

# Fall back

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[0:00] For two Sundays of the year, we really need to know the time, don't we? We really need to know the time because the clocks either go back or forward on two particular! Sundays of the year, and today was one of them. So well done. People weren't here so early, so clearly, one way or another, you remembered that the clocks had changed and we were an hour later than normal. Potentially, that meant for some of us an extra hour in bed, for some of us an extra hour up with the children. I know what that's like now. And for others, perhaps we just struggled to sleep anyway and it's felt like a long, long morning. So we're pleased we've got to church finally.

But it's important to get the time right. It's really important to get the time right. And in chapter 4 of verse 4, Paul shows us we need to have the time right. And not whether it's British summertime or wintertime, more important than that. Verse 4, 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. Paul says we need to know the time.

We need to know the time. We need to know that we now live in the era of salvation history when Jesus, God's very own son, has been born into the world. We need to see the significance of that. And we're told in that verse 4 that he was born under the law. Last week, so grateful that David Skull from Grace Church came and preached for us and he helped us to see the significance of the law of God. It was a good thing because it's God's words given to his people. But also, he helped us to see the law was impossible for us to keep and actually held us in chains, like in prison. Verse 23, before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. And the law was also like a guardian.

Until Christ came, that we might be justified. The law keeps people locked up in a prison because we can't escape from it. We can't do all it says and so we're lawbreakers.

[3:13] Or it's like being under a harsh guardian or a harsh teacher who's shouting out instruction after instruction, keep obeying, keep trying harder, keep doing better, keep being strong. But we don't meet those standards. There's no way out. We're stuck in the prison. We're under the harsh teacher.

The closest I've ever got to being in prison is playing Monopoly. It's rather frustrating, isn't it? Being in jail in Monopoly. You either have to roll doubles and you only get three chances to do it. Or you have to free yourself by paying money. I don't want to pay money. I need that money for more important things. And in the prison of trying to keep God's law, we can keep trying to pay the money or we can to buy ourselves out or we can keep trying to roll the doubles. But they're never going to come. And no one, no other human like us can pay us out of that jail. We're stuck. No way out. But the time that we are living in is now not the time when God's people are under the law. We need to remember that, Paul says. We need to remember that we're now in the time when God has sent his son. God has sent his son born of a woman, born of Mary.

We could read that verse at Christmas time and carol service, couldn't we? Because that's what it's talking about. It's talking about Christmas time. We need to remember Christmas has come.

In the Chronicles of Narnia, Mr. Tumnus says to Lucy Pevensy, he says these words, in Narnia, it's always winter, but never Christmas.

[5:39] Because Narnia was held under the power of the evil white witch. Always winter, but never Christmas. Winter without Christmas doesn't sound very fun, does it?

All the cold and dark and miserable days are no bright lights of Christmas. And if we're trying to live as a Christian, Paul is saying, by staying in that time under the law of God, then it's always going to be like winter for us.

We need to know the time. We need to know that Christmas has come, that Jesus has come. That Jesus was born in the flesh.

That Jesus has become human. God and human. Fully God, fully man. One like us, but also not like us.

Without sin. And he has come, according to verse 5, to redeem us.

[6:54] See, there is one who can buy us out of that jail. Sometimes when you play Monopoly, someone might very graciously give you a get-out-of-jail-free card.

And that's a gracious thing to do. And that's what Jesus does. For those who are trusting in his work that he has done on the cross to redeem us, that is to buy us out.

To pay the price. To free us from that jail of being under the law. For those who are trusting in his work that he has done on the cross to redeem us, remember that this is the era of salvation history that we're in.

Jesus was born of a woman. Born under the law. Kept the law. To redeem us. To buy us out of that prison.

And it's so significant for us. I don't want to miss this. It's so significant that Jesus Christ was human.

[8:14] Fully God. Fully man. It's not a truth we want to just hold off for Christmas. John Stott helps us to see it and explains it better than I do.

