

Jesus at the right time

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Date: 02 December 2018

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Here's chapter 4, verse 4 and 5. 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.

What can I say to someone who doesn't know what Christmas is?

[2 : 28] There you have it. In two verses. There you have it. But we'll explain this over these next four services. But those couple of verses really say so much and so clearly as well.

And so we thank God for that. Well, we're going to come back to that in a moment after we have sung this next hymn together. Thank you.

Okay, if you can please turn again to Galatians 4.4. And as you do that, I'll just say as by way of reminder that we have four services that lead up to our nativity service.

That is two today, two next week, and then the following Sunday will be our nativity service. But here in Galatians, we get to see the advent of Christ from a different angle, or at least it's made clear in a few very clear statements.

It can be read in several different ways, but it's quite clear that it's speaking of four things in particular. The fullness of time, God sending his son, the son being born of a woman we know to be Mary.

[4 : 11] And born under the law. And then in verse 5, it gives us the reason for why all of those things took place. And it was to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Or to put it in a slightly different way, that God sent his son, the triune family, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to bring us into his family.

Okay? Okay? God sent his son out of the family unit, as it were, not that there was any split, but to bring us into the family of God. That's essentially what Advent begins, or what we're meant to understand.

So if Advent is about how God brings us into the family of God, then it means that we need to understand how God does that. So if we read the verses backwards, so if God brings us into the family of God, verse 5, how does he do that?

Verse 4. Well, when it was the right time, he sent the right person in the right place and in the right way. So God, at the right time, sent the right person to the right place in the right way so that you may be brought into the family of God.

[5 : 29] And so verses 4 and 5 answer each other. And that's essentially what these couple of verses are teaching us, that God, at exactly the right time, sent the right person, indeed the only person that he could send, in the right place, that is the virgin womb, and in the right way, that is under the law because God has standards by which he keeps, so that he might bring us into the family of God.

Now you're thinking, well, if that is such a clear statement, what is it doing perhaps in the book of Galatians? Well, there's a number of reasons why that statement's in Galatians, is because it's not particularly an Advent verse, yet nevertheless we can see the story of Advent in those verses.

We can see the reasons for why Jesus came. But here's a summary background of Galatians. And that is the Galatian church had actually lost their way. And I don't want to come down too hard on them because many other churches throughout Christianity have lost their way in perhaps the same way that the Galatian church did.

In other words, they simply forgot that Jesus Christ was the right person, that he was the only person to be able to save them from their sins and make them right with God.

And they forgot it in a particular way, not by denying Jesus, or by saying that there's no need for Jesus, but by believing that what Jesus did needed to be added to, that is by doing good works.

[7 : 10] So they ended up believing that salvation was not by faith alone through Christ alone, but actually by through faith in Jesus accompanied by good works.

And of course, Paul has strong words to say to this church, saying, you know, why have you been deceived in this way? Why have you gone ahead and believed a lie?

Why have you who once began in the spirit now continue in the flesh? He's not exactly gentle with them. And of course, the reason for not being all that gentle with them is because they're bypassing Jesus.

That's serious to bypass Jesus. But, you know, this is why Galatians is so relevant today, that in many of the same way, I've got family members, I've even got friends, who believe that they don't need Jesus to be right with God.

You know, that's sad, because they're claiming they know what God wants, and yet at the same time, they're denying what God has said and given in his son, Jesus Christ.

[8 : 21] Yeah, and that's a real mix of affairs. How do you reposition someone like that to get them to see that Jesus is the right person? Well, the way that you've got to do it is by beginning with this issue of time.

Time's very important. The issue of waiting is very important, and that is some people take a very long time to get to see Jesus.

Some people only come to Jesus after years and years and years of being repositioned by the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus is so gentle in how he leads us to himself that it's only in hindsight that these people look back and go, oh yeah, now I can see how over those years, over those periods of time, God was realigning me so that I would be walking down the same path on which I would meet Jesus.

Okay? That can only happen in time. That can only happen in periods of waiting and perhaps even a bit of frustration. But nevertheless, the summary background here is that the Galatian church have lost their way and need to be reminded that Jesus is the only way.

And so the message is relevant for someone who has never met Jesus. It's relevant for us in the same way it's relevant for the Galatian church that we don't think that we can move on from what God is telling us here.

[9 : 55] The reason why Jesus is the answer is because of what it says in verse 3, that until Jesus comes along at the right time, to the right place and in the right way, that men and women, boys and girls, are enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

In other words, they're stuck. They cannot move out of the position that they find themselves in. Do you know what one of the best-selling books is in January?

Always in January, or at least the best-selling subjects of books. And it's the self-help section. Now, I've actually read a few of these just for fun.

