

God's Plan In The Birth Of Jesus

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Date: 22 December 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you're like me and our family, you have a series of Christmas plans to execute in the next few days. Your schedules with family have been synchronized.

You've arranged your travel. You've made final preparations for how you're going to tackle the monster that is the Christmas week. And perhaps even this moment, maybe this is in your plan. This is kind of a jump start for the week. Kids are finished with school now. They're on Christmas break. Maybe you get a few days off. And kind of the jump start of your Christmas celebration is this worship service here in this place.

Whatever your plans may be, Christmas is coming, ready or not. And the text that we're going to study this morning, a simple text, is introducing us to the execution of God's Christmas plans. Plans that were prepared in eternity past. Plans that were carried out in history. Plans that are wonderfully beneficial for anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to believe them.

[1 : 1 3] So I want to draw your eyes to Galatians chapter 4. Just two verses here. Verses 4 and 5. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Well, since we're kind of parachuting into the middle of this paragraph here, I should at least summarize for you the context here, really a much larger context in the letter, so that we might better grasp Paul's intention in writing these two verses.

He was writing to a group of churches who were being heavily influenced at the time by a heretical group that sought to merge Christian discipleship with conformity to the Mosaic law or the Old Testament law.

These individuals known as Judaizers, as we might refer to them now, they taught that while following Jesus was important, if you were to truly be right with God, then you must also observe such ceremonial laws as circumcision, feast days, festival days that were put out in the Mosaic law. Dietary restrictions, as we see being referred to. All three of these issues are highlighted in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches because this heretical group has come in, and it says, yeah, Jesus is great, he's important, but he's not enough.

[2 : 5 8] What you also need to do is you need to merge together this following of Jesus with conformity to the law. And if you do those two things, you have your faith, plus you have your works, and you bring those two things together, then and only then can you be truly justified before God.

Can you be truly made right with God? So Paul's letter to the Galatians is a polemic against such heresy. It's a warning that adopting such beliefs is tantamount to abandoning God himself and the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now that sounds like strong language, but it's the language that Paul actually uses. If you just look back in chapter 1 and verse 6, he opens the letter without thanksgiving for the church, which was unusual for Paul, but he says in verse 6, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

So the issues that are unfolding in the churches of Galatia are not issues of, that we might treat with any kind of indifference.

They are serious issues. They're gospel issues. In this portion of the letter in chapter 4, Paul is arguing that the function of the Mosaic law was never actually to offer salvation to begin with.

[4 : 2 7] That's basically what the Judaizers were saying. That's basically what a lot of people that would claim to be Christian today are saying as well. That the function of the law, that there is a certain measure of righteousness that you must have and in exchange for your obedience to a list of rules and a set of traditions, in exchange for your obedience, God will then grant you the

salvation that you then deserve.

Paul's pushing against that. He's arguing against that fiercely here. And he contends that the function of the law is to expose our sinfulness and to point us to salvation through God's promised Savior.

And beginning in chapter 3, he uses this illustration that he begins to repeat a number of times. An illustration that refers to the law as a guardian, or a tutor, or a steward, a household manager, all words that Paul is using here to describe the true function of the Mosaic law.

And the role of this guardian would be just as a guardian in the homes in Roman culture who were tasked with overseeing the child until he comes of age.

And it's when he becomes of age that he is then granted all the benefits that belong to an heir.

That's the illustration he's using, and that's the illustration that he's using here in chapter 4.

[6 : 01] And so we understand then that having started in faith, some of the Galatian Christians were in danger of turning back, that's Paul's language, turning back from grounding their salvation in Christ to actually grounding it in their efforts at obeying the law.

So that's what Paul was writing to confront, and it's the context in which this passage must be interpreted, okay? And there's a lot more to that. I would encourage you to actually go study it on your own in detail.

Not just on your own, though. Perhaps you would even be benefited more by studying it along with a partner, a husband, a wife, maybe a friend in the church. Just decide we're going to meet together maybe for a few weeks, and we're going to read through the book of Galatians together.

We're going to work against each other to make sure we understand this context, because it is quite important. But what we're going to do is we're going to zero in on these two verses that I read just a moment ago. These two verses, what they do, the way they're functioning in Paul's argument, is they are revealing to us the one that God's law, this guardian, points to.

It shows us the eternal plan of God, perfectly fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 16] It expresses for us the glorious truth of God's Christmas plans, which make it possible for us to be forgiven and to be reconciled to Him.

And this is the gospel truth that I hope to show you from these two verses this morning. Four things I want to point out to you as we break the verses apart, okay? The first thing is this. I want you to see the unfolding plan of God.

