



Galatians 3:26-4:7
In The Fullness of Time

Summary: In Christ we are given a multidimensional relationship with God and discover our place among His people.

Christmas has always been about gifts. As a kid you ask adults for gifts, as an adult you give gifts to kids – and stress about what you’re going to give to other adults. Some people see a connection here to the wise men who brought gifts to baby Jesus – gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which were expensive luxury items used to make perfumes, incense, and medicine. Nothing from the Dollar Store – these men gave their best to God.

But sometimes, in the midst of all the gift wanting, gift planning, gift giving and receiving, we forget: the only reason we have Christmas is because God gave something to us. Or more precisely God sent some One to us who brought countless benefits.

We’re going to talk about that this morning, and I hope to encourage you with a deeper appreciation for what you already have as sons and daughters of God. As we tick off the final days of an exhausting, unrelenting, 2020, we need to know – our hope is not in Christmas. It’s not in the New Year, the new vaccine, or the new administration. Christian, your hope, your greatest hope, your most durable peace, is found in something, or some One you already have.

But Paul is writing to Christians who seem to have forgotten, or maybe never clearly understood, exactly how much God had given them when they received the gospel. So, read with me now and let’s remember and explore what God has already given to you this Christmas.

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. **27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 4:1 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, **2** but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. **3** Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. **4** But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. **6** And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” **7** Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Now, there is a lot going on there, and we'll do our best to make some comments on it, though we won't answer every question you might have. The big idea is this: there was a time before Christ came when people lived one way, and then, God sent Jesus and everything was changed for those who are His.

And that happened [in the fullness of time](#). In other words it was planned, it was intentional, it wasn't spontaneous or accidental. God didn't seize an opportunity or find a way to make it work. It happened when He intended, [in the fullness of time](#). Now there are several things we can note about that. The first, is that God knows what you need and when you need it. God controls not only the events of history, but also the timing. He sent Jesus for a specific reason at a very specific moment.

Jesus came at a time when the Jewish expectation and hope for the promised Messiah was flourishing. God has always used Israel in a special way, they were the biological descendants of Abraham, and God had promised to use them to accomplish His purposes in history. But they wandered over the years, and they never really kept all the rules He gave them, they never really lived the way He told them. And so, eventually, He sent them into captivity in Babylon, the area that is modern day Iraq.

But even in captivity He sent them prophets, including a man named Daniel, who encouraged them to repent, turn from their own way of life and return to God. Daniel told them to expect that they would return to Israel from captivity, and 430 years after they were allowed to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild, Messiah would come (which is amazing, because our country is only 245 years old).

But four centuries later, the Jews were living back in Israel, looking for a Messiah. And that's when Jesus was born – [when the fullness of the time had come](#).

And then the timing and pace of His life were intentional as well. As you read the gospels you see people trying to make Him King or get Him to go up to Jerusalem and He says over and over, "My time has not yet come," "My time has not yet come," until, on the fateful day He finally said, "My hour has come," and the events leading to His crucifixion began falling into place.

After His death, burial, and resurrection, the gospel, the good news of who He was and what He had done went viral, as much as things could under ancient conditions. The Romans had united the entire Mediterranean including the Levant, North Africa and Southern Europe. They built roads and ferries that made travel possible, and guarded the stability of the region with their military while the Greek language tied everyone together making communication possible. The conditions were perfect for the gospel to spread and within just thirty years of Jesus's death, there were thriving churches on three continents.

Today, we need to be reminded, God is not shocked or surprised by the things happening around us. There are no spoilers or surprises for God in the plotlines of planet earth. He sees the end from the beginning, controls the seasons and the tides, sets the boundaries of nations and ordains the rise and fall of empires.

We feel really, really, important because we're the star character in what must be the blockbuster hit of our own personal lives, but pull back the camera and you notice, we're only a teeny, tiny, bit part in the grand story God is writing.

You're celebrating Christmas this week because of something He did two thousand years before you were born. Think about that when you open your gifts or pour out your stocking.

