

# The Preparation and Purpose of Christmas

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 December 2018

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[ 0 : 00 ] Music. Galatians chapter 4 verses 1 through 7.

! He is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

In the same way, we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son.

And if a son, then an heir through God. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? Christmas is the only Christian holy day that is also a major secular holiday.

[ 1 : 27 ] Christmas is, without a doubt, our culture's biggest, most anticipated, most celebrated holiday of the year. And so for this reason, in our society, we often have two different kinds of celebrations taking place simultaneously at Christmastime.

And often, this tension and this discomfort is referred to as the war on Christmas. Christians can't help but take notice that more and more, the public celebrations of Christmas avoid making any reference to its Christian origins at all.

This is especially the case for non-religious people who feel threatened by the intrusion of Christ in their Christmas celebration. For instance, it's difficult for them to escape hearing the traditional Christmas carols that we sing this time of year about the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

And it irritates them whenever their children come to them and they ask them questions like, well, Mom and Dad, what does it mean when it says that He was born to give them second birth? They would rather avoid those kinds of conversations.

They don't want to talk about Christ at Christmas. They'd rather the message of Christmas be, well, be good for goodness sake. This sermon, though, is not my attempt to add fuel to the fire of the war on Christmas.

[ 3 : 04 ] Because as a matter of fact, I love Christmas. It's one of my favorite times of years. And I love that businesses are closed on Christmas Day, or most of them are. And I love that people are encouraged to spend time with their families and their friends on that day.

I love the fact that we talk about how important it is during this time of year to live at peace with others. We talk about how important it is to be generous towards one another.

Those things are emphasized this time of year, and those are good things. Those are good practices. And certainly they're congruent with the Christmas celebration, at least its origins.

However, I'm concerned. I'm concerned that as time has gone by and that as time continues to go by, that the origins of Christmas will increasingly be hidden and potentially could be lost by our society and all the hubbub that surrounds it right now.

I'm also concerned that as Christians we might become overly distracted by either fighting the war on Christmas, so much so that we forget that we have something to celebrate ourselves, or becoming so angry with our society in their celebration of Christmas that we again forget to celebrate Christmas for ourselves.

[ 4 : 32 ] Or we could become so distracted by all the frivolous things that surround Christmas this time of year, all the secular things that the world says are necessary in order for you to have a good Christmas, that we forget to be worshipful at this time of year as we contemplate what God did in preparation to send His Son and the purpose of His first coming.

We should never lose the transcendent wonder of the reality that our eternal everlasting Lord left heaven, laying His glory aside to come to be the offspring of the virgin's womb.

And He came with a mission. He had a purpose to reconcile sinners to God. And He did that by dying on the cross and being raised again so that we can have everlasting life.

So how can this life be yours? Well, through an inward spiritual regeneration that is so radical, that is so transformational, that the only fitting description of it is to say that it's like a new birth or a second birth.

And so here in Galatians chapter 4 verses 1 through 7, as we've read it, we don't typically associate it with Christmas. This isn't usually a Christmas passage.

[ 6 : 08 ] We look to Luke chapter 2, we look at Matthew for some of those Christmas passages. We don't see in Galatians chapter 4 how this associates with Christmas, but boy does it.

I think this verse has a lot to say about Christmas, about the preparations that went into that first Christmas, in Christ's first coming, and the purpose of His coming, and what He achieved, in going and dying on the cross for us.

And so my goal for our time together this morning is to draw you into the awesome wonder of Christmas. That together we'll spend at least the next few days, at least the next few days, thankful and worshipful of God and how He prepared Christmas for us and the purpose behind it all.

And so that's the main idea for this morning's sermon. God the Father prepared the perfect time to send His Son for the purpose of redeeming His people from their sins and adopting them as His sons and daughters.

So now we are kind of parachuting into the text here without having had the chance to read the previous three chapters of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

[ 7 : 32 ] So I'm going to have to provide some context for you all and kind of give you a Cliff Notes version of what it is that's going on or what it is that he is talking about. So to this point, the Apostle Paul has been making the argument that salvation is not gained by man's merits or by his works.

