

The Fullness of Time

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[0 : 0 0] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, on this first time of the new year, we gather here again to worship you and thank you for your provision and guidance for the past year. You've carried us through a difficult year, and we know that you'll continue to be faithful to us during the year. At this time, we're especially conscious of our need of divine guidance. Our nation is in political turmoil.

We have a national election this year, possibly quite soon. We pray for guidance as we elect those who will lead us and pray for divine guidance for those who are chosen. We do not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. Our fate is in your hands. May you guide us in the right path, the path that you've chosen for us. Father, we reminded the redemption that you chose was a surprising one. Who would expect our king would come as a tiny baby and be laid in a humble manger? Help us to be willing to believe that the path you've chosen for this church will be a surprising one for us as well. Help us to lay aside our preconceived notions of what your will for our church and our lives might be. You are God of the unexpected. Help us to be ready for the unexpected this year. In the name of the humble babe of Bethlehem, our Savior and our King, we pray. Amen.

It's appropriate when we think about the coming of the new year, we think about the passing of time, the fullness of time. I'd like to read Galatians chapter 3, verse 26 to chapter 4, verse 7. So in Christ Jesus, you're all children of God through faith. For all of you were baptized into Christ to close yourself with Christ. There's neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you're all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you're Abraham's seed and heirs according to this promise. What I'm saying is that long as an heir is underage, he's no different from a slave, although he owns a whole estate. Heirs are subject to gardens of trustees until the time set by his father. So also when we were underage, we're in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of this world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you were his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who cries out, Abba, Father. So you're no longer a slave, but God's child. And since you're his child, God has made you also his heir. And we're thinking of the passage of time. I remember when the new year came, I remember working in an office at the time when the year 2000 was approaching. And everybody was worried that all the computer systems would crash. I wasn't too worried.

[3 : 0 0] Fortunately, we had a radio on and we could see that they didn't crash in New Zealand. And New Zealand has their noon hour, their new year, a lot earlier than us. We knew it was safe. But just for fun, I decided, okay, let's pretend that things had crashed. So I went outside and made a fire and cooked some macaroni and cheese over the open fire and pot. And so we had a can of tuna and some stuff in there and made what I call a Y2K casserole. Because it's something I could have made if Y2K had crashed.

But of course it didn't. I remember another time when my older brother Keith was going to have his 50th birthday party. 50th birthday. So we gathered at my mom's place. This was some time ago. He's older than I am. And, but the strange thing happened. Keith never showed up. It's interesting to have a birthday party without the birthday person. But when I think about it, how many people just celebrated the birthday of Christ without ever even thinking of inviting Christ to be part of it, their celebration?

We're conscious of the passing of time. We're talking about the passage focusing up a lot on verse 4. But when this set time had fully come, the coming of Jesus was exactly at the right time. It was a pivotal event in all of history. And you know how pivotal the event is? We date our calendars from the birth of Christ. Now they call it before the Christian era and after. But it was

always before Christ and I know Domini, you know, not after the death, but after the birth. Of course, the calculations were slightly off and Jesus was born a little bit before Christ, which is very interesting, but that's okay. They knew it, that it was the most important event in all of history. Because Christianity, unlike a lot of other religions, is a historical religion.

[4 : 57] It's based on events that exactly happened at a set time. That's why Luke in his account on the birth of Christ talks about the census that happened and who was ruler at the time so that everybody would know it's fixed in time. And in the Apostles' Creed, it says about Jesus that he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Again, fixing it in history. We don't have a religion based on speculation and myths. We have a religion based on events that happened exactly when God planned it. And God planned the set time.

That's why he had it figured out a long time ago. It says in Revelation that Jesus was a lamb slain from the foundation of the earth. The events of Christmas that we just celebrated a little while ago were planned thousands of years before they happened. And it was exactly the right time. It was an interesting time because at that time there was a world peace. Do you think we have world peace today? Not even close. There are conflicts all over the place. And especially around the time, the place where Jesus was born. A lot of conflict. But the Romans had conquered the then known world and set up a reign that was cruel but peaceful. That meant that the gospel could spread so easily because there was peace. We didn't have to worry about all the stuff with passports and visas and all the rest of the rest of that stuff. You could just travel. Particularly for Paul because he was a Roman citizen.

He could go anywhere. And of course what made it even easier for him to go anywhere was the Romans had built a system of roads. Some of these roads that even survive today. They were great roads. And it's so much easier to travel on a good road. How many of you have ever remembered the days when we had gravel and dirt roads?

