

Galatians 4:4-6

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[0 : 00] Well, will you turn in your Bible to the passage that we read in Galatians 4 and we're going to read verses 4-6.

! Now this morning we were thinking about the baptism of Jesus and how what happened at his baptism was actually an act of anointing.

Of consecration and of empowering. And it was an act of the triune God. God the Father anointed, God the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

And of course if our Gospel and if the work of salvation are the work of God, of course it is rooted absolutely in who and in what God is.

So lying behind everything that we have in the Gospel is this great doctrine that our God is one God and our God is three.

[1 : 43] And that same background is before us in the words of our text. Because in this remarkable passage in which Paul is telling us that if we're in Christ we are the sons of God, then behind that, lying back of that, again, is the work of the triune God.

God sent forth his Son. So by implication, the sending God is God the Father and the sent God is God the Son to redeem us.

And having redeemed us and adopted us into his family, God the sending Father, now sends, same word in the Greek, his Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of his Son, into our hearts.

So this remarkable phenomenon of how we actually come to experience the salvation that God has won for us in Jesus Christ is again rooted and grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Now let's just take a moment to reflect on the context of this epistle in which this remarkable teaching is set. In this letter to the Galatians, Paul is talking about the gospel.

[3 : 07] And he's encouraging us, as well as his original readers, to defend the one gospel that there is. I mean, we marvel that there is a gospel at all.

And the gospel is what God in Christ has done for us and for our salvation. But then, as now, that gospel is open to corruption and to compromise in a thousand different ways.

So Paul actually invokes the curse of God on anybody who alters the gospel. The gospel is what Jesus did in his life and death and resurrection and ascension for us and for our salvation.

And the moment we add to that gospel, we have compromised it and we have changed it, in Paul's language, into another gospel that is no gospel at all.

So if you want to make sure that it's the gospel you're preaching, the good news of God's salvation, you need to make sure, according to this epistle and indeed the whole testimony of the Bible, that you are preaching Jesus only as the Savior of sinners and Jesus' work only as the basis of my acceptance before God.

[4 : 38] There were teachers in the regions of Galicia who were compromising that by saying, yes, we believe that Jesus lived and we believe that Jesus died and we believe that we need to believe in Jesus.

But in addition to that, you must keep all the extraneous requirements of law and ceremony and you must in some way supplement what Jesus did by your own obedience.

Well, Paul's great argument here is that an addition to the gospel is actually a subtraction. And the moment you try to supplement Jesus Christ with anything, the moment you bring a plus into it, is the moment you're subtracting and actually denying the gospel of God's grace.

And it really doesn't matter what your plus is. If your message is Jesus plus your church attendance, or Jesus plus your religious knowledge, or Jesus plus your theological orthodoxy, or Jesus plus your law-keeping, or Jesus plus your experience, you are actually degrading the gospel of God's redeeming grace.

Now, I'm not for a moment decrying or undermining the necessity of experience, or orthodoxy, or church attendance, or law-keeping.

[6 : 11] But you make sure that you put them all in that proper place, and see them in that proper context, because at last, the whole of the gospel is in the exclusiveness and the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, as he expounds this great theme in Galatians, Paul comes to give us the great motto of his life, and it should be written over the life of every one of us, and over all our churches, God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let that be my gospel. Let it be what Jesus did in his life, in his law-keeping, in his experience, so that in Luther's great words, the gospel is outside of me.

It's the very opposite of the world's philosophy. The world will tell you tonight that all your problems are outside of you. They're in the world around you, and the challenges that you're presented with every day.

That's where your problems are. And your solution is inside of you. So, all you need to do is tap into your inner resources, and you'll soon find an answer to life's challenges and problems.

[7 : 32] And the gospel comes and says the very reverse of that. The problems are inside of you, and the solution is outside of you.

And it's outside of you, you must look to Jesus, and to Jesus only. And so, when anybody comes to you and says, what must I do to be saved?

You answer the way Paul answered. You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are saved. And faith comes, I think St. Clapper doesn't say somewhere, it is active, but non-contributory.

In other words, when I believe, I'm not contributing anything to my salvation. I'm simply coming, and I'm taking what's there. With an empty hand, taking from the riches of Christ, and I'm made all the richer.

You go for your shopping into the supermarket, and nowadays, you need to take your shopping bag with you. Because if you're going to take the plastic bag from the shop, you're going to have to pay five pence.

