

Glory to the New Born King!

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[0 : 00] Merry Christmas to you. Thank you. Now when the second lesson was read today, I wonder if you thought, what does this have to do with Christmas?

Maybe the first lesson from the Gospel of Matthew is the one that's most familiar to you, but the second one created some curiosity in your heart and in your mind.

I want you to know that Charles Wesley from the 18th century wrote three Christmas carols at least based on Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7, and one was, To Us, a Child of Royal Birth. Another one, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, used during the season of Advent as well. And then one that we sung this morning, Hark the Herald Angels Sing. If you turn with me to page 2, I just want to point out to you the last half of the third stanza.

Galatians chapter 4 is represented by the hymn writer in these words, Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.

[1 : 22] It's a beautiful, glorious rendering of some of Galatians chapter 4. But you must admit, the beginning of chapter 4 doesn't sound like anything it has to do with Christmas.

It starts off, I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave. I'm sure that's not why you came here this morning probably to hear about that, but later on we read, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son.

Now that sounds a lot more like Christmas, doesn't it? And as the sending of Jesus Christ, we'll find out in this great letter, in part, is about freedom. It's about freedom from religious laws, which represents real trouble, but it leads to freedom for real value and real living.

I think that's in part what the Christmas message is about. So let's look at, first of all, real trouble.

This letter is written to people who think that life comes through religion and rituals and rules.

And before you think that's ridiculous, they thought that that meant getting things right, doing things well, living the good life. And we're not all that different from that.

[2 : 35] We like to justify or prove or present ourselves positively to. And Paul says this. He said, those are good desires, but that's the wrong way to do it, through these three R's of religion, rituals, and rules.

He says that God does it for us through Jesus Christ. And the only way to get life right, do things well, live strong, knowing how weak we are, is in relationship through Jesus Christ.

It comes down to God being the one who writes wrong. And what's wrong? Well, it's our nature. It's spoiled. It's infected.

It's rotten. There's sin there. Let me give you an example of how that happened just by that of an apple. And I wonder if you have ever wondered how an apple gets its worm.

Well, an apple gets worms from not the outside in, but from the inside out. There are eggs that are laid by a fly, and they're laid inside the apple.

[3 : 42] And then the egg actually hatches inside later on in the harvesting season, and a worm is born from the inside out. It's kind of a description of our nature of sin.

We're infected, spoiled from the inside out. We are sinned against, but sin starts inside us, spoiling, spreading, separating us from God.

And that's our nature. And there's nothing that we can do about that to change our orientation, inclinations, our impulses, our intentions. Verses 1-3-3 say that we're basically slaves to sin.

And Paul comes along and he says that God used to address our sinful nature by rules, rituals, and religion. But that ends up actually enslaving and trapping us.

And chapter 3 tells us our desire to right the wrong is a good one, but only God can justify us through faith in Him. His life is then in us, and it changes us.

[4 : 46] It changes this sin-saturated life, this infected life, from the inside out because of who Jesus Christ is and the sending of Him, this Christmas event. So these rules, religion, and rituals, while they are good, they don't change a person.

We need this internal transformation, this really big change. And that's the identification of a real trouble, which turns us then to something else, these two things that Paul points out in the last half of this set of verses, these seven verses in Galatians chapter 4.

One is redemption, and the other one is adoption. So how is this change then to take place? Well, Paul writes this. He says, But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law.

So when the time was just right, the Virgin Mary miraculously conceived a Son, and the Son of God is sent through birth. That is the Christmas event. And God sets the stage to enter the world like just any other human, except the miraculous birth of that, though He is God.

Now the Romans and the Greeks thought that men became gods. Not all, but some. But Christians believe the opposite. That is, that God became a man.

[6 : 12] And the birth of Jesus Christ, fully human, fully divine, enters into the world under the law. Just like the rest of the world, who's under this law that enslaves.

And why does God send forth, you know, the Christmas event, His Son? Well, Galatians chapter 4, verse 4, tells us to redeem us.

