

# A Perfect Christmas

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Let me ask you this morning: what for you would make a perfect Christmas? Now perhaps some of the older folks would say, "You know, if just all the family could be together. That's all I would want, if we could all just be together that would be a perfect Christmas." Perhaps the younger among us would say, "If I get everything I'm hoping for for Christmas, that would be a perfect Christmas." And maybe some have loftier dreams and say, "Well, if we just had world peace that would be just a perfect Christmas." Some of us would think, "If my family just would have peace this year, that would be a perfect Christmas." I talked with one church member who said, "We used to have fistfights over Christmas every year and, ah, I'd have to break one up." What would make a perfect Christmas? Well, Christmas is about salvation and the salvation God brought to us through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ is a perfect salvation. It's of God and God only does perfect things.

So let's go to the Christmas story this morning over in Galatians. Would you turn there? Oh, you thought we'd go to Luke, didn't you? Galatians 4 and let's look at the Christmas story in Galatians 4:4-6 and I've entitled this "A Perfect Christmas."

[baby crying] Now we don't have a nursery so you just need to get used to that, alright? That's okay. If they get too bad we'll let you dismiss yourselves with your child but some of it's okay.

Galatians 4:4-6.

4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that 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!"

Now first of all, I want to talk about this perfect salvation by pointing out, I., that it is perfect concerning the timing of his coming. It is perfect in the timing of his coming and that's exactly what the text wants us to see because it says there in verse 4, "when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son." The fullness of time.

Now if you look up in the preceding context in verses 1 and 2, you see these statements, Paul writing to the church of the Galatia regions says,

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.

So he's using this as a parable or a parallel that as you look in the Roman culture it was common in that day at least for well-to-do families to hire a servant or a slave who would be a guardian or a manager, sometimes they'd, they'd call him a tutor over the child and that guardian or manager would educate and train and take care of the child under the parents' oversight. And so he's making a picture here of how before conversion we're under law, we're under the guardianship of the law, a tutor, and then we come into full maturity as a true son when we come to Christ and receive him as Lord and Savior, and so that's the parallel that he's doing here and when you become a son, when you leave the guardianship of the law, or in the Greek culture that guardianship of that servant your parents placed to watch over you, then you begin to enjoy the liberties and the privileges of becoming a young adult. So again, the heavenly Father saw fit in his sovereign and perfect purposes to place us under law. That's the law of God and the law was our tutor, our manager, our guardian for a season of time.

Look back up in chapter 3 and look at verse 24,

24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

So until the time set by the Father which, by the way, was set before the foundation of the world, all things concerning Christ from eternity past before time and creation were established by God. Ephesians 1:4 tells us, "4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love." So God set everything up about this perfect salvation for his children before the foundation of the world. The law had been established for some 1,300 years before Christ was born and then at that perfect time, that set time established by the Father from the foundation of the world, Christ came to redeem us from the curse, that is, from the penalty of the law.

The Bible tells us that Christ fulfilled all righteousness. He was the perfect one and in coming to perfectly redeem his children through a perfect salvation, he had to come at the perfect time. After all, God had foreordained that the Jews had a set ordained time for the atonement of sin. It was the first day, if you will, of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the Jewish calendar year which was the set time for the Day of Atonement, and on that day and only on that day, and at that time and only at that time, could the high priest enter the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary of the Jewish temple, and there he would sprinkle the blood for the sins of the people.

So in fulfilling that type, Christ came at the set time, the fullness of time the Bible says, and when you see that phrase "fullness of time" it has the idea that everything else that needed to be done previously had already been completed. You see, God does nothing prematurely. He wait, or he waited rather until sin was fully developed and man's inability to save himself was fully manifested and then he sends his Son. All the prophecies of all the ages came together at this common center point. The social and political world was fully prepared, prepared for the coming of our Redeemer.

He has a purpose for allowing the evil day before he brings the remedy and when the fullness of all of the Father's perfect intentions had come to that point, then he sent his Son. The entire universe had been awaiting this greatest of all events. The entire cosmos was pregnant and eagerly awaited the arrival of the Christ child, and no wonder the angels exclaimed when he was born, "Glory to God in the highest." Matter of fact, let's look at that for just a second, would you? Turn over to Luke and let's look at the actual historical narrative of this announcement of the fullness of time when, ah, the angels are singing or the Bible actually says speaking, and they're, ah, celebrating this wonder of all wonders.

Luke 2, if you would, and look at verses 6 through 14.