But listen, that's not to belittle you or say you're worthless, it's just to remind you: you're not the star of the show. You're the one being saved, rescued, redeemed, by the star of the show.

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

Jesus is the Son of God, born of a woman, under the law, which is the list of rules including the Ten Commandments that He gave to Israel telling them how to live. Because He was human, He was able to identify with us and stand in our place of judgement at the cross. Because He was born under the law, He was able to grow up and fulfill it, living in perfect righteousness so that He, of all people, did not deserve the cross. And because He was the Son of God, He was able to make us Sons of God through adoption by identifying with us.

Through Him, through faith in Him, we receive the gift of total transformation at Christmas. Look with me at the last verses of Chapter Three and notice: we are now **in Christ** (27), we have **put on Christ** through baptism (27), we find unity with other people **in Christ** (28), and we are descendants and heirs of Abraham, **in Christ** (29).

We have said this several times in our study of Galatians, but Scripture emphasizes the fact that Christians have a spiritual before and after picture of their soul. There was a time when you were not, and now you are, a time when you did not, and now you do, and the point of reference for the change, is the moment of your salvation – once you were outside, but now you are **in Christ** because **when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son**.

But that's not all our generous Father has sent this Christmas – look at Chapter 4 verse 6: **because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"**

This is something else we've seen several times in our study of Galatians – if you are saved, the Spirit is within you. There's no maybe, kind of, sort of, or occasionally – it's either yes or no. If you are saved, the Spirit is in your heart; if He is not, then you are not saved.

So, what does that mean, what does that feel like? How can I know? Well, it might mean you have a spectacular experience. Some people have those – we see it at Pentecost in Acts 2

and time and time again in Scripture. Some people manifest spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, and then, there are those who do not. Your experience of the Spirit may be spectacular or it may be simple. And there's nothing wrong with that, *but you can know* the Spirit is in you.

Writing 500 years ago on this passage, Martin Luther said Christians should not,

Doubt whether the Holy [Spirit] dwells in us or not; but be assuredly persuaded that we are 'the temple of the Holy [Spirit]' as Paul says (1 Cor 3:16).

And there's one simple, but important way that Luther says that will happen for many people – you'll just love to hear and talk about Jesus. He writes:

For if any man feels in himself a love toward the Word of God, and willingly hears, talks, writes, and thinks of Christ, let that man know, that this is not the work of man's will or reason, but the gift of the Holy [Spirit]; for it is impossible that these things should be done without the Holy [Spirit].¹

In other words, God draws us to Christ by the Spirit both before and after conversion. If you love Jesus, you can be sure: you have the Spirit, regardless of how you feel, and you have Him *because the Father sent Him*.

So let me point out: we have a full Trinitarian gospel gift here. God the Father, sent Christ the Son to redeem us, and the Holy Spirit to fill us, adopting us as sons and daughters.

And Christian, *this is all past tense*. It has happened. You're looking *forward* to Thursday, to Christmas, that's natural. But are you looking *back* to Bethlehem and Calvary? Because, nothing under Thursday's tree is better than what you already have in Christ and the only reason Thursdays is coming, is because Jesus already came.

Now, we know that, but we need to be reminded. That's the whole reason we're reading this Scripture, it was written because Christians in the early church in Galatia needed to be reminded of what they had in Christ and not to go looking elsewhere. My friends, it is important for us to acknowledge that *even as Christians*, we can forget everything God has done for us, *all the stuff that made Christmas a thing*.

He sent His Son in the fullness of time, He sent His Spirit into our hearts, and let's notice now, He gave us an identity and unity, a people and a place, He gave us somewhere to belong.

First and foremost, we have relational unity with Him – we have been adopted, given a new and true identity. And it's important to remember adoption is a gift, not an achievement. We weren't recruited by God on the basis of our past performance or future potential. We received grace, undeserved favor. And now we cry out [Abba, Father](#). That's personal, like

¹ Martin Luther, Commentary on Galatians, 247.

saying Daddy. We have this affectionate, confidential, intimate, access to God in prayer as well as the promise that He is with me, watching over me, empowering, guiding, and strengthening me, every day for every challenge I face.