[8 : 42] At least that's the cost in Scotland. So you spend £100 on your weekly shopping, but you grudge that extra five pence for the carrier bag. So you make sure that you take your shopping bag with you.

Your shopping bag doesn't contribute anything to what you've purchased. It doesn't make the food you've bought any sweeter to your taste. It doesn't do anything to what you're going to make of the food.

But if you don't have it, you'll struggle to carry what you've bought, and take it home. And faith is a bit like that. It's your empty shopping bag that you take to the marketplace of the gospel, where the bread of life is there for the taking, and you need the shopping bag to take it home.

So you come with your faith, and you fill it with Jesus, and with Jesus only, and you carry it with you, and you feed on him everywhere.

And I want you to know tonight that the gospel is as simple as that. I want you to go into this world and say to sinners, you are in need of saving.

[9 : 56] Here is the gospel. You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. I need you to know that. But I want you to know that undergirding that simple message of Jesus only is this magnificent, multidimensional work on the part of the Triune God.

Because Jesus only is the Jesus sent by the Father. Jesus only is the Jesus who has been commissioned for a specific purpose.

Jesus only is the Jesus by whom it is possible for you to have the Holy Spirit in your heart. So I want to explore that tonight as we come to these magnificent words of Paul.

And Paul, of course, is operating here in terms of transitions. You know, he's talking about transitions in history. He's talking about a long, long time when the church was under ceremony and under laws and civil requirements that are no longer enforced.

Transitions now to the simplicity that there is in Christ. He's also paralleled with that and intertwined with that. He's talking about transitions in experience.

[11 : 28] He's talking about coming to faith in Christ led by the law, our schoolmaster, schoolmaster, to bring us to Jesus. So there's a point in history when God's way of dealing with the word changes.

But there's a point in our experience too when God brings us at last through all of these things simply to close in with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I want to ask three very basic questions tonight. I want to ask, what did God the Father do for me? To give me Jesus only. And then I want to ask, what did God the Son do for me?

To give me Jesus only. And then I want to ask, what does God the Holy Spirit do for me? In order to give me Jesus only. And when I ask these questions, I'm conscious all the time of the limitations of our own minds and intellect.

Because we're making distinctions where there is no separation. Now if you know anything about theology, you know that that is the fundamental rule in theology.

[12:50] There are some things that must be distinguished from each other but must never be separated from each other. And the persons of the Godhead are where we begin.

We must distinguish them. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father. These persons are to be distinguished but not separated because there is only one God.

And the fullness of God is in each person in his own way. So the fullness of God is in the Father. And the fullness of God is in the Son.

And the fullness of God is in the Holy Spirit. So I react very strongly against theologians that write about the members of the Trinity as if the Trinity was some kind of club comprised of three members.

Because the matter is much deeper than that. So I just prefer the old theology that speaks about three persons in the Godhead. And I speak more than I can possibly ever know.

[14:04] Because I don't understand in order to believe. But I do believe in order to understand. So I come before the triune God of Scripture and I say what does this God do for me in the person of the Father?

And my text tells me that God the Father is the sending God. He sent the Son forth.

He sent him out. He ex-apostulated him. I'm making up that word. But it really is what the Greek says.

His Son is an apostle and he is sent out. So he's the sent Son. Sent forth from God. And the same language of course is used here of the Spirit.

Sent forth from God into our hearts. So God the Father for me and for my salvation is the sending God.

[15:08] He sent his Son. When did he send his Son? Well he sent his Son according to my text when the fullness of the time had come.

God never does anything that is not at exactly the right time. And Christ came into the Word at exactly the right time.

And God had been preparing the ages for that time. That's why I love the way John struck his gospel with all his references to the hour.

So you study John's gospel. Look at how often John talks about the hour. He begins his miracle working at Cana in Galilee at the marriage and uses that language his hour my hour has not yet come.

My hour has not yet come. My hour has not yet come. And then we hear him praying in chapter 17 and saying now the hour has come.

[16:19] And he's conscious all the time that he's moving towards the hour that heaven had set.

And in eternity where there are no hours time was invented in the mind of God and an hour was set on the calendar of history and God drew the timeline and every event that would take place on the timeline of history and marked the spot and the very hour at which the sun would be sent forth into the world by the father.

And so he comes when the fullness of the time had come. I'd rather like to think of it in terms of the building of a grand theatre.

You're about to build an extension to this building. I hope it will be a grand theatre. I hope I'll see it one day. We had a new school built in our district and it was great just walking into the pristine new school the time had come.

