

A Strange Sense of Timing

Galatians 4:1-7

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A couple weeks ago Beth and I helped her parents put up their Christmas decorations. While I was untangling long strings of lights I noticed that her dad uses several timers to make sure the lights come on when they're supposed to. This was like a new revelation to me because I have never used timers before. For over thirty years, I've gone outside in my socks to plug our lights into sockets and then trudged back outside in my PJs before going to bed to unplug them.

Guess what? We now have three timers at our house! [Hold up timers] One is for the lights in the front and a second one is for our manger display on the hill in our backyard. The third timer is for the Christmas tree in our den. It's like a miracle having our lights turn on at the exact time every night! I love timers so much that I'm thinking about using them on every outlet in our house!

Are you aware that God has a perfect sense of timing? Ecclesiastes 3 contains the most profound statement about time ever written: ***“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...God has made everything beautiful in its time...”*** God is never late, and He is never early because He's always on time.

Jesus lived with an acute awareness of divine timing. Speaking to his mother in John 2:4, Jesus said, ***“My time has not yet come.”*** Responding to His brothers' sense of timing in John 7:6, Jesus said: ***“My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.”*** On another occasion, in Mark 1:15, Jesus gets the green light from God the Father: ***“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”*** Later, in His prayer for His disciples before He died in John 17:1, Jesus cried out, ***“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”***

In our *Upside Down Christmas* series, we've looked at the lineage in the Savior's surprising family tree and discovered different types of people hanging from the branches – the *faithful*, the *failures* and the *forgotten*. Last weekend we were blessed by the children and adult choirs along with the brass ensemble as we looked at how we can be at peace *with* God, how we can have the peace *of* God, how we can experience peace *with* others and we were urged to take the gospel of peace *to* others.

And today we're plugging [see what I did there?] into "*A Strange Sense of Timing.*" While the Christmas narrative is found in Matthew and Luke, Galatians 4 tells us that the divine timer turned the lights on when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Here's where we're headed...

1. **The reality of God's timing is always right** (4).
2. **The reason for God's timing is redemptive** (5).
3. **The result of God's timing is always remarkable** (6-7).

The Book of Galatians was written to help new Gentile believers understand their liberty from the rules and regulations of the Old Testament. A huge problem plagued the early church because some Christians from a Jewish background insisted that these new believers had to follow all the laws. The Law however, is designed to show us our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. The Apostle Paul establishes that it's impossible to totally keep the Law and that Christ has freed us from bondage to it. Chapter 3 ends with the reminder that all born again believers are offspring of Abraham and heirs of the promises of God.

Turn to Galatians 4:1-3. Our focus will be on verses 4-7 but let's make sure we put our text into context: "*I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*" The picture is of a Roman father who plans to turn over his inheritance to his son when he reaches maturity. But until that happens, the son is like a slave, in that he has no special privileges. He does not have one penny of the inheritance in his possession and has guardians and managers who are in complete control of his person and property until he reaches a certain age. When the time is right, at a predetermined date set by the father, he will officially become a son, enjoying all the rights and privileges of sonship.

With that as background, listen to the beginning of verse 4: "*But when the fullness of time had come...*" That leads to our first point.

1. The reality of God's timing is always right. The phrase, "*the fullness of time*" is a very eloquent expression that means something is complete and fully developed, like ripe fruit ready to be picked. It was also used of a pregnant woman

experiencing labor pains. The stage was perfectly set for the Savior to be sent. If we stand back and look at what was happening behind the scenes, we can see how the reality of God's timing is always right.

- **Political preparation.** Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, Alexander the Great conquered the world. The Greek language united people and could be read and understood by almost everyone. Later, the New Testament was written in Greek and was widely dispersed. The next world power was Rome. They built roads that linked the entire empire. This enabled the gospel message to quickly spread everywhere.
- **Spiritual preparation.** Because Roman society was morally bankrupt, people became very superstitious, extremely immoral, and totally corrupt. Paul described this situation in Romans 1. Because they had ignored the true God, and turned to idolatry, they were given over to paganism and perversion.