It's not based upon who you are or what you've done. Salvation, Paul argues, is achieved by God's sovereign grace working through man's faith.

Paul uses the analogy then of a child becoming an adult to make that point. We'll be unpacking that point as we go along here through these seven verses and I think you'll see, I hope that you'll see how these truths tie to God's preparation and God's purpose for Christmas.

For right now, let's look back again at verse 4. And there we see that God the Father prepared the perfect time to send His Son. Verse 4 there it says, But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

When we read that verse, we see that Christ's coming was not an accident. It wasn't something either that was done in haste. It wasn't as if God was up in heaven with His finger hovering over the button where He was just waiting for the perfect time to press it and deploy His Son into human history.

[ 9 : 01 ] It wasn't like that at all. The Bible says that in eternity past, before Adam and Eve were created, before they had even sinned, that God had planned the redemption of sinners.

1 Peter 1.18-21 says, Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

Again, we see this truth in Acts 2.23. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Again, in Acts 4.27-28. For truly in this city, there were gathered together against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

[ 10 : 26 ] And then 2 Timothy 1.9. Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus.

When did He do that? Before the ages began. So here in verse 4, we see that God had planned for a specific moment in time to send His Son.

We see that God had always had this plan. That He had always had this plan decreed and ordained. And it was in the fullness of time because God had planned and prepared it to be the

fullness of time.

It wasn't an accident. It wasn't by chance happenstance that it happened to be the right time or a good time. This was intentional. This was purposeful. This had always been God's plan.

He knew. He had prepared it. It wasn't an accident. It was intentional. And as I was thinking about that this week, I thought, you know, wouldn't it have been great?

[ 11 : 40 ] You know, doctors, when your wife is pregnant, they give you an idea of, you know, about when the due date might be, but they don't know the exact date.

They don't know the exact time. And when Hazel was born, our daughter, she was born a month early and she was born at 3, or Danny went into labor, I should say, at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Man, it would have been great if I could have known, right, what God knows, if the doctor, if the technology advanced to the point where like, hey, it's going to be this date, it's going to be at this time, be ready, it's going to happen. I would have appreciated that, but it's not that way.

Why is that? Because we're not God, obviously. Because we don't possess God's mind. We are finite creatures. He is infinite.

Our minds can't fathom all that God is and all that God knows. But we are fortunate to live in this age and to have God's completed word here for us.

[ 12 : 38 ] We have the privilege of being able to go back and look on that first Christmas and witness what God had done throughout all of history to prepare the world for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And so we understand now, from our perspective looking back, we can see that when Jesus was born, everything had been prepared and was right for the coming of the Messiah.

First of all, the time was right religiously. During the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities of Israel, while they were captive in those different places, once and for all, they finally forsook their idolatrous ways.

They also, while they were outside of Israel, had established synagogues in these foreign nations, in these foreign lands where they would get together and where they would continue to worship God.

And so when the first church was persecuted in Jerusalem, if you remember, they spread out. And where did they go? They went to these places where these synagogues had been established, where the Old Testament Scriptures were being preached, were being taught.

[ 13 : 55 ] And so they could go to those Jews, they could go to those people who were in the synagogues, and show to them from Scripture, which had also been compiled and completed by this point in time, at least the Old Testament had been.

And they could show to them how Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Messiah. The time was right religiously. The time was also right culturally. You understand at this point in time, the Greek language was commonly spoken and understood throughout much of the known world as a result of Alexander the Great's conquest.

And though by this time, at the first Christmas, he had long been dead, his efforts to establish Greek culture and Greek language continued to have a dominating influence during this time.

And so as a result of that, there was a common language that was spoken, that was written, so the gospel could spread even further. People could hear it and understand it.

It could be written down, and they could read it for themselves and understand that Jesus Christ had come, that Jesus Christ had died for sinners, that salvation was possible.