I never found them all that interesting, although I did read them. But do you know what? It doesn't matter how many people write a book on those subjects, they're all effectively saying the same thing.

And that is, you can do it. And it's true that you can do much of what they say, but you cannot bring yourself into the family of God.

[11 : 02] You cannot forgive yourself of your sins. You cannot be found innocent before God of your own doing. Now, of course, if somebody says, well, those things aren't of interest to me, then it's not at all surprising that they have no interest in Jesus.

So these things are crucial. So let's begin then with number one, the fullness of time and this issue of waiting.

Waiting. Do you know what? I find waiting boring and frustrating. And I just don't like waiting.

You know, I've had a stand in many queues, and I've probably stood in queues for quite a long time where I thought, how can I jump it? You know, can I distract the person in front of me?

You know, can I, you know, how can I just budge my way in? I've even been tempted at times to, for my children who might be playing up to say, look, can I just budge in front of you because I need, you know, I need to.

[12 : 08] But that doesn't work either because everyone's in a rush. Waiting. None of us seem to like waiting. And yet, from God's point of view, it's not so much waiting as it is the necessary time needed for you to understand why Jesus is so important.

In other words, none of us can get to Jesus with total clarity in a moment. Nobody can become a physics professor in one lesson.

Nobody can become a math tutor in one lesson. It takes time. It takes training. It takes a lot of learning. And then you arrive. And then even when you've arrived, you've realized that there's a whole lot more to learn.

Well, you know, it's exactly the same with Jesus. That even if you met Jesus, you've got a lifetime of learning who he is and what he has done for you.

So this waiting period from God's point of view is not about sort of telling you to sit still and be quiet until Jesus comes. No, not at all. Rather, he's, in that period, he is demonstrating to you the necessary understanding that you need to understand why you need Jesus.

[13 : 24] If I can put it a slightly different way, the good news makes absolutely no sense at all unless it is the answer to bad news. And the Old Testament has lots of bad news.

Sin, death, all the types of sins that are in that category of sin. And people find themselves, verse 3, trapped in these elementary principles, unable to escape their own means, their own ends, their own circumstances of life that they live within.

There's just no way out. And yet, in that period of time, God makes promises. He tells us what his law is so that we know what sin is.

He tells us that if we establish these things and we make sacrifices and we give gifts, then atonement for sin is possible. And then all of these things are spread out throughout the whole of the Old Testament, preparing us for Jesus Christ.

God says, God says things like, you know, that unless you're completely holy, then you cannot enter into my presence. And of course, everyone's looking at each other, realizing that nobody here is going to be able to enter into the presence of God.

[14 : 46] Do you know, what about the prayers of those in the Old Testament who asked for the city to be spared? You know, or what if there was five righteous men? Would you spare this?

Oh yeah, I'd spare it. But what does the prayer stop? Well, the prayer stops and it can't be answered because five righteous men cannot be found. So over this period of time, people get to understand the bad news that they live within.

They get to understand the bad circumstances that they live within. And this is spelled out again in the Old, the New Testament. You know, I keep saying over and over again and yet it's important that we don't lose track of it.

That the younger brother who asked for the father's inheritance, only can, only, he walks away from home as long as he has money in his pocket. It's only at the point when that money runs out does he then turn around and go, man, I'm in trouble.

and nobody seems to realize, even today, having learned the lessons that Jesus is taught, that actually, if I'm doing all right, then I must be all right.

[16 : 01] But if I'm doing all right, then the direction that I'm going in is not leading to any kind of consequences whatsoever. Well, give it time. Give it time. It's like the man who jumped off the skyscraper and said on the 50th floor on the way down, all right so far.

Yeah, everything's all right so far. But there comes a point where that gravity pulls you to a stop. You know, and that's the message of the Old Testament, isn't it?

Time and time and time again, people cannot escape these elementary principles that they're tied into. They cannot escape their own, if I can put it this way, gently, corruption.

There's no way out. And yet, it takes a long time for people to realize that that is true of them. I don't know if you've ever had to work with someone.

I mean, I spent several years in the trade and I spent several years working under men and then several years with men working under me. And of course, you always get one that comes along who thinks he can do it quicker and better.

[17 : 11] And it doesn't matter how much you try and tell that person it just will not work. You cannot do it that way. Sometimes, you just have to let them do it. And they try for a whole morning.

Right? And then they get their pay packet at the end of the week and wonder why you've docked them half a day's wage. Well, because you've wasted all that time. What does that mean?

Well, it means that some people, however much they are told, will not learn unless they experience that for themselves. In fact, that's true in Proverbs, isn't it? Where the father's trying to teach his son.

There's nothing new. Okay? You're not going to try anything that I haven't tried. You're not going to try and think of anything that I've not thought of. You're not going to try and achieve it in the same ways that I've tried.

