

First Sunday after Christmas; January 1, 2023

Galatians 4:4-5

“You Are Now God’s Son”

**But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, that we might be adopted as sons.**

The little word “b-u-t” can be a most beautiful – or a most ugly – word. Perhaps you can think of a time when someone was talking about you or your work in glowing terms, listing off accomplishments, your positive qualities, your pleasant attitudes. But all the while they were speaking so positively about you, you could feel that wretched word coming. “You have achieved a great deal, you are a pleasure to work with, and you are a positive person...but.” And that one little three letter word becomes the ugliest word of all, because you know with that one little word everything is about to turn upside down for the worse. Now will come all the negatives: your failures and your weaknesses.

On the other hand, that little word “but” can be a thing of beauty, can’t it? When you have had your fill of bad news or negative outlooks – then that little word comes along and you know everything will turn around for the better. That little word but can turn day to night, joy to sorrow. But it can also work the other way.

On the first – and, this year, only Sunday after Christmas – we have in front of us one of the Bible’s most deep and meaningful statements about the birth of our Savior Jesus. It is a beautiful sentence, deserving a dozen profound sermons and hours of meditation. However, much of the beauty of this verse’s ultimate beauty and impact is lost if we skip over its first little word, “but.”

Before that little word, “but” stands an awful reality. It is the reality of the whole world without Jesus and without his work. In this sentence, St. Paul describes us as **under the law**. That means God has given us commandments to follow in our lives. We live under his law, his commandments. But under that law, under those commandments, we have sinned and continue to sin every day. And that, Paul says, makes us slaves to sin. Because of our own sin, every human being stands condemned, locked in the stocks of sin without room to maneuver or escape. In that slavery every human being stands condemned to death for this life and the next. This is the awful reality of existence without Jesus. Without him, everyone suffers in slavery to sin and death, with no way out, and no hope of ever getting out.

That was you. That was me. That was everyone. Everyone a slave, with no hope of ever wriggling free from it. Everyone staring down the barrel of hell, clutched in Satan’s evil grasp for eternity.

But.

But the words that follow that terrible reality turn everything upside down and inside out. God took the awful reality of slavery for every human being and turned it around, so that we are no longer slaves without hope. Now we are his sons, his heirs, with the undeniable hope of eternal life. Ah, what follows that little word “but.” Never has more grim news been turned into such good news!

**But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son...**Thousands of years before God sent his Son into this world, he created two perfect human beings. And to these two people, Adam and Eve, God had given everything imaginable. And in return, as an opportunity to thank him for all his gifts, God gave them one simple command to follow: to keep away from the fruit of one particular tree.

Yet in their lust to be more like God, those two human beings gave into Satan's temptation, broke God's command, and thrust the world into sin. But God came to the rescue and promised that one day a man would come to crush Satan's work and free the world from the shackles of sin. It was the very first promise of the Savior Jesus.

And from that day forward God orchestrated every event in the history of the world to lead up to the birth of that Savior. He waited until every last prophecy about Jesus was in line to be fulfilled. He waited until the Greeks united the world with a common language, to make it easier to spread Jesus' message. He waited until the Romans built roads that tied the world together, so Jesus' message could spread across the globe. And then – when the time was exactly right – when all the prophecies were in line, when countless ears could understand Jesus' message, when distant lands could be reached with that message, God sent his Son.

He sent his Son at exactly the right time. It was the right time for Jesus to come not just because the prophecies about him could be fulfilled; not just because his message could spread far and wide. It was the right time for God to send his Son mostly for this reason: God loves us. We were wretched, doomed slaves. But he loved us anyway. And he set his heart on setting us free from that sin and making us his sons. That, more than anything else, is what made the time right for God to send his Son. God is a gracious God, a loving God, a forgiving God. God wants us with him forever. And that more than anything else made the time right to send his Son to set us free from our sin.

**...God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, to redeem those under the law...** When this sentence says, "God sent his Son," it is a terribly boring translation. The original word is much more descriptive than that. God did not just "send" his Son, he "commissioned" his Son. He sent him out on a mission, with a purpose. Jesus came with the purpose – the mission – of freeing us from slavery and making us God's sons. He came to redeem **those under the law**.

In order to carry out that most special and important mission of redeeming us, Jesus had to do two things. First, he had keep God's law perfectly. Remember, he comes to set us, the people who have broken God's law, free from our slavery. So Jesus had to keep God's commands perfectly in our place. Secondly, Jesus' mission required him to die for our sins. He had to die with the sins of the whole world weighing on his back, in order to pay for them all. With that payment of his holy life and death, he freed us from our slavery to sin. He redeemed us, which means he bought us back out of our slavery and brought us back to our Heavenly Father. God sent his Son on a mission to free us, to buy us out of our sin. He accomplished that mission with own his holy life and death.

In order to carry out that mission of a perfect life and death in our place, Jesus came both as true God and true man. This verse teaches us that, too. It says **he was born of woman**. Born of his mother Mary, Jesus was just as much a human being as you and I, with one important difference. He was also fully and

completely God. Paul says, **God sent his Son**. Jesus was at the Father's side from eternity, just as powerful, just as glorious, just as much God as the Father. He is God himself. In order to carry out his mission to save us, Jesus had to be both a man and the eternal God. True man to live perfectly in our place and to die on the cross; true God to keep God's commands perfectly, to make his death count for every sin of every person in history.

Because of Jesus' redeeming work, we are freed from slavery to sin. But Jesus' successful mission does more than that. He not only sets us free. He presents us to the Heavenly Father as sons. Now we are God's sons. Now you are a son of God. Jesus' work does not simply cause the Father to wipe our slate clean and let us start over. It does not cause the Father to put us back under his law and say, "Okay, now this time do it right."

No, Jesus' work doesn't give us a second chance to earn God's favor. Jesus' redeeming work makes us God's children. Specifically, it makes us God's sons: **But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons**. We were slaves. But. But. When the timing of the loving Father was just right, Jesus came – true God and true man – and bought us out of our slavery to be nothing less – absolutely nothing less! – than sons of God.

When Paul says we are all God's sons, he hasn't lost awareness that over half of all Christians are female. He is making a point about everything that is ours as God's children, both male and female, when he calls us all "sons." In Paul's day, a son with full rights enjoyed every privilege in the house of his father. And we have every privilege in the family of our Heavenly Father. We can go to him prayer and ask for him for anything, and he promises to hear us and answer us. We have confidence that he will keep every promise to us always, for he is the perfect Father who never breaks a promise. We know that he will never, ever leave our side. And we know that even when we are suffering, even when life seems terribly uncertain, he will never abandon us – no more than a father would leave a hurting child.

We are his sons – we enjoy every privilege of living under our loving Father. And the greatest privilege of all is this: the promise of inheritance. Sons with full rights could look forward to receiving all of their father's wealth and land and prestige someday. As God's sons with full rights, we look forward to the inheritance of heaven. It is an inheritance that surpasses what we could ever imagine; an inheritance that never ends. And it's ours to look forward to. God promises it to us, because we are his sons.

Once we were not. Once we were slaves. But. But now we are. For at exactly the right time, with a heart full of love, God sent his Son on a mission. And he came – true God, true man – to live and die on that mission. His life and death buys us out of slavery, and places us into his Father's arms as sons – sons with every privilege and promise.

You are now God's son. Amen.

