essence of all of this man-made religion, much of it with the name of Christianity on the outside. It's a cosmetic thing. It's not a real substance. It's a false foundation. And these Galatian believers, thinking that, now listen, here's what's interesting, thinking they were rising up in maturity, thinking they were rising up in increased knowledge, were beginning to embrace the old religious elementary principles of rituals and rites and ordinances and works. They thought, "Oh, we're becoming real superior Christians now." And Paul says, "No, you're not. You're going backwards. You're going backwards. You're like an adult man who's quite well-educated who's still going over his ABCs. You're in reverse." So in this predicament, in this situation of being under guardians or managers and not being able to enjoy the family's blessings and

privileges, even though they're ours as God's elected predestined chosen ones, and being under the burden of law that condemns us and will not let us free from that condemnation, what's going to happen? Well, that's what I call the great Christmas rescue. That's III., the great Christmas rescue. So here God comes to fulfill his promise, to fulfill his pledge, "I will come and get done what you cannot do. I will come and perform the atonement, the redemption that you cannot obtain on your own. I will come to you because it's a sacred pledge with divine assurance that I would do this."

Well, two thoughts here, two sub points coming out of our text. Number one, notice in the fulfillment of this pledge or promise, it was perfectly timed and Paul wants to point out here that – are you listening to me this morning? I don't want to start over. Everything, not most things, everything that has ever happened in time and space history, everything that is right now happening in time and space history, and everything that is going to happen before Jesus comes in time and space history, is to the end of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ and to the good of his church, which is his primary work. Everything serves us. Are you getting this because I wanna tell you, Jesus is not coming again to fix the earth. He's coming again to remove the earth and leave his perfected church in the perfected earth. Are y'all getting this, folks? It's all about Jesus and because he chose us and gave us this divine pledge with divine assurance, it's all about us. And that's what he did on Christmas. He said, "The children are in a mess. The children are like babies in a Greek household that got guardians and managers. They don't even enjoy the real blessings and privileges of being a member of the household. They don't even understand how they're heirs of everything. They're under the bondage of this law. I must go rescue them just like I pledged I would."

So he says in verse 4, here's the Christmas message, "But when the fullness of time came," this is sub point A, the perfectly timed fulfillment of the promise, "God sent forth His Son," that's the incarnation, "born of a woman, born under the Law." You see, there was a set time when God made Adam and Eve and there was a set time when after Adam and Eve sinned God clothed them with garments of a third party, showing them someone else must atone and cover you, cover your guilt and sin. There was a set time when God sent the flood but preserved Noah and his family so there would be a righteous remnant and a lineage coming toward the promised Messiah. There was a set time when God called Abraham and gave him a sacred pledge with divine assurance, "You're gonna be the father of great nation and in effect through you, the promised Savior will come." There was a set time when God called Isaac to be the promised lineage. There was a set time when God affirmed that Jacob would be the line of promise. There was a set time when God changed Jacob and changed his name to Israel. There was a set time when Joseph became the Prime Minister of Egypt and secured the people of God in Egypt to continue the lineage to the Savior. There was a set time when Joseph's brothers came to Egypt and settled there. There was a set time when God used Moses to lead them out of Egyptian bondage. There was a set time when God parted the Red Sea and led Moses through. There was a set time when Joseph took the children of God over the Jordan and into the Promised Land. There was a set time when God led his people through judges, and there was a set time when God led his people through kings. And then at the right moment, the fullness of time came, Jesus comes to rescue the children and deliver on the

divine pledge, "I'll come and provide for you. I will come and do for you what you cannot do for yourself." So in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman and born under the law. Mary conceived Jesus in her virgin womb. She gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus grows up and begins his earthly ministry. There's a time when Jesus sets his face like flint towards Jerusalem and he goes to the cross there and there fulfills the pledge, makes the payment, freeing us from guardians and masters and stewards and the bondage of the law. And at the set time, in the fullness of time, he rose from the dead and then he ascended back into heaven to faithfully intercede for his own until he returns again. He came to rescue his dear people and there he reigns at the right hand of the Father and no one is able to topple him.

The fullness of time has the idea that everything was properly prepared and built up to that moment. God, seeing the end from the beginning, knew it was fully ripe. It was the time. Sin had had time to show forth its deadly fruit and its true nature. And man had had more than abundant time to fully prove he was unable to save himself. In addition to that, the Roman Empire controlled the whole known world and they built these incredible roads. I've been over there. Some of those roads are still functioning today. And so you could take the gospel through all that kingdom of the known world. And Rome had implemented one language for the whole earth, which helped in the age of the spreading of the gospel. It was the fullness of time. So it was at the perfect timing that God fulfilled his pledge, his promise that, "I will come and fix it. I'll come and save you."