So the divinity of Christ, that is Jesus being God, and the humanity of Christ, and the righteousness of Christ, uniquely qualify him to be humanity's redeemer.

If he had not been human, he could not have redeemed humans. If he had not been a righteous man, he could not have redeemed unrighteous people.

And if he had not been God's son, he could not have redeemed people for God, or made them the sons of God. It's so significant that Jesus was born human.

Fully God. Able to keep the law in a way that we could never do. And so we praise God.

[9:17] We praise God that Jesus stands and says, I'm qualified to redeem you. Look to me. Look to my work. So know the time.

Christ has come in the flesh. Come to redeem us. But Paul not only wants us to know the time that we're in, but he also wants us to see our identity.

See our identity. If he's come to redeem us, what does that mean for our lives? The time that we live in often shapes our identity, often shapes sort of who we are.

You might be influenced by a particular sort of music from the time that you grow up in, and that sort of shapes who you are, what you like, what you love. For another instance is the Generation Z, Z, basically almost everybody younger than me, born between 1997 and 2012, they're known as the smartphone generation.

That's the time that they have been growing up in. Unlike any other generation, they have grown up with constant internet access and technology throughout their whole lives.

[10:37] And no other generation has known that, and that's going to shape who they are. It's going to shape what they go on to do in the future. And if we were living in the time BC, before Christ, we would only really know the law of God.

We'd know promises as well, and we've thought about the promises to Abraham, but we would also just know the law of God that we've got to keep. And our identity would then be lawbreakers.

But the time we now live in, in salvation history, is that Jesus has come to redeem. If we're trusting in his work to redeem us, trusting that he's the only one qualified to be our saviour, then here, our identity.

Verse 26, So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. That's chapter 3, verse 26.

So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

What a wonderful thing. We're children of God. How can that be? Well, we're united to the Son of God. And we're united through two things, according to verse 27.

[12:03] Have a look. We're children of God. For all of you who were baptised into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ. Two things which identify us as children of God.

First of all, baptism. And some of you might at this point be on high alert, thinking, hang on, how can we be children of God through baptism?

And yet we've been saying that Jesus' finished work on the cross is all we need to do to save us. Is Paul about to say, but you have to be baptised? Isn't that just as bad as the false teachers in Galatia who say you have to be circumcised?

Why is Paul talking about baptism? Baptism, we know. We've seen baptisms a few times this year. It's an outward sign of an inner reality.

The reality that when we come to salvation in Christ, as one writer I read this week puts it, we're plunged into or we're immersed into Christ.

[13:19] That happens when we come to faith in him. And Jesus has given us that sign of baptism to help us for ourselves experience in a very tangible way the reality that by faith, spiritually, we're united to Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection.

The water of baptism, it doesn't save, but it is a wonderful sign and seal that Jesus gives for us. It's a really precious thing. And we can look back to our baptisms, look back to them and see how wonderful it is that we're united with Christ in that precious way.

And then Paul builds on this in verse 27 by saying we're baptized into Christ and we've clothed ourselves with Christ.

We're clothed with Christ. Our clothes tell us something of who we are and what we're like.

[14:32] This weekend, people may well have been going around with Brighton and Hove Albion tops to show who they support, to show what team they're on.

And not tomorrow morning, but most weekday mornings, you will see schoolchildren walking to school in Brighton wearing their school uniform, showing what school they belong to, who they belong to.

The clothes I'm wearing this morning show I'm an evangelical church preacher. Our clothes show us something of who we are, what we're like.

But they do more than that, don't they? Our clothes, pointing out the obvious, they cover up our nakedness. Remember Adam and Eve in the garden when they fell?

They realized they were naked. And they felt shame when God called out to them because they realized their sin.

[15:40] They realized they couldn't stand in the presence of a holy God. And so they felt naked and ashamed. But Paul says we're clothed with Christ.