[ 15 : 05 ] The time was right also politically. At this point in time, Rome was the unmatched world power. The first Christmas happened during a time called the Pax Romana, which means the Peace of Rome, which lasted for about 200 years.

And it was a time of economic and political security for the world. Now, the Romans were not perfect, but they were good at keeping the peace. And so after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the apostles were able to then go throughout the world, traveling freely on these system of roads that the Romans had built and developed, and the gospel again continued to spread as a result of that.

Each of these factors was uniquely planned and prepared by God the Father for the spreading, the advancement of the good news of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And so when we come to Luke chapter 2, we understand that each event surrounding the birth of Christ was also planned and prepared and ordered by the Father.

The census that was taken, the manger that Jesus was placed in, the star, the angels, the shepherds, they were intentional. God did this for a reason, and they have much to tell us about Him.

[16:32] They have much to tell us about Jesus. In Luke chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, it says, In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town. Now before this event had happened, on the Ides of March, back in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar was murdered by his friends and closest associates.

This killing was motivated by their fear. They were fearful of Caesar. His power had gotten to the point where it was out of their ability to control. And what's ironic about all of this is that these men who killed him two years prior were worshiping him as a god.

And when Julius Caesar died, all of his wealth, all of his power transferred over to his great nephew, whom he adopted as his son. His name was Gaius Octavius, and he was only 19 years old when all of this transpired.

But over the next 20 years, Octavius became the unrivaled, unmatched, undisputed leader of the Roman Empire.

[17:58] And over that same period of time, this man continued to add titles to his name. At first, Octavius took on the name of princeps, which means leading citizen.

Then a little while later, he added the title of pontifex maximus, which means high priest. And then later on, he added Augustus, which means supreme ruler.

Then in 12 B.C., as Caesar Augustus was walking around his palace, and he saw Halley's comet jetting through the fall sky, he said that that comet was the spirit of his adopted father, Julius, ascending into the heavens.

And then he surmised that you know what? Julius Caesar was my father, and he was a god. Then so must I be.

And he repeated the same mistake of his father, declaring that he himself was a god. When in reality, Caesar Augustus was just a mere man. And what he was really doing here in Luke chapter 2 was running an errand for God.

[19:21] And God didn't need his permission to do it. Continuing on in Luke chapter 2 verses 4 through 7, we see, And Joseph also went from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And here we see how God prepared things in whom Jesus' parents were, his earthly parents were. Both of them could trace their roots back to David.

Mary's lineage is recorded in Luke chapter 3, and there it reveals Jesus' physical descent to King David. Matthew's genealogy records Joseph's lineage, and as his stepfather, it records Jesus' connection to the royal line of David.

And it's in Matthew's genealogy that we learn something very profound about God's preparations in choosing to link his son to this very dysfunctional family.

[20:45] You ever read the genealogy recorded in Matthew? The names of those who are within it? We have people who have committed adultery. We have people who have committed murder.

We have prostitutes. We have an act of incest. These are the things that if you were looking on Ancestry.com and you found in your family tree, you wouldn't really brag about those things.

At least I don't think that you should, or I hope that you wouldn't. But Matthew includes them. Why does he do that? Well, there's a purpose in it.

In God's preparation, linking Christ to these immoral people, he did so, excuse me, to show them that he's not afraid to associate with sinners.

He's not afraid. He does so to show them that it doesn't matter what your pedigree is. It doesn't matter what you've done.

[21:48] If you repent, if you believe in him, the grace of Jesus Christ will cover your sins, all of them, and unite him to you forever and ever.

And again, we see that truth played out in whom it was that God first chose to share the news of this glorious birth with. In Luke chapter 2, verses 8 through 14, and in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you.

You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a magnitude of heavenly hosts praising and saying, Glory to God in the highest.

[ 22 : 58 ] And on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. So here we notice in God's preparations in sending his son that he did not choose to send the angel to the elites of that society.

He didn't choose to send him to the upper class of that society. No, he sent them to poor, stinky, smelly shepherds.