The unfolding plan of God. Just the very first phrase in verse four is where we get this. But when the fullness of time had come, the fullness of time had come.

Now remember, the language is connected to this illustration Paul is using. If you just set your eyes on verse two in chapter four, the illustration refers to a child being under guardianship until the day set by his father.

That's the illustration he's using. But he's under guardians and managers until the date set by his father, Paul says. Now we get to verse four. This statement about the fullness of time coming is the explanation of the illustration Paul's using in verse two.

[8 : 26] So he illustrates it. He says, there's this kind of scenario he puts forth where there's a child. He's raised by this guardian until the date that the father has determined. And then he turns to the plan of God, the unfolding plan of God in history, redemptive history.

And he says, the fullness of time has now come. The date set by the father has come. Now what he does not mean here is that when God felt that the world's circumstances were most favorable that he suddenly decided to take action.

That's not what Paul means by this statement. What he means is that the events of Jesus' incarnation, including the historical circumstances into which he was born, took place at precisely the time God intended.

At precisely the time when the fullness of time had come, when everything had been accomplished that God had intended to be accomplished in the orchestration of his sovereign plan and his providence.

Then and only then Christ came. It's the unfolding plan of God. Now, I hope this doesn't happen to you, but the chances are something's going to happen this week.

[9 : 46] It's going to mess up your Christmas plans, right? A few weeks ago, Ashlyn's birthday is tomorrow. Ashlyn's 13 years old tomorrow. We celebrate, do you want me, do you want us to sing to you?

You don't want us to do it? A couple of weeks ago we celebrated her birthday. This year she wanted to go to Winterfest at Carowind. She wanted to take some of her friends with her and some of the girls here went along with her.

Julie and I had, it was a Friday night, we had to set up this whole plan together where Julie was going to drive to Troutman to get Annette and Phoebe and then she was going to drive down to Mooresville to get Clementine. Then she was going to drive to Matthew's to get my niece, Kate, and then she was going to drive to the Zaxby's next to Carowind's.

Now while she was doing that, Harper and I were taking Charlie to Gastonia so we could drop her off with my parents and then we were going to rendezvous with them at Zaxby's so that we could eat dinner before it cost, you know, 50 bucks a plate and then we were going to go into Carowind's and enjoy the time together.

Well, things don't ever happen the way that you want them to happen, do they? And Harper and I are on 77, 485, and 85 all at about, I don't know, 430.

[10:56] And we just weren't going to make it to Zaxby's so I called Julie and I was like, we're not going to be there in time, she was already at the restaurant, if you'll just get Harper and I something to eat, we'll eat dinner in the parking lot at Carowind's and we'll go in and we'll enjoy the night.

So Harper and I go straight to Carowind's, plans have already changed, we get there, we're in line to get into the parking lot and finally they open up the gates and we go into the parking lot and we find our parking space, Julie pulls in behind us and we get out, we're so hungry, we haven't eaten all day, we say, where's our food we would love to eat and she says, oh, I forgot to get you food. So, plan B is already changed. So we go inside and we think, okay, we're just going to find us a restaurant immediately. Well, there's no restaurants immediately unless you want Cinnabon, right, when you walk into the thing and then there's these shows that we want to go to.

It's like two hours later, Harper and I finally get something to eat at Carowind's. The plans were just constantly changing, right? Our plans do that. Your plans are going to do that this week. Listen, one person or one being that never happens to is God.

His plans never change. Nothing takes him by surprise. There's nothing that he's hoping to happen or waiting for to happen before he decides to act. That's not how it works for him.

[12:05] No, God has an eternal plan that he executes in time and space according to his sovereign will and that plan has everything to do with Jesus and saving sinners from his own wrath through Jesus.

Now, there's a lot of text we could turn to for this. Let me just show you one in Ephesians chapter one. It's on the screen for you to see. God chose us in him, in Christ.

God chose us in Christ, watch this phrase, before the foundation of the world, before creation. In eternity past, God had a plan to save sinners.

In love, he predestined us to adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ. Here's the phrase, according to the purposes of his will. He planned to do it in him.

We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us here the mystery of his will, or we might say his plan, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan, and here's this phrase again, for the fullness of time.

[13:29] In him, we have attained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things, according to the counsel of his will.

What am I saying? I'm saying that God's plan in Christ was not spontaneous. God's plan in Christ was not happenstance. It is his sovereign purpose from before creation.

