

Son Maker

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Preacher: Dave Hampton

[0 : 00] Thank you very much. Great to be with you, both in person and at home. Hello. Last time I was with you, I think, was the Church Away Day over in Musselburgh, which was a really lovely time to be with you.

A lot warmer than today, that's for sure, but just as much of a precious time. And it's great now to be with you again. And this evening we're thinking about Christmas, of course, and particularly the reasons and the purposes behind, of course, the biblical explanation for Christmas.

And as I'm sure you see on your TVs and as sure as you see around you, every business, every company right now is working a way of harnessing some sort of good Christmas campaign.

Yeah, they always try to work it out so they can twist it in to raise some profit. And this popped through my door this week. The Bowdoin Clothing Magazine. Feel how you wish about Bowdoin. But it's quite an interesting way they've gone about selling Christmas and their clothing this year. It says, if ever there was a year that needed Christmas, this is it. I realise I've got my mask on. I don't need it on, do I? What a privilege. Look at that. That's cool. I feel free. Right. Great. If ever there was a year that needed Christmas, this is it.

[1 : 15] I wonder if you agree or disagree. Clever, yeah? Let's be honest. Of course, this year has been different. Hard for many. Different for everyone. And you get what they're getting at here, yeah?

Christmas is often associated with positive things. Time off work. Great food. Games with the family. Maybe that's how you feel and you can't wait for a few weeks' time.

And so you see what they're saying. Look, if ever there was a moment, if ever there was a time, if ever there was a year that needed all the things that Christmas can bring, this is it.

This is the time. And it's with that in mind, we're going to be thinking about the time where God brought about the first Christmas. Christmas. And I put it to you this evening that we have needed Christmas every year from that first one right through until today with equal value and importance. So please, if you have your Bible there, keep it open. And we're going to particularly look down at verses four and five and really think about what the Apostle Paul is trying to teach us. Let me read those two verses again to us.

[2 : 22] Right. Some big words in there, some unfamiliar words. What is it all about?

Here's the first thing I want us to understand. Point one this evening. Christmas happened on God's watch. Christmas happened on God's watch. You see what he's saying? He's saying that there was a time when God decided to send his son into the world.

It was a set time. Another Bible version says that in the fullness of time has come. God sent his son. A particular moment in time, space and history.

God, the God of the universe, as Archie prayed earlier, decided he would step foot on planet Earth and be with his created.

People. Please don't let this pass you by this evening. Whether you call yourself a Christian or not, don't let this pass you by. Christmas happened, according to the Bible, because God planned for it and proactively engaged with his created world.

[3 : 35] I'm not a scientist, but I did a bit of reading and scientists estimate that there's around 100 million, million, million planets orbiting the universe right now. Within our little solar system, the Earth is the fifth largest planet within our solar system.

But we orbit, of course, around our megastar, the sun. The sun is said to be our largest of stars.

And the Earth, you could fit around one million Earths inside the size of the sun.

And yet the sun in the whole universe is deemed to be one of the medium-sized stars compared to some of the others, like the big red giant, what was it called?

Belita guys. I hope I've said that right. Which is around apparently 700 times bigger than the sun. Just to blow your mind on a Sunday evening, hey? Yet considering all of that, the vastness of creation, the vastness of the universe, considering all of that, what did God do?

He decided, according to his plan for the universe, to step down into our world. Sending his son from the glorious holiness of heaven to the grubby, dusty streets of Bethlehem.

[4 : 52] It happened on his watch. Remarkable, isn't it? When you stop and think about it for a moment. Absolutely remarkable. Why?

Well, because we needed him to. That's point two. Christmas happened because we needed it to happen. Christmas happened because we needed it. Look at verse 4 and 5 again with me if you can.

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship.

See, Jesus came not just to reveal God to us, which is amazing in and of itself, but he came with a real purpose and a real goal in mind. Verse 5, to redeem those under the law.

Right. What's that all about? What is Paul getting at in this moment? Well, it links with the wider purpose, really, of why he's writing this letter to the church in Galatia at the time. Let's flashback just for a few moments why we're at the point we are within this letter.

[5 : 56] Paul, on one of his journeys where he was taking the gospel to various towns and cities, he goes to this place called Galatia. He tells them the good news about Jesus. Yeah. There Jesus is coming to the earth, his death, his resurrection, all that it means to follow him.

And amazingly, people receive that news positively. They give their lives to Jesus. They follow him. That's what it means to be a Christian if you're exploring the Christian faith. But as Paul moves on and he goes on to other towns and cities, what happens at that point is some of the other religious folk within Galatia and their surrounding areas come on in.

