

In the fullness of Time. Galatians 4:4-7 Romans 5:6-10

Portions adapted from: When The Time Had Fully Come, by Steve Shepherd @ SermonCentral.com

A time management expert at a conference was giving a speech about her success in business and how time management played such a huge part in the businesses success. She was engaged with the crowd and they seemed to love her; giving tips and sharing success stories. Suddenly, she realized she had been talking for two hours! She stopped to apologize to the weary group and explained that she had left her watch at home. When a voice came from the audience, "There is a calendar next to you."

Two hours. Not many people these days would tolerate a two-hour message. Having been conditioned by 30 minute TV shows and 15 second commercials, we would have to be vitally interested to stay engaged with anything any longer. Not that it wouldn't be good for us, but we feel like we don't have the time.

Which reminds me of a young preacher. Being new to the church, he asks an Elder "*How long do you want me to preach?*" The Elder replies: "*Son, you can preach as long as you like ... but we leave at noon.*"

Well that's a western way of looking at time. Other parts of the world treat time differently. When African Christians gather to worship, they have no set time for ending the service; it will end when everything that needed to be accomplished has been accomplished.

I was the preacher at one such service. And after 1.5 hours of praying, singing, and worshipping, it was finally my turn to open the Word. Ignorant of their ways and feeling that the service was running overtime, I shortened my sermon. After the service, I was given a gentle scolding from my translator – who knew that I had cut the message short. He said, "*We came to hear God's word. And we should not leave until we have heard all that God would say to us. Never shorten a message that God has given to you to give to us.*"

Such a different view and use of time – of which there are many around our world.

God also has a keen sense of time and has given the best advice when it comes to the use of our time on earth.

*Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people
but as wise, making the most of the time ...
Giving thanks to God at all times and for everything
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:15-20

As you read through the Gospels, you should also see how closely Jesus was watching the clock – or in His case the calendar. Jesus was very aware of playing His part in a carefully scripted drama of truly universal proportions.

Jesus knew that He only had so much time to train His disciples and He also knew, as He informed His disciples, that He would die on the day of Passover.

So we see Jesus, especially in His final week both instigating and going along with a higher plan which ended with His death precisely on Passover; and His return to life some three-days after. Jesus was following a plan that He himself had help lay down – from the very beginning of time.

As our scripture today explains it:

But when the fullness of time had come,
God sent his Son ... in order to redeem
those who were under the law, so that
we might receive adoption as children.
Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

When was this time? Again, one cannot read the Bible without getting the sense that the entire course of human history – from our very beginning until the very end – has also been carefully plotted out on some heavenly calendar. So, Jesus' arrival on Earth appears to have been carefully planned for that particular time when most of the human race (from Africa to Europe) was very closely connected under Roman Rule: it was a world largely at peace with good roads to everywhere, one language, and a religious vacuum.

As the Greek word for fullness implies Jesus' birth was that time when everything was just right, it was the pregnancy carried to full-term, the cup filled to the brim, the net filled to bursting, it was at just the right time.

According to God's spiritual sense of timing, Jesus death was also precisely at that time when we humans were most hopelessly lost. The Bible says, that *God Proved his love for us in that while we were yet enemies – Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

Ernest Hemingway once said: "*Life is just a dirty trick, a short journey from nothingness to nothingness. There is no remedy for anything in life. Man's destiny in the universe is like a colony of ants on a burning log.*" Hemingway sounded like a man with no hope for anything good in life. He took his own life at the age of 61.

In 1927, the USS submarine S-4 was rammed by another ship and quickly sank. The entire crew was trapped beneath the water. Heroic efforts were attempted to rescue the crew – but to no avail all hands were lost. But near the end a diver finally got down to the stricken sub and placed his helmeted ear to the side of the vessel and listened. He heard a tapping noise. One of the last few survivors, was tapping out a question in Morse Code. The question came slowly: "Is... there... any... hope?"

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_S-4_\(SS-109\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_S-4_(SS-109)))

This seems to be the cry of all humanity: "Is there any hope?"

God's answer is: ***when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children***

I do believe that's God's timing is perfect. God's timing was right on! Aren't you glad you're living on this side of the cross? Those who came before, could only live in hope that one day the promised Messiah would come, but we live with the historical assurance of Jesus' birth and His death; we still count our years from the days of that world changing event. **Ano Domini** (In the year of our Lord)

But notice that there is one more sense "of the fullness of time" that also applies to you and me personally.

... *And because we are children,
God has sent the Spirit of his Son
into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'*
Galatians 4:6

in *the fullness of time, God sent His Son, so that we might receive adoption as children*
... *And because we are children, **God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our***

hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

At the precise right time in history, God sent His son into the world, to bring about the redemption of all who would one day return to Him in faith. In the same way, in our personal history, when we are most ready, when we are ripe for the harvest, God sends the spirit of His son into our hearts. As He waited for the right time in history, so also God waits for the fullness of time in our lives – I presume, for a certain level of spiritual maturity.

You know you're getting mature when:

- You look forward to a dull evening.
- Your back goes out, but you stay at home.
- 95% of the time you spend in front of a computer is for real work.
- Your children are beginning to look middle-aged.
- When on vacation your energy runs out before your money does.

Spiritual maturity could be defined in many ways, depending on whom you are or where you are in life. Some people are still not mature at 60 or 70, whereas others may be very mature as a teenager; I've known a couple of those – I was not one of them

It takes a while for some people to become spiritually mature, to a point where they are workable or perhaps useful to God – so each of us also have our own timetable with God. When the fullness of our time comes God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

In other words, God is both the Creator and is also the re-creator of our human soul.

It is God who makes both our birth and rebirth possible. We can't do either for ourselves.

- When the time is right, God births us, pushing us out of our mother's womb.
- Also, when the time is right God rebirths us, spiritually awakening us
- And when the time is right, God will bring us home.

But we do have a small part to play in our spiritual rebirth: we have to answer God's call. We have to repent, we have to think again about our life, we have to turn around and start walking back homeward. Our part in our rebirth is the day when we lodge our faith in Gods Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

So when the time is right and the person is ripe, that's when God will send His Spirit into their hearts and God will become their Father. That is the day when they cry out, "Abba, Father."

But notice this important difference. God has always sent His Spirit to work "on" people all the time. Jesus said, that when the Holy Spirit came, it would convict the world of sin and convince the world that Jesus is the Son of God. So ever since the days of Jesus, God's Spirit has been at work in our world and in our personal lives.

But God only sends His Spirit to reside in our hearts when we are ready, in the fullness of our time when we get to the point of surrendering our life to Christ and not before! God's timing is always perfect!

Time is so precious. We only have so much of it and only God knows when our time will run out.

Last week after a long life, Betty White died just days before her 100th birthday. Also last week, many would say that Bob Saget died too soon, at the age of 65 and in the middle of a comedy tour seeking to bring more laughter into our world. This last Tuesday a friend of Paul Van Dyke and myself, Thomas Blythe died fighting for every last moment of his life.

Any of us can leave this world at any time. Health declines, accidents happen, hearts stop. We all need to be walking with the Lord so as to be ready when our time comes to leave this world.

God entered into our world at just at the right time and He enters into our lives at just the right time. So now is a new year, another year for us and just the right time for us as God's children, to be wisely using our time for his glory.

Or as the Bible more pithily phrases it:

'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

Let's pray about this.