It is the unfolding plan of God in history, the pivotal moment of which is the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

You say, how do you know that? The Bible tells us all about it. You can start from the very beginning. Jesus is the seed of the woman whom God promised to Adam and Eve that he would rescue fallen humanity.

Jesus is the ark of our salvation from God's judgment pictured in the story of Noah. Jesus is Abraham's offspring through which all the families of the earth are blessed.

[14:31] Jesus is the perfect spotless lamb pictured in the worship of Israel. Jesus is the son of David who will rule God's eternal kingdom. Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the prophets.

The birth of Jesus was not a coincidence. God didn't wake up one morning and say, oh, this might be a good time to try to make something happen. No. This was the pivotal moment of human history orchestrated by the sovereign plan of God as the event to which all the scriptures pointed. So using this illustration, Paul reminds the Galatians that in God's unfolding plan, the time to which the law pointed was marked by Jesus' advent, his coming.

And because of what God did through Christ in the fullness of time, we are no longer under a guardian. No longer under the condemnation of the law held in bondage to it.

The unfolding plan of God. Number two, I want you to see the agent of God's plan. The agent of God's plan. Now we're still in verse four. Just look at the next couple of phrases. In the fullness of time, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law.

[15:57] Now these brief statements, they give us an introduction to the true nature of Jesus. He is the agent of God's plan, carrying out this plan in real time and space.

Now that he was sent forth from God, is Paul's way of indicating that Jesus actually existed before he was ever born.

That's strange. None of us can say that, can we? Oh, we came into existence at our conception, didn't we? Not Jesus, though. No, Jesus was actually sent forth in order to be born of woman. He existed before. John chapter one. In the beginning was the word. John's using word here as a proper noun for Jesus.

In the beginning was the word. The word was with God. The word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were actually made through him. Jesus is the creator.

[17:03] And without him was not anything made that was made. And then in verse 14 he says, and the word became flesh. This preexistent word, this one existing with God as God in eternity past became flesh, became a man and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory, John says, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. Jesus makes this very claim himself.

In John 17, four and five, Jesus prays to the father, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do. And now father glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world ever existed.

He says. Jesus' birth is not the beginning of his existence. It's just the beginning of his incarnation. That's important. That's important. That the essence of his eternal existence is as God's son corresponds to the reality that his coming indeed was via a virgin birth.

Just as the scripture says. People keep trying to explain this away. Can't explain it away if you're using the Bible. It just doesn't work. He didn't become God's son.

[18:27] No. He's always been God's son. Luke chapter 1. The angel comes to Mary. Behold, you will conceive in your room and bear a son.

You shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the most high, the son of God. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, how will this be since I'm a virgin? I've never known a man. And the angel said, the Holy Spirit will come upon you.

The power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the son of God. And then in Matthew chapter 1 in Matthew's account, all this took place, Matthew says, to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God is with us. Not one from God is with us. No, God is with us.

[19:39] So in this simple phrase, this simple statement in Galatians 4, as Paul is making this argument of the sufficiency of Christ in his gospel, he reminds us of Jesus's true nature, underscoring Jesus's true divinity, deity.

But he also underscores Jesus's true humanity. This is the mystery of it, isn't it? It's the very next phrase. That Jesus was born of woman highlights the fact that Jesus was not only truly God, but he's actually truly man.

He's a real man. That he was born under the law means that as a true man, Jesus was fully subjected to the demands of God's law like every other man and woman.

Jesus truly is the God-man. A mystery to be sure, but a reality that's made plain in the scriptures. Jesus's nature as truly God and truly man is absolutely essential.

to God's saving plan. He's the agent of God's plan because only he can be the agent of God's plan. [20 : 55] So we've got the unfolding of God's plan. We've got the agent of God's plan. Third, we see the execution of God's plan. The execution of God's plan.

Now we're going to look at verse five, just the first phrase there. Why did he come? Why did he send forth his son? To redeem those who were under the law. To redeem those who were under the law.

Now how is it that this child whose birth we celebrate executes God's plan to save sinners? What did the father send the son to do so that those who are under the law, that's me and you, that's mankind, what did he send him to do so that we could be redeemed?

The manger in Bethlehem is of course shadowed by the cross in Jerusalem, isn't it? The execution of God's plan necessitated the execution of God's son.

To redeem those who were under the law, Jesus was born so that he could die. And it was all according to God's sovereign plan.

[22 : 08] A plan that was foretold hundreds of years before it took place. Isaiah tells us all about it in Isaiah 53. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

This is the plan of God. Now how could the execution of Jesus be a means of redemption for us? How is that even possible? What does a Jew and his death from 2,000 years ago have anything to do with your life today?