6 While they were there, the days were completed [fullness of them] for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn child; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today [the fullness of time] today [not just any day] today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." 15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

At the perfect time, he came.

So there's a perfection about his very coming but, secondly, note from our chief text back in Galatians 4, that there was a perfection concerning the person God sent. The perfect person came. The text tells us there in verse 4, "But when the fullness of the time came,

God sent forth His Son." Not just an angel. Not a representative from heaven. Not even the Captain of the Lord's Host which, of course, is Jesus in the Old Testament but I mean in the sense of the leader of the angels. Not the archangel. But Jesus, God's Son, the person who came. You see, he is of the same essence and the same character as God the Father, co-equal to God the Father. And by the way, if you have a job to do, who better to do it than God? That's why we feel so strongly about the perseverance of the saints. Sometimes it's reduced down to be called the eternal security of the believers. Why do we feel so strongly about that? Because our God came and perfectly executed our salvation. It's not of us. And he can't fail.

So God himself came in the person of his Son. So here is God, God becoming flesh, God dwelling among us. The perfect has come so that he might do for us what no man can do for himself. Romans 8:3 is a great cross reference here, Romans 8:3 says, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did." I love the past tense emphasis there, "sending His own Son." Labor and strive as man will under the law to think that somehow he has some inherent merit in him whereby he might please the holy law of God and God say, "Yes, you have My stamp of approval now." What a blasphemous heresy. What the law could not enable us to do, weak as it was, God did. He sent the perfect one to do something that no one else could do.

Well, note not only is he perfect as God, the text says he's perfect man. In verse 4 the Bible says continuing, "But when the fullness of the time came," that's perfect timing, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." Now that is remarkable. That's the astonishing thing. You know, there have been many men who would be God. Hitler would like to have been God. Stalin would be God. Mussolini said he is God. Sun Myung Moon says he is God. Saddam Hussein wanted to function like God. Many men would be God but only one God became man.

Born of a woman. The angel told this miraculous conception or about this miraculous ception, conception to the virgin Mary. Let's turn back there to Luke 1 right quick just to get the historical narrative. Luke 1 and notice how it's worded beginning in verse 26,

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and

the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

Born of a woman. He's fully God and he's fully man. Theologians call him the God-man. There's only one. Did you know that right now as we sit here in this building that a man sits on the throne of the universe? The man, the God-man Jesus Christ.

The mystery of it all and the glory of it all. He was like us in all ways except he was without sin. Think of the mystery and the wonder of that first coming to earth as a man though he was God. Think of his parents, humble and lowly people. Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth. He was referred to as the carpenter's son. Think of his birth mother, the virgin Mary, a woman who was already accused of scandal and immorality by people in her community because she was pregnant before marriage. Think of the village of his birth, insignificant Bethlehem. Think of his birthing room. We call it a barn but it's really a hewn out place in the side of a hill that livestock would find some shelter at night, a musty, dirty cave, if you will, in the side of a hill. Think of his bed. We call it a manger, it was a livestock feed trough. That's where he lay. Think of his companions. They were farm animals and later on a few lowly shepherds. Think of his dress. The Bible says they wrapped him in swaddling clothes. No, those were not the garments of kings, swaddling cloths were the common garments of the poor. Think of his worshipers, not the theologians of Jerusalem, just lowly shepherds on that night. God becoming man, we call that the Incarnation, but becoming man in such a way as this. That is a condescension, I call it a condescension beyond comprehension. In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son born of a woman. That is a mystery and a miracle and all of this perfectly fulfilling what the prophets foretold, all perfectly fitting the Father's plan. God in his perfect timing sent his Son and God sent the perfect person to bring about salvation.

Well, the glory and the wonder of it all. Not only these things, but not only the person is perfect, and not only was the timing perfect but, thirdly, he was perfect in the execution of salvation and that's what our chief text, Galatians 4, tells us next. In executing, bringing about, working out our salvation, he did it perfectly. You see, the Bible does not leave us with Christ's birth. Sometimes I want to scream to the world that he's no longer in the manger. Matter of fact, I like it when you do nativity scenes to leave the baby out of the manger, leave it empty, to remind you that it's wonderful and it's glorious. Now if you've got a baby in your nativity scene at home, you're not sinning, okay? We're not gonna have baby manger wars and we're not gonna have Christmas tree wars and we're not gonna have Santa Claus wars or Frosty the Snowman wars. Brothers and sisters can seek God and settle that themselves. But I like the empty manger because if you leave him in the manger, you miss Christmas.