I mean you looked at the whole building program and process and you thought that it would never come. You'll think that too. You'll think we'll never ever finish this project.

But I tell you this, the last day always comes. Whether it's the last day of term or the last day of the year or the last day of the holidays, the last day always comes.

[17 : 50] And the last day of preparation will come and you'll enter into your grand new theatre. which is only for us Presbyterians a plain meeting house.

It's not the church. So God is busy all through the Old Testament building a theatre. He begins in Genesis 1, doesn't he?

When he makes the world, he's got his plan, he's laying the foundations of the earth life. And it's his grand project. And the triune God is making this world.

I mean, who made the world? Well, God made the world. But John tells us that the creation is actually the act of the word, who is God and with God.

By him all things were made and without him nothing was made that was made. Because he's the unmade maker of all things. And the triune God is making the world.

[18 : 56] And as Shakespeare put it all, the world is a stage. And that's what God is making. He's making a stage on which at the last his great drama of redemption is going to be enacted.

And suddenly, one day, his design is perfected and the principal actor of the drama walks onto the stage.

And it's actually the designer and the builder of the stage. He takes the principal role in this dramatic work of redemption.

The triune God in the person of Jesus coming onto the stage to be the great worker of my salvation. and the fullness of the time had come.

Everything ready. The stage is set. And now God sends him into this one. That's when he came. And how did he come?

[20 : 02] Well, he didn't come to a fanfare of trumpets and choirs of waiting angels. I know that we have that idea, you know, in Luke chapter two, that the shepherds were treated to some kind of remarkable choral performance by the angels when Jesus was born.

But you get that from your storybooks. That's not what the Bible says. They didn't sing glory to God in the highest because it was some kind of polished performance of the heavenly hallelujah chorus. Who did the singing? the hosts of heaven did the singing. That word hosts is the Old Testament word for armies, not for choirs.

It's the anthem of heaven's infantry and of heaven's soldiers. And actually what they're singing is the anthem that is appropriate because their commander-in-chief has actually come into the field of battle where as the captain of our salvation he's going to wage war with the devil to crush him and to defeat him so that we might be saved.

Glory to God in the highest. Let's go to Bethlehem. That's where the king is born. And Jesus is born in Bethlehem because David was born in Bethlehem, the great captain of the Lord's hosts.

[21 : 45] Actually it's the other way around. David is born in Bethlehem because Jesus was born in Bethlehem. But that's for another day. Now on the fields the shepherds hear the not the massed choirs of heaven but the combined armies of heaven and they're standing to attention and they're singing glory to God in the highest.

Now there will be peace on earth because the king has come. Who is this king? This king of hosts? It's the Lord mighty in battle and it's a warrior king that appears for us and for our salvation.

And he is sent but you would never know him as the warrior king because he is simply born of a woman. And he's there born in some cave somewhere don't sanitize it.

He's there in some cave somewhere and Mary gives birth with all the pains that the curse pronounced because this is the defeater and reverser of the curse coming.

And he's made under the law there's his subjection and he's come as the obedient one simply saying not my will but your will be done.

[23 : 22] God sends his son. God the father is also going to send God the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

And when does he do that? He does that when the fullness of the time comes. He sends the Spirit into your heart when your own has come.

The glorious sovereignty of God in our salvation means that he determines the point of our regeneration.

Glory be to him that's on his timeline too. It's on his list of things to do. He's going to bring us into a place where his Spirit will be sent into the hearts of his people and melt these hard hearts so that

we will close in with Jesus only.

And we will be born not of woman, not of the will of man, not of the will of the flesh, but of God because God the Father does the sending.

[24 : 38] What does God the Son do for me? Well, he comes. He comes, doesn't he? He simply obeys the commission. He comes into the world and he takes my nature and he is under God's law for me and he does that according to my text for two distinct reasons.

Distinct but inseparable. He does it first of all to redeem me because I need redeeming. That word redeem and redemption that are so much part of the vocabulary of an evangelical gospel theology. It's actually a word, as you know, from the word of the marketplace. When you're redeem, you are buying. You have to part with your money.

You can't keep it clenched in your fist. You have to part with your money and buy something. I don't know that there is a greater illustration of that than what happens in the book of Hosea.

You know the story of Hosea who was commanded to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him. Remarkable providence. And he had to love her fiercely and vehemently and uncompromisingly.

[26 : 07] Even to the point where when she had prostituted herself and become a slave, he had to go down to the marketplace where slaves were stripped naked and were put on show and sold to the highest bidder.