It's like our clothes, say Jesus. We're adopted children of God, clothed in Jesus, clothed in his righteousness.

And so baptism and being clothed in Christ shows we're children of God, verse 26, we're children of God through faith.

A big theme in this letter we've chatted about a few times over the last few weeks is justification by grace, that legal language that says God the judge sees that if you're trusting in Jesus to save you, he declares that you no longer stand guilty before him because you are clothed in his righteousness.

It's a big theme of this letter. The Galatians were failing to understand that by the way that they lived. But when you stand before a judge in a courtroom, you're not expecting them to continue a relationship with you.

[17:05] In fact, they probably seem quite scary to you and so you're glad not to see them again. But it's amazing here to consider that not only is God the judge who says, you're righteous in my sight.

But also, he becomes a father. We become his children, his adopted children. Which means that the judge also really loves us.

We're loved by God. And last week, Becky and I were staying with some friends. They've had two children of their own over the recent years and now they've taken in another little boy into their

family.

He doesn't bear the family likeness, but they have welcomed him in as their own. The fridge now has a family photo, not just of the four of them, but the five of them.

He's part of the family. That's such a remarkable thing, isn't it? To invite someone who's not part of your family to come in and enjoy all the blessings of being part of the family.

[18:24] To treat them, to care for them as you would, your own child. An amazing thing to be adopted. And what an amazing thing it is to be adopted by the creator of the universe.

by the one who reigns over all things. Especially when we consider that before that, we stand as condemned sinners.

Lawbreakers. not fit for standing before God, but wonderfully because of Jesus. Because of the deep love of the Father that we sang about at the start of our service.

Our identity in Christ is a loved, treasured, precious child of God. God. It's an amazing thought. Which is why we got to join in with that family prayer this morning. Our Father in heaven. Because we're children coming before the Father.

[19:37] We don't come with fear now. Fear before a holy God who's going to punish us for our sin. We come with confidence that He is a Father who loves us.

Some of us will, all of us, will have had different experiences with our own parents, our own fathers. some good, some bad, some just okay.

If you haven't bought it, if you haven't read it yet, John Woods' book, Friend of the Church, is really worth reading if this is a particular area you struggle with.

Struggle with thinking, God is my Father. Do get that book. And as you work through Scripture, and if you use that book to help you work through Scripture and see what God the Father is like, we can learn to see what an almighty, awesome privilege it is to be called children of God, to be loved by Him, the One who Himself is love.

And to hear from another writer, R.C. Sproul, he says this of adoption, we're beloved of the Father because Jesus is beloved of the Father.

[21:07] And we ought never to forget that. He is the eternal object of the Father's affection, and we are the Father's gifts of love to His Son. We're adopted by the Father in Christ, and the Father loves us because we're in the Son.

And don't forget, we have this identity because we're in the Son, because of Christ, because of His clothes of righteousness that we wear. And just as the Father loves His Son, so He loves us.

It's an amazing thing to be loved, beloved by God, the Father. He now treats us as His own. And He's a Father who, like good fathers, delights to give good gifts to His children.

And we see that in verse 6, not only has God sent His Son for us, but verse 6, because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.

The Spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. Jesus has achieved the way of salvation for us, and in the Spirit we get to experience the blessings of that salvation.

[22:23] And one of the ways the Spirit sort of applies that work of the Son to us is by giving us that confidence to cry out, Father, Abba, Father. That word, Abba, it's Aramaic for Father.

Abba, it's a word Jesus Himself uses as He talks to His Father. Some translate Abba as sort of Dad or Daddy.

They recognize that it should have the sense of a close relationship with a loving father and their child just coming with full confidence.

But Scripture does use the word Father. when it talks about God being our Father. And I think it's right that we use that word Father when we talk to Him in prayer because not only does it help us to see that wonderful, close, loving, parent-child relationship that we have with God, but also helps us to remember the awe and respect that we need to have as we come before God who is Almighty. Micah, as you know, our son Micah, he's about four and a half months now.

