

Advent 2

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Date: 02 December 2018

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[0 : 00] Please, if you turn to Galatians chapter 4. Now, of course, as I said this morning, we're going to be looking at the same two verses for the next four services.

The first one was this morning, and then at the end of the fourth service, we will close our Bibles and you'll be able to recite those two verses without looking.

So, Galatians 4 verses 4 and 5 is our reading, and then we'll come back to that in message form after we have sung again.

So, please, now hear God's word. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

It's a wonderful couple of verses, and we'll come back to that after we have sung again. Thank you. Of this morning. That we began this morning by at least addressing verse 4 in particular, and we summarized it in a slightly different way than Galatians 4 does, or as Paul does it, by simply saying that it can be read this way, that at the right time, God sent the right person to the right place in the right way.

[1 : 29] The fullness of time had come. It was the right time. God sent forth his Son. That is the right person. Born of a woman.

That is the right place. And then, of course, born under the law is to be born in the right way, at least from a Jewish perspective, which is really important for understanding the promises made concerning the Messiah.

This morning, we concentrated very much on the first part, that Jesus came at the fullness of time, or rather, the importance of time needed to prepare us for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I use the illustration of perhaps raking over the ground. You know, when the ground is like hard soil, and you take a rake to it, or a pitchfork, and a spade, and you turn the earth over.

And the reason I use that illustration, that picture, is not because it's my own, but rather because it belongs to Jesus. And Jesus said, you know, there's four types of soil, but only one seed.

[2 : 39] And the seed falling onto that particular type of ground brings forth much fruit unto salvation. And, of course, throughout history, God is preparing his people with the Ten Commandments and the other laws, with how to go about atonement, and why sacrifice is necessary, even the shedding of blood, and all of the promises and prophecies regarding the land, the miracles regarding bread from heaven.

A number of things are there preparing us for the Lord Jesus Christ. At the time, they may never have been seen that way. But as we look back into the Old Testament, as Jesus says, you ought to be able to read the pages of Scripture and be able to conclude that all of this is pointing towards me, that all of this is about me.

And we said that God, over time, kept his people waiting, but not because waiting is an inactivity, but rather because in that period, you are learning something.

And God reveals bit by bit. And I said that not any one of us here can become a professor overnight. It doesn't work like that. Nobody else can become a school teacher immediately by taking one lesson.

It takes time. And in the same way, it takes a lot of time to appreciate who Jesus is. So even before we can get to the right person, we need that foundation of knowing, well, who is it that we're actually looking for?

[4 : 16] Who is this actual Messiah? And of course, God is drawing out through pictures and promises and prophecies and arrangements who this person will be.

So time, it's necessary for God to take his time. But another thing that happens in that period of time is that throughout the Old Testament, you actually get to learn what the content of your faith in Jesus actually is.

So you tell someone that you believe in Jesus, okay? You tell someone that you have faith in Jesus. Okay, what does that mean? What is the content of that faith?

Well, suddenly you're able to explain so much more than you ever imagined because you realize that it's faith in his death. It's faith in his word. It's faith in him being God the Son.

And the only reason you're able to know all of these things is because over time you have learned them. That even if you've come to Christ in salvation, nevertheless, from that, you appreciate so much more the content of your faith through the time it takes for you to take in and learn what God has revealed about himself and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 34] In other words, if I can put it simply, that Jesus is simply the fulfillment of the promises made in the Old Testament. And so we read the Old Testament with that in mind.

So having then doubt with the right time, that it was the right time because everything in God's providential care meant that the people, his people, were ready to receive the Messiah.

They had received all the promises. They had received all the preparations needed. They were ready to receive the Messiah. And so this evening, we come to the Messiah. We come to Jesus being the right person.

Now, of course, Jesus is overlooked in the same way that God is overlooked in the Old Testament. But he's not overlooked because he hasn't made himself clear.

But he's overlooked because people have their own ideas about what they think God should be like or what they think God should do for them. And what they're missing or rather repeating is the same thing as the people did out of Egypt, that they neither understand their need nor their future.

[6 : 45] And so Advent doesn't really come home to them with its full power because they're not in the position to be able to appreciate what Advent actually is.

And so God has to reposition us. He's saying to us, look, you're not going to be able to see it from where you are. I need to lift you on top of the chair. I need to put you on the table so that you can look over what's obscuring your view.

And God, very carefully and very gently with all of us in some way or other, repositions us to be able to appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ. Another way of addressing this issue here is that in recognizing who Jesus is, Paul is also dealing with the problem that he has in the Galatian church.

