

Born a Redeemer Galatians 4:4-5

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We have diversity of our gathering in this auditorium today. Think of it. We have age diversity. For some, this is the umpteenth Christmas of your life. You have heard, seen, and done it all. Here is yet another Christmas. Others, especially children, are psyched up out of their minds for all this. They have not lost any wonder at Christmas. Age diversity. We have family diversity here. Some of you are with family, literally, on both sides of you. Some of you are far from family and maybe will be over the holiday. Perhaps a death in the family makes that seem even more poignant. We have ethnic diversity here. We have faith diversity here with people from all kinds of faith backgrounds gathered in this one room.

So much diversity! Is there any unity? Anything we share in common? We all happen to be sitting in the same auditorium at the same service. We are all human beings. Christmas highlights something deeper and easily missed that we all have in common. In fact, you can live your whole life largely unaware of this mutuality.

But you can't understand Christmas without understanding this commonality. There is what happened that night in that manger as Mary gave birth to a son. Just as the angel Gabriel had told her. Joseph was there. The angels appeared. The shepherds were told. The little town of Bethlehem was the center of the universe for one starry night. Kids can tell the story, but the real question is, *What does it mean? Why did this happen?* And this gets back to our shared commonality. The same Bible that tells us of Jesus' birth explains the why as well.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5 ESV)

These two verses summarize the story of not just Christmas, but God's whole outworking of our salvation.

Let's answer the question. What do we have in common? Verse 5 tells us, *"to redeem those who were under the law."* That's fancy language to say that we are all condemned by the law of God. *Condemned as what? Condemned as slaves. Slaves? Really. What kind?* The Bible says we are slaves to whatever masters us. The moral law of God identifies all of us as *slaves to sin*. We are in bondage to sin. Addicted to sin. It is a master over us. The result is a broken and conflicted society like ours with families like ours and marriages like ours and hospitals, nursing homes, funeral homes, and cemeteries. Every town and city has them. Why? Because the sign that we are slaves to sin is that we decay and die. When you are a slave to sin, you are also a slave to wrinkles, aches and pains, cancer, heart disease, and inevitable death. It turns out being a slave to sin has horrific consequences for us forever.

But this word "redeem" is the greatest news we slaves could ever hear. God chose to explain what he is doing in salvation with a word that was used throughout the Roman Empire to describe buying a slave out of slavery and into freedom. Imagine it. You are a first-century slave. You were born a slave. Your parents were slaves. You've never known a day of freedom your whole life. You could only dream of NOT being a slave. But then you find out an unknown benefactor has paid the required price for you to be bought out of

slavery. You have been “redeemed” out of slavery and granted permanent freedom. You would look back on redemption day as the greatest day of your life.

This brings us back to this verse describing what God is doing and how Jesus’ birth on Christmas was a part of it. Let’s take this on with the who, what, when, where, why, and how.

When? *The Fullness of Time*

“But when the fullness of time had come.” (Verse 4) We don’t normally think of time being “full” but we do say, the timing was just right. It was just the right time for Jesus to come. Historically, it was the right time. Alexander the Great had brought a shared language (Greek) to the civilized world. The Romans had brought roads and communication like the world had never known. Spiritually, it was the right time as it had been quiet for 400 years. There had been no revelation from God. No nothing. People were desperate for something from God. *God, speak to us!*

Circumstantially, it was the right time. Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census and everyone had to return to their city of family origin. This allowed a certain descendant of David to go to Bethlehem and have a son, just as prophecy required.

Who? *God*

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.” (Verse 4)

The orchestrator of all this is not the slave population. Not us. Slaves can revolt, but slaves cannot redeem themselves. Slaves have nothing. Redemption requires payment. In this case, payment isn’t money, it is moral righteousness. Who has that? God has that. He is the holy God. A ransom payment was required to buy slaves to sin from their slavery into freedom and newness of life. Who did it? God. This is a God thing. Mary was a virgin. The genesis of Jesus’ humanity didn’t come from Joseph. It didn’t come from humanity. Salvation is of God.

What? *Redeem Sinful Humanity*

“To redeem those who were under the law.” (Verse 5)

We are under the moral law of God. This law declares our slavery to sin. But see the goal? To buy us out of our slavery to the cemetery. To redeem us from the curse of sin and death. To set us free. But how does some baby born in some manger 2,000 years ago accomplish that?