But listen. Listen. There's two ways to learn. Either you can listen to me and save yourself a lot of pain and a lot of bad experiences.

[18 : 12] Or, you will learn through committing those same experiences yourselves. Now, that takes a lot of time. But in many ways, that necessary time almost prepares the ground.

It's almost like taking a pitchfork to hard soil and turning it over ready for the gospel seed to be sown onto it. That's what's happening.

The ground is being broken up. The heart is being moved and changed ready for the gospel seed to be thrown on top of it. And we hear that in Jesus' parable, doesn't he?

He tells us that there's one seed, one gospel seed, but four soils. And yet, only one of those soils brings forth the fruit, the gospel fruit.

Why? Because the soil is different. Not the seed. It's not a different seed as if Jesus is handing out different levels of information or different gospels.

[19 : 11] That's the same gospel, but the soil is different. And in many ways, God throughout the Old Testament is sort of raking over the ground, is sort of getting out his fork and his spade, and he's turning the hard soil over, ready for Jesus to come and people to be receptive to the right person.

Waiting. It's not about waiting. It's a learning curve. It's a moment where Jesus, God rather, is doing that preparatory work on your heart, as it were.

So when the fullness of time comes then, the right time, suddenly now we begin to appreciate Jesus. Because now we begin to appreciate everything that Jesus will accomplish that I couldn't accomplish.

Having learnt the Old Testament that Jesus has laws that I cannot keep, he has forgiveness that he's able to give through sacrifice, he understands the principles of atonement that we are meant to practice, or at least in the Old Testament, until we get to Jesus.

And we get to Jesus and recognise that all of these things that I cannot come to God with are fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It takes time for us to appreciate the right person.

[20 : 34] And so the fullness of time here that Galatians 4.4 speaks about is that God, having revealed everything that he needed to reveal in the Old Testament, everything that he needed to reveal in the Old Covenant, in order that we understand why Jesus is just so very important.

To understand why Jesus is just so vital. And for the Galatian church, for them to understand why Jesus is the accomplishment, and there's nothing beyond him.

Yeah, many Christians, I think, even today, have a faith in Jesus that is that is pretty secure. And yet, at the same time, seem to move beyond Jesus by looking to other things for changes to come.

It's just, it's just not going to happen. Either you come to the point where you recognise that Jesus is the right person, or you go back into that period of time where you're just going to be here, there, and everywhere, having to go through a whole learning process all over again, just to bring you back to the same point and conclusion.

Do you know, I had a teacher called Mrs. Horton. I think she liked me. I'm not entirely sure. But, she was so strict of me. I don't know why.

[22 : 02] But, I can remember once that I thought that I was never very that great at Mass. I got better over time. And, I thought I would copy the persons next to me. And, I'm pretty sure in hindsight that she allowed me to do this.

Just so that she could do what she was about to do to me next. Now, it didn't occur to me that because I didn't know the answers that the person next to me didn't know the answers. I just assumed that I didn't know and he did because he was writing things down.

I guess that was the mistake. So, I handed in my paper and realised that I got all of these things wrong. And, Mrs. Horton took me to one side and she gave me the equivalent test but different answers.

And, she realised that it wasn't the copying which was the problem. That wasn't the issue. And, she was a very smart teacher to be able to figure that out. I guess all teachers know more than their pupils do.

That's why they're teachers. But, she understood that the issue wasn't the answer. The issue was that I couldn't arrive at the answer. I didn't know how to do my working out.