And Hosea is watching just to buy his wife Gomer from those who were selling her as a slave. And the bidding begins.

What will I make for Gomer? Somebody say I'll give you a handful of barley fire. And so the bidding continues until Hosea at last goes as far as he can, gives possibly all that he has.

A homer and a leite of barley and measures without them and the auctioneers say sold. Hosea you've bought her. And now that language comes into the New Testament.

It's already of course been so much part of the Old Testament's theology but Hosea says I bought her for myself and I said to her now I've bought you, you belong to me. And Christ has come in order to pay the price of my liberation out of slavery and set me free.

[27 : 27] All that's necessary, he has outbidded everyone my great, here is my redeemer, he has come into this one and has given his very life as the price of my redemption.

The son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom. So now in the great words from the book of Job, God looks at the cross and simply says of his people, deliver them from going down to the pit.

I have found a ransom. the price is paid in the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is done, the great transactions done.

It is finished. That part of his work that Jesus could only do on earth, he finished on earth.

before the eyes of the world, like the priest officiating at the outward altar in the temple courtyard, in the tabernacle, Jesus has officiated at that altar, offered the sacrifice, paid the price, and it is finished.

[28 : 52] He came to redeem. But if that was all he did, what hope could I have that I was saved?

You see, something else happens that is distinct from redemption but inseparable from it. God sent his son to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

He had one son and gave him so that he might have many sons through the giving of that one. And so I'm redeemed and bought from my slavery so that through Christ I might be brought into the family of God.

That's my ultimate security, isn't it? That having been purchased by him, I will not be lost by him. I love these great words in the drama of the Joseph story in the book of Genesis.

Who was the most important of the sons of Jacob? That's a great question. And if you say Joseph, you're wrong. I don't think Joseph was the greatest of the sons of Jacob, not in the redemptive history of the Bible.

[30 : 29] Because the Messiah was going to come from Judah, not from Joseph. And sometimes I think that the only reason Joseph is where he is in Egypt is just to keep Judah alive.

And I think that that's one of the reasons why the sordid stories of Judah are there in the book of Genesis. To remind us that it's not according to our righteousness, because we have none, but the sheer sovereign grace of God that provides us savior even against the backdrop of our sins.

Judah is there right at the beginning of the story. Let's not kill Joseph. Let's sell him as a slave, he says, because he's our brother. Can you hear the irony in that? We'll not kill him.

He's our brother, so let's just sell him as a slave. But Joseph is spared. And then of course everything happens, and the famine happens, and the brothers have to come down, and Jacob is willing to let them all come down except Benjamin.

He's already, as he thinks, lost the son of Rachel that he loved. Joseph is not going to let the other one, Benjamin, go. But Joseph knows what he's doing. Engineers it. Read it if you don't know it.

[31 : 42] Engineers it so that at last Benjamin has to come. There's no other option. He has to come down. Jacob says, no, no, no, you've already, you've already been, I'm already bereft of everyone.

I'm not going to let Benjamin. Judah says, I'll be the pledge of his safety. I'll look after him. My life for his. Let me stand in his place. So off they go down to Egypt with Benjamin.

And then there's that whole business of the cup of Joseph found in Benjamin's sack. So Joseph says, okay, I'm going to keep Benjamin here. We can all go back home.

Genesis chapter 44, the longest single speech in Genesis, Judah steps forward. Pleased with Joseph for the life of Benjamin.

I promised my father I would be a pledge of his safety. Please keep me and let him go. He began selling the son of Rachel as a slave.

[32 : 48] Now he wants to make himself a slave for the other son of Rachel. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?

And I seem to hear in the gospel a greater than Judah saying and doing exactly the same thing. Jesus has come to be the pledge of my salvation and will not go back to his father without me because I am his brother.

And he came to be like me, born of a woman who was all together unlike me in his sinless perfection. But he did all of that so that I might receive adoption into his family.

And my brother now, Jesus now, stands before God and says I am not coming back to heaven without the children that you gave me.

They are yours and you gave them to me. and the words that you gave to me I have given to them and now in the glory of this great work of redemption he makes me his brother and is not ashamed to call me such.

[34 : 19] And is himself the pledge of my eternal salvation. So that's what the son does for me. He comes to redeem in order that I might receive sonship into the family of God.

And that is good. It's good. But how do I know it's true? How could I ever have that assurance that I've been adopted into the family and redeemed by Christ?

I'll tell you how. because in this remarkable tie in salvation the completeness comes when God who sent the son now sends the spirit.

And where does he send the spirit? He sends the spirit who is the spirit of his son into the hearts of his people.

That's why you're described as a new creation. A new theatre for God's glory to be displayed. That old heart of yours on which was transacted and enacted all kinds of sinful business and gave no glory to God.

[35 : 44] He has now made into a theatre prepared for his own divine drama of redemption. In the theatre of history, he accomplished that great work in the theatre of your heart.

He now applies that work and makes it personal to you. So the God who sent his son in history, sends his spirit in history, not two thousand years away from where you are and not thousands of miles away from where you are, but right now where you are sends the spirit into your heart.

And how do I know he's there? Because I cry Abba father.

And I use the same language of God that the son uses. He calls God father and so now do I.

So this is not some kind of hallucination this thing when you say, well, God is my God and I want to pray to him. It's real. There is a real person, a divine person in the hearts of real people, sinful people, and where the spirit is, God is.

[37 : 32] Christ says, doesn't he, that he will send the comforter, he will dwell with you forever, the spirit of truth, and the spirit comes into the hearts of his people and Christ says, we will come to that person.

So where the spirit is, the whole of the Godhead is. And if the spirit is in your heart, the triune God is there.

God is faithful who called us into the fellowship of his son.

And just as the word was with God in the beginning, so we are with God in Christ Jesus now, and shall be with God forever and ever.

But Paul doesn't say when we have the spirit, we say, Abba, Father. What he says is, when we have the spirit, we cry, Abba, Father.

[38 : 47] in his book on the Holy Spirit, Sinclair Ferguson draws attention to this. It's a book that I commend to everyone. When they ask me, what would I take with me to a desert island?

Some people might think I'm there already, but when I go to a desert island, I'm going to take Sinclair Ferguson on the Holy Spirit. If I can't just take Sinclair Ferguson, of course.

And he deals with this text, and he says, this is the word of intense emotion that we hear when the boy with the epileptic fits is possessed, and he's screaming.

That's the word. He's screaming. It's the word of the shout of Bartimaeus when he shrieks over the crowd to Jesus. It's the word that's used of Christ on the cross.

with a loud voice at the very end. He cries out. The atmosphere here, says Ferguson, is not tranquility, but crisis.

[40 : 03] the usage of this word in the gospels, it's a cry at critical moments. No other hope, no other place.

It's the scream of sheer abandonment, and of sheer hope in God alone. God has sent the spirit of his son into my heart, so that I shriek to heaven, and I say, thou must save, and thou alone.

It's an amazing use of child language, isn't it? Abba, father. But don't let's think of it merely in terms of intimacy and security.

All of these things are in it, certainly. The emphasis is on the relationship that is absolutely fundamental even at the most critical moments of our experience.

And when I'm stripped of everything, the spirit enables me to cry, father. And in the valley of the shadow, the spirit enables me to cry, father.

[41 : 16] In life and in death, the spirit enables me to cry, father, because in Jesus only I have discovered that there is absolutely no refuge for my soul but the refuge that there is in Jesus Christ.

So I can sing the chorus other, father, father, father, to the most beautiful melody. I don't think that's what Paul is saying here.

I think he's saying that at your lowest depths, even at the point at which you are doubting that you were ever saved, Christ to heaven and you are saying Jesus of Nazareth, son of David, come to me, I need you, and there is no other place for me to go but to your finished work, at Calvary.

That's what the spirit does for me, and enables me to look heavenward and to say Abba. So my friends tonight, I need you to know that you don't need to know any of this in order to be saved.

I need you to know that you only need to know that Jesus died for sinners, and that you must trust to him.

[43 : 03] That's what I need you to know. But I want you to see the gospel in color, not just in black and white. And I want you to know that it's the gospel of the three in one.

It's the gospel of our glorious God, the sending Father, the coming Son, and the coming Spirit, all so that I can dance with God throughout eternity in the fellowship of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God and the tiniest glimpse of that, then I cry out all the depth and the length and the breadth and the height of the love of God that passes all knowledge.

and I shall stand as I might stand on the west coast of Lewis looking at a Hebridean sunset with no words, just a mouth wide open at the sheer glory of what God has done and for all eternity be lost in wonder and love and praise Jesus only in all the multi-dimensional functionality of the persons of the Godhead in the business of saving may God anchor my soul in that great rock of ages let's pray