And they start teaching extra teaching. You might call it additional teaching, which is essentially them turning around and saying that, listen, if you really want to be a Christian, if you really want to be a part of God's family, well, then, yes, believe in Jesus, but you've got to do a little bit more.

You've got to obey the special law. And if you're a bloke, you've got to be circumcised. That's what it means, really, to be a Christian. And they held really firmly on to this promise made to their forefather, Abraham.

If you're not too familiar with the Bible, you find this promise in the Old Testament, which is the first half of the Bible in a book called Genesis. And in it, you see God making a promise to Abraham that he will have a son.

[7 : 11] And subsequently from his son and all the generations that flow from that, God would establish his kingdom, his nation, sorry, his family would come through this seed.

And so this is a really significant promise for the Jewish people. And for the Jews at the time, the Judaizers speaking to these new Galatian Christians, they made much of it.

And they wanted to say that essentially, if you did not keep the law, if you're a bloke and you had not been circumcised, really, you're not in. You're not in God's family.

You cannot be sure of it. And you're not included. And so this is why Paul writes this letter. He writes to urge them and remind them of the gospel and to refute some of these additional arguments that are being made.

And just in the verses before, the four and five that we've read a couple of times, he really starts to explain why Christmas happened. Why it's so important.

[8 : 12] And he says two things in regards to the law that are just important for us to understand. So zone in here. Two things he really wanted us to understand, or he wanted them to understand, and us today.

Firstly, this. The law was never there to fully save people and bring them into God's family. Yeah, it was almost like a guardian. It was this law given to them at a period of time in their history to guard them and protect them.

And he uses this analogy of an heir who in Roman citizen times would have been the child of an elderly, of a senior person, who would have had this guardian look after them.

And they would have watched them and protected them. They would have taught them. And that guardian would have been with them for a period of time until they were ready to move into adulthood. See, I don't know.

It's much like when we learn to drive, yeah? You've got to drive an instructor. You've got a parent who's patient enough to sit with you and teach you how to drive. What do they do? They guard you. They protect you. They help you drive according to the laws of the road until you're ready, until you've passed your test to be able to go in and be able to drive freely yourself.

[9 : 18] This was one of the purposes of the law, Paul is saying. It's there for a period of time to guard you and protect you and to help you. Under God's plan, it was never there to save you.

And why? Because this is the second reason that Paul really refutes this. Because the law, you couldn't keep it. They just couldn't keep it. Whether they were a Jew or not, and whether we are Jews or not today, we can't keep God's standards.

We can't do it. And Paul knew that. And instead of people living up to God's laws and fulfilling all that he wants for them as they're created people by their heavenly father, what have people done? They've rejected him and they fail to be able to live his ways. And so Paul uses verse three really as a real summary of the condition of the human heart. Look at it again.

Look at it with me. He says, so also when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

[10 : 24] That's pretty meaty language. What's he saying here? He's saying, look, flick on the BBC News. Over here a conversation out on a walk.

What do you see? You see a world that is not functioning in the way it should be. Right? It's not hard for us to see it these days. The world is not functioning in the way it should be.

Whether you call yourself a Christian or not, if this is all that we've got, something's probably gone wrong at some point along the way. Yeah? And that is why one of the things Paul is really saying here is that all of us, instead of putting God at the number one podium spot of our lives, have at various times and in various ways put ourselves there.

And we bump God down a second or third or a lot of people don't even want him in the race of their own life. And this is serious. Really serious. And see the word he uses?

Look at it. What does he say people are? They are under the law or they are under the forces of the world. This is a real deliberate choice of word from Paul.

[11 : 28] Hear what he's saying. People are under. They're trapped. They are captured. By the forces of the world.

I wonder how that makes you feel. Potentially, for some people that's a bit random. Potentially quite offensive. A random Welsh bloke telling you that you're under the forces of the world might be something you're not expecting to hear.

But here's the reality. Whether you believe in all of this or not, the Bible says that you are not free. If you do not know God, you are not free. You are trapped.

You are locked down. You're under another master. And yes, some people might find that offensive. But I wonder, maybe you do feel that at times.

Christian or not, we feel it, hey? Do you ever find you've got to keep up an appearance? You've got to be a certain way because you don't want to be the odd one out amongst friends or colleagues or neighbors?

[12 : 31] I don't know, find yourself saying stuff because everyone else says it or you're liking stuff because everyone else is because you don't want to be the person that's excluded. That's pressure. That's the world and the culture telling you you've got to be a certain way.

Ever find yourself wanting the latest gossip or wanting the latest gadget? That's pressure. That's the world telling you to be a certain way. That's you trapped. Captured.

See, our culture says make yourself number one, yeah? Make yourself number one. But do you know what that often brings? Is this pursuit of trying to prove yourself. Trying to gain acceptance.