- [23 : 10] And, she began to realise that that's what had to be taught. Not just the answer. The answer's important. Okay, faith in Jesus. I have faith in Jesus. Okay, that's important.
- I know the answer. Yeah, that's not the point though. The point is, are you able to do the working out to know why faith in Jesus is the answer? Okay, belief in God.
- Yeah, belief in God's important. Okay, but that's just coming up with the answer. Are you able to show your working out for why God is the only way? And, that's what Paul is doing here with the Galatian church.
- It's not that they haven't come up with the right answers. We have faith in Jesus Christ, but they have gone beyond Jesus. Why? Because they're unable to see that the sum is complete.
- Unable to see that all of this finalises in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, there's only two reasons why you float around.
- [24 : 08] Either you've not yet got to Jesus or you have moved beyond him. the stability point is in Christ. The place where you are stable and firm and strong is in him and in him alone.
- And so, this fullness of time and for us to be able to see that Jesus is the right person, which we'll get to this evening, it takes this period of being able to learn your working out.
- not just being able to come up with the right answer, but to be able to show you working out, to understand why Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, to understand why Jesus is the only way to forgiveness, to understand why this person in Jesus Christ is the Messiah.
- and the only way you can get to appreciate all of those things about Jesus is by learning them all beforehand or afterwards, but nevertheless, you have to learn them.
- To put it a slightly different way, unless you understand the problem that men and women, boys and girls face, unless you understand the problem clearly, you will not be able to clearly appreciate why Jesus is the only solution.
- [25 : 28] Okay? So by understanding the problem clearly, we're able to see Jesus as the only solution clearly. They're a perfect fit, not that they go together in that sense, but one finalizes, completes, accomplishes the other.
- And that's what Advent is about. Advent is about God at the right time having laid all that preparatory ground, then sending the right person that all that went before him, all the promises, all the prophecies, all the conditions, all the laws, all the standards are met in Jesus.
- And if you don't get that, you make the same problem or fall into the same problem that the Galatian church is, and that is, well, I must add to the work of Jesus now because I'm not, I'm not good enough.
- I'm going to have to do more than what Jesus did to get right with God. And that's a mistake. That is a big, big mistake. And that comes down to the fact that you haven't actually appreciated exactly what Jesus has accomplished.
- Let me put it to you in the words of Simeon who held Jesus as a baby in his arms. He said this, Lord, you are now letting your servant depart in peace.
- [26 : 49] That is his own death. Simeon speaking of his own imminent death. According to your words, from my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for the revelation of Gentiles and for your glory to your people Israel.
- In other words, here we have Simeon at the advent of Jesus Christ recognizing that this is it. Everything that God promised, everything that God prophesied, everything that God spoke about the future, all the standards and all the accomplishments finalize in this person in my arms.
- Here's the exhortation then as we sort of close. What is the meaning of Advent? And how do we teach that meaning to others?

Well, I believe one of the things that needs to be explained when it comes to explaining Advent is that God took a long time with this world before he sent Jesus. I don't know if you've ever read the Bible from beginning to end but there's a lot of words between Genesis and Matthew.

Okay, you've got the whole of Genesis all the way through to Malachi long before you get to the book of Matthew and that's not unnecessary. It took a lot of time for those words to be spoken.

[28 : 13] It took a lot of time for all of those things which are mentioned in those words to be accomplished and fulfilled in the land and in the world as we see it. Now think of it this way, that before we get to Jesus we need to understand why Jesus is necessary.

That takes time. It takes time to appreciate Jesus. Now sure, we can start with Jesus and then learn and many people do that.

Many Christians have a little knowledge about the Lord Jesus Christ at their conversion, become converted and then spend the rest of their Christian life learning these truths. I didn't know hardly, probably 90% of the Old Testament when I became a Christian.

Yet I began to appreciate why Jesus is the only person, the right person by my reading of the Old Testament and of course the new.

So it doesn't mean that you cannot learn by starting with Jesus and that you have to start with the Old Testament. What I'm trying to get you to appreciate is that to fully appreciate Jesus, that time that God spent in laying out all of his standards and promises and meanings finalizing Jesus.

[29 : 38] In other words, it gives us a richer understanding of why Jesus is the right person over the fullness of time. And so under God's providential care, the sending of Jesus was at the exact time that it needed to be, the right time.

In fact, if you go ahead and read Romans chapter 5, it even says that at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. In other words, not a moment too late, not a moment too soon, but according to God's providential care, Christ died at exactly the right time.

Well, what does this mean then? Well, one of the things it means is this, be encouraged, be really encouraged. And Jesus took his time with his disciples, telling them, look, I have much more to tell you, but I can't because you cannot bear it at this time.

Patient, waiting. You know, and it seems to me that almost every individual needs to come into their own fullness of time before they can truly appreciate Jesus.

Jesus came at the right time from a historical point of view, from God's plan and purpose, but it seems that even Jesus addresses with his disciples that there's a limitation on our part where we are very, very slow to recognize the things of God.

[31 : 07] We are very, very slow to recognize exactly what Jesus has accomplished. In other words, it's not that God has been slow in telling us, but we're very, very slow in taking that in and living with it and appreciating it and then living it out.

Okay. Here's a final thought. as you share the meaning of Advent, as you share the meaning of Advent this Christmas, and you think about the person who knows nothing, be patient.

Be really patient. Think about how much a person really needs to appreciate before they can really appreciate Jesus. Why the forgiveness of sins is necessary.

Why the Ten Commandments ought to be kept. Okay. Why sacrifice in the shedding of blood is the only means of forgiveness. That's deep stuff.

And yet we begin to realize that all of these things that we know, we've known them for so long, suddenly are just completely foreign to people out there.

[32 : 18] In other words, as you share the meaning of Advent this year, be patient with others. in the same way God has been patient with his people for the whole of time.

Taking his time and then giving us Jesus at just the right time. Amen.