

Freedom, the Key to Advent
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When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those which were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. (NASB)

I have some heavenly things to set before you this morning—not least is the great news: “Advent is about freedom!” We should fix our mind on that this morning!

There are several premises advanced in these two verses that are worthy of extraction; they point to a biblical worldview within which these premises make sense. There is a revealed backdrop to a picture of the world, so to speak. Let’s examine first, **the fullness of time**. This expression says that there is more to time than time, or more to time than measurement and duration. **Fullness** supplies either a sense of anticipation, or a sense of maturation. It takes time for the acorn to fall into the ground, incubate there, sprout and produce an oak tree—that’s part of the maturation dimension of time. And here, in this verse, the phrase **fullness of time** points to a moment in human history and ties that moment to the redemptive plan of God summed up in the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this advent differs from the use of Advent in the liturgical years—this “advent” is a one time event and that event marks the changing of era’s or epochs in world history, or the human story. That shift is commonly denoted by BC and AD—or, in a de-Christianized world, before the Common Epoch and after the same Common Epoch. These designations are markers of time.

The interface between the redemptive plan of God and the human story is what Paul’s affirms here. The rightness of the moment, the suitability of the occasion, for **God to send forth His Son** is an important theological assertion. It suggests a particular suitability for the timing of Jesus’s advent: some spell this out in terms of the helpfulness of the Roman empire for travel, the adoption of Greek as the *lingua franca*. We remember that the Scriptures were in Hebrew (accessible to some, but not to all) and that Jesus, and the Palestinian Jews he associated with spoke Aramaic. Koine Greek became the language of commerce, and Latin the language of academic/classical discourse alongside Classical Greek in the wide culture, but this dynamic was paralleled inside the expanding church world. Insofar as ways of thinking are linguistically framed, the metaphors of commerce tended to be in Greek and the metaphors of law and jurisprudence tended to be in Latin. So, while Latins could communicate with Greeks, there were vital needs for translation and interpretation. As a result the semantics of scripture could be teased out by comparisons of Greek, Latin, Aramaic/Syrian variants and that proved helpful in verification—there was room for nuance, shading and specificity because of these variants! So, in these ways and others, the peoples of the world, and the nations were brought to a moment most propitious for **the proclamation of the gospel**.

So, the question arises, why did the gospel need to be proclaimed? Or, to phrase it another way, why did God send His Son forth? And the answer is to **redeem those who were under the law**. The passage doesn’t say, “the Jewish law” (with a capital “L”) because something more general, more pervasive was intended. And that is the

moral/legal obligation facing the whole human race—we are accountable to the law which is present everywhere. It is part of the fabric of human life, historically, and realistically. There is right and there is wrong, and we both know that and we are all bound by it. Bondage is supported by the phrase: **under the law**. This is the same law that makes us conscious of sin, but conscious of sin in a broader sense than is defined by the Judeo-Christian tradition. All men are born under sin, and being under the law—that's the sense here. Specific elementary principles in both worlds, Jewish and Pagan—codified by Moses in the first instance and intuited as being universal elsewhere. This brings **All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God** in synch with the notion **whose who were under the law**.

It is the universal sense of bondage, whether of sin, or of the law, on a quite general level (and universally applied) that motivates God to **send His Son** on a deliverance, and a rescue mission. ***Because God sees and is compassionately concerned for the world, His creatures and especially mankind!*** There are specific episodes in scripture where this divine concern for man, for the spiritual condition of man shines forth: Gen. 6:11-13 contains these laments:

5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of [a]their hearts was only evil continually. 6 So the Lord was sorry that He had made mankind on the earth, and He was grieved [b]in His heart. 7 Then the Lord said, “I will wipe out mankind whom I have created from the face of the land; mankind, and animals as well, and crawling things, and the birds of the sky. For I am sorry that I have made them.” 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Footnotes

- a. Genesis 6:5 Lit *his heart*
- b. Genesis 6:6 Lit *to*

11 Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for [a]humanity had corrupted its way upon the earth. 13 Then God said to Noah, “The end of [b]humanity has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of [c]people; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.