Now, it was perfectly executed. Look at verse 5, perfectly executed. "So that," he came born of Mary, "born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." So Jesus was born of the woman in order to redeem the children. He was born under the law, the text says. The idea is that Jesus came into the world as a man obligated to all the law that all of us must answer to, except he kept it perfectly, and then also he took the place at the judgment bar of God for us when he died at the cross, obligated to all the retribution and just punishment we should have received as lawbreakers. So God the Father, listen to me, God the Father did something with God the Son that he does to no or none other of his children, placed him under the law. You understand, you're not under law, you're under grace but Jesus was under law so that he might be able to put us all under grace. He fulfilled the law. He bore the requirements of the law against sinners that we might be children saved by grace.

Matthew 5:17 reminds us, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." When Jesus breathed his last on the cross, he knew no sin, he'd committed no sin, but in that moment on the cross, there was a radical reversal between God the Father and God the Son. God the Father now turned and looked at his Son, not as the holy, righteous Son of God and God the Son, but as if he were a sinner like all of us are sinners. That's why the text says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." So God the Father looks at Jesus the Son and views him as a wretched, unholy, unrighteous lawbreaker on our behalf.

Jesus came under the law that we might come under grace. Jesus was born under law, the text says, to the end that we might be born again under grace. Christ came and purchased us from slavery, and now we're received into sonship. So back to the flow of the context with the Galatians thinking, "We're gonna be so smart, we're gonna be so mature, we're gonna start embracing the law again and just kinda put some law with Jesus," Paul is writing, "What a foolish thing to even think about. How absurd to go back to the law in order to attain maturity. That's not maturity, that's immaturity." The moment you're born again, the moment you receive Christ as your Savior, you are immediately you are immediately an adult son or daughter in the family of God. Everything, everything that God is, everything that God has, everything that God could give you in inheritance is already yours. You're not under guardians. You're not under managers. You're not under stewards. You're God's mature, fully accepted adult son or daughter. Now you may be a child in your understanding of what you have, but you're not a child in the possession of what is yours. That's the that's the great Christmas rescue. That's why he came. You enjoy all the benefits of the family, you you enjoy all the liberties of an adult in the family, you're a full heir, and notice in verses 4 through 6, the entire Trinity is mentioned here. In verse 4, in the fullness of time, God sent, that's God the Father, his Son, that's of course God the Son. And then verse 6, and God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, that's the Holy Spirit. The entire membership of the Holy Godhead is intent on you being freed and welcomed into full family sonship and an heir of God's family.

So in the truest sense, matter of fact, look at verse 7 first, "Therefore you are no longer a slave," that's gone, "but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." So in the very truest sense, you are not God's possession as servants, you are his precious sons who now are learning to long to serve him. The Galatians wanted to go back in position and become just a possession, a slave, when they were really already, Paul is saying, "You're already sons because He came on Christmas and got it all fixed."

Real quick, five things about the contrast of thinking you're a slave or a servant trying to earn your way to God, being a son already welcomed into God's family through grace. First of all, the son has the same nature as the father. A slave doesn't have the same nature of his master. Secondly, the son has a father. The slave in the family does not have in in the one who's over him a fatherly figure. No slave could ever say father or abba, father like we can. The son obeys out of love. The servant, the slave would obey out of fear. Number four, the son is already rich. Slave owns nothing. The Bible in Ephesians 1:7, we know the riches of grace. Philippians 4:9, we know the riches of glory. Romans 2:4, we know the riches of his goodness. Romans 11:33, we have the riches of his wisdom. Colossians 1:19, Jesus says we have all the riches of God in Christ Jesus. It's already yours because he came at Christmas to rescue us from the state we were in. In this world, we're kind of like a son that's on a journey. We're away from our home. And while we have full rights to all the family's inheritance and property and privileges, we can't enjoy them because we're on the journey but when we get home, how can I say it? It's party time. We're sojourning down here and we don't quite realize all that's ours but one day we will. The son has a future. The servant/slave didn't necessarily have any future. Some slaves had masters who provided for them in old age, but it was not required. But the father always provides for the son and we're his son.

That's why he came. That's why he was born on that Christmas morning so that you might be released from guardians and bondage and slavery into the full status blessings and privileges of a member of the household of God all through the merits of Jesus Christ. So the Son of God, Jesus, became the Son of Man so that the sons of men can become the sons of God. And so you are. That's the meaning of Christmas. That's the great Christmas rescue of the children. Now, if you individually become his, God's always about a collectivity. He's always about having for himself a people. So it's incumbent, no, it's required, it's essential that you join up with his people in a formal and real way.