[23:43] He's not yet speaking. He's definitely finding he has a voice, but he's not yet speaking words. But one day he will call out, Dad.

And I'm looking forward to that. It will be a precious thing. But I also know that I am a human. I am not like God.

And sometimes he will call out, Dad, and I won't hear him. Sometimes he'll call out, Dad, and I'll be like, no, no. I don't want to hear from you right now.

Sometimes he will call out, Dad, and I'll be sleeping and I won't hear his voice. How precious the thoughts. That by the Spirit, as we call out, Abba, Father, we call out to one who never slumbers or sleeps.

Who is always ready and willing to listen to his children. To one who is not going to get annoyed and say, no, now.

[24:53] What a wonderful thing. What a wonderful privilege that by the Spirit, because of the Son's work, we call out, Father, my dear Father God.

But there's even more in this passage. Thirdly, as we live in this time when God has sent his Son into our world and we find ourselves children of God, we also find we have this wonderful unity with others.

that's a great thing because at the moment, more than ever, it feels, we see culture around us so divided.

I think politically, like, more far left and far right groups, more people finding more not the mainstream political parties to support and vote for.

It seems more and more difficult, in fact, to be a political party trying to be in the center of things. It seems to be difficult to unite people.

[26:06] So wonderful, then, that Scripture speaks about the wonderful, unique unity we have as children of God because the gospel breaks down barriers of all kinds to bring people together as one in Christ Jesus.

Have a look there at verse 28. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

wonderful thing here that we're seeing. We have all sorts of brothers and sisters in all sorts of places. Three barriers that we see are broken down by the gospel.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile. That's the cultural barriers. Paul is not saying that our nationalities don't matter to who we are anymore.

He's not saying that the colour of our skin is unimportant. But he is saying that there is no barrier, no cultural barrier to us coming and being known as children of God.

[27:22] United together in the family of God. And so it's wonderful this morning that we look out around us and we see that there's many different nationalities present amongst us week by week.

And that's a wonderful thing to see because it reflects what God is doing in the world bringing together people of all nations, tribes and tongues to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in his kingdom there isn't and there certainly shouldn't be any culture more superior than the other. We're one united in Christ.

in God's kingdom whether we're from Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America, Australia, Antarctica, all the continents, wherever we're from, if we know Jesus, we're one in Christ.

What a wonderful thing. But the other barrier that the gospel breaks down is class, neither slave or free. a class divides our nation, doesn't it?

[28:37] A few of us, a few weeks ago for our church away day, we were up in the village of Hurstby Point just north of here. It's where I grew up as well.

And I want to tell you we were in the nice part of the village, the wealthy bit. I grew up on the other end of the village, the sort of council estate bit.

In our road, there was often people fighting, drug deals going on, the phone box over the road from us was constantly smashed in. Anytime someone came to repair it, you'd take guesses of how many days it would last.

but then you'd walk up into the high street and you'd see all these expensive shops and fine houses and fine cars and class divides of different experiences even in the same place, in the same road sometimes.

But in God's economy, whether we're rich or poor, slave or free, unable to work and claim benefits or earn 50k or more a year, we are one in Christ.

[29:49] Whatever our class, none of us could pay that debt that we owe to God. None of us could pay our way out of the jail of the law.

We're all spiritually the same. But if Christ has come to redeem us, class is no longer a barrier to come to Christ, to know God as our Father, we're one in him.

And this isn't at all the Bible saying it's wrong to enjoy the privileges of middle or upper class or wrong to be in working class.

It's all okay. We're one in Christ and we can use what God has given to bless his kingdom and to bless his people. people. And finally, there's also the barrier of gender.

Gender divides, doesn't it? Gender divides us perhaps more than ever in our culture. But we see in the Bible God has made us male and female.

[31:06] Israel. But our culture comes up with other options, doesn't it? And even now, there are injustices between men and women.