Footnotes

- a. Genesis 6:12 Lit *all flesh*
- b. Genesis 6:13 Lit *all flesh*
- c. Genesis 6:13 Lit *them*

While it may be hard to hear God's care, loving concern, because of His wrath over sin and wickedness—resulting in corruption and violence! The same compassion is evident in Exodus 3:7-10:

7 And the Lord said, “I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the [a]power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 And now come, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Footnotes

- a. Exodus 3:8 Lit *hand*

The boundaries of nationalistic interest are absent in Galatians 4 but the compassion of God shown in the deliverance of Noah, the deliverance of Moses and the deliverance of Jesus are rooted in the heart of a love, aware divine being who intervenes and alters human history just as he chooses! This matter of **God sent His Son** is presented exceptionally in a personal manner—both in its degree of compassion (infinite) and in its personal cost. It was not a lack of love that sent the Son, nor was it a lack of love that led to the Son’s consent. The Son loved, obeyed and sought to please the Father. That love was reciprocated. Here is mystery of love: God sent, God gave and the Son came. Jesus came forth in perfect willingness, gladly, **for the joy set before Him**. . . .

It takes some effort to escape the gravitational arc of our modern individualistic orientation. Men seem obsessed with “what’s in it for me?” Or they approach things from the human-centric side of things rather than the God-centered! It would appear that Paul is not guilty of this move; he puts the fullness of time into the perspective of “**as the Father sent the Son**” and not seeing it from the worldly perspective. It is the appointed time of the Father, a moment ordained from the beginning. His Son should be born of woman in a punctual sense: at this time, at this place because it was planned. I hope you can see, where it comes to a question of divine determination versus the world’s preparedness—the essential tops the accidental. Indeed, in God’s economy nothing happens by chance. That, in case you missed, is the exact opposite of the evolutionist/scientific world view. Of course¹. Scientifically, what does love, or joy have to do with it? Revelation answers: everything. “If Christ were not the eternal Son of God, He will not be the universal Savior of men” (Maclaren, p. 129)

“Before time was the Son was, delighting in the Father, and ‘in the beginning was the word and the word was with God,’ and He whom in respect of His expression of the Father’s mind and will was the Word, was the Son in respect of the love that bound the Father and the Son in one.” (Maclaren, p. 128)

¹I say “Of course.” because when it comes to omniscience God has nothing to learn from science.

So, when God relented from the total destruction of life on earth (a global concern and not a psychological/therapeutic concern!), as in the Noah account . . . or when God intervened to bring the long oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt to an end (an international concern)—and a considerably shortened season of affliction than the Babylonian exile from which God again preserved a remnant of those whom He sought to glorify His name, the emphasis is not on the individual—history does not revolve around man as a single person to the exclusion of national and world history—salvation is not reducible to personal experience! Subjectivity is not the whole of reality. Volcanoes happen regardless of how we “feel” about them. And yet we are also given the testimony of the life of Paul as evidence that God does intervene in a personal manner . . . totally transforming the nature of a man, and redirecting the trajectory of his life. Paul is not known as a tent-making minister; no, it is his pivotal role as an apostle of Christ which demonstrates the heights to which an individual Christian believer can aspire and . . . achieve!

Adoption as sons seems a major step-up from emancipation from slavery in Egypt. But that only hold if we limit deliverance to the circumstances surrounding Moses’ mission! And this attainment of a new, better standing has overtones of restoration to it. Although I believe that in this instance put back better is the rule. The born-again believer has Christ in a way that has been missing since the fall of mankind. We are not put back as Adam once was—no, we are rejoined to Adam as he now is. (I assume that Adam repented and is now saved.)

So this is what we have here, various things of God, shaping things, heaven-sent. First we have **fullness** . . . fullness of time, of anticipation, of maturation. It is God who is taking us where we are going and by His promises and through His power life is made “life.” It is made fulfilling, meaningful, significant and hopeful by His grace and holy intentions for us.

What lies ahead will not be mediocre, *it will be supremely good* . . . it will be just, and right and glorious. We should keep that in mind, we should think on those things! Second, we have **God sent His Son**. That is the **fount of every blessing!** God advances, God causes, God ignites, God activates the processes that fulfill His plans for everything and everyone, everywhere and forever. Natural causes pale in comparison, they are partial in scope and incomplete in nature. There are wobbles in the journey, not the flight path!