This is why understanding Jesus' true nature is so important. That's why Paul is laying out the argument the way that he is. He doesn't just say that Jesus is the son of God born of woman born under the law just because he's trying to fill up space and he's being real wordy like I am.

No, there's an intention to it. It's only after you understand that nature that you can actually understand this redemption. Though as a man, Jesus was fully subjected to the demands of the law unlike any other man.

[23 : 19] Jesus perfectly obeyed and fulfilled that law. Therefore his death was not a judgment for sins that he committed but it was an atonement for those who have indeed sinned against God.

That's how he did it. That's why it matters. In other words, Jesus lived the life that we were meant to live and then he died the death that we deserve to die.

On the cross, he laid down his life to suffer the wrath of the Father meant for sinners so that God might count those same sinners as righteous before him.

That's amazing. Let me give you just a few passages that echo this. from Galatians itself. If you want to just flip back a page to chapter 3. Galatians 3 verse 10.

All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. In other words, if you're counting on your ability to just kind of be good and do your best and try your hardest that how could God ever condemn somebody like me if that's what you're counting on?

[24 : 35] Paul says you're under a curse. He says the reason you're under a curse is because the scriptures say curse be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

He says in other words if you're counting on your goodness to make it you're under a curse because none of us have been good enough. All of us have fallen short and somebody has to pay for that. Somebody has to reckon with that.

But then look at verse 13. But Christ redeemed us from that curse. How? By becoming a curse for us.

For it's written cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. Paul says the same thing in Romans chapter 8. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do.

How? By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh. In his flesh with his flesh with his body in the execution on the cross he condemns sin.

[25 : 43] He deals with sin Paul says. Why? In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be filled in us who have not truly fulfilled it and yet we're counted as righteous.

2 Corinthians 5 29 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We sing about this every week bearing sin and scoffing rude in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon with his blood.

Hallelujah what a savior. But of course death isn't the end for Jesus. He defeats death by rising from the dead three days after that crucifixion and this too is the execution of God's eternal plan. This is what was meant to happen. John chapter 10 tells us Jesus says it for this reason the father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

[26 : 57] No one takes it from me I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down I have authority to take it up again this charge this mission this plan I have received from my father.

Oh it's not just that his execution was a part of the plan so was his resurrection and you can't have one without the other. the resurrection it shows us that God actually accepted Christ's crucifixion as sufficient for us.

Now why in the world would Paul be referring to this in Galatians 4? Because he's talking to a group of people who are being deceived. Somebody's telling them that yeah Jesus is fine but he's not enough.

But in the resurrection itself God himself tells the world Christ is enough. nothing else need be done. Receive salvation through him.

Christ fully satisfied God's wrath against every sinner who will receive him by faith. There is nothing left for you to pay.

[28 : 11] But his resurrection it guarantees our future resurrection. salvation. Because he lives we have the full assurance that we too will live.

It's the execution of God's plan. Fourthly and finally the purpose of God's plan. The purpose of God's plan. Look at the last phrase of verse 5.

It's a purpose statement. We know that because the first two words so that it's a purpose statement. so that we might receive adoption as sons.

So that we might receive adoption as sons. There is a popular idea out there that maintains something like this.

We are all God's children. We're all God's children. Perhaps you've heard that. Maybe you've said it. But here's the thing. That doesn't actually come from the Bible. That was a phrase that was brought to bear at the end of the enlightenment when culturally men had decided that God and religion was no longer necessary that mankind can get by just fine on pure reason and rationality.

[29 : 26] But yet there was still hundreds and hundreds of years worth of religion that existed. They didn't want to just do away with it all. So what they did is they tried to merge the two together and they said they spoke of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

In other words we all belong to God. We're all the children of God and we're all brothers and sisters together. A nice sentiment. Not true. It's not what the Bible teaches. We are all God's creatures. We do belong to Him in that sense but we are not all His children. In fact in our sinful condition the Bible describes us as God's enemies not His children.

That's why the New Testament so often uses this idea of adoption in reference to God's salvation. You see it right here in the phrase don't you?

If Christ executed this plan with the purpose that those who believe Him might receive adoption might become children of God that means necessarily that those same people at some time were not the children of God.

[30 : 40] God's purpose in His eternal plan as executed by Jesus Christ is to make His enemies sons. It's to make His enemies sons.

I just want you to let that sit on your mind for just a second. It's kind of amazing. Who of you would ever look at an enemy who hates your guts and wants nothing to do with you and say you know what I'm going to do?

