

**Talk given at All Age Service, Sunday 10 December 2006 at
Grace Church Dulwich, Rosendale School, by Mark Jackson**

Galatians 3:4-7

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Christmas is an exciting time of year isn't it? It's exciting because you get to decorate your homes- with tinsel and lights and Christmas trees. You get to eat lots of food like turkey, and mince pies You get to build snowmen outside- depending on the weather. You may even get some time to put your feet up and relax- although some of you parents are not looking too hopeful! Of course- Christmas is exciting cos you get to give and receive lots of presents. Christmas is an exciting time of year. But I wonder whether- amidst all the excitement- there might just be a risk that we forget about the most important part of Christmas.

(Acetate 1)- presents with Question mark in middle.

Now I have a picture here with many of the exciting things we just mentioned at Christmas time: family meal- presents- Christmas tree- snowman- Christmas pudding- but there is a big question mark in the middle. Because one thing is missing. The most important part of Christmas is missing. Who can tell me what is missing? (Who is missing?)

Yes- it is Jesus of course! Christmas is all about Jesus. Jesus being born into the world. That's the most important part of Christmas. He's the whole reason we celebrate Christmas! Which means it would be crazy to forget about him at Christmas time! So whether this is your first Christmas or fiftieth Christmas- God wants all of us to be reminded this morning why Jesus is the most important part of Christmas. To do that we will need to look at God's words in the bible. And the verses we are going to look at are printed on your service sheet. We've just heard them read out- Galatians 4:3-7. In these verses- we are going to see that through Jesus- God offers us two remarkable presents.

1. A remarkable relationship

So let's open present number one and see what God has given us. What is it? It's a picture of my family. Can you all see that? (- show picture to kids.) Because- the first present God offers us at Christmas is: "A remarkable relationship" (Acetate 2)- where we can belong to God's family. A remarkable relationship.

Let me read from verse 4: "*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son that we might receive the full rights of sons.*" So on the first Christmas- God sent Jesus to Earth- that you and I might receive the full rights of sons. That we might become God's children. And be brought into God's family. Christmas, then, is about the offer of a remarkable relationship in God's family.

And just in case we don't realise how remarkable this is- let me read verse 6 to you- (Acetate 2): "*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*"

In other words- being God's son is remarkable because it means God is always with you. God's Spirit comes into our hearts and God lives with us. Being in God's family is remarkable because God is always with us.

Now to illustrate this- let me ask you a few questions:

- Hands up: who likes it when mummy or daddy comes to support you in a school sports match- or school play- or whatever it may be? We all do- don't we? We all like it when mummy or daddy are there with us.
- Hands up: who thinks it's great when you can go to mum and dad if you are upset about something and need their support? We all do. It is great when mummy or daddy are there for us
- Now for everybody- who thinks it would be amazing to have a mother or father who loves his children perfectly- brings up his children perfectly- and is always there for his children 24-7. We all do- unlikely. But would be amazing!

Well verse 6 says God is exactly like. If you are a child of God- then God's Spirit is in your heart. Which means God is with you all the time. Every second of every day. Whether you are in a sports match or school play- God is always with you. Whether you're frantically trying to cook Christmas dinner or desperately trying to complete some work project before Friday 22nd- God is always with you. No matter who you are. Or what you are doing. God is with you. And you can always talk to God if you are upset or things are going badly. He always listens. And he always answers. God is the perfect parent- who loves you perfectly. Brings you up perfectly. Is there with you and for you 24-7.

Clearly being in God's family is quite remarkable.

But it's also remarkable to be in God's family because of the end of verse 7- (Acetate 2): "*...and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*"

Now an heir is someone who one day receives all that the family owns: the family fortune. Which means one day- if we are children of God- well one day we'll receive all that God owns- God's fortune. Now who can tell me what God owns? Everything! God owns the entire universe. And the bible teaches that one day God will transform this universe into a perfect place where no one ever gets sick- and no one ever dies. And He will give it all to His children to enjoy with Him forever. God will give us everything. Now is there anything more remarkable than that?

OK- so far we've seen Christmas is about the offer of a remarkable relationship in God's family. Well God says- don't forget this. Amidst the excitement of Christmas time- don't forget the most important part about being in God's family. It could be some of your friends think you are mad to be a Christian. Certainly our culture says being a Christian is something ridiculous or at worst boring. But they couldn't be further from the truth could they? Being a Christian means being in the most remarkable relationship there is- God is always with us. Being a Christian really is the best way to live- one day God will give us everything. And after the next carol. We will see why being a Christian is not just the best way to live- but the only way to live.

[So let's stand now and sing our next carol- a carol which speaks in verse 3 about this remarkable relationship we have just been talking about. "born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of Earth, born to give them second birth". Let's stand and sing together. Hark the Herald Angels Sing.]