And that is, as I said this morning, they have come to believe that while faith in Jesus is necessary, they think they need to add to it with good works in order to be saved.

And what Paul has to point out to them is, look, you're missing the fact that Jesus is the right person. You're missing the fact that it's Jesus who brings us into the family of God. It's not you and your good works.

[7 : 57] And so while this isn't a particularly Advent account here in Galatians 4.4, nevertheless, it does address the Galatian problem. And that is, people who believe in Jesus but then still feel they need to add to that by making sure that they do good works so that God would find them acceptable.

No, no, says Paul. No, if you think that, you've misunderstood what Jesus has done for you. You've misunderstood that Jesus is not only the right person, but the only person who can make you right with God.

So Paul's main concern is to a group of Christians that have received Christ but then have moved on beyond him. We're addressing it from the point of view of those who have not yet received Christ, but then we could address it from the other side as well.

A point of clarity then before we sort of get into the main body of the text. Remember, as I said, when we looked at John last Sunday morning, there's a big difference between identifying the Messiah and identifying Jesus Christ.

What do I mean? Well, what I mean is this, that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all want to identify Jesus in different ways. Matthew and Luke in particular give us the nativity account.

[9 : 19] You know, they start with the birth of Jesus Christ. John starts with Jesus' eternal state. you know, that he was the word who was with God and was God.

Mark wants you to understand that Jesus Christ is the son of God but Matthew and Luke, they want you to understand that God came in the form of a man through a woman.

And of course, we appreciate that. But the identity of Jesus is summed up by identifying who Jesus is. But what Matthew and Luke particularly want us to understand is that the identity of the Messiah promised in the Old Testament is seen in the identity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

I want you to sort of just process that for a moment. In other words, what Matthew and Luke are trying to do and trying to get across, and I think they do get it across, is for you to appreciate the identity of the Messiah is Jesus.

That all of those promises concerning the one that God would send is found in the identity of Jesus. So, in short, the identity of the Messiah is Jesus.

[10:38] But it is possible, as some historians have pointed out, to totally miss that, to concentrate on the identity of Jesus from only the point of view of Jesus, the words that he spoke, the miracles that he did, and then miss somehow that he fulfills all the promises of God.

I guess someone's not paying attention to Jesus really all that much. So the point here is to recognize that this right person, that this right person, is Jesus, but Jesus is the Messiah.

Okay? The right person is Jesus Christ, but Jesus is the Messiah that was promised. Okay. Where do we go from here? Well, I think we need to begin with the importance of having a simple faith.

What do I mean by simple? I don't mean simple as if it lacks understanding, but I mean simply believing the promises of God and simply believing that Jesus fulfills those promises of God.

In other words, if you have a simple faith in that you truly believe that Jesus is the one who makes you right with God, yet that's the type of faith that pleases God. You know, if you have a simple type of faith that trusts that Jesus Christ is the only way to God the Father, that he is the one who has redeemed you and brought you into the family of God, then that again is the kind of faith that pleases God.

[12:06] You know, God says, without faith it is impossible to please me. And yet for this Galatian church, what they have done is that they have mixed that simple faith now with this additional work of saying, okay, that's just not quite enough.

God must want more than this. And the truth is, God doesn't want more than that. He wants the simple faith, not simplistic, but the simple faith of believing that every promise he has made is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

that at the right time God sent the right person and that's what you believe. Okay. So why is Jesus the right person? Well, I think he's the right person for one reason mainly and I think you'll agree with no problems here.

In fact, it's so obvious that you'll probably, oh, of course we know that to be true. Think about it this way. When you make a promise, it doesn't matter to who it is.

Who keeps that promise? Does the person that you made it to keep the promise? Well, no, of course not. It's not their promise, it's yours. Okay. Well, does somebody else keep the promise for you?

[13:23] Well, no, because that wouldn't be you keeping your promise. Okay. So throughout the whole of the Old Testament, who makes the promises? Well, God does.

Well, then who has to keep the promises? Well, God does. And so very simply, the reason why Jesus is the right person is because he is God the Son.

The reason why Jesus is able to keep the promises of God is because he is God keeping his own promises. So that's what Paul is spelling out here very simply.

That if God has made a promise, then God will keep his own promise. And the way God keeps his own promise and for you to understand that Jesus is the right person is to truly appreciate that Jesus is God.

God the Son in human flesh to do for you, as we've often said, what you cannot do for yourself. So why is Jesus the right person?

[14:26] Well, he's the right person because he's God. And that's simple in its statement, maybe a little difficult to get your head around. And yet, that is what God is declaring.

