

Sermon for Sunday, December 12, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor  
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"GUESS WHO IS UP FOR ADOPTION!"

Galatians 4:4-5

Let your minds go back in time--decades, centuries, milleniums--back to the beginning, back to Genesis 1, 2 and 3. There we are told that God created everything. At the last he created the world as a habitation for man. Then, as the crown of his creation, he made man in his own image and he made him to be the glory of all he had made. God loved man and he wanted man to love him in return. He wanted it to be real love. He could have built man so that he had to love God, but he would have been a robot, an automaton, and God didn't want that kind of love. He gave man a freedom; as it turned out, a terrible freedom. He gave him freedom to say "Yes" to God, and a freedom also to say "No". And so our first father, Adam, with that wonderful, dreadful freedom, stood under the love of God and he disobeyed, rebelled, he broke fellowship. That brokenness spilled over into every area of his life until everything about him was contaminated and ruined. We call it sin. God cast him, with great sadness, from the garden. The bible tells us he placed angels at the gates so that man could never return again. Man, who was the child, the creation of God, had broken his fellowship and forfeited his sonship. His brokenness was so great that only one as great as God could do anything about it, yet it was man who owed it.

As we look at our text I want to call to your attention the opening phrase, "But when the time had fully come..." Perhaps another translation of the Greek will help us understand the full import of this passage. It could be translated properly "when the right moment had completely arrived..." or "When the precise instant had totally come." This focuses our attention on God's timing. Have you ever stopped to think why Jesus was born when he was? Was there any reason that God chose that particular moment in history? Was there any force at work in the world that made that specific instant the appropriate one for Jesus to be born? Do you remember how in the musical, "Fiddle on the Roof", when the Jews in that little Russian town were being persecuted and driven from their homes, a young man runs up and says, "Rabbi, we have waited a long time for Messiah. Wouldn't now be a good time for him to come?" Well, that's a fair question--when is it a good time for Jesus to come?

From that dreadful day back in the garden when man had rebelled and broken his fellowship with God, man has tried mightily to solve his own brokenness to meet his own needs, and before the birth of Jesus there were three hopeful signs of man's hope in the world --three signs of things with potential to meet his needs. First there was the hope of a universal government. It was the age of the pax romana, the peace of Rome. Rome ruled the world--there was one government over civilization. In such a government lay a hope that all men might somehow be united. There was a common law, a common coinage, a common language, a universal system of communications by a network of roads such as the world had never seen. Commerce brought men of all countries into intimate contact with other races and nations and there was a possibility for a common understanding and common cooperation among man. But government failed. It became oppressive to the ordinary man. It failed because it was in the hands of greedy and corrupt men who used this tremendous potential for selfish and personal gain.

In our day we are hearing again of the hope of the world in some form of worldwide government, whether it be through the Common Market nations, through NATO, through the United Nations, or pacts or treaties. But the effectiveness of such a system as a hope for man is dependent upon man himself. If man fails, the system fails. Who of us can have much confidence in man?

The second sign of hope in the ancient world was that of a universal culture. Through the Greeks, culture had reached a zenith. Education, philosophy, science, medicine, literature, language, and a host of other cultural successes had been achieved. Such a common culture held out the hope that men of every nation could be united with others through intellectual stimulation and the world be brought together in a cultural whole. Yet, culture too, contained its own seeds of decay and poverty. Philosophy and science had failed to satisfy the deepest needs of men which had proved to be more profound and deep than first suspected.

We Americans had the fond dream that the American culture or the American way of life was what the world needed to bind us all together. Stories of the Ugly American and taunts of "Americans, go home!" have shocked us into the realization of our own cultural failure. And even at home, the burning of our cities in the 60's, the revolt of the hippies who were protesting against the structures of our world, were symptomatic of the deterioration within our own culture. No, a universal culture could not unite men.

The third potential for ancient man was the hope of a universal religion. Of all the ancient world, the Jews alone had a monotheism with the potential of a universal application. Theirs was a religion with a moral code and a strength to bind all men into a single religious family. Yet, religion failed, too. It failed because God's chosen people were marked by bigotry, provincialism, and narrowness.

In our day we have seen a proliferation of religious sects and cults, purporting to be the solution to man's need for a universal religion. Gallup's first world-wide poll indicates the universal hunger for spiritual reality, but religion has been man's great divider. Look at the religious wars today in the mid-East or Ireland--the shame of mankind.

So the ancient world stood bankrupt. Its best hopes had not worked out. It was at this moment, at this precise instant, at the appropriate time, God said to the world, "there is another way." It was at this moment, when the fullness of time had finally come, that God spoke a word to the world, a word that said, "there is still hope, there is still a way." And the word that God spoke at that moment was Jesus. Yes, "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son..."