The Bible didn't leave him there and we can't leave him there. No, quite the contrary, the Bible tells us explicitly and without equivocation that his birth was the means to a tragic and really even more wondrous and glorious end than even his birth and because of that culminating and tragic ending that he had to his life, we have what we see in Galatians 4:4-5. Look at it there, if you will, actually verses 5 and 6, "so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you

are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" So he says two things here. He came born under the law, he had to fulfill all the righteousness of the law or he would not qualify as Savior. He came born of a woman, wow, the mystery and the glory of that. And he came to the end that he might redeem his children and they might be adopted as sons. Oh, we're getting down to Christmas now, we're getting down to the glory of it now. Redemption and adoption.

Well, let me say something about this execution. Let me divide it into three parts here, three parts to the execution of salvation. A in our outline will be, first of all, in representing us before the law he was very perfect. Well, the old Jewish law was both ceremonial and moral and he fulfilled all the law. The Father by his own appointment placed his Son under the law, that is, he made his Son subject to law. He came as one of us and we are all subject to law so he became subject to law. He had to honor the law of God. Of course, he would not disobey it because it was his heart too just like it's the Father's heart. In Matthew 5:17 the Bible says, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law," of course, this is Christ speaking, "or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." You see, Jesus Christ was the representative man. He came into our room, if you will. He came to stand in our place so he came under the law to perfectly keep it. Now he didn't have to come to perfectly keep the law in order to prove who he was or what he could do, but he needed to come to perfectly keep the law to be the Redeemer we needed and he did that.

Romans 8:3-4, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh," now notice this, "so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us." The word "fulfilled" is the word "realized." So the point is he came under the law, fulfilled all the righteousness of the law, and if you are in Christ all the law is now fulfilled on your behalf perfectly. Not kinda, not sorta, not most of it, perfectly fulfilled. How am I assured of my salvation and my standing before a holy God? Because God's Son perfectly stood in my place and perfectly fulfilled all righteousness before God. Wow. That's Christmas, folks. That's the joy and the wonder of it all. Oh, Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." I love what Hebrews says. I've said it many times but as I studied through Hebrews the phrase grabbed me and it won't let go of me, that we are no longer conscious of the guilt of our sin. Now friend, you stand here or sit here this morning and if you're a child of God and the Holy Spirit at all works within you, you are conscious of your sin, but in Christ you're no longer conscious of the guilt of your sin. Wow. No wonder the songwriter said, "Hallelujah, what a Savior!" So he comes under the law as the representative man and fulfills it perfectly.

So first of all, he perfectly executed the law by representing us before the law. Secondly or B in our outline, he perfectly executed our salvation in redeeming us from the law. Redeeming us from the law, the law's condemnation and curse. Um, look at verse 5, if you will, notice what he says here, "so that He might redeem those who were under the Law." Now go back up to Galatians 3:13 for another good cross reference, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written,

'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" Through his death, his curse-bearing death we are redeemed from our status or our standing as condemned, condemned and doomed law-breakers. You see, we are so very guilty. Let me say that again: we are so very guilty. We are so very guilty from violating God's law from within and from without. Every thought, every motive, every intention, every desire in your heart and mind that dishonors God is a violation of his law. We are so very guilty and there's nothing we can say, there's nothing we can do.

The Bible says in Romans 3:19 for "we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law," that's us, "so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God." It's as if God says, it's as if puny man says, "Well, I, I was baptized or I've tried to do better and I, I no longer lie and..." God says, "Shut your mouth. Shut your mouth." All the world is locked up as guilty. There's nothing to say. The immutable bar of divine justice thunders from heaven's throne that all mouths must be shut. You are without excuse. You must bear the weight of divine wrath worthy of such a one as guilty as you. But wait. Can it be? Yes, listen, between the thunders of law's condemnation, I think I hear something. Is it really? Yes. Between the thunders of law's condemnation I hear the sound of a baby, even a little child. Can it be? Can it really be that law and judgment are not God's final word to his children? Yes, it is true, wondrously, mysteriously, gloriously true that God has satisfied and silenced law's demands against us through the coming of this seemingly weak baby, even this little child. Maybe that's one of the reasons Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:25 that "the weakness of God is stronger than men." Summons all of your strength and keep his law and flaunt yourself in arrogance before the holy bar of justice and God says, "I can send a weak child and conquer your problem and you can't do it with all the energy of all of your life." Romans 8:3 again, "what the Law could not do, weak as it was, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Hm, redemption, redemption. Of course, it comes from the Greek culture. It was common in those days for wealthy couples who could not have children of their own to go down to the slave market and they would purchase a child off the slave market and often they would release that child to be their own son, releasing him out of slavery, and that's what Christ has done for us. Through Christ we are redeemed. Once we were helplessly enslaved to the law's condemnation, once we were helplessly enslaved in sin's prison, but now through Christ we are redeemed.

