

THE GRANDEUR OF THE INCARNATION

Galatians 4:4-7

There are two ways of reading history. The familiar way is to regard it as the story of the activities of men. This it undoubtedly is, and the best way to study it is through the lives of the great personalities who at various points dominate the story. But, the Bible gives us a deeper view. It regards history as the story of the activities of God. He dominates and directs the movement. The varied actions of men are but the response of human minds and wills to His activity. That response is of different kinds.

There is something so sublime in the message of the incarnation of Christ that the passing of the years can in no way dim its glory or destroy its grandeur. The life and light that broke forth from the manger at Bethlehem has endured as the years fade into obscurity, thus revealing the hidden wonder of the plan and purpose of God.

These words in our text and context are beyond human understanding. Nevertheless, they need to be pondered over anew and afresh, as well as emphasized in our day.

I. The Preparation For The Incarnation.

From all eternity God had it in His heart and mind to send Jesus Christ into the world. Long before time began He had thought out that "unspeakable gift" for us. Numerous other and mighty benefits He heaped on mankind--prophets, revelations and new understandings of God and man.

The way for the incarnation of Christ was prepared by the Jewish religion, by Grecian culture and by Roman conquest. Other contributing factors in the preparation for the incarnation of Christ were the vainly attempted amalgamation of Jewish and heathen thought, the exposed impotence of natural civilization, the universal distraction and hopeless misery of the age and the yearning of souls after God.

1. There was a political preparation.
Rome did not care about religious opinions. She simply wanted her revenue, and there was, therefore, religious liberty in a large measure all over the world. War had ceased, and Rome had reached the zenith of her power and influence. By means of the Roman Empire, the world was under one government.
2. There was a linguistic preparation.
The Greek language, in process of formation for centuries, had reached perfection so that the gospel of Christ might be written and preached around the world through this most perfect medium of thought ever known.
3. There was a religious preparation.
The Jews were scattered to the four winds and had carried with them the Old Testament Scriptures and the traditions of their fathers.
4. There was a demonstrative preparation.
The world had grown bad. You have only to look at the ruins of Pompeii to see a picture that Paul drew of the heathen world. The world of painting, literature, music and culture had become putrid. It had been demonstrated that culture, artistic refinement, military power and civil government did not make people morally better.

When God sent forth His Son into the world, men had fathomed the lowest depths of degradation. Those days were marked by disgusting licentiousness, inhuman cruelty, horrible atheism, utter despair and numerous suicides. It was a disillusioned world

into which Christ came. A deep weariness and futility had settled down on the hearts of men. Cynicism was rampant, and that is always a sign of a thwarted spiritual longing.

II. The Period Of The Incarnation.

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son." All the purposes of God are on schedule. He never works haphazardly. There was a time appointed for this great event, the incarnation of Christ, like all other events in the divine chronology. The precise time of the coming of the Saviour was predetermined from the very beginning. The promise of His coming was made at least four thousand years before its fulfillment. God did not send forth His Son one moment before the time that He had promised. The Saviour arrived exactly as the prophets had said He would. He was neither one moment ahead of time nor one moment late. The day which God chose as the appointed time for Christ to appear was very much like our own day. Then, as now, people were disillusioned and desperate. They had found that life was too difficult for them and that things had broken in their hands. Then, as now, the axioms of human conduct, slowly built up out of the experiences of many generations, were impudently challenged. Then, as now, men were casting away the accredited religion as a thing outworn and of no further use and were eagerly trying out anything and everything that offered itself to them as a possible substitute. It was in such a storm-tossed, heart-sick and desperate day that at long last Christ came to earth, not merely with the Father's sanction, but under His directive will.

Men have asked why Christ did not come sooner. God alone knows. Haste and hurry are elements in our human existence, but God is great enough to move with unhurried and unerring motion across the stage of time. Whatever may have been the divine motive in allowing the years to roll by, we know that the passage of time but demonstrates the helplessness of man to recover what sin had destroyed. Our Lord came at the most appropriate moment. The world had arrived at a mature age. Politically, it was the fulness of time. The Roman Empire had spread its wings in universal sovereignty. Prophetically, it was the fulness of time. Expectation throbbed in every Jewish heart that the Deliverer was at hand. Morally, it was the fulness of time. Old religions were powerless to check the evil tendencies of human nature.

III. The Process Of The Incarnation.

"God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law." These words are significant in what they do not say and in what they deny. They deny that Jesus Christ was of earthly parentage. The miracle of the incarnation is here set forth. That miracle was that Jesus Christ had a human mother, but no human father. He was begotten of the Holy Spirit and conceived by the virgin Mary, a union of deity and humanity. He received His human body substantially from a human. He was made without the help of man. The expression, "made of a woman," implies the possession of a higher nature; for, if the Son possessed only mere humanity, where would have been the necessity of saying that He was "made of a woman"? The phrase points significantly to His supernatural conception, for there is an exclusion of human fatherhood. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus is here represented as the deed of God the Father. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman."

