

In the Fullness of Time A Christmas Message

Thesis: God works out his purposes in the fullness of time. At the right, God sent Jesus. This Scriptural declaration means that God is sovereign over the times and events of our lives, our nation, our planet, and human history.

Text: Galatians 4:4

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God (Galatians 4:4–7 ESV).

Waiting is hard for us as humans.

I remember Christmas around my house when I was growing up. I was desperate to know what was wrapped for me under the tree. I wasn't very patient as a child. I bugged my mom and dad incessantly, asking if I could open presents early.

Even now, I have a problem with waiting. When I buy a gift for someone, it is hard for me to wait to give it to them. I want them to have it now and to enjoy that gift. I want to see the joy they get from opening just the right gift that I picked out for them.

Timing is a difficult issue for us. We want what we want when we want it.

Think about the waiting that the world had done before Jesus came. The world was trapped in darkness. The people of this world were living in darkness. This world was ruled by the kingdom of darkness.

At just the right time, God sent Jesus.

Fullness of time. That expression means "when the time was ripe," and occurs in English translations of Galatians 4:4 and Ephesians 1:10. In Galatians the reference is to the time when "God sent forth his Son." The apostle Paul used the image of a child coming of age (Galatian 4:1-3) to say that **Jesus came at a point in human history when the time was ripe and released humanity from bondage to the law.**

Scholars see that Jesus came at the right time in the historical circumstances of his day. Rome's conquests had produced "Roman peace," so that travel was **relatively** both safe

and easy. That political unity was built on the earlier victories of Alexander the Great. Alexander's expansion from Greece to Egypt to India left in its wake the Greek language and culture, which later made the spread of the gospel easier. Greek-speaking Jews lived in every city of the Roman Empire. Their religion was protected by Roman law, and that law protected Christianity for its first half century. Many Gentiles who were interested in the monotheism and morality of Judaism went to the Jewish synagogues. Thus, the synagogue was a natural starting point for the church's early outreach to Gentiles.

Then, there was the spiritual worldview of the world into which Jesus came. They understood the reality of heaven and hell. There was a spiritual family that had revolted against God, and there was a humanly family that had chosen its own way. The spiritual and material world interacted in their worldview; they weren't separate like the thinking of modernity in the West. There is much which we could say about their spiritual worldview; suffice it to say that at the right time, Jesus came, and that included their understanding of spiritual realities.

In Palestine, the Jews were longing for a Messiah, because they were politically subject to the Herods and the Romans. Messianic rebellion simmered constantly, and repeatedly broke out in open battle. Socially, peasants were oppressed by large landholders, who used every opportunity and legal loophole to expand their properties. Many of those oppressors were from the chief priestly families, whose greed was well known to all. Throughout Palestine messianic speculation was at a high point. The Pharisees talked about what would happen when the Messiah came. **The time was ripe for Jesus' coming, as he himself noted (Matthew 13:16-17; Mark 1:14-15).**

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Matthew 13:16-17 NIV).

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15 ESV).

Consider again what the word of God said: "At just the right time, God sent Jesus." The emphasis is on God sending of Christ, not a "last-ditch effort," but as a part of God's gracious plan from the beginning.

Christmas is not just a holiday or a season. Christmas is about God fulfilling his purposes, plans, promises, and prophetic words in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christmas is about the timing and ways of God.

At just the right time, God sent Jesus.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy.... 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:2–7 NIV).

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it [cannot conquer the light] (John 1:5 ESV).

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13–14 NIV).

Last Thursday as we prayed about these passages (see above), Jeanne Hughes prayed:

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14–16 NIV84).

That phrase grips me today: They don't put it under a basket. It is the enemy who wants to put us under a basket of fear, division, and hate. We say “no” to that work of the enemy.

Lord, help us to be who you are have called us to be.

We pray in the name and power of Jesus Christ for that basket to be lifted off the church in the name of Jesus.

Let us take on that mantle and let us be the light, to shine brightly for Jesus whom we love.