That God, at the right time, sent forth his Son, whom we know has God the Son. He comes to keep his own promises.

That's how we know him to be the right person. What does that mean then? What it means is this, is that I made a little joke this morning about self-help books and how the sales of them go up in the month of January.

It's though people get the idea of, right, we've got to begin a new year and I need a little bit of help, I'll turn to the bookshelf. And I said to you, many of these books are the same and many of these books have actually got some pretty good ideas in. But they don't address the real need of guilt or forgiveness or even a future beyond the immediate. They don't even get close to this.

[15 : 28] but the right person addresses that whole genre of books in a slightly different way and it's this, that if I'm the right person then you're not.

But if Jesus is the right person to make you right with God then you're not the right person to make yourself right with God. And so the right person makes you right with God because you're not right with God.

It's a little bit complicated but you get the picture. To understand that Jesus is the right person is to appreciate humbly that I'm not the right person.

To be told that Jesus is the right person may offend my pride in all that I do to make myself a good person. and so to be faced with Jesus Christ as the only person that God finds to be right with him is both difficult and yet at the same time deeply encouraging that God sent his son who is right with him to make us right with God.

And that's the appreciation that we have with Jesus by understanding that he is the right person. God sent his son if I can put it this way to make us his children.

[17 : 00] Okay? God sent us his son to make us his children. Okay? Let's move on. Now that we are made his children and we know that Jesus is the right person the one that God has sent what does it mean for us to actually know God beyond knowing that he just happens to be the right person?

what does it mean to know Jesus beyond the simple statement that God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law at the right time? What does it mean to actually know the Jesus that we belong to?

Well any of you that's in a relationship will know that relationships go deep and wide but only over a period of time. And over that same period of time you get to find out things about the other person that you didn't know when the relationship began.

They get to see things in you that you can no longer hide simply because the length of your relationship exposes them warts and all. You know I was never like this before I married you.

Well maybe I was exactly like this but it took marriage for somebody else to see it. Okay. That idea of relationship bringing out of another person something that they don't see in themselves is exactly what happens when we relate to Jesus Christ.

[18 : 28] That suddenly we see ourselves in a whole new light. Jesus sort of brings to the surface and deals with things that we never thought was true of ourselves. But on the same token we get to appreciate Jesus that gentleness that wonderful counselor.

What does that mean? I think it means this. We should never forget that Jesus Christ is the word of God ever. Why? Because a counselor a good counselor has got one tool and it's the most important tool and it's words.

Jesus is the counselor because he is the word of God. Jesus is the advocate and what does an advocate need?

What is the most skillful thing that an advocate needs in order to stand before a judge? Well he needs two things in particular. The first is words. An advocate is someone who speaks on behalf of the person before the judge.

But what else does an advocate need? Well an advocate needs evidence. Evidence. Jesus is our advocate stands before God and all the claims that devil makes against us regarding our sin and just how bad we are.

[19 : 57] Jesus' answer is simply, yeah but I died for him. Yes but I died for her. Never ever forget that in knowing Jesus we know Jesus through his words.

and those words is the great counselor are the words that assure us. They are the words that give us the answers we need. They are the words that are constantly saying to God, yes but I have died for him.

In other words as we know Jesus through his word we recognize that those same words is what does us the greatest benefit. it. Whether they are directed towards us in his word or they are directed towards God the Father as Jesus stands before him as our advocate.

In other words to truly know Jesus, to truly know why he's the right person, we must get to that level of understanding why he's the word of God. To truly move in and appreciate just how beautiful and how precious Jesus Christ is, we must make it all the way in to the fact that that he speaks for us on our behalf and he speaks to us through his word.

Now we're getting to know why Jesus is the right person in a far deeper way than simply looking at a cross or looking at a story. Now we're beginning to appreciate the fullness of exactly why Jesus Christ is the right person.

[21 : 29] And remember this, you are never ever going to be able to work out how precious Jesus Christ is by how many people build their lives on him. You're just not going to get there.

The world is not going to be able to work out how vital Jesus Christ is for them, how needful he is, by how many people follow him. You're just never going to get there.

You only truly appreciate why Jesus is the right person through knowing him. And that takes time, like I said this morning, it takes time to know the Jesus that you belong to.

It takes time to appreciate what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. Here's a few considerations then as we sort of draw this towards a conclusion.

It may be difficult at times for you to remain firm in your witness in a world that doesn't appreciate Jesus in the same way you do.

[22 : 30] It may be difficult for you to truly appreciate Jesus when the world doesn't see anything in Jesus that you find both attractive, that you find worth holding on to, that you love him for.

