

Cross Centered Birth

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[0:00] We already heard this Christmas season, Charlie Brown's anxious cry. Will someone, somebody please tell me what Christmas is all about?

! Tonight we want to go deeper, try to see what is behind those Gospels. Maybe it's been some time since you've used a microscope, but a lot of microscopes have different lenses that you can change out so that it has different powers, so that you have a lens that might magnify things ten times, or a hundred times, or two hundred times.

So this evening we're going to use Galatians chapter 4, verse 4 and 5 as our lens to narrow down, to look into the Gospel story, to see what is behind it and underneath it.

So if you would turn there, Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, it gives us an in-depth look at Christmas, and we're going to see that it has everything to do with what we are about tonight.

We're actually going to begin reading in chapter 3, verse 26. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.

[1:36] So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

[2:48] I have very little journalistic experience. The extent of my journalism is only one occasion. I wrote one article, written my freshman year in high school, on the junior high soccer team.

And I was so ill-trained, so little direction, that as I sat down to interview the coach, he had to tell me what to ask. And I remember him sitting there in the cafeteria to this day saying, Who, what, when, where, why?

And so that's how I did my interview. He told me what to say and I said it. We're going to ask those kind of questions of this text tonight. We're going to ask who, what, when, why, and how.

And they're all in our text, Galatians 4, 4 and 5. First we ask who. Who? Well, you see it in verse 4. God sent his son. God sent his son. So the who of Christmas is God the Father and God the Son. God sent his son.

[4:02] The word means to dispatch, to send someone on a mission. It means that he had a previous position beforehand. He had a standing, a previous place.

So Jesus Christ's birth in the city of Bethlehem, in the city of David, was not the beginning of the Son. It's in that one verb.

He sent. It means he dispatched. So not at all. His birth was his sending. So pretend you are standing up here with me. And I send you back to talk to Charlie by the recording desk.

Your arrival at the recording desk. There you are. Isn't your beginning. Your beginning was sometime before then. And so it is with the Son.

In the beginning, we saw it just now. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. That was his previous place. And his standing was he was God.

[5:04] The Word was God. And so the Son didn't begin in Bethlehem. No, he had a life before then. He was with God as God. He enjoyed this entire life.

And then he was dispatched. He was sent on a mission. And so the who is the eternal Son of God sent from the Father.

Now we ask what? What happened? God sent his Son born of a woman. That's what's happened. The Son of God was born of a woman. So the angels appeared to the shepherds. And they told them how they would know that what they were saying was true.

You're going to see a sign. And so the angels sent the shepherds off to see the Messiah that first Christmas night. And the shepherds ran to see this remarkable thing that they had been told. And into the stable they went.

[6:05] And what did they see? So put yourself into that position. Put yourself there. You have an imagination. What do you see?

You see a tiny baby boy. He's probably still red from the birth. And maybe his head is a little bit cone-shaped from the pressure of the birth canal.

One of my daughters was born with one of her noses. The first surgery he had was to take off that extra nose. She was born with her nose off to one side.

It was squished. Maybe Jesus had some features like that. A squished nose. Squished ears. There was no halo of light around his head.

He was a little baby boy. And he was as much a man, a human, as any of you are. So Stan asked a question last week in the worship.

[7:12] He asked, did baby Jesus cry? Remember the hymn says, no crying. Did he, or the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. So he told us to talk about that.

And that's what we did. We went home and we and our guests talked about it around the table. And everyone said, no. Jesus cried. Jesus cried. If he didn't cry, he wasn't a human.

It wasn't a selfish, demanding kind of cry. But if a baby communicates by crying, then Jesus cried. He was made like us in every way, except without sin.

And so it wasn't necessarily a silent night, that night in Bethlehem. Now, there's no doubt he cried when, for the first time, the light came into his eyes.

The dazzling eye, dazzling him. And it wasn't a silent night, for the Son of God was being born of a woman. And God had said to the first woman, Eve, that from that point on, there was going to be pain with childbirth.

[8:21] With pain you will bear children. And in Mary, this young teenager, full of grace, was giving birth to a baby boy.

And it was their first baby boy, first baby. And there was no mother's hand to hold. There's only Joseph. And I'm sure there was blood on the ground of the stable.

When our Lord was born. So the Son of God was sent. By God. He was with his father forever and ever. And he's coming into this world as a man.

And so we say, what humility. For nine months, the Creator is encased in a womb. And takes his life from his mother. He depended on her.