Equality is getting better between men and women, but it's still not there at all, is it? amongst younger men in particular, people over these last few years have been influenced by Andrew Tate in a way of thinking that's not good.

He believes that the women belong in the home, they can't drive, and a man's property, making out men to be the dominant superior sex, that's not good.

And it has no place in the kingdom of God. See, in God's sight, whether we're male or female, we're one in Christ.

Men are no more superior in God's kingdom than women. We've received the same grace. We have the same saviour. We're all equally able to serve in God's kingdom together.

[32:25] Important to say, there are clear differences between how God has made men and women. We have different roles. Today's not the day to discuss that.

It's a day to, it's a passage that helps us to see each is valued and finds their worth in the costly, precious bloods given for us for our redemption, and so that we can be called a child of God's. God's love. What a wonderful thing, this unique unity that we have in God's kingdom is. Whatever our race, whatever our economic status, whether we're male or female, we're each invited by Jesus to come and belong in the family.

family. And finally, final thing that we see here, final wonderful blessing of the time that we're in, because God sent his son, is that we get to be an heir.

We get to be an heir. You may have spotted the end of verse five and verse six speaks about Christians being sons.

[33:43] Verse five, to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship. Verse six, because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts.

And yet earlier he said, children. Is that just like a mistranslation by the NIV, the Bibles that we use here? Well, no, it highlights actually it's really important for us to remember the context of Bible passages, who the first readers were.

And if you were one of the first readers of Galatians, you would have lived in a time where being a son meant you would inherit the family property.

If you were a daughter, that wouldn't be the case. And if you didn't have a son, you might adopt one. You might even adopt your slave, male slave, so that they can receive the property instead of it going somewhere else.

And all of that's helpful to bear in mind when you read chapter four, verses one to three, where Paul is saying, what I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave.

[35:02] Although he owns the whole estate, the heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time is set by his father. So also, when we were under age, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

But when the time, set time had fully come, God sent his son. Paul's saying that if you were a son, due to inherit property, then you wouldn't have been of age to have any control of your inheritance until at least age 14, but possibly up to age 25.

And when you reach that age, finally, if you have inherited legally inherited property, you get full control of it.

And Paul is saying to these Galatians, in this whole passage, do you not see that in Christ you're no longer a slave. So don't go back to the law.

Don't go back to the old strict teacher. Don't go back to that prison. You've grown up now. You have full status as sons of God, as children of God.

[36:25] And verse 7 summarizes it nicely. So you are no longer a slave, but God's child. And since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

In Christ we are heirs. Jesus, in a great prayer in John's gospel, said, Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me, because you have loved me before the creation of the world.

He's praying for all believers, all future children of God. Our inheritance will be to be with Jesus, to be with God, our Father, where he is, where we will see his glory, where we will share the glorious inheritance, the glorious home that he is preparing for all his children, a home that we'll get to live in for all eternity.

what a wonderful blessing, what a wonderful thing it is to be children of God. So remember the time we're in.

The Christian life is not winter without Christmas, it's the joy of Christmas every day, because God has sent his son, born of Mary, to redeem us, so that we may know that identity of being an adopted child of God.

[38:04] We're children who get to call out to the maker of the world, Father, my dear Father, and one day we'll share as heirs together of that glorious inheritance to come.

Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you so much that we live in the time after that first Christmas where you sent your son into the world, born of Mary, born under the law, fully God, fully man, more than able to be our perfect savior, to free us from that law which held us in chains, which we could not keep.

Thank you that he's come to redeem us, and thank you that he gives us his spirit to live within us, the spirit by whom we cry out to you, Abba, Father, father, because we are your children, precious in your holy sight.

Father, thank you for what you have done for us and what you will continue to do for us, your children. Thank you that we get to look forward to that inheritance to come.

And will these things help us as we live out this identity as your children, in this place that you have called us to through this week.

[39:51] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.