So, we pray and sing: shine, Jesus, shine. We want to see you. Give us a revelation of who you are in this season.

God works out his purposes in the fullness of time. At the right, God sent Jesus. That statement clearly indicates the sovereignty of God over times and events of our lives, our nation, our planet, and human history.

Nothing could motivate God to send the Messiah and Master until everything was in divine order and the time was right: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law”—Christ, the Messiah. Jesus could not descend to earth until the fullness of the times had come, and he could not ascend back to heaven until he had fulfilled all the Messianic prophecies.

It had been prophesied that the Messiah would be in the grave three days, and when that time was fulfilled, Jesus arose and ascended back to heaven.

Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, but he cannot come back to earth until the times of the restoration of the church are fulfilled and all enemies are made his footstool.

Eternal God established earth to have day and night, months, years, times, and seasons. God made it that way so that he could have certain times and seasons for his purposes to be accomplished on earth.

The Scriptures declare that there is a season and a time for everything that happens on earth: a time to be born, a time to die, a season to plant and a season to harvest, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time of war and a time of peace, and more.

Even God’s purposes are brought forth at special times and seasons, “for there is a time for every purpose and for every work.” “And a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment, because for every matter there is a time and judgment.”

At the right time, God sent Jesus.

What does Christmas teach us about God’s timing?

1. God has a timetable for everything that happens.

God had been telling the world for centuries that he was going to send a Savior. Yet, God waited thousands of years for just the right time to send his Son.

Why didn’t God send Jesus sooner? God had his own timetable for Christmas.

The Bible says, “*But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children*” (Galatians 3:4-5 NLT).

We don’t fully understand why God sent Jesus when he did, and we know it was the right time to do what he wanted to do.

The same is true for your life. God has a timetable. You may not know what it is right now, but you can trust that his timing is perfect.

2. God does not tell us the details in advance.

Although God has a timetable for your life, he doesn't lay it all out to you in advance.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says this: *"God has given them a desire to know the future. He does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing"* (NCV).

God didn't tell Israel exactly when Jesus would come, but the Bible says Jesus came at the right time.

You and I prefer to know exactly what's next in our lives. However, God doesn't work that way. God rarely lays everything out before us. Why?

First, it would overwhelm us if God told us everything he wanted to do in and through our lives right now. We would likely run away from it.

Second, we would probably misuse that information. We would try to change the bad parts and make the good parts happen sooner.

But the most important reason God waits to announce his timetable for our lives is that he wants us to trust him. Everything God does in your life is because of his love for you. God wants you to trust him more today than you did yesterday.

3. God is never in a hurry, and he's never late.

God isn't bound by time. He can be in the past, present, and future at the same time. Our view of time is bound by life on earth, which rotates every 24 hours and travels around the sun every 365 days. God is timeless. God is never in a hurry. God is never late.

When the people of Israel were awaiting the coming of Jesus, it probably seemed like God was taking forever. Many thought he was late.

But, the Bible says Jesus came at just the right time—not a second too soon or a second too late.

To see that, you would need to have God's perspective on time. Second Peter 3:8 says, *"Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day"* (NIV).

You and I look at time differently than God does. When we're waiting on God to change a heart, meet a need, solve a problem, grant a breakthrough, or deliver us, it feels like a thousand years. We don't like to wait. In contrast, remember that God is timeless; yet, he acts in the course of history and is writing his story.

That reality has major implications for our lives. God has a purpose and plan for your life. The Lord has a vision for you in partnership with him. Unfortunately, many people give up on God's vision because it's taking too long.

Maybe that's you. You're ready to throw in the towel. The dream for your life is bruised and broken.

God doesn't want you to give up. He says this in Habakkuk 2:3: *"The vision will still happen at the appointed time. It hurries toward its goal. It won't be a lie. If it's delayed, wait for it. It will certainly happen. It won't be late"* (GW).