2. A remarkable rescue

Please sit down. Now so far- we've seen Christmas is about a remarkable relationship. But that's only half the story. Because now we're going to see that Christmas is also about a remarkable rescue. **(Acetate 3)**

You see- you might have been wondering- when singing the carol. Well I like the sound of being part of God's family. But what I need to do? How do I become a member of God's family?

Well- let's find out. Who wants to open present #2? Go ahead. What is inside? A key. Now this is a key to some handcuffs. Some prisoner's handcuffs. Which might come as a bit of a shock. Probably not what you expected as a present.

But then we probably didn't expect the shock of verse 3. Because when we look at verse 3- we see that before the first Christmas all of us were in a terrible position-**(Acetate 3)**: "*So, also when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*" This verse says that every single one of us, by nature, is actually a slave. Which is a shocking thought isn't? To be born into slavery! Now how can that be? I don't see any of you with handcuffs on. Or ball and chain on your feet. None of you look like a slave. And besides slavery was banned years ago. How can anyone be a slave today?

Well we need to be clear what God means by this. And in the previous chapter, God explained that the whole world is a prisoner of sin. Now sin means living "my way"- not God's way. In other words- to be a prisoner of sin is to be enslaved to a way of life that says no to God- and yes to me. We were like this prisoner- **(Acetate 4)**- handcuffed in prison and enslaved to ball and chain. Because we have said no to God- we are unable to have this remarkable relationship we were talking about before. Because we've said no to God's way- we can't be his children. It means God is never with us by His Spirit. And we can't enjoy His perfect world in the future. It is a terrible position to be in- because it means being without God forever. And what is worse there is nothing we can do to escape from this prison. In other words- there is nothing we can do to have this remarkable relationship with God.

So what next? What are we to do? Well to demonstrate this- imagine for a moment that I enslaved one of the children in Sunday School- imagine that I put some handcuffs on you. And placed you in prison somewhere in this room. Now there is nothing you can do to escape. Isn't that right Matilda? (Yes!). As you can see Matilda is in prison. She has handcuffs on. No matter how much she struggles- she cannot break free. There is nothing she can do to escape. What does she need? Well she needs someone to rescue her. And I've got the key. The only means of rescue. Who wants to go rescue her? (Give key to Al) OK- Al I am sending you to rescue Matilda.

Now verse 3 tells us we were all in the same position of Matilda. We can't escape from our sin. We all need to be rescued. But wonderfully verse 4 tells us that God has the key. That key is Jesus. And God sends Jesus into the world to rescue us. Let me read verse 4-**(Acetate 3)**: "*But when the time had fully come, (that's Christmas time), God sent His Son (Jesus), born of a woman (the Virgin Mary), born under the law- to redeem (or rescue) those under the law...*"

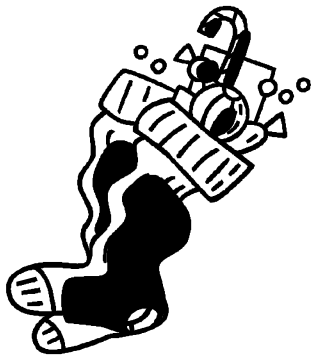
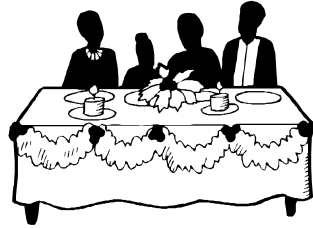
So Jesus came to rescue us. This is why Jesus was born into the world. As a rescuer. Not merely a wise teacher. Nor some miraculous healer. But as a rescuer. To rescue us from our slavery to sin. And bring us into God's family. Christmas, then, is about a remarkable relationship through Jesus' remarkable rescue.

So- as we finish- how do you become a member of God's family? Simple. Accept Jesus' rescue. It is the only way to be freed from your slavery and brought into the family of God. You see- being a Christian is not just the best way to live. Ultimately it is the only way to live. Only Jesus can rescue you from sin and death. Only Jesus can give you this remarkable relationship into God's family. Accept the offer of Jesus' rescue and you will belong to God's family this Christmas. What an exciting Christmas that would be!

And for those of us- who already do belong to God's family- well Christmas is a time to remember Jesus' rescue. And to give thanks for Jesus' remarkable rescue of us. We're part of his family- How remarkable is that! Let's pray.

Dear God- thank you for sending your Son, Jesus into the world to rescue us and bring us into your family. It is remarkable that you would do this for us. We are so thankful. Please help us never to forget it. Amen.

Christmas time- What is missing?



1. A remarkable relationship

VERSE 6: *"Because you are **sons**, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

God is always with us!

VERSE 7: *"...and since you are a **son**, God has made you also an heir."*

God will give us everything!

2. A remarkable rescue

VERSE 3: *"So, also when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world."*

We can't escape!

VERSE 4: *"But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law- to redeem those under the law..."*

But Jesus has rescued us!

2. A remarkable rescue

God's way

My way

Son



Spirit



Heir