Trying to fit in. When you make yourself number one, you spend your life failing. And the Bible says this is really serious. Because without realizing it, you know what you start to do?

You start to just march to the beat of the world. You're trapped, verse 3 says. Enslaved to the forces of the world.

[13 : 31] This is why we need set free. This is why we need redeemed. This is why Jesus came. This is why we've got Christmas. God sending his son back into this world to bring us back to him.

See, not only does Jesus come to deal with that problem of enslavement, enslavement, more than that, he offers us a new start. A brand new start. I caught up with an old friend of mine recently.

We haven't spoke for probably about five years, but we were at university together. And then we did an internship program together for two years after that. So we were in each other's lives a long time. But as you do, as you move around, we lost touch.

And we phoned up. And within a few moments of us doing the formalities of hey and all of that, I said, how are you doing? And then he says, oh, gosh, some exciting news for you, Dave. My wife and I are about to adopt two 22-month twin boys on Thursday.

My jaw dropped. I said, do you know what you're getting yourself in for? He says, yes, and we can't wait. He was no stopping. He was smiling from ear to ear. And he was thrilled because, I mean, he couldn't tell me an awful lot about their circumstances, but they were not good.

[14:42] And he and his wife were so excited to give them a new start in life, to welcome them into their family. And see, this is now the third point we've got to get our heads around.

Not only does Jesus come to redeem us, what does he do? He comes to give us a new start. In God's grand plan, he is the one who takes the first step.

Why? To welcome us in. Point three, if you're a note taker. Christmas happened to bring us back to God. Christmas happened to bring us back to God, to receive adoption into his family.

How? Through the life of his son. See, the Christmas story doesn't just start and stop at a crib around a manger scene and a stable. No, the true Christmas story is foretold and promised way before Jesus arrives, starts at a crib, ends at a cross, and goes on to glory forever.

That's the true Christmas story. And if you've never read it, I would so urge you, if you've never read the Bible for yourself as an adult, I would really strongly encourage you to do it. Look at the life of Jesus.

[15:53] Ask a Christian friend. Remind yourself if you have read it, because Jesus is like no other. You know what it is. When you look at it for yourself, what do you see? You see Jesus having this incredible relationship with his heavenly father, don't you?

You see Jesus doing stuff that no one has ever seen before, teaching in ways that our world and our culture has never heard before, showing love, care, compassion to people around him, backing up everything he does with incredible glory and power, doing miraculous acts and signs.

But at the same time as all of that, what do you see? You see Jesus' life coming to an abrupt end around the age of 33, as he is captured, as he is murdered, as he is crucified to a Roman cross. See, the Lord Jesus was sent to redeem us and to grant us adoption into God's family. How does he do it?

Through dying in our place and exchanging his position with us. He's the son, yeah? He's in God's family already. Bible says he was there right at the beginning, watching and helping his father create us.

[17:10] He was there. Bible says he knows the end already. He knows how it's all going to wrap up. He knows what we are going to face. He knows that. That's Jesus. He's in the family, yeah? He knows a world with no more pain or suffering or viruses.

He already knows that. He knows a much better place of joy and happiness and life in all its fullness. He ate the best food. He's got the best clothes. He knows it all because he's God's son. And see what he's saying? He offers you an exchange. Jesus is the most glorious son, the son of God.

There's a story of a father and a son, actually, from a few years ago, who together had a real passion for art and collected many different wonderful art pieces, from Van Gogh to Rembrandt. And they would sit there and they would admire these wonderful art collections that they had together. But a time came when the Vietnam War erupted and the son was called to duty to go and fight in the war.

[18:20] And he was a very brave and heroic soldier and he helped many people. But upon helping one of his comrades, sadly, he was shot in the chest and he died.

The father learned of this and was grieved deeply. A few weeks after finding out the news, the father had a rattle on the door, opened the door, and a young man stood before him with a parcel in his hand.

And he says, hello, you don't know me, but I wanted to come and say to you that your son was a real hero. As he was carrying me off of the war site, he got shot in the chest, but I managed to live. And the father was quite taken aback by this. And he said, I've got something for you. And he handed him the parcel. The father opens up the parcel and within it is a portrait of his son.

He says, I'm sorry, I'm not much of an artist, but I know your son would have wanted you to have had this. And the young soldier has painted this portrait of the son. And the father is overwhelmed. [19 : 27] He stares at it and stares at it. And tears start to roll down his eyes. He says, thank you so much. What can I give you for it? The young man says, you don't need to give me anything.

Your son gave his life for me. This is a gift for you. Well, the father loved it and cherished it. He put it above the mantelpiece. And for the weeks that followed, anyone who came to their father's house to see the other artwork, the father insisted, you've got to come and see the son first of all. You've got to come and see it. And every person would come in and they'd be made to see the son before they could see the other bits of collections. Well, a few months later, around Christmas time, the father sadly died himself and his entire estate and all of the art collections were put up for auction.