And after he was born, he depended upon her. He cried when he was hungry. And when he was wet, she changed him. And all we can say is, behold our God.

[9:18] Let no one say he is not humble. Let no one say he isn't humble. He was born of a woman. And that in and of itself was a promise that was fulfilled.

Because there was a promise that God made to Eve. Or to Satan, actually. And he made it to every woman who ever lived. For God said to Satan, I will put enmity between you and the woman.

Between your seed and hers. He will crush your head. And you will strike his heel. So God started a fight that day in the garden. I think we misunderstand if we think Satan started the fight.

God started the fight in the garden that day. He said, I will put enmity between your seed and her seed. And then he pointed to one of those seed far, far away. And said, he will crush your head.

And it would be a man, a man born of a woman, who would crush Satan's head. That was the promise. And now thousands of years later, Mary, one of Eve's daughters, is on the ground in a stable giving birth to a little baby boy.

[10:34] And she is moaning. And the whole heavenly host is bent down looking and wondering at what this is about. How could this be? She was giving birth to the Son of God.

Fully God. Sent by the Father. Fully man. Born of a woman. And that's our Emmanuel. That's our Savior. Perfect in every way for us.

And he's come to destroy the works of the devil. And he's come to redeem his people. And so now we see he was born of a woman. He was born under law.

And this is really the heart of the passage. Jesus was born under law. What does that mean exactly? Well, we can begin to answer that question by seeing that Jesus comes to redeem those who are under law.

That's speaking about us. We come into this world under law. To be under law means to be under the principle, the covenant of obedience for life.

[11:45] We saw it this morning in Isaiah. They've broken the everlasting covenant. And for their disobedience, they are punished. And it means to be living under the covenant where the man who does these things will live by them.

If you obey, you will live. Obedience for life. And that's the condition that all people have in Adam. That's the covenant that God made with Adam. And so here we are, all sons of Adam, daughters of Eve.

And we are children of our first father. And so we are born under that principle, under that law. God said, do not eat the fruit. If you do not eat the fruit of the tree, or if you do, you will surely die.

But if you believe my command, that's what's implicit. If you believe the command, you'll have life if you obey it. And so it was the principle of do and live. Obey and live.

And of course, Adam fell. And he disobeyed. And he brought all of us with him down. We fell with him.

[12:48] And he brought us under death and under condemnation. So that's partially what is in the background of this.

But Paul has something even more specific in mind here. Most of the time, when Paul is speaking about the law, he's talking about the covenant that God made on Mount Sinai with the people of Israel.

He's not really talking about moral, judicial, ceremonial law, any of those per se. But he's talking about this covenant, this principle of living. And you see the principle in Galatians 3, verse 12.

So if you'll look over Galatians 3, verse 12, it says this. The law is not based on faith. On the contrary, the man who does these things will live by them.

That's a quote from Leviticus 18, 5. And that was the principle of Mount Sinai. Do and live. Obey and you're blessed. Disobey and you're cursed.

[13:52] And so Jesus was born under law. This was the system that he was born under, just like us. And so on the eighth day, he was circumcised.

And Paul says, if anyone is circumcised, he is obligated to obey the entire law. He was born with the principle of do and live. And so John the Baptist comes and he's baptizing sinners.

And he's preparing the way for the Lord. This is the great opening scene of this last, final, climactic act in redemption. Jesus is about on the scene, but John is the forerunner. He's coming through and the strange thing happens.

Jesus goes to John. And he asks John to baptize him. And John is stunned. And John says, no, that's not that.

Lord, this can't be. You should be baptizing me. And Jesus replied, let it be so now. It's proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.

[14:59] So why was Jesus baptized? Well, he was identifying with sinners. He was identifying with people who needed washed and regenerated.

He's saying, I'm one of them now. And in doing so. And I'm going to do everything that they're supposed to do from the beginning to the end. I'm going to fulfill all righteousness.

And I will obey. And in his baptism, he was saying, I will obey for them. So there he is under law. If he does everything right, he lives.

And so do we. Well, what happened next? In the story, in all the gospels, in every account, after Jesus' baptism, he goes into the desert.

Why does he go right into the desert? Because he is going to obey where Adam fell. Adam fell in a garden. Adam disobeyed in a garden where there is every reason to obey.

[16:01] Jesus goes into the desert to obey. And he goes there to obey because he's going to go where Israel fell. So for 40 years, Israel was in the wilderness, sinning against God.

And they lost that generation, lost the promised land. And so for 40 days without food, Jesus without manna. Jesus obeys.