Now, I wish I could tell you that means your life is going to be easy. I wish I could tell you that you won't feel any pain, all your prayers will be answered, you'll have absolute confidence in every decision you make and everything you try will work out.

I wish I could tell you that. I can find other people who *will* tell you that. But it's not true.

There are times in the life of every child when things are hard. When parents say no. And the kids don't always understand what's going on. So too with God.

There will be times when you will experience doubt, you'll waver in your faith, convictions, and commitment, you'll experience fear, anguish, anxiety, heaviness of heart. But that doesn't mean you've lost your Father.

It just means life on earth is rough, but He is working all things together for good, He is still in control and He will make the right things happen, [in the fullness of time](#). Meanwhile, you are [in Christ](#), you have [put on Christ](#), and [God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"](#)

Even if the whole world is against you, God is for you, and He is with you, He is *in* you and it doesn't depend on how you feel or what you've done or what is happening in the world. You're accepted on the basis of Christ and what He has done. As we have seen so many times in our study of Galatians, Paul was able to say:

[Galatians 2:20](#) [I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.](#)

These things don't depend on circumstances, and they do not change. We are united with God, in Christ.

And, we are not only united vertically with God, we are united horizontally with His people, His family. John Stott refers to this as a three-dimensional union produced by salvation; there is height as we are connected to God, breadth, as we are connected to Christians around the world, and length as we are brought into the family of God throughout history.

In our modern lives, we are both incredibly connected and disconnected. We can communicate with anyone, anywhere, at anytime, but we don't really have a sense of home or people, a community, in the same way we once did. We're all digital nomads to varying degrees and there is a part of us that thinks that's wonderful and amazing and a part of us that longs for a sense of place and a people, an anchor for our identity.

There is a part of us that wants to define ourselves for ourselves, and a part of us that wants to be defined, to have a place to belong. We find that in the Church of Christ where we are united across the lines of gender, economic status, and ethnicity. Look at Chapter 3, verse 28, we [are all one in Christ](#).

When you put on Christ, the things that divide us in this life disappear.

[28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.](#)

Our culture is grappling with, wrestling through, and rioting over all these issues today. Our culture and many of its institutions are trying to figure out equality and equity, and it's laying right here at the foot of the gospel – the problem is: they're permanently attached. You can't have true unity and equality without the gospel, without Jesus.

You see everything hinges on three very, very, important words: [for you are all one in Christ Jesus](#).

Without Jesus we find ways or reasons to sort ourselves out. In any crowd of people we're constantly judging others, racking and stacking ourselves – am I better than that person or are they better than me? Are you one of those people or one of my people? We have all kinds of ways of sorting people, but we're given three important categories here: ethnicity, economic status, and gender – all of which have come up in 2020.

First, notice: [There is neither Jew nor Greek](#) in Christ Jesus. But there is black and white in America. And why is that such an issue? Well, you have to go back 250 years and remember that black tribes in Africa, instead of loving their neighbor, as Christ commands, attacked and captured their neighbors and then sold them to willing white Europeans and brown Arabs who transported them half way around the world and used human beings as tools for economic gain.

It was abusive and demeaning, dehumanizing, and although we abolished the institution of slavery in December of 1865, that was only 155 years ago – the wound may have scabbed over, but it's not healed yet – wounds that terrible don't heal as soon as a law is passed, and there were a lot of other things that happened along the way to disrupt or impair the healing process.

And then there is the fact that we are a nation of immigrants and yet we have often scorned newcomers as unsophisticated, uneducated, and criminal. It turns out, we all have this natural tendency to find someone to look down on – because we think we're better, do things better, or do better things. We all think there's a reason for me, but no excuse for you.

But what if the person we're looking at is [in Christ](#)? What if, instead of seeing the color of their skin or the language they speak, or the way they dress, what if instead of seeing Jew or

Greek, you saw Christ? How would you treat them then? I seem to recall Jesus saying something about whatsoever you did to the least of these, My brethren, you did to Me.