If you know anything about this time, shepherds were the outcasts of society. So imagine how these men must have felt when they received this message from God from angels.

I think they would have been thinking at last. At last we have a king who shares our lowly station in life being born in a manger.

at last they would be thinking, I think, they have a king who sees them. A king in whose eyes they matter. They have purpose.

[ 24 : 08 ] Here was a king who they could finally identify with because this king was willing to identify with them. And there's so much more that we could say about all of this if only time permitted, right?

But don't you see that God prepared all of this? That it was the perfect time? It was such a perfect way for Him to send our Lord?

Then there in Galatians it says that He was born of a woman. Meaning that He was fully God and He was fully man. Because He had to be fully God in order for His sacrifice to have the infinite worth necessary to atone for our sins.

He had to be fully man in order to represent us. In order to take the penalty of our sins upon Himself. He had to be God. He had to have the power of being our Savior and He had to be a man who was able to be a substitute on the cross where He literally physically died in our place and for our sins.

In Galatians it says that He was born under the law. Just like us. Just like every other person who's ever been born. But unlike us He was obedient to it in every way.

[ 25 : 26 ] Able to not only obey it but then to be judged by it. But unlike any of us He was able to obey it again perfectly satisfying all that the law required. And because He was able to do so He is able to save us from our sins.

God prepared this. God prepared this. And secondly we see that God the Father prepared this because He sent His Son for the purpose of redeeming His people from their sins and adopting them as His children.

Now I would rather take a few Sundays to dig deeper into all that these verses have to say but we don't have that kind of time so I'm going to have to give you again a Cliff Notes version. And so here in verses 1-3 Paul is talking about a child's coming of age which was much different than our societies.

Right? We have children who are adults who have never really come into age yet. They're playing video games in their parents' basements and they're past their 30th birthday.

Right? But back in these societies both in Roman culture and in Jewish culture the Father set a certain day. On this day my son becomes a man.

[ 26 : 41 ] For the Romans that would be more like 18. For the Jews that was around the age of 12. Until that time the child though he was an heir to the father and all that the father had for him he had to be taught.

He had to be trained and so in that society they had slaves who would be the tutors for their children. And the father or the child I should say though he was an heir he had no right over his tutor though the tutor was a slave.

He had to learn from the tutor. He had to obey the tutor. He had to be obedient to all that the tutor asked of him. But on that day when he became a man that day that his father set he came into his own.

He came into his inheritance. He came into that responsibility. No longer was he under bondage to his tutor but this man was now free because he was a man.

In a similar way while we also are under the law and we were held in bondage until we spiritually became of age at the point in time that our heavenly father had prepared for us to become heirs of his kingdom to set us free from our bondage of sin and death.

[ 27 : 50 ] That's what Paul is saying here. That the father has prepared that day for each of us who become believers in Jesus Christ. And we are free from sin. We are free from death.

Then moving on to verses 5 and 7 we see that God the father at the fullness of time sent forth his son to redeem us from our sins so that we might receive adoption as his sons.

Having that good news confirmed to us then by the sealing of his spirit in our hearts we can be certain we can be sure that we have received the second birth that we are truly sons and daughters of God.

But here's the struggle that I often have with that. And I bet it's a struggle that you at times have as well.

You read that. You can comprehend that with your mind but sometimes it's hard for that to register with your heart. Could God really love me that much?

[ 29 : 01 ] Could God really be that gracious to me? feels like I should have to do something. Feels like I should have to do something to earn his love or to keep his love.

We at times struggle to understand God's amazing grace. love and the Bible says that we can approach him like a young child approaches his father who loves him.

In joy and excitement when dad comes home from work he can rush to the door daddy you're home and his dad will embrace him and be thankful to see him again.

He's that kind of loving father when you've messed up as a kid or when you've been hurt and you're in pain you can run to him and you can cry daddy and he won't turn away from you or reject you he'll embrace you and help you to heal.