But here's the sort of, I guess, challenge, if I can put it that way, is be careful about being ashamed of Jesus' words. Be careful.

Jesus said himself, you know, whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this generation. The Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he come.

You know, how often, you know, I've over the years had conversations with people and I've walked away knowing that I should have said something and I just pray to God that I didn't say something, not because I was ashamed of Jesus or ashamed of his words.

I pray that that was never the case. But how easily it could become that. where I forget the preciousness of those words for the salvation of others.

[23 : 39] That words can seem so offensive at the time that they are spoken, that Jesus is the only way to God. And yet, they're the very words that God uses to bring men and women, boys and girls to himself.

And so it's crucial that we're not ashamed of Jesus in his words for the benefit of others and for our own benefit that the Son of Man is not ashamed of us when he comes.

It's a challenge, I know, but I think it's a challenge that needs to be leveled against all of us, just so we remember what's at stake here, just so we remember the type of relationship that we ought to have or remember that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ.

is another consideration then, devotion. You know, we believe that Jesus is Lord over everything. We believe that he knows the beginning from the end.

We also believe that all authority has been given to him. We need to put him first then, not because he's not first.

[24 : 50] And I guess perhaps putting him first is just another way of saying you need to take one step behind him rather than constantly one step in front. In other words, you're getting in your own way by getting in the way of Jesus in your own life.

You know, to appreciate Jesus is Lord as the right person, it is really to live in a submissive life before him. You know, God is the one who takes care of you, you're not going to be the one who takes care of God.

And the way God will do that, is by making sure you're in the right position. He will carry you, he will lead you, and he will bring you home in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's a conclusion then. Just simple, in short, but nevertheless I think important. It takes the right person to bring us into the right relationship, Galatians 4 verse 5, with God.

God. It takes the right person to bring us into the right relationship with God in the right way. And I think when we understand that, all of their efforts fall away.

[26 : 03] You know, I've met a few Christians, even I've been tempted to think it myself. You know, that if I pray more, God might favor me more. Like the Galatian problem.

The Galatians were at it, you know, front, left, and center. Okay, I've got faith in Jesus. Nobody can accuse me of being an atheist, but now I'm just going to add to that faith by doing good works. I don't know if they thought that this gives them a one-upmanship over anybody else, but Paul is saying, no, you're getting in your way. In other words, by appreciating that Jesus Christ is the right person, all of your own efforts fall away.

They lose their impetus, they lose their power, they lose their importance. They're just not worth pursuing. But you only get to that stage by truly appreciating why Jesus is the right person and why everything that he has done for you does not need to be added to.

So for some, they may just need to come to Jesus Christ. And for others, Christians, they may just need to turn around and wander back to Jesus, having met him and then gone off in their own direction.

[27 : 21] I think about it this way, that how do you get a person to turn around? How do you get a person to turn around? I think you have to do one thing before you do anything else, and that is you have to point out to them that they're going in the wrong direction.

right? It's not over there, it's over here. Okay? You're going in the wrong direction, I've often used. How do you know it's the wrong direction?

Okay? Then you have to go back and explain. It seems as if everybody in the world, nobody turns around unless they are convinced at some point that they're heading in the wrong direction.

And I think that that's what God does with Jesus with all of us, to the unsaved and to the saved, that we all have that one thing in common with Jesus, that whenever we come close and clean with Jesus, we become distinctly aware of where we're going wrong and at what point we need to turn around and turn back and follow in his ways.

Okay, here's a final thought. In all that's been said, one thing must be appreciated and it's this. That at the right time, God sent the right person.

[28 : 36] And that right person brings you into a relationship with God. Why? Why? Well, you've heard me say this before. God is non-competitive with human flourishing.

God is not in competition with you. God wants you to flourish in the very best way. God wants you to do it. And the way that he gets you to do that is by bringing you into him so that he may share himself with you.

God, who is in need of nothing, wants to share himself with you. And the Lord Jesus Christ brings us in, if I can put it this way, to God's sharing heart.

In fact, giving us Jesus is God demonstrating that very truth itself. God's love. What does that mean? Well, it means this. Don't fall into the trap that the Galatians did.

By having come to Jesus, they seem to have got bored with him. They seem to have grown apart in their relationship with the Lord.

[29 : 43] They seem to have moved on. And so the challenge is very simple. Don't grow apart from Jesus. Just don't grow apart from him.

Stay close and stay clean. And remember this, that at the right time, God sent the right person to bring you into the right relationship. Amen.

Amen.