Whereas God’s plan is comprehensive, entire, whole and complete; that is what **God sent His son** signifies. And that is heaven-sent, it explains “the things of God.” Social causation turns out to be more descriptive than proscriptive. God through His Spirit is catalyst to “spiritual progress.” The Kingdom coming is more significant than human progress—scientific progress, governmental improvements are temporal matters, divine progress is forever! We should stay mindful of that. God’s will, will be done not merely because we pray for it but because God is who and what He declares himself to be.

Nothing is impossible with God—that is an absolute truth. It is His will that we find our place of service, fulfill our purpose and calling in His Son, through redemption

and sanctification being conformed to Christ. Christ is in the world today, still working the will of the Father in those called by his name . . . He fires the boosters that correct the flight pattern that eventually brings us home, to our final destination in heaven, with Him. Proclaiming the gospel is that firing of the boosters, saying nothing changes nothing. We have a course mending role, we are God's nudges applying the right force to the right place at the right time—yes, we contribute to the flight course but we do not set it, determine it and we cannot abort it.

We also have **liberation from oppression**—God's determination to set the captives free! The **under the law** days have yielded to the **under the Son and Spirit days**. God is having His way more, not less as we approach the culmination of all things, all that He was up to in the beginning is coming about. Forgiveness of sin lends forward momentum . . . losing the shackles and chains, opening prison doors and setting captives free are manifestations of the Kingdom coming in power increasingly. We rejoice that **God sent, God gave and the Son came** willingly. God's love is abundant, not stingy, over-flowing-y. Remember that you are loved with an infinite, everlasting love. God's gift in the Son's mission, if you wish to believe in some determining force, ascribe to that one! **The word of God does not go forth come back void!** So worldly power, either natural, or mechanical, nuclear or biological, is impotent compared to this . . . human corruption, wickedness, conspiracies and plots . . . our genes, our instinct for survival, adaptation, replication, genetic engineering, design and reproduction are lesser things, worldly considerations—what Paul calls "elemental," but they are not divine. It turns out that Jesus was not a social worker, or a case manager, not a politician, or judge, or soldier . . . he was not a social reformer, or professor of ethics, He came as our Redeemer! He is more powerful than any political party, and their secret police, or systems of surveillance. All the cameras in all the world, even if the world was saturated with drones, planes and satellites can never match His field of vision, or exceed His knowledge of us, or of His world *as the Son of God!*

Thought control and group think are powerless before Him, have been and always will be. For this we know, divine causation was in place before ever we were; it is supra-social. Our God is the supreme being and He reigns transcendentally—that is sovereignly. God is God and that is why we can boast that the best is yet to come, justice will prevail, His justice, and good will triumph (He defines what is good, and as He is good, good issues from Himself), we can boldly project that love wins because God is good, just, merciful and loving. It is who He is that matters, beloved, not who we think we might be on any given day. We know His preferences and we should prefer His preferences to our own. It is God who marshals our destiny. His hands are on the controls as captain, as pilot, as shepherd . . . as God.

God will judge all the earth. He will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. He will silence the slanderers and gossips. All workers of iniquity will wither and perish because of who God is, and because He fashioned this world His way. His demonstrations of power, historical and miraculous, put our petty protests and demonstrations in the shade. The heavens tell His glory, not ours. We may shout, threaten, trust in ourselves, but God remains God, ruler over all. He delivers. We should remind ourselves of that and thoroughly trust in Him. Remember Noah, and Pharaoh, and Galatia and Paul and then reconsider who we are. Remember that God

has chosen to **adopt as son** all who receive His mercy as embodied in His Son. Great is our God and greatly to be praised. Therefore, take these things to heart, mull them over and over again, ponder them often,, save them up in your heart, meditate on them day and night so that they may inform, move and shape you as you grow up in Christ, as the image of God, reinstalled through the sacrifice of Christ and faith, is perfected in you both now and then.

I rejoice in the exposition of this verse because it has reminded me why I am a Christian and not an atheist, an agnostic or a skeptical free thinker. **When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those which were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.** I am content to leave it there, certain that the truth of this verse has been opened either largely, or at least somewhat to you. I do have some advice on how to take **every thought captive to Christ** which I wish to make available to you all. So I took the liberty of attaching it as a document to this week's on-line service invitation. Do with it as you wish and let me now if it proves useful. If you struggle with self-control in your thought life, as I do, you may find this extremely timely. I lovingly hope so.

Amen