And so the day came when the auction came round and everyone poured in, many wanting to get their hands on some of the great collections of art that they had managed to accumulate over the years. Excited, hustle and bustle and waiting.

And as they piled into the room, the auctioneer walked up and the first picture that was on the stage for the auction to kick off was the portrait of the son. And he says, welcome along.

[20 : 38] We'll start our auction. First bid, please, for this portrait of the father's son. Silence. Anybody? First bid?

No, we didn't come for that one. We came for the good ones. Let's move on. A voice shouts out from this crowd. The auctioneer persists. No, we'll start with this one. Thank you very much.

Anybody, anybody.

\$100, \$200. Anyone want to kick us off? Silence. This place starts to murmur a little bit. Another person heckles, shouts out. No, we don't want to. Move on, move on.

He says, no, the son. The son. Will anybody take the son? Silence continues. The auctioneer starts to get a bit edgy and doesn't quite know what to do.

A few more murmurs. One more heckle comes out. He says, fine. Anybody. And suddenly this voice shouts in the back. It's the gardener who's looked after the estate and knows the father and son.

[21 : 33] And he's feeling a bit sorry for the situation. He's not a wealthy man at all. And he says, I'll give you \$10 for it. Thank you very much. \$10. You've got \$10. Anybody? \$20. \$20, the auctioneer thinks is about to get going.

Nothing. Eventually the auctioneer just has to accept. He says, okay, go in once. Go in twice. Sold. \$10 to that man there. This sigh of relief fills the room at last.

Right. And they all start getting excited, ready for the next one to come out. And with that, the auctioneer puts down his mallet and he says, thank you very much. That's the auction over. The place erupts.

What? What about the other ones? That's why we've come. We didn't come. What are you doing? What are you doing? Auctioneer steps back up and he says, well, there was one stipulation that I was not allowed to tell you before this evening, this afternoon's auction.

And this was it, that the only painting that was actually being auctioned off today was the portrait of the son, because the father insisted that whoever got the son got the rest of the collections and the entire estate.

[22 : 39] And so that man, he gets the lot. Whoever gets the son gets it all. See, what's Paul saying here in Galatians?

He's saying that whoever trusts God's son gets it all. Whoever gives their life to this son who was sent by God, trusts him wholeheartedly, is redeemed and they can receive adoption into God's family.

You can be a son or a daughter of God this evening. And this brings about two wonderful, incredible realities for you if you do that this evening and if you have already.

Here's the first reality. Verse six. Look, you now are welcomed into an intimate relationship with the father. The spirit of Jesus lives in you and you can cry out the word Abba, father.

It's translated this intimate daddy. A God who knows you, who loves you, who wants the best for you, that will never forsake you and never leave you and watches over every single step of your life.

[23 : 47] That is now your father in heaven. When you receive adoption into his family. Here's the second reality. Verse seven. You become an heir.

As you accept Jesus as your savior, what happens? You get the full rights of his status. That exchange happens. When God sees you, he doesn't see you the way you are right now. How does he see you?

Just as his son, Jesus. And all that Jesus has and will have and will inherit remarkably, unfathomably becomes ours.

And we will inherit an eternal life with him forever. With no more masks, no more spaces, no more coronavirus, no more rubbish things that happen, but eternal joy and satisfaction.

See, we will taste and see the full inheritance of God when we trust and receive this wonderful adoption. So what's Christmas all about?

[24 : 53] Well, Christmas happened on God's watch, that's for sure. Christmas happened because we needed it to. And Christmas happened to bring us back to God. And so I reckon you're right, Bowdoin.

If ever there's a year that needed Christmas, this year we need it. But we've needed it ever since the first one, don't you agree? We need Christmas every year because what is Christmas actually all about?

It's about Jesus' son sent on God's plan and timing, on his watch to redeem us. So that we might receive adoption into his family.

Let me pray. Oh, Father God, Father, Abba, Daddy. Oh, we come to you this evening with such gratitude and thankfulness.

Thank you that you sent your son. In your grand plan of salvation, you sent him to this earth. And he was willing to die in our place.

[25 : 58] Exchange his righteousness with our unrighteousness to forgive us of all of our wrong and set us free to know you for ourselves.

Oh, Father God, we thank you for that this evening. And we pray that this Christmas time we will worship you and thank you and remember what it is all about. I pray we have a wonderful Christmas and we can all enjoy it.

But, Father, I pray more than that, we might all receive this gift of new life through Jesus and cherish it above all else.

And we pray these things in your name. Amen.