And then, [There is neither slave nor free](#) in Christ. Now, we always have to be clear, there was slavery in the ancient world, but it was not the race-based horror that we experienced in this country – in the Roman Empire you could not tell who was a slave or servant by the color of their skin.

This is more about economic status. This is more about the haves vs the have nots. Today we might say it's about urban elites vs low income workers. Those with economic opportunity and those who are stuck and so, this Scripture is telling us: Jesus is not just for people who live in trailer parks or people who live in the new high rise downtown. He's not Lord of the suburbs and God of the McMansion, He is Lord of all. But today we have partisan divides fueled by economic interests. Much of the division between Republicans and Democrats comes to down to economic policies and who will be the winners and the losers in the US market.

If you have ever judged someone on the kind of car they drive, the shoes they wear, or the purse they carry, *or felt judged on the basis of any of those things*, you should know – there is no favored economic status [in Christ](#).

And, [there is neither male nor female](#). Feminism in America and especially the #MeToo movement rose, in part, out of the frustrations of women who were harassed at work, treated as incompetent or ignorant objects, deprived of the respect, honor, and dignity they deserve – it wasn't because they were all being loved, cherished, and respected.

So, whether you want to talk about racism, economic inequality and opportunity, or gender issues all the problems we face today are driven by looking at other people and putting them down while lifting myself or my group up. But what you cannot find is any evidence that our current struggles are driven by seeing the other side [in Christ](#).

So, how do we do that, how do we change? Well, first of all, we have to remember, we're talking about equality [in Christ](#), so you should find this ideal, and you should work toward this ideal in the Church first where the majority of people are [in Christ](#). That means the church should look different from the culture, refreshingly distorted. It should seem foreign, and yet, it should be compellingly so to those who are outside.

Second, and this is critical – you have to see the context of what is being discussed here – these are issues of salvation. Your ethnic, social, or gender status doesn't give you any privilege *when it comes to* salvation, but that doesn't mean they are completely wiped away.

In fact, it is the preservation of diversity that brings God glory in the Church. Koreans are still Koreans, Hondurans are still Hondurans, Ghanaians are still Ghanaian. Hourly workers and CEOs keep their jobs. Men are still men and women are still women. It's the fact that these *different* people assemble together, love each other, respect each other, live and worship together that brings God glory.

This is what was so revolutionary about the early church – you had masters and servants worshipping together, women learning alongside men, Jews and Greeks having dinner in each other’s homes. This was strange behavior, unseen in the rest of the culture. But they were brought together in the gospel, [in Christ](#).

The gospel doesn’t wipe away our distinctions, it actually preserves them, men have unique roles, women have unique roles, but the gospel tells us how to thrive in those distinctions, so whether you’re a boss or a subordinate, whether you’re black, brown, or white, we’re all told to live and work for the glory of God and the good of others in whatever we do.

And to remember, that not only is it possible for us to see others [in Christ](#), it’s important for us to remember that we are [in Christ](#) too. In fact, that’s the whole point of the passage we’ve seen this morning.

All of this was said to make one big point:

[Galatians 4:7](#) *Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

You have to see yourself the right way this Christmas. You have to see, and remember, what God has given to you. You’ve been adopted, you’ve become an heir. *And it’s all past tense.* You may be hoping that something is under your tree, you may be hoping something is in your stocking or hoping Amazon delivers something on time, but if you have received Christ, you are in Him, the Spirit is in you, you are adopted, you are an heir, you are a son or daughter of Christ, you have an identity, a place, a people, a promise, you have unity with God in the diversity of the Church.

And if all of that is true, it will have a radical impact on the way you experience Christmas and the coming year.

My friends Jesus told us in the world you will trouble, but take cheer, I have overcome the world.

He showed up in a manger, but grew up to make us kings and queens, highly favored in the sight of our God. That’s the good news for us this Christmas. Do you know it? Is it true for you? If you’re not sure, ask questions. Seek answers. Talk with the person who brought you, or reach out to the church, we’d love to help.

Let’s pray.