Sounds like our society today, doesn't it? I read an article this week on CBS.com about the rising popularity of witchcraft. One witch, who refers to herself as "the high priestess," made this telling comment: "*The time is right...there are definitely more of us than you think.*"

In addition, God's people had just come through 400 years of silence from the time of Malachi to Matthew. The people were ready for God to speak. They were prepared for Him to make a visit. Even though they didn't know the carol, this cry was in their heart:

*O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.*

- **Prophetic preparation.** Did you know that God had been predicting all along exactly what was going to happen? These prophecies, made hundreds of years in advance, have been fulfilled with pinpoint precision.
- **People preparation.** Consider how God prepared two people to experience the Incarnation at just the right time.

Simeon. After Jesus was born, his parents dedicated Him in the Temple. At that exact moment a devout man named Simeon came up to them. According to Luke 2:25, he was “***waiting for the consolation of Israel.***” He was told that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Verses 27-28 show how God positions people exactly where he wants them for His purposes: “***Moved by the Spirit...Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...***”

Anna. After Simeon blessed the baby, they came face-to-face with a widow named Anna. Notice the first part of Luke 2:38: “***Coming up to them at that very moment...***” The Majesty moved her so that she could speak about the Messiah at that exact moment!

Look now at the second half of Galatians 4:4: “***...God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law.***”

- **God sent forth His Son.** The word “*sent*” means “*to commission by sending forth.*” This shows His deity because the eternal Son was sent forth by the eternal Father. What has God done? He has sent His Son!
- **Born of woman.** Jesus was sent forth from the Father and was also born of woman, meaning He is fully man. God not only came to us, but became *like* us. That’s the mystery and majesty of the incarnation. Christ had to be God, for only God can redeem man and He had to be human or He could not have been a perfect sacrifice for sin.
- **Born under the law.** Jesus is the only one who perfectly kept God’s law so He is qualified to take on the curse that we deserve for not keeping His law.

The reality of God’s timing is always right. Let’s look at the second point from this passage...

2. The reason for God’s timing is redemptive. We move from the plan behind the coming of Christ to the purpose of His coming. We see this in verse 5: “***To redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.***”

- **To purchase us.** To redeem means to purchase out of the slave market. It has the idea of rescuing, releasing and delivering from slavery by the payment of a price.

- **To parent us.** Through the new birth we are given standing before God as sons and daughters. The phrase, “*adoption as sons*” literally means, “*taking the position of a son.*” The Son of God took our position on the cross so that we might in turn take our position as sons [and daughters] of God. C.S. Lewis put it like this: “*The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.*”

The Romans practiced a unique form of adoption that is different from our understanding. They recognized all children as part of the family but only those who went through the adoption ritual of son-placing were officially recognized as sons. At the age of 17, the father had a “liberation party” where he would take the youth toga off his son and place on him an adult robe, recognizing him as a man and now an heir of the father.

We *enter* God’s family through redemption, and we *enjoy* God’s family by adoption.

The reality of God’s timing is always right.

The reason for God’s timing is always redemptive.

3. The result of God’s timing is always remarkable. We see this in verses 6-7: “*And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*”

- **Relationship as sons and daughters.** Remarkably, as adopted children we get to call the Father “Abba.” This is a term of endearment that can be translated as papa or “Daddy.” The term Father is a title of respect and Abba speaks of relationship.
- **Recipients of Holy Spirit.** Notice that the Holy Spirit is calling out “*Abba! Father!*” which affirms that He resides within us, sealing us as an adopted son or daughter.
- **Reward of inheritance.** We are no longer slaves to sin but rather sons and daughters who have an eternal inheritance. Do you see the Trinity here? God the Father sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts to give us assurance that our inheritance as heirs is guaranteed.

I like how one pastor summarizes this passage: *“We have seen that the birth of Christ at a definite time was a determined act accomplished by deliberate means to effect a distinct purpose.”*

We go from slaves to sons and from those who have erred to those who are now heirs of God!

*The reality of God’s timing is always right.
The reason for God’s timing is redemptive.
The result of God’s timing is always remarkable.*

Application Time

I see two applications that we can trust the Holy Spirit to apply to our lives.

