

The Adult Teacher

LESSON 11- IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

DECEMBER 13, 2020

Background Scripture: Galatians 4

Lesson Passage: Scripture Reference: Galatians 4:4-12 (NIV)

Introduction: “But when the fullness of time had come...” tells us that everything about Jesus and His mission had been planned. He came to a very specific time, from very specific family line, and worked His entire life for one very specific task: our salvation. God worked through sinful people to bring mankind to that exact spot in history so that His sinless Son could save all humanity. So, as you begin reading the historical account of our Savior’s life and work, know that it did not happen in a vacuum. All of human history and especially the accounts we read about in the Old Testament, have led up to Christ’s coming. God worked throughout history to save His people through His Son, which is why we read: “when the fullness of time had come.”

Scripture Reference: Galatians 4:4-12 (NIV)

4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. 8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. 12 I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.

Topic Explored: “*In the Fullness of Time*” ~ Many incidents were happening that prompted men to look at the time and speculate about why that particular point in history was a good time for Christ to come. But we understand that God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), and these may or may not have been some reasons for why He chose that particular time to send His Son. From the context of [Galatians 3](#) and [4](#), it is evident that God sought to lay a foundation through the Jewish Law that would prepare for the coming of the Messiah. The Law was meant to help people understand the depth of their sinfulness (in that they were incapable of keeping the Law) so that they might more readily accept the cure for that sin through Jesus the Messiah ([Galatians 3:22-23](#); [Romans 3:19-20](#)). The Law was also “put in charge” ([Galatians 3:24](#)) to lead people to Jesus as the Messiah. It did this through its many prophecies concerning the Messiah which Jesus fulfilled.

Memory Verse: *4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship* (Galatians 4:4, 5) NKJV

Lesson Focus: Galatians 4:4-12 (NIV)

Verse 4, 5 ~ “But when the fullness of time had come...” tells us that everything about Jesus and His mission had been planned. He came to a very specific time, from very specific family line, and worked His entire life for one very specific task: our salvation. God worked through sinful people to bring mankind to that exact spot in history so that His sinless Son could save all humanity.

The plan of salvation began in Genesis when the human race fell into sin and God promised a Savior. That Savior was later prophesied to come from Abraham’s line. That promise seemed threatened

when Abraham's great-grandchildren ended up becoming slaves in Egypt; but even in slavery Scripture shows that God was working. He preserved His people, and His plan, through 400 years of captivity. Then when the time was right, He used Moses to free the Israelites and deliver them to the promised land. Every single event, and person that we read about in the Old Testament shows how God moved His plan precisely to the exact place where it would accomplish His purposes. For His own reasons God chose this exact time to fulfill His plan. All of human history and especially the accounts we read about in the Old Testament, have led up to Christ's coming. God worked throughout history to save His people through His Son, which is why we read: "when the fullness of time had come."

Verses 6-7 ~ It is fitting that those who are in fact sons have the Spirit of the Son in their hearts. This gives us both the *right* and the *ability* to cry out "Father!" to God our Father, even as Jesus did to His Father. *Abba* is an Aramaic affectionate diminutive for 'father' used in the intimacy of the family circle; it passed without change into the vocabulary of Greek-speaking Christians.

We know that we are the sons and daughters of God by the witness of the Holy Spirit within us (Romans 8:16). The Holy Spirit can be called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, or linked to God the Father. This is because the nature of God is consistent among the persons of the Trinity. Here, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of His Son because the idea of our sonship is based on Jesus' sonship. Our sonship is based on who we are in Jesus, yet there are important distinctions between our sonship and Jesus' sonship. He is the *only begotten Son* (John 3:16) making Him a Son by essential nature. We are *adopted* sons and daughters of God, made children by a legal decree of God.

There is a beautiful progression. First, we are set free from slavery. Then we are declared sons and adopted into God's family. Then, as sons, we are made heirs. Heirs inherit something and Paul made it clear just what we inherit: an heir of God through Christ. We inherit God Himself. Our release from slavery, our sonship, the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts, and our status as heirs of God are all birthrights given to us in Jesus. We receive them through Christ. These are things we should be living in and enjoying every day of our Christian life.