And so he opens up our heavenly home. And so do you see the humility of our Lord? Not only is he born of a woman, but he's born under the law.

The law giver is put under his own law with the sword of judgment hung over his own neck. And he walks in our place for us.

That's the what? God sent his son. Born of a woman. Born under law. And now we ask, when? When did he do that? Well, the first part of our verse tells us, When the fullness of time had come. [17 : 11] When the fullness of time had come. So, I want you to imagine time falling out of your faucet into your bathtub. And time is falling out and it's filling up your bathtub.

Jesus came when the bathtub was full. The fullness of time. God sent his son. So, do you ever wonder why Jesus came when he did? Why did he come when he did?

Why not now? Why not before? Why not some other time? What's so special about the time that Jesus came? Why is it the fullness of time?

Well, people have answered this or that. And they've come up with several things. And some of them, there's probably something legitimate. It was a time of peace. The Pax Romana. The peace of Rome was spread across the civilized world.

And so, that would surely help when the gospel of Jesus Christ was to go out. It wasn't into a war situation. It was into a peaceful situation. There were good roads.

[18 : 15] Roman roads went all throughout the empire. And that would help the gospel go forth. Jesus came at the right time from a sociological perspective. The mythology of the ancient world was dying.

People still talked about gods, but almost no one believed it. And there was, the philosophy of Greece was going in a more fatalistic direction. People were looking for something.

There was a sense of hopelessness in the world. The old was dying and the certain jadedness was coming over. People were looking for something real, something powerful, something like the gospel.

People were looking for something real, something like the gospel. And so, the time was right. But actually, all those things are right. And they do contribute. But that's not really what Paul has in mind.

And we could say, I mean, we really could say that email and interstates makes travel a lot easier today than it ever was then.

[19 : 22] There's large areas of peace now. And we do live in a world of change and transition. And there is a certain pessimism about our world where people don't think they can find the truth.

And things are getting more and more hopeless. And so, really, things were very much the same as they are now. So, what was God doing?

What was he measuring? What was the fullness of time that he was looking at? Well, he was thinking of something different. He was looking at where Israel was. That's what Paul says in the verses.

In the verses before this. He said, living under the law, living under Sinai, was the time of childhood for Israel. For the people of God. It was the time of childhood. And it was really a time of nothing better than slavery.

They weren't free. They were told what to do. They didn't have the full rights of sons yet. And so, they weren't counted as bonafide heirs. They were still children.

[20 : 25] Because they hadn't reached their maturity yet. And so, now the time had come for them and for all of God's people to go into adulthood.

And it was time for the law for Sinai to be fulfilled. It was time for them to move out from underneath that and into the freedom of sons.

And so, what I mean is the law was given to prepare people for Christ. To drive them to Jesus. It was given them to seek after Jesus. And now, in God's view, that work, that time of childhood and driving people and preparing them for the Messiah.

It was done. And it was time for the Messiah to come. And so, that is something of what we see when we read the accounts in the Gospel. Many people are longing for a Messiah.

Many people are longing for something. And sure, there's many of them that aren't. That's always the case. But the law had done its work in many people's hearts. They knew they couldn't keep it.

[21 : 35] They knew they needed rescued. They knew they needed something, a Savior. And that's why the crowds went out to John. And that's why the crowds followed Jesus.

Many in Israel were longing for something that the old covenant could not give them. And at the fullness of time, at the right time, when people were ready for the Messiah, when it was time for Israel to grow up and the people of God to come into the full maturity, God sent his son.

Now, why? That's the when. Now, the why. Why did Jesus come? We read about it in verse 5. To redeem those under law.

To save those. To purchase them. To buy them back under law. And so, now this is Israel, as I've been saying, but this is all people in Adam and Eve who live under this principle of, if you obey, you will live.

Do and live. Jesus came to buy us out of that slavery. And let no one be mistaken.

[22:48] The law as a covenant. As you do this and you live. Or you don't do it and you forever perish. That is slavery.

It's an impossible standard to keep that no one can stand up to. The law is holy, just. And good. It should be obeyed.

But our flesh. Paul said it, but I have this other thing going on inside me. The things I want to do, I don't do. The flesh makes it impossible for us to obey. No matter how hard we try.

No matter how much we want it. We can't keep his standards. We can't obey the law. And all the law ends up doing is condemning us. And we can't escape it.

And the law as a covenant for sinners. It can only enslave us. It can only enslave us to fear and to sin. It can't make us love God.

