

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

GALATIANS 4:1-5

THE AWAITED DAY !

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

To wait for a particular day, a big day, is something you've all done. Was it your 16th birthday or 18th birthday? Was it graduation day? Your wedding day? Was it a visit from Grandpa and Grandma? In that case maybe it wasn't a "day" but an "hour." I remember one time, I suppose I was about 4, waiting at the window for Grandpa and Grandma to drive in, asking my Mom, "How long?" asking her enough times that she finally said, "You better go play and the time will go faster" ! Are you waiting for the birth of a grandchild? For summer vacation? Waiting for rain? Waiting for harvest? Waiting for cattle-sale-day? Waiting for Christmas?

It takes patience, doesn't it? Waiting for things that are out of your control. Waiting for dates and times—whether already established and well known to you, or waiting for dates and times unknown to you, such as those established by God.

A great period of waiting began for this world after the Fall into Sin. Adam and Eve began waiting for the mess they brought upon themselves and their children to be fixed, which we perpetuate with our disobedience and transgressions to this day. They and everyone after were waiting for sin, death, and destruction in hell to be overcome by God's Champion. That Champion would be the Seed *of the woman*, thus truly a man, who would go to battle for us. He would bruise Satan's head, which only God can do, thus also truly God, rushing Satan's power forever and bringing to us forgiveness and LIFE. After this promise from God, Adam named his wife c"Eve," the "mother of all living," She is our mother not just in the genealogy sense of being with Adam at the base of the world's family tree, but in the spiritual sense. In her "son," the promised Seed, God gives LIFE for all. In Jesus the debt of death for sin is paid. He took our death-for-sin at the cross, but in holiness and righteousness, He did not stay dead. He arose victorious from the tomb. Our debt is paid. We are redeemed and set free forever—in Jesus.

That period of waiting lasted a long time. From Scripture, the figures add up to 4000 years of waiting until Christ came. Think of it—4000 years. In comparison, the Europeans became aware of the western hemisphere and the "new world" a mere 500 years ago, and that seems like a long time! 4000 is 8 times longer! Why so long for the Savior to come? Had God forgotten or temporarily lost track of His promise? Had the eternal God, with whom there is no "Time," lost track of "time"? Not at all. God was waiting for conditions to be just right. *When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.* In the best interest of the world of the Old Testament and in the best interest of the world of the New Testament, God knew the best time, the right time.

We can perhaps see some of those reasons. The Lord waited until His Old Testament Jewish people were desperately longing for rescue again, much as they had done in Egypt at the time of Moses. Now it was the Romans who oppressed them. God also used the Roman Empire to establish peace in the Mediterranean World, so that the apostles could travel unhindered preaching Christ, traveling "easily" on Roman built roadways, sailing on the Mediterranean safe from pirates. Plus the Roman Empire continued to use the Greek language that Alexander the Greek had established some 300 years earlier. Almost everyone spoke Greek in addition to their own language. What an advantage for spreading the Gospel of Christ, verbally and in writing. God the even used Roman Caesar Augustus to order a census which led Joseph to take Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem where Jesus would be born.

4000 years was a long time to wait, but it was God's time, and it was best. The same is true as you await different stages, opportunities, or seasons of life. Pray and patiently wait. Your Father knows what is the best time and the right time. And as you wait again for December 25 (a date chosen by Christians many years ago to celebrate Jesus' birth on earth) ponder again the great love of God for you. Ponder the fact that His promises are not just "fluff," or words spoken to get you off His back, as we may do. His words are spoken in love, truth, sincerity—words which He always keeps!

In our text, there is another side to that concept of awaiting the Great Day. Paul in the previous chapters has been talking about Gentiles being included with the Jews in God's Kingdom in Jesus. He explained how Abraham, the forefather of the Israelite people, was saved by faith in God's promise of the Savior, the "Seed", born to Abraham's family line, in whom all the people of the earth would be blessed. Abraham believed the Lord's promise and it was accounted to him for "righteous" (Genesis 15:6). Righteousness was not acquired by Abraham on the basis of circumcision. God would not yet command circumcision for another 20 years. Abraham was righteous before God by faith. Even all the worship laws, sacrifices, feast days, clean and unclean foods, would not be commanded by God for another 400 years. Abraham was not saved by keeping the Old Testament Laws. No one was. The rules of the Old Testament were used by God to keep His people looking forward to the day of freedom in Christ—forgiveness by faith in Christ.

Then Paul used an earthly example to explain—our text. *Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.* Paul says, waiting for the promised Christ was like the child of a rich father. All the time, even when he was very little, a "ne-pios," that is, one who could not speak, he was heir of the estate and future master of it. But during his youth, he had no more freedom and authority than a slave child. He was being controlled, ordered, reprimanded, corrected by guardians and stewards, given charge over him to teach him, train him, raise him. And even while the young child grew into a young man, it was no different. He had no authority and no control to decide anything in the estate. . .

UNTIL *the time appointed by the father.* The father would set the day when the son would become the adult heir—no longer a minor but a "major," an adult. Think of the son looking ahead for that day! The day his father in wisdom had pre-established. Why was it set then, not earlier? Maybe so that the son had more time to mature and to be seasoned a little? Maybe because of certain financial stipulations and obligations? Maybe for family reasons? At any rate, for the father's very good reasons. Though the son waits patiently, not rebelliously, yet he looks forward to the day when he becomes adult son and heir—a privilege and a joy!

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. Paul says, the people of God were just like that. In the Old Testament times they had all God's rules and regulations over them, teaching them, training them not to be self-righteous but to look for forgiveness in the Promised One. They were in bondage. Indeed I wonder how anyone could keep straight and keep track of all the laws and rules God imposed on His Old Testament people! And maybe that was just the point. "You can't on your own be good enough to pass muster before Me," God says. You need help.

They were, and we are, in bondage under the elements of the world, under the elemental rules and building blocks of growing up—this is right, this is wrong, you can do this, but don't you ever do that, if you do such, this consequence will follow, and if you do that, this consequence will follow. As far as each of us trying to find and fend our own way to heaven, it's just bump after bump. Remember being a child? "No matter what I do, I get scolded. Why am I so helpless, so dumb?" We are all in those same shoes under the elements of the world.

BUT *when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.* The day of Christ's birth and His entrance into redeeming work to set us free, is more than just the day God keeps His promises. It's the day of our full rights as sons! The day we are free from the guardians and the control of trying to get to heaven by keeping the rules. The day of our adulthood in God's Kingdom. Freedom and forgiveness are ours. It's the day of our full "adoption" as heirs of heaven, the doors no longer closed to us, but open in Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, the one punished at Golgotha, the one alive at the empty tomb. In Jesus "sonship" is ours. God didn't at the last minute figure out the day—"I better slip it in here." It was His long appointed time. It is your day of Joy.

The celebration this Christmas is again a celebration of sonship and our status as heirs of heaven! What a day!

But the time of waiting doesn't fully end at Christmas, does it? We are all waiting, like it or not, to die, to leave this world and life behind. But yet, that's still not the end. The day when Christ returns is the END. Then our adoption and sonship is complete. It will come when the time is just right.

Rejoice again this Christmas, awaiting the celebration of your full sonship in God's Kingdom, now and finally on the Last Day!