I'm going to make you my child. I'm going to give you everything that's mine. I'm going to forgive everything you've ever done. I'm going to turn away from every bit of hatred that you've ever put towards me and I'm going to give you everything that's mine.

None of us would ever do that and yet that's exactly what God does in Christ. Why? God's plan of salvation it's not a provision that he makes for us out of pity.

Sometimes we get this idea that because of God's holiness that you know he feels like he has to do something because he kind of feels sorry for us so he kind of pinches his nose and he sends Jesus and I go do this thing for anybody who wants to deal with it and he just kind of keeps his distance.

[31 : 55] That is not at all what we find in the scripture remember this is God's unfolding plan from all of eternity. This is his plan. Why? Why would he do that?

What is it that he actually desires? He desires to be reconciled to us his enemies. Why does he want what's motivating this desire?

Love. Love. Romans Romans 5 8 God shows his love toward us how? That while we're still sinners his enemies and in that moment don't even want him we're not asking for salvation don't think we need it.

Even then he shows his love for us by sending Christ to die for us. Ephesians too but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you've been saved.

1 John 4 9 and 10 in this the love of God was made manifest in this the love of God was put on display how?

[33 : 23] That God sent his son into the world so that we might live through him in this is love not that we've loved him but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation the full satisfaction for our sins unless we begin to think that Jesus is an unwilling participant in this hear the words of the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2 he says look to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God what do you mean by that?

you go to Chick-fil-A you go to the drive through you do your mobile order you say you got a mobile order for Jared B they say you want to make any changes they say no they say alright you can pull forward they say thank you and they say my pleasure it is my joy to serve you in this way and I don't think they really mean that all the time God sends his son not as an unwilling participant it is his joy to give himself for us why?

so that we might be his why did God make such a plan of redemption and go to such great extent to save sinners because of his great love because he desires to be reconciled to us because he wants to adopt us into his family and make us heirs of eternal life now let me finish this way let's go back to the context the Galatian Christians were beginning to waver from this gospel why would you ever want to do that right?

and yet the temptation to do that is real isn't it? how many times have we been in churches or maybe we've been the guilty party in a church that see someone come to Christ exemplify faith put their trust in Jesus and then we come behind that and we strap on the bondage of the law afresh all over again the temptation is real to do that and the Galatian Christians were starting to waver from it they were tolerating this idea that the grounds of our justification before God is our conformity to the law so Paul writes a whole letter to correct them if a righteous standing before God can be gained through good works Christ died for no reason that's another argument he makes in the letter think about that if this is God's plan and God's plan was to send Christ to save sinners through his death and resurrection and then invites us to come to him by faith how could we possibly say that it's our works then that somehow merit salvation if that was true if we could actually be saved by our works then Christ came for no reason then his incarnation has no purpose let alone his death and resurrection but the reality of God's eternal plan to save sinners through Christ the very fact that that is his plan as presented in the scriptures proves that no amount of personal righteous can actually atone for your sins this isn't an exchange of good deeds what a mockery that is to God the one who in his great love goes to such great lengths to provide salvation through Christ by his own grace what a mockery it is for any person to turn to God and then say look at all that

I've done for you won't you please let me into heaven what a mockery how then can someone be saved it's not by our righteousness it's through Jesus' righteousness through faith in his identity as the son of God whose death satisfies God's wrath and whose resurrection gives us the hope of eternal life it is by faith alone in what Christ has done that any one of us can be saved again Galatians 3 in fact this is even closer if you'll just set your eyes up to the top of the page probably Galatians 3 24 to 26 in the midst of the same illustration Paul's been giving so then the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith but now that faith the faith in the revelation of Jesus now that faith has come we are no longer under a guardian for in

[38 : 29] Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith that's it that's it that's it salvation is received only through faith turning from sin and unbelief to trust Jesus as Savior which necessarily means that you also submit to him as Lord because of this plan of salvation is motivated by his love he accomplishes it and he invites us to receive it doesn't he force it upon us he invites us to receive it these are the words of Jesus in Matthew 11 come to me he says come to me all who labor and are heavy laden what is that labor the labor of trying to achieve something through the law that you

can't achieve come to me all who are laboring trying to do your best and try your hardest

I will give you rest he says take my yoke upon me upon you learn from me for I'm gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your soul for my yoke is easy and my burden is light so then in all you're giving and receiving this week as you execute your Christmas plans don't neglect the only gift that ultimately matters which is what God has given us in his Christmas plans salvation through Jesus Christ alone for