1. Trust God’s timing in your life. Just as He worked out His plan perfectly at Christmas, He is wonderfully working out His purposes in your life right now. Since He controlled the details surrounding the birth of the Savior, can He not control the particulars in your life? Maybe your circumstances don’t look very good right now. Will you trust His timing anyway? Perhaps you’ve been angry with God because you don’t like what’s happening. It’s time to surrender to the Savior just like Mary did when she said, *“May it be to me as you have said.”* It’s time to trust His timing.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *“There are no loose threads in the providence of God...the great clock of the universe keeps good time.”*

My wife Beth experienced this recently. She’s a nurse at Pregnancy Resources and wrote the following:

Time. It defines our days and moments. Sometimes we have too much of it and sometimes not enough. Author Jen Wilken says that time is one of the limits that God has put upon us. It reminds us that we are not God. For God is timeless and not constrained to time. He is not bound to a clock nor to a calendar. “At just the right time,” God came to earth delivered as a human baby. At just the right time, Christmas happened.

People coming into our centers or approaching the Mobil Medical Van at a certain time, is not just coincidence. We believe that Jesus Christ actually

oversees the timing of all these things. And He doesn't waste time or lose time.

This fall, a woman called and made an appointment for her co-worker who had confided that she was unexpectedly pregnant and that both she and the baby's father wanted an abortion. The caller said she would bring her co-worker and translate into Spanish for her. During her pregnancy test appointment, it was revealed that she had only been in the US for 6 months and didn't speak any English.

Interestingly, the translator shared that she had been a former client when she herself was a young teen with an unplanned pregnancy and unsure of what to do. When her coworker had shared her pregnancy secret, the translator knew exactly where to bring her new friend for help and support. The translator offered to bring her friend to Pregnancy Resources where she had chosen life for her baby years earlier. After the initial appointment, Pam, our center director, sensed that the client needed to meet with someone who could speak Spanish. Two days later, I was to meet with this young Hispanic woman.

Way back in 1996, my husband and I and our three daughters left the US to be church planting missionaries in Mexico City. That first day in Mexico all we knew in Spanish was "hola." [that's still all I know!] Three years later, after learning the language and making ministry contacts and beginning to see people learn about Christ, we had to leave Mexico. Returning to the US was one of the most disappointing times in my life. I didn't think that I had had enough time there...but my time was up.

We were concerned when the client didn't show for her next two appointments. She had seemed determined to get an abortion. And so we prayed for her. Amazingly, she did return for an ultrasound appointment with me, a Spanish-speaking nurse. After the facts and risks of abortion, telling the "message in a bottle" story and giving her a quilt, she said she still thought an abortion was her only option.

I wondered what she would choose. And so we went to prayer at the centers, leaning on God to do His work in His time. After that ultrasound appointment, I read what the client had written on her exit survey about what she gained from her ultrasound. She wrote, "How valuable is the life that I carry inside." We kept praying.

About a week later, the client told me on the phone that something had changed inside her and she had decided to carry her baby! Something in the translator's past and something in the nurse's past were used to help a frightened Hispanic woman in the present. God is not constrained by time, but rather He works at the right time and in His time. God chose the virgin Mary, who obviously realized how valuable was the life that she would carry inside, the Savior Jesus.

He came at the right time, to die at the right time, to offer life to us, for all time.

Will you trust God's timing in your life?

2. Receive the gift of Jesus right now. God's perfect timing must come down to the personal level. It is no accident that you are here today. This is your appointed time to accept what Jesus has done for you. 2 Corinthians 6:2: ***"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."*** Don't put off the most important decision of your life. Decide right now to receive Jesus into your life.

Two and a half years ago I took our summer intern, Sam Anderson, with me to make some hospital visits. After visiting a few people I called the church office to see if anyone else was in the hospital. As we were just about to get on the elevator to leave I received an email that Patty Kraft had been admitted. Sam and I turned around and went into Patty's room.