What is this word that God has spoken to his world? Look at our text for this morning. First, it says, "God sent forth his son..." When we ask the question, "who is Jesus?" we must always say first of all that he is God. There have been those who have attempted to humanize Christ completely, to say that he is humanity at its highest, that he is the best of what man is capable. But to say that Jesus is a mere man--even man at his best, his noblest, his highest--is to leave man in his despair. No, man, who's brokenness goes back to primeval times, can be healed only by one as great as God. Man does not need another man--even the best man. He needs help from the Divine. Can man break the shackles of his own sin? Can man pay the terrible price for the punishment for sin? And the answer is no. Only God could do that. At Christmas the Bible tells us, "God sent forth his son..."

But then our text says, "God sent forth his son, born of woman..." This speaks to us of the humanity of Christ. Just as there are those who make Jesus nothing but a super-human, there are also those who deny his humanity and make him nothing but God. Yet, the Bible tells us that he was truly God, but he was also truly man--he was born of a woman. He knows what it is to be tired and hungry, he knows what it is to feel the hurt of rejection, he knows what it is to weep tears of despair for his people, and he knows what it is to feel the incredible agony of nail-pierced hands and feet, to feel the burning agony of the sword as it pierced his side. Yes, he was truly man--man born of a woman.

But then in the third place our text says that not only was he born of woman, but he was born under the law. Part of your problem and mine is the law of God. Because we have broken it we can't measure up to that law--we can't be the kind of people God wants us to be. Do you remember how St. Paul put it? He said, "I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." That's my problem, too. He said, "when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand." That's true for me. He said, "For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin..." That's my problem, too. I want to do right, but the things I would, I do not; and the things I would not are the very things I do. Well, Jesus lived under that law. The Bible tells us he was tempted in all things, just as we are. I don't know about you, but that helps me. When I see that little babe born at Christmas in my mind's eye, I know he will experience all of the trials and tribulations, the tests and temptations, that I do. He will understand me. He will know what I feel, he will know the power of evil tempting me. Yes, he's been there and has experienced all that I have. Praise God for that! Praise God that he knows how I struggle, he knows the pain and hurt that I feel when I fail.

Then, in the fourth place, notice that our text says that God sent his son to redeem those under the law. When you redeem something you buy it back. It means that something once yours no longer belongs to you, but now you redeem it, you buy it back. Perhaps you remember the story in the Old Testament of Hosea and Gomer. Gomer was Hosea's wife, but she left him. He had taken her from a life of sin and she went back to it. But Hosea never stopped loving her. And then one day, as he walked in the market place, there in the slave auction, he saw his beloved upon the block, being sold as a common slave. By rights, she was his. She belonged to him, but he paid the price--he bought her back again-- He redeemed her. In a profound way that's what God did for us. We were his because he made us. But we were not content and we turned away from God. As a consequence, the Bible tells us we became subject to sin and death. We forfeited our sonship with God and became spiritual slaves. And then one day God came to redeem us, buy us back. The price he paid was his own son.

Whoever you are, that's the good news of Christmas. It doesn't matter what you have done; it doesn't matter how badly you've sinned--God still loves you. And when you see Christmas with the baby Jesus--that's the price of your redemption. That's what God has laid on the calendar to pay for you.

Finally, our text says, "that we might receive the adoption as sons." Are we all children of God? The answer is no. No, not any more. Back there we forfeited our sonship. We are born into sin--as the Psalmist put it, "in sin did my mother conceive me." But Christmas tells us that God is willing to adopt us back--he is willing to receive us as sons again.

As I have been praying over this text this week I've been thinking a lot about adoption. Did you ever stop to think why a little child is up for adoption? Isn't it usually because no one loves him or wants him or wants to be bothered with him, or he is more trouble than he is worth? It means that for that little child his situation is hopeless if there is no one to care, no one to love. We have a family in our church with two little adopted children and I have watched that family. How very much those little children are loved and cherished! Though they were not wanted or cared for, someone came along and said, "I love you. I care. I want you." In a far deeper sense that is what God is saying to us. He is saying that though we are little children who are unloved and uncared for, he loves, he cares, he wants to adopt us that we might become the children of God.

Would it not be sheer foolishness for a little baby who was unwanted and unloved and uncared for to say to someone who wanted to adopt him, "No, I don't want to be adopted. I don't want to be your child." At Christmas God says, "I have redeemed you. I have paid the price for you. I want to adopt you as my very own. I want you to become a child of God." And since you are the one up for adoption, what would you say to that?

you to become a child of God. And since you are a child of God, would you say to that?