What a blessed woman she was! How favored! How honored! The angel said to her, "Thou hast found favor with God;" also, "Blessed art thou among women." Wherein did her blessedness lie? Certainly not in herself. That she was a lovely character we do not doubt. Her honor and glory lay in the fact that she was chosen of God to be the mother of Jesus Christ. What an honor to have been selected by the Father from all eternity to become the mother of the Saviour!

There was in Jesus Christ the union of the human and the divine--just as human as if He were not divine, and just as divine as if He were not human. Jesus Christ was not human at one moment and divine at another. Rather He was human in His deity and divine in His humanity.

IV. The Purpose Of The Incarnation.

What then is the real purpose and final goal of the incarnation of Christ? The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, supplied the answer: "To redeem them that were under the law." Jesus Christ came specifically to be a Redeemer. He was born to bleed. He could only redeem those who were under the law by fulfilling the requirements of the law; in other words, by paying the penalty of the law. But He came to do that very thing. He came to accomplish that which could not be achieved by other means or by an inferior agency. Christ came to this world to become a substitutionary sacrifice; and He died, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God. His supreme purpose in coming was to make atonement for sin. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" strikes the keynote of His mission. By his sin man had come under the law of condemnation. The righteous law of God found him guilty and held him for punishment. The death of Christ satisfied the demands of the law and thus bought and brought man back to liberty.

V. The Product Of The Incarnation.

1. Adoption.

"That we might receive the adoption of sons." Adoption was essentially a Roman and not a Jewish custom. The law of Moses did not recognize it, and the Jews did not have a word to express it. But, with the Romans it was an everyday occurrence for persons without children of their own to adopt as their sons those who had been born of other parents. In short, the relationship was to all intents and purposes the same as that which existed between a real father and his son.

Adoption does not mean sonship, but son position. It is the translation of a person out of one family into another. The adopted one changes name, abode and costume--conforming to the family into which he is adopted. In spiritual adoption the children of Satan are taken out of his family and placed into the family of God.

2. Heirship.

"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:6-7).

(1) Our position.

"Because ye are sons." Paul tells us how we came into this relationship. He says we are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. We are members of God's family, not through the operations of God's law, but through the redemption that is in His Son. If we are sons of God, then we are sure of at least three things:

a. We are sure of His love.

Every true father loves his child, and in the last analysis will surrender almost anything for the good of his child. Few things are more persistently preached, and more generally disbelieved, than the love of God for His individual children. His love does not always operate in the way that we would expect or prefer, but it always acts in the right way and in the best way. God's wisdom is equal to His love and He always knows what is best for you and for me, and that is the thing He always sends.

b. We are sure of His care.

It is the very nature of a father to care for his child. If any evil comes to your child or mine it is either because we are ignorant of the peril or we are unable to prevent it.

c. We are sure of His discipline.

When God sends sorrow to His children His purpose is to bring them closer to Himself. There was a young man who had gone to college, and after a while he became so absorbed in sports and social functions that he neglected to write home. Weeks passed without their receiving a line, and the mother became very much agitated, and wanted to make the journey of nearly a thousand miles to see what was wrong. The father assured her that they would soon have a letter. She asked why he thought so, and he replied, "I have not sent him his regular check which was due two days ago." The following day the letter came. Sometimes God has to withhold our needed supplies of health, comfort and gladness to remind us of our dependence upon Him. If God has taken from you something that you greatly desire, it may be simply because you have forgotten Him, and He wants to come into closer fellowship with you.

(2) Our possession.

"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." This indwelling of the Holy Spirit implies certain things.

a. It guarantees divine guidance.

"When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth."

b. It guarantees cleansing.

When the Holy Spirit enters the life He does so in order to cast Satan out.

c. It guarantees ultimate triumph.

(3) Our profession.

"Whereby we cry, Abba, Father." "Abba" is a diminutive form of father. It is a child's name for a parent, and corresponds with our word "papa." There are three things wrapped up in that cry:

a. Lordship.

When I say "Father," I confess my obligation to submit to His rule. What a mighty force this church would be if each and every member not only recognized that God was and is his Father, but rendered Him a filial obedience, no matter how much the flesh recoiled therefrom! We are all ready enough to claim from God the care that children have a right to expect, but are we as keen to render to God what He has a right to expect from His children? To know what God wants us to do, and then refuse to do it is to repudiate His Lordship, and align ourselves with those who oppose His will.

b. Fellowship.

Sonship implies fellowship. The general of an army has lordship over his troops, but he does not have fellowship with them. They cannot sleep in the same tent with him nor eat at the same table. But, the children of God have all the rights and privileges of the family circle.

c. Partnership.

Sonship implies partnership. The interest of the mere servant in his master's business is simply that of a wage earner. But, the son knows that every dollar added to the capital account is an addition to his own coming

inheritance. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. If we have the consciousness of that fact it will get into our faces, upon our lips, into our hand clasps, into our courtesies, and there will be a royal significance in all the issues of our lives.