

Dec. 28, 2014 – Galatians 4:4-7 (OT: Psalm 98:1-9 Gospel: Luke 2:1-20)

Jesus is the only gift that changes you:

- *He changes your status.*
- *He changes your heart.*

Did any of the gifts you received this Christmas change your life? That may seem like a strange question. It would be unreasonable to think that something someone bought in a store or made for us themselves could really make such a big difference in our lives. But don't we often focus on external things with the thought, "If only I had this, things would be better!"

The things we look to may not be something that we would expect someone to give us on Christmas. We might think that if only we had more money, or that perfect relationship, our lives would be better. Things like a new car, a new job (or retirement), or a new city, might make our lives easier, but the change they bring is only external and temporary.

This past week we celebrated the only gift that really changes your life: the gift that God has given you in sending His only begotten Son. Jesus changes *you* because He changes your status with God and He changes your heart.

As our Creator, and the Creator of the heavens and the earth, God is in a position to demand our obedience – to require that we obey His laws by doing the things He tells us to do, and not doing the things He tells us not to do.

The problem is, we have done a terrible job! We have failed to follow His commandments. We have loved ourselves more than we have loved God or our neighbor. We have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Galatians 4:3 says that we were "*in bondage under the elements of the world.*" We were all slaves to sin and death.

What would a master do to a servant who daily fails to do what he asks and too often does the very things he doesn't want him to do? He would punish the servant or sell him to someone else. He would not remain the master's servant for very long.

But that is not what God does to you! We read in verses 4-5: "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*"

Last week we looked at why it is so important that Jesus was born of a virgin. Jesus was born of a virgin so that He was not just a man, but also God. Because He is God, His life and death in our place has infinite worth and merit and can take away the sins of the whole world. We are reminded of this here when we are told that "*God sent forth His Son*" to redeem us. Jesus is God made manifest – God made flesh.

The focus here, however, is on the circumstances of Jesus' birth: He was "*born of a woman, born under the law.*" Because Jesus was "*born of a woman*", He is fully human and, as we looked at last week, was tempted in every way just as we are, but He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15-16). Because He was "*born under the law*" Jesus had to obey God's law, which He did throughout His life. He fulfilled God's law for you (Matthew 5:17) by His perfect life.

We read here that the purpose of Jesus's life and death was "*to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*" Jesus redeemed you from servitude to God and God's law by perfectly fulfilling God's law for you. He died in your place on the cross to pay for your sins and rose from the dead so that you no longer God's slave, but you have been adopted as God's son. He redeemed you from slavery to make you a son.

This is a big change! Servants or slaves are rewarded for their obedience and punished for their disobedience. Sons, on the other hand, receive an inheritance from their parents because of their relationship, not because of their obedience. God refers to your adoption as *sons* not to exclude women, but because in New Testament times it was the sons who received the inheritance. God adopts you as a son to emphasize the inheritance that you will receive from God because of the change in your relationship to God. As verse 7 says: *“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”*

The other day I turned on the radio and heard a man talking about “positional authority” as opposed to “relational authority.” “Positional authority” is what someone has because of their role in a person’s life. The example the man on the radio gave was a baby sitter. A baby sitter has authority over a child because he or she has been put into the position of caring for the child and telling that child what to do. The child is to obey the baby sitter because of the baby sitter’s position.

“Relational authority”, on the other hand, is what someone has because of their relationship to the other person. A parent has this kind of authority over a child because he or she is the child’s parent and loves the child. The child obeys his or her parents because of this relationship – the child obeys out of love for the parents.

This illustrates the change that Jesus has made to your life. God had “positional authority” over you as your Creator and could demand absolute obedience. As God’s servant, your reward and blessing was based on your obedience to God. But because of our sin we would expect neither a blessing nor a reward.

But Jesus has redeemed you *“who were under the law.”* You now have received the adoption as sons so that God’s authority has changed from a “positional authority” to a “relational authority.” God is now your Father. You have an inheritance waiting for you in heaven because God, through Christ, has made you His child. Your relationship to God and inheritance are not based on your obedience. They are based on Christ’s obedience to God in your place – something that He has already accomplished.

This change from being a slave to being a son also changes our reason to obey God. We no longer obey God because He is God and we have to, or else! Rather we obey God because He is our loving Heavenly Father. We want to obey God – not to get a reward or to avoid punishment – but because Jesus has taken our punishment upon Himself and earned us an eternal inheritance. We want to obey God because we love Him as our Father in Heaven.

At least in theory. You who have children – and we all who have been children – know that they do not always obey their parents. In fact, sometimes children can get so upset when they are told “no” that they scream “I hate you!”

When it comes to God, we are no different. Sometimes it can be hard to love God. Left to ourselves, we wouldn’t, no matter how great the gift is that God has given us in sending forth His Son, Jesus. That is where verse 6 comes in: *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”* Through the Spirit of His Son, God changes your heart.

God changes your heart from one made of stone that cannot love God to a heart of flesh filled with love from God and love for God. God does this through the Spirit (see Ezekiel 36:26-27) – the same Spirit who gives you faith to trust in the redemption you have in God’s Son. The Holy Spirit creates in you the desire and ability to walk according God’s commands out of love for God – the love that the Spirit Himself puts in your heart (Romans 5:5, 15:30; 2 Timothy 1:7).

In Romans 8:15-17 we have this description of the Spirit's work: *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”*

Here again we see the change from bondage to adoption. It is the Spirit that makes us believe and know that our status has changed. It is by that Spirit that we understand that we are no longer slaves but sons and are now *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”* And it is that Spirit that enables us to love God with all of our heart.

Because you are a child and heir of God, you can now call God “Father.” You can come to God as your loving Father, knowing that He will take care of you and provide for you. When you address God as “Father”, think of all that that means!

Your heavenly Father has given you the greatest gift of all: His Son. Jesus is the only gift that changes you. By His perfect life that fulfilled the law and His death on the cross that removed your sins He has redeemed you from sin and death and made you God's child and heir. And He has sent His Spirit to create in you a new heart that loves God and calls Him “Father.” Thanks be to God for His exceedingly wonderful gift! Amen

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