Well, he says God sent forth his Son and he sent him forth to the end that he might redeem us from the law and adopt us as sons. Notice how he says it there in verse 5, if you will, "that we might receive the adoption as sons." So this is the third or C in our outline under his perfect execution of our salvation and that is releasing us to the liberty of sonship. Now in that verse it says that we might receive the adoption as sons. The word "received" there the scholars tell us is an interesting word. It emphasizes that you're receiving something that is long due. Not quite but it almost has the idea that it's owed to you that you get this liberty of being a son of God. It's the sense in which it was already yours. It's the point that salvation is now suitable and right for God's children. We can now receive it and it is right for us to have it and it's not just forgiveness, it's right for us

to have it and it's not just that God says, "Okay, I'm gonna pardon your sins. Now you sit in the corner of heaven and you be quiet." That's not what God did. This is so powerful. It's right for God to take this as his very own precious beloved child, his Son.

I've told you before, do you understand as God's elect in Christ, God doesn't just like you, he intentionally loves you. You're a son of God. Son of God. Some of you have sinful strongholds of wrong thinking in your mind that you're so wicked and you're so vile and you're so bad, that's true, don't de-emphasize the mighty power of grace in Christ who can take the most defiled and make him the most loved and beloved and precious child to God. We're getting down into Christmas now, folks. That's the wonder of Christmas.

Augustine said it this way, "God makes of the sons of men the sons of God because first he made the Son of God a son of man." The experience of our liberty in sonship begins at the moment of conversion, conversion wrought in our hearts by the work of the Spirit of God.

Now as I'm concluding, let's think about these verses again. In verse 4 the Bible says God sent forth his Son, in the fullness of time God sent his Son and that was at Bethlehem. In verse 5 he says God redeemed his children. That was at Calvary. Now in verse 6 he talks about the Spirit bringing the liberty of sonship to those children and that happens at conversion. "Well, pastor, if God sent his Son and that's Bethlehem, and through Jesus if God redeemed his children and that's Calvary, where does God bring the liberty of sonship?" Wherever the sovereign Holy Spirit chooses to birth new life in you. For me it was in a car driving back to Middle Tennessee State University. For you it may be in this church on this morning. Who knows? Wherever he sovereignly chooses to find you.

You see, God did not send his Son just to secure our sonship, God also, the text tells us, sent his Spirit to assure us of that sonship. You see, it's the Spirit's inner witness that comes and comforts us and assures us that the law's thundering condemnation is now over. Christ has won our victory. Verse 6 says that because of the Spirit's witness and assurance, that we can cry, "Abba! Father!" Look at it and let's just read it together. He's concluding things in this one little section and he says, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

Now you've heard the word "Abba" means "Poppa." It's, it's that endearing or special word between a father and a son or a daughter. Years ago, ah, my oldest daughter, I do not remember if it was Father's Day or a birthday, she gave me a card and she misspelled my title. She wrote my name d-e-d-d-y. Deddy instead of daddy. Well, I don't know exactly how it happened but as the years went by that's become our special term between father and daughters. I'm not just their daddy, d-a-d-d-y. You may say you're Katie Lee and Taylor Beth and Anna Claire's daddy but to them I'm their deddy. It's a special term. It's just special to us. It's one of those things that just happened. Now why am I not just daddy, why am I deddy? Because they have full confidence, full trust and full peace that I'm gonna be there for them. That's the way it's supposed to be. That's not, I'm not special, that's just what deddy's do. It's what they are.



Well, that's what this term is. That's what this term means. While we respect God our Father as our heavenly Father, the Bible text says you must go beyond that. There is by the Spirit's inner witness a child-like confidence, a child-like trust, and a child-like peace that he is my daddy, he's even my deddy because the Spirit bears that witness.

No wonder Fanny Crosby could write the words, "Perfect submission, all is at rest." Is that not good? All is at rest. "I in my Savior am happy and blessed. Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love. This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story and this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long."

You see, he came as a little child that you might find rest and peace before God, even a just God, like a little child. And listen to me, if the Spirit of the holy God bears witness with your spirit today that you're his child, that inner peace you have makes you to have a perfect Christmas.

Let's stand together in prayer.