We've been adopted as his children. God the father almighty creator of heavens and earth knows us individually and he loves us immensely and he's adopted us as his children.

[ 30 : 22 ] I know that story can be hard to register with us so I want to share a story with you that has really helped me and I believe it will do the same for you. It's a long story I'm going to close with this story but man it's powerful.

And I came across it while I was reading a theology book of all things from Timothy Paul Jones who's the professor of Christian and family ministry at Southern Seminary and this is what he had to say I never dreamed that taking a child to Disney World would be so difficult or that such a trip could teach me so much about God's outrageous grace.

Our middle daughter had previously adopted by another family. I am sure that the other couple had the best intentions but they never quite integrated the adopted child into their biological family.

And after a couple of rough years they dissolved the adoption and we ended up welcoming an eight-year-old girl into our house. For one reason or another whenever our daughter's previous family vacationed to Disney World they took their biological children with them but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend.

Usually at least in the child's mind this happened because she did something wrong that precluded her presence on the trip. And so by the time we adopted our daughter she had seen many pictures of Disney World and she had heard about the rides and the characters and the parades but when it came time to pass through the gates of the magic kingdom she had always been the one left on the outside.

[ 32 : 08 ] Once I found out about that history he says I made plans to take her to Disney World the next time a speaking engagement took my family to the southeastern United States.

What I didn't expect was that the prospect of visiting this dream world would produce a stream of downright devilish behavior in our newest daughter. In the month leading up to our trip to the magic kingdom she stole food when a simple request would have gained her a snack.

She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She whispered insults that were carefully crafted to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible. And as the days of the calendar moved closer

to the trip her mutinies multiplied.

A couple of days before our family headed to Florida I pulled our daughter into my lap to take her through her latest escapade. I know what you're going to do she said flatly.

You're not going to take me to Disney World are you? The thought hadn't actually crossed my mind. But her downward spiral suddenly started to make some sense.

[ 33 : 26 ] She knew she couldn't earn her way into the magic kingdom. She had tried and failed that test several times before. So she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on the earth.

In retrospect he says I'm embarrassed to admit it. In that moment I was tempted to turn her fear to my advantage. The easiest response would have been if you don't start behaving better you're right.

We won't take you. But by God's grace I didn't. Instead I asked her is this trip something we're doing together as a family?

She nodded brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed. Are you a part of this family? He asked. She nodded again. Then you're going on this trip.

Sure there may be some consequences to help you remember what's right and what's wrong but you're a part of this family and we are not going to leave you behind.

[ 34 : 30 ] I'd like to say that her behavior grew better at that moment. It didn't. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop on the way to Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

Still we headed to Disney World as we had promised. And it was a typical Disney day he says. Overpriced tickets, overpriced meals, lots of lines, mingled with just enough manufactured magic to make you want to go back again someday.

This is the part that gets me every time. In our hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged.

She was exhaustive, pensive, and a little weepy at times. But her month-long facade of rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, I prayed with her.

I held her, and I asked her, so how was your first day at Disney World? She closed her eyes, she snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn, and after a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly.

[ 35 : 43 ] Daddy, she whispered. I finally got to go to Disney World, but it wasn't because I was good.

It was because I'm yours. That's the message of outrageous grace. Outrageous grace isn't a favor that we can achieve by our own good works, our own good choices.

It's something God does for us. Outrageous grace is God's goodness that comes looking for you when you have nothing to offer God in return, but your sin.

Outrageous grace is a man like Hosea, refusing to abandon his wife after she leaves him to pursue other lovers.

Outrageous grace is the insanity of a shepherd leaving the 99 to find the one. Outrageous grace is the father who clothes his rebellious son with his finest things and places his ring upon his finger when he comes back home.

[ 36 : 54 ] Outrageous grace is one way love that calls you into the kingdom of God, not because of who you are or what good you've done, but because he's chosen you, he's adopted you, he has made you his own.

You are in his kingdom, you are his child, now and forever. May that be what we reflect upon this Christmas time. Amen.

Amen.