[6 : 51] I remember getting stuck and going off because the roads were not good. Great roads. And then there was a Greek language. Alexander the Great before the Romans, he was a couple hundred years before the Romans, had conquered the world. And because of that, he established the Greek language throughout the whole world.

Everybody that was educated spoke Greek. And it's so much easier to preach the gospel if everybody's speaking the same language. I got illustration of that happened when for Christmas, a friend of mine gave me a book of cartoons done by Charles Schultz, the one who created Peanuts. These were bridge cartoons. I showed you to my sister who was a bridge player and she just laughed and laughed and laughed.

They were hilarious. Showed them to other people who were not bridge players and go, huh? What's so funny? What's this all about? You have to know the language in order to understand. It makes a big difference. When everybody spoke Greek, it made it so much easier to preach the gospel. And then also, because of the Babylonian captivity, the Jews were scattered throughout the entire world.

They went everywhere. And everywhere they went, they set up synagogues. That's why the term diaspora means the dispersion of the Jews. They set up synagogues everywhere. And then there was a number of Gentile people who attended these synagogues. They were dissatisfied with their own religion and were very interested in Judaism.

[8 : 26] But they, let's just say they were reluctant to undergo circumcision. And you can wait till Kent deals with Acts 15 to talk about that. But that, so, but they hung around. And then when Paul preached in these synagogues, these God-fearers, these Gentile people turned to Christ in great numbers.

It was exactly the right time. God planned it. Exactly the right time. It said time had fully come. God sent his son. It's interesting. The word sent implies sending from a previous existence. Jesus was God's son. He wasn't just conceived and married. He was before that. He was preexistent. John 1, 1 to 4 says, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life. And that life was the light of all mankind. And then verse 14 says, The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came to the father, full of grace and truth.

Yeah. Jesus was God's son. That's incredible mystery that we celebrate every year at Christmas. That somehow God became a man. We don't understand how it could happen. And I've said it many, many times.

[9 : 57] A God that I could understand would no longer be God. If there's no mystery to the Christian religion, then it's, what's the point? It's an incredible truth that we celebrate because it just boggles our minds.

How could it happen? God sending his son. But it continues. Born of a woman. That means Jesus became one of us. Like us in every way. Hebrews 2, 14, 18 says, Since the children of flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death.

That is the devil. Free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For surely it's not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason it had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful, faithful high priest, and he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted. God became one of us. Only like it. And it also says, interesting enough, it says, Born under the law.

The king of kings and lord of lords lived a life in subjection to the law. Now, we have trouble with even things like speeding tickets and all the rest of that kind of thing.

[11 : 15] We don't like any kind of rules and regulations. Imagine what it was like, the Son of God, the creator of the universe, to live a life in subjection to the law.

But he did. And because he lived that way, we don't have to be in a subjection to the law. Verse 5 says, To redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Jesus came with a special mission. He came to redeem us. Lived the life of obedience. Lived the life of sacrifice. It's interesting. He was born of poor parents in an obscure village.

Lived in poverty all his life. He said, The Son of Man has no place to lay his head. Nothing. When he died, they gambled for the little bit of clothing that he had. Nothing. And he was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And the Son of God sacrificed his own life for us. That we might become sons. That we might receive adoption to sonship. He did the law for us.

[12 : 19] That's what we celebrate. Paul was not one of the original apostles. In fact, he was the opposite. He fought against Christians. Persecuted them. Imprisoned them.

He had a role in some of their deaths. But he met Christ in a powerful way. And he, although he certainly was not around at the time of the birth of Christ, he knew about the birth of Christ by great revelation.

And he said in this very powerful passage, two verses, about what the birth of Christ was all about. That Jesus was born at exactly the right time.

Like no other time in history was exactly right for him. Wouldn't have worked if he was born today. Too much conflict. Too much problems. But born at the right time.

And that he was God's son. And became one of us. Like us in every way except sin. And he came to redeem us.

[13 : 15] That's the wonderful message. Exactly the right time. For exactly the right purpose. What a wonderful thing to celebrate. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the incredible gift of your son, Jesus Christ. The sacrifice that he made to leave the worship of angels for a manger, for a life of poverty, a life of obedience, a life of sacrifice, and paid the ultimate sacrifice, a shameful death on a cruel and agonizing cross for us.

Your son, who knows no sin, became sin, and he might pay the price for our sin. That we might become adopted into your family. We thank you for all of that.

The wonder of it all. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.