Here's how Patty describes what happened next: *"I was very sick, wondering if I was going to live...I was scared, confused and depressed. We talked about God and prayed. I told you that [two months] earlier I was brought by ambulance to Trinity hospital unconscious. And how I saw nothing but a 'white and a very bright shiny light.' God was not ready for me yet...You asked me if I wanted to get saved. I said, 'Oh, yes!!' I was ready. I wanted to be saved. It was then that I accepted our wonderful and amazing [Christ] into my life. How amazing! I immediately felt different. I wasn't afraid anymore and felt peace and comfort over me. It was then that I knew I was going to get a new liver. I had my liver transplant on November 2, 2015...Thank you for coming into my hospital room that day...you came to me at just the 'right time.'"* [show slide]

It was during this time that I first met Patty's husband Dave. He was not real talkative and I sensed that he was uncomfortable around a pastor. Listen to his

story in his own words: *“I believed I could just sail through life on my own plan...always putting off what’s important until tomorrow, until tomorrow becomes today...then the storm came. Patty became seriously ill and we learned she needed a liver...things continued to get worse. I began to think there is no coming back from this. On October 15, 2015...she’s lethargic and unresponsive and needs to be transferred to Loyola.*

All night, and most of the next day I watched as the doctors and nurses hooked up IVs, a suction tube and a ventilator...I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat...I went for a walk. I wondered if it would all work and if it didn’t would I have to shut it all down? I felt like I was drowning. My phone rang. It was Pastor Brian. He asked if I could keep him informed on her condition. My first thought was like, ‘Really? Like I don’t already have enough to worry about? My sister in law can update the pastor herself, I don’t need this!’

Pastor Brian said the church will continue praying for us. What, people we don’t even know are praying for us? Me too? Then Pastor Brian asked how I was doing. I really wanted to lie, just like I did to everyone else, saying fine under the circumstances. But I couldn’t bring myself to lie to a pastor, that would be going too far. Pastor Brian prayed with me. He prayed, I listened. In my mind, I agreed with everything he said. Something changed. Something inside me changed. Big time...God has impeccable timing. God set forth a chain of events in the right place, at the right time, just when I needed it most.

At the end of [this] timely call, I turned my life over to Jesus Christ! Patty received a new liver two weeks later...when Patty came home from the hospital, I think she was surprised that she didn’t have to drag me to church...there’s bound to be rough waters and I know I’ll take some falls, but with the good Lord as my captain, I will make it through it all.”

Dave and Patty were baptized one year ago this month and are now members of Edgewood!

This quote from Tim Keller is spot on: *“Christmas is the end of thinking you are better than someone else, because Christmas is telling you that you could never get to heaven on your own. God had to come to you.”*

Don’t delay. Don’t procrastinate. Do it now. Vince Lombardi used to say, *“We didn’t lose; we just ran out of time...”* Actually, when you run out of time, you will lose. One day it will be too late.

Jesus was born in the fullness of time. That means that there was an exact moment of time when he came to earth. And the timing was perfect. But most people missed the miracle of the moment that Christ came. Just as each of us has a birth date when we were born physically, in John 3:3, Jesus tells us that we must be born again spiritually at a specific time: ***“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”*** This may be your day. Are you ready for this to be your birthday?

It’s hard to believe but I have never watched *“A Miracle on 34th Street.”* But I have seen God do many miracles on 38th Street! He wants to do one right now in your life.

There are two Greek words for time. One is *chronos*, which is quantitative time and refers to the passing of moments. It’s how we measure time. The other is *kairos* and refers to qualitative time. It’s the idea of an opportune moment, also known as the “supreme moment.”

Are you ready to move from living a *chronos* life to a *kairos* life where you’re focusing on living each moment as a supreme moment? Ephesians 5:15-16: ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time [kairos], because the days are evil.”***

Sadly, most people are just going through the motions wasting time, passing time, or killing time. Some are like the passengers on a plane who heard the pilot give this message: *“We have lost our position, folks, and have been flying rather aimlessly for over an hour. That’s the bad news. But the good news is that we’re making very good time.”*

Our lives are on a timer. [Hold up timer] Life here will turn off one day. Are you ready? One moment in time can determine an eternal destiny.

I want you give you the opportunity right now, at this time, and in this place, to do some business with God.

“Lord Jesus, for too long I’ve kept you out of my life. I admit that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I now know there is more to this life than the way I’ve been living as I’ve been wasting my time. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I’ve been living. By faith I gratefully receive your gift of salvation. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe

*you are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and that you rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe your words are true. I **accept** you into my heart. I believe and now, at this exact moment in time, I believe. Be my Savior and Lord. I surrender to your leadership in my life. Make me into the person you want me to be. Amen.”*

Closing Video: [Come Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)