If God gave you a dream, he will make it happen. It just has to happen on his timetable, not yours.

So, wait for it. The timing of the Lord and the plans of God are worth it.

His timing is always perfect.

4. God's timing is not always convenient.

God's plan for your life and his timing are good. What God is doing will benefit you.

And, the plan and timing of God are not painless. The plan of God which unfolds won't always be easy.

Think about Mary and Joseph. Mary was a pregnant virgin. Imagine her conversation with her mom: "Hi, Mom, I'm pregnant. I'm still a virgin, and the baby is God." I'm sure that was a difficult conversation.

Then, Caesar Augustus decides to call a census and tells everyone to return to the town where they were born. Imagine if the government asked us to do this today. It would be chaos. Every plane, train, and automobile would be booked. Every highway would be full.

But back then, this decree meant Mary had to get on a donkey and take a long trip to Bethlehem the day before she delivered her baby. Then she must deliver her first child in a barn without any family but Joseph—along with a bunch of animals.

Surely, Mary had a different plan; this wasn't Mary's plan. Her timing would have been much different. But the Bible said Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, so that's what God orchestrated.

I doubt that the Christmas story was Mary and Joseph's idea of how they wanted to welcome their first child into the world. But it was part of a much bigger plan.

This year of 2020 wasn't convenient for many of us. A year ago, no one would have dreamed that a global pandemic would have killed hundreds of thousands of people. Who could have imagined the dreams of High School and College Seniors changed overnight? Who could have imagined people losing their jobs, businesses shutting down, and whole industries, like the entertainment industry, going on hiatus?

Looking ahead, the year of 2021 will have its share of inconveniences and difficulties, too. Your life will be challenged by them. You can either throw in the towel, or you can lean on God and his plan for your life. **At the right time, not at the most convenient time, God sent Jesus.**

5. At the right time, God can do anything suddenly.

God can do more in one millisecond than you can do in your entire life. At the right time, God can accomplish his will instantly. The Bible says, *“At the right time, I, the Lord, will make it happen” (Isaiah 60:22 NLT).*

[God says:] “I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass (Isaiah 48:3 NIV).

God refuses to worry about time because he doesn't need time to accomplish what he wants to do.

This truth is tough for us to accept. **The most difficult place for us to be is in God's waiting room.** Many of us find ourselves there right now. You're waiting for COVID-19 restrictions to subside. You're waiting for your family to get together. You're waiting for this or that to open up. You are waiting for a breakthrough or an answer to prayer. Some are waiting for a vaccine. Maybe you're waiting on something else, like children to be born or possibly an upcoming marriage.

When you're in a hurry for something to happen and God isn't in a hurry, that's God's waiting room. When you're in God's waiting room, you tend to wonder if what you're waiting on will even happen at all.

But God doesn't need a lot of time to do what he wants to do in your life or in our church.

Israel waited for hundreds of years for the Messiah to come. But the Bible says, *“When the right time came, God sent his Son” (Galatians 4:4 NCV).*

When the time is right, God will answer your prayers as well. Even this broken year of 2020 can't get in the way of God's perfect plan for your life. At the right time, God can do anything suddenly.

Conclusion: God works out his purposes in the fullness of time. At the right, God sent Jesus. This Scriptural declaration means that God is sovereign over the times and events of our lives, our nation, our planet, and human history.

Application:

Waiting can be hard. But, let the Lord use the message of Christmas to say something clearly to us.

1. Don't give up. Don't give in. If you don't quit, you win.
2. God hasn't given up on you; so, don't give up on him.

We acknowledge that waiting is hard.

1. Some of us are waiting with joy as we experience all the blessings of Jesus' coming into our lives, of his answers to prayer, and of his work in and through us.
2. Some of us are waiting with sorrow as we face the lingering griefs and losses of this human life, our brokenness, and the brokenness of this world.
3. But we can all wait with hope, because God has the last word in our lives.
Remember: At the right time, God sent his Son.

Ministry Time: