**GOD’S CHRISTMAS GIFT**

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Galatians 4:4-7

Galatians 4: 4-7 (NLT)

*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. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.*

What a beautiful passage! This is about 50-55 years after the birth of Jesus – Paul is writing to the church of Galatia under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He says, “I want to remind you about the fullness of time, when the right time came and God decided to do something for the salvation of the entire world.

*In the fullness of time, 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.*

This morning, beloved, you and I are adopted children of the most high God, and because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Because we are God’s children, God’s Spirit resides in your heart and mine, enabling us to be able to refer to God as Abba, Father. Our Father who art in heaven! Then he says, “You are no longer a slave but God’s own child, and since you are His child, we also become heirs of God – heirs to the incredible inheritance that God has kept in store for us.

What a beautiful plethora of things Paul has placed there – that in this fullness of time….

**What is this fullness of time?**

When we try to understand the fullness of time, we look at the genealogies. In Matthew we see that the genealogy goes from Abraham all the way down to Jesus. Then in Luke, we see that the genealogy goes even further back to Adam. So, we see that from Adam, which includes the whole world, and when we look at Abraham which includes the law and the prophets, he’s combining both and saying that in the fullness of time was for all creation. And yet, in His humanity, Jesus was born in the lineage of the Jewish people and culture and what that meant for all us?

Because the fullness of time happened again in terms of when we look at history; we see that Rome’s dominance was so strong at that time. But they had taken over from the Greeks who had brought culture and philosophy and thinking to the people there. Even in all the parts of the Roman Empire, Greek was spoken, not the Greek that we have here today which is a classical kind of Greek, but Koine Greek, the Greek of the marketplace. The common people spoke Greek and that’s what the language the New Testament was written in.

It was the fullness of time even in terms of history and culture. Why fullness of time in history? When you look at Roman dominance – they had conquered everything around them and had established their rule. Having done that, there was a sense of peace around – no more war. So, it allowed them to build roadways connecting all the cities around. That then enabled the gospel to go out freely. Ships could travel freely around the Mediterranean region without any problem, allowing the gospel to go freely, as Paul would his missionary journeys. In the fullness of time God sent His Son to be our Savior, to make us His children and to make us His heirs. How beautiful! In the fullness of time, the Savior was born.

**What does He offer to us?**

As a Savior, He offers salvation to us. He came, He lived a sinless life, He gave His life for you and for me, and then He rose again and is now back in heaven. He did all those things for you and for me. The Bible tells us that He did all this while we were yet sinners. It’s not that we were so good that God thought: These people are so good on the earth; I’ve got to make sure they come to heaven. No! We were far away from God, steeped in our sin. The bible says there was no one who was without sin. The consequences of that was death. But God couldn’t bear that, and He sent His Son to pay that penalty of death, take it upon Himself so that we could then spend eternity with Him.

Maybe you’re a visitor to this online service today. Maybe you’re just here because it’s Christmas and you feel that it’s the right thing to do. I’m so glad that you think that way and you are listening to this. Because this wonderful gift of God is for you, you who think that you are just here by chance or because it is what you do every Christmas. Yet, God has a word for you – He has given His Son to pay the penalty for your sin. And if you accept that penalty and say, “Yes, I am indeed a sinner. I have done many things that are against God’s laws and principles. I’ve just lived my life.”

Well, the good news for you is that this life doesn’t have to be all it is. You can spend eternity with God, spend eternity with all your loved ones who also know Jesus. All you need to do is to be able to say: “Yes, I too want to appropriate that finished work of Jesus giving Himself for me on Calvary.” Then this Christmas can become a day of celebration, not only for you but for the angels in heaven. So, I’m glad you’re here if you’re here just because it’s Christmas.

What about for others who are here as Christians, but you’re saying, “I’m here! It’s the right thing to do. I’ve drummed up the enthusiasm – put up the tree and the lights, done some cooking, made some sweets, put up the star, whatever! But deep inside, it isn’t Christmas for me. I’m just going through the motions. Somehow it doesn’t seem real because of what has transpired in these last nine months. But I’m a Christian, I’m a follower of Jesus and I’m trying to get excited about it.”

To you, I would say that Christmas means much more than all the decorations and all the trappings. You and I know that. but I also want to say this to you, that Jesus, born in a manger so many years ago, also means a host of other things as well. along with salvation, He has brought other things into our lives that were meant to help us navigate these difficult days.

**What are the other things that Jesus has brought into our lives?**

They are the things that we have celebrated every Sunday till now; the themes that we have had in terms of hope, and peace, and love, and joy – the gifts that are the extra things even beyond salvation that Jesus’ birth means for you and for me. If we are able to bring each of those areas to bear on what’s going on in our lives today, the things we can’t control, the things that are sitting heavy on us, I believe that there would be a resurrection of the joy of Christmas and the exhilaration of thinking about that wonderful time when in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son.

So, allow me to unpack those four areas for us so that we can once again be invigorated, and let that light that we talked about last week, begin to shine again through us. Then this enthusiasm that we may have drummed up suddenly becomes real, and there’s an excitement that builds up within our spirits that says: This Jesus, who I believe in, He trumps all my situations and circumstances, dim and bleak though they may be. Still I have peace, I have hope, I have joy and I have love that can ignite a fire within me.

So, let’s look at these four areas together. Hope, love, peace and joy.

1. **HOPE**

Maybe, you’re not in a place where you’re very hopeful. Maybe your hope is in a hope-less situation. Or maybe you are saying, “Yeah, I have hope.” If you have hope, great. That’s a wonderful place to be. But if you don’t have hope, remember that because of Jesus in your heart, in your life, you can have hope. As I was thinking about this, I couldn’t get away from the image of the woman who was hemorrhaging for 12 years, pushing her way through a crowd that she knew she could get into trouble with if they knew who she was and what she was suffering from. She must have been muttering under her breath, “If I can just touch the hem of His garment, I can be whole. If I can just touch the hem of His garment; if I can just touch the hem of His garment…,” pressing in, pressing in, because she knew that there would be hope in the person of Jesus.

The thing with being in a hopeless situation is that it moves us away from God, in a sense. We say: I’m in this situation. Okay, I’m just going to ride it out though I don’t know how. Instead, what we need to do is to present to God at that time and say, “Lord, I’m in this situation. You’ve got to do something. I’m coming in Lord. I’m pressing in. Lord, all that You need and can give me, You need to give me. I need renewed hope.” God is one who can always dispense hope to us. We are never in a hopeless situation because we are sons and daughters of an omnipotent God, who cares and loves you, has made you His child, and an heir of His inheritance. This inheritance is so great and vast that you can never run out of hope.

Maybe this Christmas, what He’s saying is, “Come a little closer. Come close to Me.” Maybe you’re down and out, but He’s saying to you, “Come! You’re My child. You don’t need to be in a hopeless situation.” Living hope is what we have. It’s not a dead hope. It’s a living hope because Jesus burst through that grave. And that bursting out of death gives us hope. Even as we look at the past, we see Jesus rose from the dead. And then we see the present. It continues in the present because Jesus is alive, as we see in Colossians 3:1. It’s an enduring hope forever because He promises eternal life and a resurrection in that day. So, we have a living hope that enables us to live our life without despair as we encounter different situations and circumstances.

This living hope is also sold and secure. Hebrews 6:19 says we have this hope as an anchor for the soul. Maybe you don’t feel like you’re anchored today. You’re just being tossed by your waves. Maybe you need to just focus on Him and recognize that you are anchored in Him and He’ll hold you through this time.

I love the song that goes:

We have an anchor that keeps the soul

Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;

Fastened to the rock which cannot move;

Grounded firm and deep in the Savior’s love!

So, if you’re without hope today, this Christmas Day, let your hope be renewed and restored as you press in towards this living hope.

1. **LOVE**

We are loved of God, beloved. Again, maybe this Christmas, you’re in a place where you’re not feeling love. You don’t feel like you’re loved; in fact, you feel unloved. Maybe you’re alone, unable to connect with people or just feeling unloved. This verse, that we all know by heart, brings this love home to us: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”*

For God so loved you, yes you, that He gave His only Son because of His love for you. And today, you are a dearly loved child of God. Believe it, even if you think nobody loves you around here. Maybe you’re in that position on this Christmas day. God’s love for you has never failed or stopped. Will you just accept that? maybe you’re not yet ready to believe it, but just say: Okay. I’ll take that. god’s love for me is available.

Graham Kendrick wrote this song. It says:

Such love, pure as the whitest snow

Such love, weeps for the shame I know.

Such love, paying the debt I owe.

O Jesus, such love.

Such love, stilling my restlessness (and maybe that’s where you are)

Such love, filling my emptiness (and again maybe, that’s where you are)

Such love, showing me holiness (maybe, that’s where you need to turn your attention to)

O Jesus, such love.

Such love, springs from eternity

Such love, beloved, reaches out to you and to me today. Unloved though you may feel, you are dearly loved by God.

Paul, in trying to express the beauty of God’s love says this (Ephesians 3:17-19)

*“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord’s holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.”*

You may not be able to understand it but God’s love is “deeper than the deepest ocean, wider than the widest sea, as the chorus used to go. God’s love is available for you today, dearly beloved. As we said of hope – press in. We say of love now – just accept it, for He offers it to you.

1. **PEACE**

What kind of peace? Maybe you’re filled with uncertainty, maybe there’s stress all around, maybe health is not good, the office position is not good, home situation not good. There’s a lot of turmoil and upheaval, and peace seems to be distant. You’re saying: “I don’t understand. The Prince of Peace is what they call Jesus, but I don’t feel that peace. I look around and there’s no peace.” Yet, if I can bring to your recall the words Jesus says, “My peace I leave with you. Peace that the world doesn’t understand, and it’s a peace that passes human understanding.”

That’s the kind of peace He gives to you and to me this Christmas. It’s a peace that doesn’t make everything normal again. It’s a peace that was modelled for us in that picture of the storm and the boat being rocked to and fro. The disciples try to hold on and then Jesus sleeping in the back of the boat. That’s the kind of peace Jesus is talking about. The storms in your life may be real, every situation, every circumstance. But what Jesus says to you is: “In spite of it, I can let My peace so dwell in your heart that they don’t take over your life, but still allow you to be in a peaceful place this Christmas.”

A peace not like the world gives you, but a peace that will pass your understanding. And He says, “My peace I give you.” God’s peace is available to you, and maybe today, you need to look inside and say, “Lord, I too want to rest in the storm. Will You show me how to do it, that this Christmas, in spite of everything around me, would be the most peaceful Christmas I have ever had in my life.” Available to you, My peace, He said, I leave with you.

1. **JOY**

Joy, exceeding great joy was what the wise men felt as they began to search for Jesus so that they could worship Him. We, who live this side of the birth of Jesus, and don’t have to look in anticipation as the prophets and the people of the Old Testament did, but we look in fulfillment of all that has happened. Know that great joy was available to people as they came to worship Him. The wise men saw it, shepherds saw it, the angels rejoiced, because caught up in this little bundle of joy that was our Savior, the Lord Jesus, was the potential for joy inexplicable to touch each one of our hearts. The wise men showed us the way as they came to worship Him. And beloved, we have done just that in our worship of God today. And the legacy that is ours as His children, as we come together and worship Him, set Him on the throne of our lives, is that we will have joy that will come to us.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come;

Let earth receive her King.

Let every heart prepare Him room…

Is there room in your heart for Him? Maybe you haven’t invited Him in. and if you do that this Christmas day, and all you have to say is, “Lord Jesus, I want You to be my Savior. I have done a lot of wrong things, but I know You paid the price, and I accept that. Lord Jesus, please come into my heart.” Love, peace, joy, hope and eternity with Him is what He gives to you.

But if you already have Him in your heart, but the troubles of this world have restricted Him, maybe today you need to say, “I’m going to make space for Jesus, to let the glow of His presence bring great joy, exceeding great joy into my heart. There’s going to be an effervescent sense of His presence filling me, inspiring me, making me want to break out into songs of worship. I’m just so thankful for all that He has done in coming to earth and giving me this joy and peace and hope and love and salvation and eternal life.”

The message of Christmas for you and me! And it’s a glorious message. We don’t need to focus on a manger and a baby because we know that the baby grew up to give His life and is now seated at the right hand of God and one day, we will be with Him. So accept the hope and the joy and the peace and the love this Christmas and may it be an extraordinarily blessed Christmas for you and your loved ones. Amen.