[23:50] Even though it says love God. It can't make us do it. It actually will only make us hate God. Because the law says do this and live.

And so I try and I fail. And I try and I fail. And I fail. And I fail. And then finally my flesh screams out. God, this is your fault. This is an impossible standard.

I mean, we put the blame on him. I'm not saying that's right. We're driven to hate God. Because we think his ways are unjust. He's given us something too hard to do.

So without forgiveness. Without grace. Without being previously justified. And declared innocent.

Apart from the works of the law. We can never obey the law the way it's supposed to be obeyed.

It can do nothing but be a terror to us. And a taskmaster to us. And that's what it's meant to be.

Because it's meant to drive us to Jesus Christ. It's meant to take us to him.

[24:50] And so Jesus comes and he redeems us. Who are under law. He rescues us from this impossible standard. That we are in. That we are under. And he brings us into a covenant of grace.

Where he supplies the righteousness. Where he supplies all the righteousness. And the obedience.

And he takes all of our guilt. He gives us everything we need to be right before God.

And then he transforms our relationship to the law. So no longer is it a covenant that we live or die under. Instead, I'm not freed from the law's expectations.

I still must obey. But I don't have to obey to be justified. I'm justified by faith. And not by works.

And I don't have to obey to stay God's child. No, I'm free. And now I want to obey. And I can obey.

[25:51] And I say, oh, Lord, how I love your law. It's my meditation all the day. And now I say, Lord, give me your law. I love your law.

Feed me your law. Let your law get inside of me. And come out of me. And be all around me. And now we want to obey his law. Because he loves us so much.

Why wouldn't I obey the law of my father? It's only when you're freed from the law's condemning power that you're free to obey him. You're free to obey the law with a loving heart.

And so Jesus came and he came to redeem us. That's why. Now how? Well, look over at Galatians 3.13.

It tells us how. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

[26:51] For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. So Christmas, Christmas night. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

He became a cursed thing. It says he became. He became by becoming a curse. So he became a curse.

He became a rejected thing. A cursed thing. A God rejected thing that is despicable and can fill you with nothing but indignation.

And the curse that fell upon him and that consumed him was the curse of the law. So he obeyed for you as he lived.

He did everything to fulfill all righteousness. And now he dies under the curse of the law for your disobedience. So behold, you disobeyed.

[28 : 19] And the curse was for you. Curse was for you. But behold, your Savior's love. He came in and the curse fell upon him.

And he became a curse. The pain, the rejection, the indignation, the righteous wrath of God went into him and filled him and consumed him until he was the curse.

He who knew no sin became sin for us. And so that's how he bought us. That's how he redeemed us out of slavery to the law by taking its just penalty.

By drinking the curse to the dregs. So you see, Christmas is connected to that scandalous night in the middle of the day because Christmas was for that day.

Jesus came for this purpose. And so Christmas, it was for Golgotha. And that leads us to this night. So here we are.

[29 : 29] And now we have a totally different relationship with God forever. And it's all changed because of what happened on Christmas and what happened on Golgotha.

You see it at the end of verse 6. Why did Jesus redeem those under the law? In order that we might receive the full rights of sons. That we might be adopted.

That we might receive sonship. And so tonight is a family meal. It's communion and it's fellowship. And we do it as the grown sons of God our Father.

See, Jesus, our elder brother, paid our way into the family. He took the curse that was ours so that we could sit and enjoy the blessing of being and living with God.

And we do it. We remember it. We fellowship tonight around his death. Because our family, our fellowship was made in his death.

[30 : 36] His death sealed the new covenant in his blood. And that new covenant doesn't say do this and live. It says believe this and live. There's no works to do.

So you can come as you are to Jesus. Simply believing what he has done. He was born of a woman. He was born under the law.

And he obeyed that law. And then he took the curse for you. And it was all for sinners gain. And so tonight we remember that. And tonight we celebrate it. And so let's do it with solemn joy.

We are freed. We are freed from the law's curse. We are freed from the law as this impossible burden. But that freedom came at Jesus' expense.

He humbled himself for you. And he took on flesh. And he humbled himself for you. And he went to the tree and died. So rejoice. And tremble.

[31 : 39] That God has loved you so much. Be amazed again. Because when the time had fully come. God sent his son.

Born of a woman. Born under law. To redeem those who are under law. That we might receive the full rights of sons. Tonight as we partake.

Remember what it cost your Savior. To bring you into the family.