How? *Sent his Son, born human, lived perfectly*

“God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.” (Verse 4)

Each clause here describes something essential. This baby that was born was the Son of God. The manger doesn’t make Jesus famous; Jesus makes the manger famous because of his glorious person. God sent his son. That baby born was the Son of God. See also his humanity. He was “born of a woman.” This birth of a woman means Jesus was completely human. Anyone here NOT born of a woman?

When a couple has a baby, people ask, what is it? Everybody answers, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" Nobody says, "It's a human! We are so excited to have a human!"

I saw a couple earlier who told me they were at a gender reveal party yesterday. Do you know what a gender reveal party is? You have all your friends and family over and you find some clever way of revealing the baby's gender to everyone. The couple having the baby told their doctor to find out the gender and then call their baker with the news so that they could bake a cake. If it's a boy, the inside of the cake would be blue; if it's a girl, it would be pink. So the day came, and family and friends were there, cameras were rolling, and they cut into this cake and the inside was...white. The baker forgot to put the color in the cake! True story. "You're having a...human!"

The human is assumed in the birth from a human. Jesus was God's Son (his deity) and was born of a woman (his humanity). These alone don't qualify him as a Redeemer.

He was "*born under the law*." I understand that delegates of the UN are granted some level of immunity while they are here. I've read articles describing the thousands, maybe millions of dollars in parking fees owed by UN delegates. When you have immunity, you don't have to obey the law.

Despite Jesus' exalted position, he did not come here with some kind of divine immunity arrangement. He was "*born under the law*" meaning that he perfectly obeyed God's moral law. Why is that important? To buy slaves out of freedom you CANNOT be a slave yourself. If Jesus disobeyed God's law, he would have been a slave to sin like the rest of us. Instead, He perfectly fulfilled it.

Why? To redeem us from slaves into sons

"To redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."
(Verse 5)

Wait, this doesn't sound like chestnuts roasting on an open fire or rockin' around the Christmas tree. No, it doesn't. Those seem incredibly trite in light of the real truth that Christ came to free us from slavery to the cemetery. But it doesn't stop. Not only does God make it possible to NOT be slaves anymore, God doubles down and welcomes us into his personal family "*that we might receive adoption as sons*." No longer slaves but sons and daughters of the most high God. From slaves to forgiveness. From forgiveness to freedom. From freedom to adoption into the family of God. None of this would happen if Jesus had not been sent by God, born of a woman, lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay the price to set us free.



I've lived in Indiana for 25 years, but I grew up in Iowa. Something very special began in Iowa this year at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital in Iowa City (pictured left). This hospital is highly regarded for its medical care for very sick children. Earlier this year they completed a new addition, a tower of medical facilities and rooms built next to Kinnick Stadium where the University of Iowa football team plays their home games. The tower is tall enough to see over the edge of the stadium. They actually built the tower with windows on the stadium side so children could watch the home games.

This past year, Krista Young, a mom in Iowa posted on Facebook, "I think with the new U of I Hospital addition open, Kinnick should hold a 'wave to the kids' minute during every game. Can you imagine how neat it would be to have all of those fans, players, & coaching staff looking up at you sending a little inspiration?"¹

People at the University liked the idea. So at the first home game, after the first quarter, the announcer said, "It's time to start a new tradition here at Kinnick. Take a look at the U of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital and let's give a big Hawkeye wave to all the kids watching the game."² The whole game stopped. The fans, the football players, the referees all turned and waved their support to the kids (see pictures below).



You likely know about this because it has been celebrated everywhere as a great thing. They call it The Kinnick Wave. The Kinnick Wave puts everything in perspective. In that moment the game doesn't seem so important. The Big 10 standings don't seem that important. It is a moment when 70,000 fans are reminded of the reality of the value of human life and the life and death struggle of families and children.

What is Christmas? When we get it, it puts everything else in perspective. It reminds us of the reality of life and death. That baby born in the manger was God waving to us, coming to us. We are the leukemia kids desperate for healing. We are the chemo kids clinging to hope.

You know what those kids do in the hospital when the stadium waves at them? They wave back. *It is their personal response.*

The bottom line of Christmas is that salvation is a personal response. God requires us to respond in faith. To believe. To place our personal trust in Jesus as our Savior and our redeemer. In essence, to wave back. What does that wave of faith say? I believe that in the fullness of time God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. Born to redeem me.

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¹ Krista Young, www.landof10.com/iowa/ "How '2 Sentences' Turned Iowa Hawkeyes First Quarter Wave into the Coolest New Tradition in Football.

² www.YouTube.com, "Hawkeye Fans Wave to UI Stead Family Children's Hospital," September 3, 2017.

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