Verse 8-9 ~ The bondage is natural when we did not know God and when we served those things that are not God. Yet now the Galatians have known God and yet placed themselves under bondage. This was what amazed Paul. In turning (back) to legalism, the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one – the idea of a works-relationship with God. "*One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a 'second childhood' of Christian experience.*" (Wiersbe)

Verses 10-11 ~ The false teachers among the Galatians demanded the observance of days and months and seasons and years and other such legalistic matters and acted as if this would lead them into a higher plane of spirituality. Yet all these weak and miserable forces of legalism did was to bring them into bondage. Paul's fear was that this attraction to legalism would mean that his work among the Galatians amounted to nothing and would end up being in vain. We can have a living, free, relationship with God as a loving Father based on what Jesus did for us and who we are in Him. Or we can try to please God by our best efforts of keeping the rules, living in bondage as slaves, not sons. Living that way makes the whole gospel in vain.

Verse 12 ~ "*I urge you to become like me*". For many of us today, these are strange words from Paul. How could he ever urge the Galatians to become like him? Should he only point them to Jesus? In what way should the Galatian Christians become like Paul? Paul knew well that he wasn't *sinlessly* perfect. He wasn't standing before the Galatian Christians, saying, "Look at how perfect I am. Don't worry about following Jesus, just follow me." He simply wanted them to follow him as he followed

Jesus. Paul knew the Galatian Christians should imitate his *consistency*. The Galatians started out with the right understanding of the gospel, because Paul led them into the right understanding. But some of them didn't *stay* there like Paul did, and in that way, they should become like Paul. Paul was free in Jesus, and he wanted them to know the same freedom. In that way, they should become like Paul. *"All Christians should be able to say something like this, especially to unbelievers, namely that we are so satisfied with Jesus Christ, with His freedom, joy and salvation, that we want other people to become like us."* (Stott)

Paul could say to the Galatian Christians, *"When it comes to legalism, I know where you are at. I used to live my whole life trying to be accepted by God because of what I did. In that regard, I became like you and saw that it was a dead end. Take it from someone who knows where you are coming from."* You did me no wrong: Paul has used pretty strong words with the Galatians. It would be easy for them to think he spoke just out of a sense of personal hurt. Paul assured them that this wasn't the case at all. Paul wanted them to get this right, but for their own sakes and not for his. *"We have been listening to Paul the apostle, Paul the theologian, Paul the defender of the faith; but now we are hearing Paul the man, Paul the pastor, Paul the passionate lover of souls."* (Stott)

Paul has been encouraging Christians to accept that they have already been fully made right before God—"justified"—by faith in Christ's death for their sins. To begin to follow the law of Moses, in hopes of being justified, simply makes no sense. Worse, it would make them slaves to their sin again. To depend on rituals and sacraments for salvation means asking God to judge them based on their works instead of Christ's work on the cross.

Now, Paul calls them these Galatians "brothers." This demonstrates that he believes what he has written earlier. In Christ, they are all one. He is not superior to them because he is Jewish, or Roman, or male, or free and not a slave (Galatians 3:28). In fact, he begs them to become as he is because he has become as they are. In other words, Paul is asking the Galatian Christian to fully accept their status as free men and women in Christ as he, Paul, has fully abandoned his own status as a man "under the law" to live free in Christ Himself.

Let's talk about it. . .

1. What are reasons some people prefer law-based spirituality?
2. What does freedom in Christ really mean – in practical, everyday terms?
3. What is the best way to respond to people who have a law-based approach to God?
4. How would you explain true Christian freedom to an immature Christian?

Making it Personal:

Closing Prayer: *Father, thank you for the Christian freedom we have. We pray that we will neither abuse it nor take it for granted. Keep us from inventing new legalisms to demonstrate to us our righteousness. Instead, let our holiness derive from Your Holy Spirit, Who is changing us daily. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.*