Now this word, redeem, is an economic term, often applied to slaves and servants, bought and sold. The original owner or slave, though, after some time could buy back his or her freedom, or have someone else.

Maybe their family members do that. The value for purchase would be negotiated, sometimes more, often less, depending upon future potential. But Christ alone was sent forth, as it says in verse 5, to redeem those born under the law.

This one born on Christmas morning that we remember is the one who will redeem us. We can't redeem ourselves. Redemption means His life then will restore the value of our lives, originally lost through sin.

[7 : 27] Lost and ruined through sin and separation from God, the life of Christ redeems and restores, restores our life. He frees us by forgiveness of this cost to redeem.

Now it's hard to appreciate this word, redeem, isn't it? And the only time we seem to use it is for rewards earned by customer consumption and loyalty. You know what I'm talking about.

We earn and then redeem points with a merchant for products. But in Christianity, Jesus Christ is the only one who can redeem and give value to our lives. And that's why He came.

Our Lord, born, who lived, who gave His life, who died for us, is the one who restores, redeems the value of our life. This is redemption.

Now that all sounds great, maybe technical, a bit mechanical. But there is a purpose to all this, and Paul moves from the marketplace then to the family, from real value to real life, from slavery to freedom.

[8 : 32] But what then? Now if you were a slave set free, where would you go after that? Let's think about that. You would most likely go home if your home was still there, if it existed.

And God sent His Son so that we, we could not just return home, spiritually speaking, but live as sons and daughters in our Heavenly Father's family.

How do we know that? Well, Paul writes that God sent forth His Son so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters. This is what Christmas is in part about.

Redemption, which is for the purpose of adoption. I wonder if you've ever looked at another family and thought, wow, I wish I were a member of that family.

Or maybe you thought, you know, those parents over there, they're pretty wonderful. Maybe you thought, I wish I had a brother or sister like that one over there. Maybe the benefits of a family you think for some reason are better than yours.

[9 : 41] You think, in other words, the grass is greener on the other side of that family fence. Well, this isn't permission to leave your marriages or families or that sort of thing.

But, this is probably the only time, well, it is, that the grass is actually greener on the other side. If you're ever inclined to think that, well, Christmas, the coming of Christ, is the solution through adoption.

God becoming man means our family status now has changed. Christmas means that we become children of God through this great work of Him called adoption.

And the purpose of Jesus' birth is the promise of our new birth, new family, new life. And Jesus and Peter, as well as Paul, all taught about the imperative of this new life or to be born again.

Through Christ Jesus, we can have new birth, giving real life in God's family as adopted children. And it's strictly by the grace and the goodness and the kindness and the work of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the work of His Holy Spirit.

[10 : 55] Our new life as children of God begins with the birth of Jesus and gives birth to us to reorient and direct our lives to our Father in Heaven.

So in Christmas, we have these two great teachings about redemption and adoption. This real value as free men and women through redemption. Real life as children of God through adoption into His family.

And it just has two implications and I'll end with this. The first one is that of service. Since God sent His Son to redeem those under the law, God has freed us from living a life of should to could.

In other words, living a life not of duty but now of destiny or changing from what I call servitude to servanthood.

It is freedom of slavery from sin now which liberates us to serve like Christ. The one who came not to be served but to serve.

[12 : 02] And we can do that all the time. We can do it at work, at home. We can do it in our families. We can do it at our leisure and leisure activities. Any association that we might find ourselves in is a great opportunity to live this redeemed life as servants of Christ.

And the second implication is that of desire. Since God has sent His Son so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters, God then lavishes His love on us which changes our desires for Him and others.

And our deepest and greatest and best and boldest desires or affections are given to God and His family in this world. After today we will have more things and stuff probably fulfilling some of our wish lists.

But at the end of the day we live fuller lives when we have the desires for God and for His family in this world in which we live. so we're adopted to desire life with Christ for His family in this world this day.

Merry Christmas.