

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Galatians 4:4-7

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In 1966 a new TV series was introduced to the American public. It was called "Mission Impossible." It aired for seven seasons and then returned for two more in 1988. But that was just the beginning. "Mission Impossible" moved to the big screen in 1998, inaugurating a series of dramatic action films featuring the Hollywood star, Tom Cruise. Over and over again Tom Cruise and his team of well-trained compatriots overcame seemingly impossible odds to fulfill their mission and rescue those in danger. Nothing, however, can compare with another mission impossible which took place just over two thousand years ago. That too was a carefully planned endeavor that required great care and skill in order to be successful. In fact, that's precisely what Saint Paul said in the passage of Scripture which was read this morning.

So let's spend a few moments today discovering how God put together a plan of action that was so carefully crafted, that its success continues to impact our world today. Looking over these verses in Galatians, a number of things become apparent. God's mission possessed four crucial elements. It had to occur at the **right time**. It had to occur at the **right place**. It had to involve the **right person**. Finally, it had to achieve the right outcome, the **right purpose** for which it was designed. Let's take a look at each of these key components of God's "Mission Impossible."

God's decision to insert Himself into our world had to take place at the **right time**. If you look back through the pages of human history, there are propitious moments when something new can be inserted into what is taking place here on earth. One of those moments was the first century A.D. People were eagerly awaiting the intervention of God. That was certainly true with regards to the gods of the Romans and the Greeks. Their deities were always involved in the affairs of mankind. No one has to look further than Homer's famous epics about the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to recognize their presence. The divinities on Mount Olympus were all over the place, interfering with and sometimes even manipulating the events which took place between those two combatants. Furthermore, there were lots of other religious cults which emphasized the possibility of divine intervention. In fact, great leaders were often proclaimed to be divinely inspired. Such was the case with Alexander the Great. When he conquered Egypt, he was proclaimed to be a god. However, down deep the people of the Mediterranean world knew that these divine interventions were not real. They were simply projections of a deeper desire, to know and experience the one true God who had created them. Realizing that God had chosen this particularly propitious moment, when

humanity was anxiously awaiting a divine manifestation, Paul wrote, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son" (Galatians 4:4).

It was the right time for God to do something that would change the course of human history. It was also the right time to do something in the **right place**. For the first time in human history, one nation ruled over all of southern Europe, a good portion of the Middle East, as well as the northern coast of Africa. That nation was the Roman Empire. There were no restricted border crossings within this empire. People could easily travel all across it on well-maintained roads or by ship on the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, there were trading routes to far distant places like India. Additionally there was one language which was spoken throughout this far flung empire. It was Kione Greek, a rich and expressive language that had been introduced centuries earlier by Alexander the Great. A citizen would be fluent not only in his native tongue, but would also know how to converse with others in Kione Greek, the language of the market place, the universal language of the business world spoken throughout the empire. Finally, there was an openness to new ideas and beliefs which had been championed by the Hellenistic culture of Greece. There was a remarkable degree of religious freedom as long as it didn't challenge the growing cult of emperor worship. Into this kind of world, God sent His Son, who was born at the very crossroads of the empire, the Middle East. It was the meeting place where three continents were joined together—Europe, Asia and Africa. If God wanted to do something new and different and start sharing it with the entire world, the Middle East, especially the little providence of Judea, was the right place to begin. It was situated right in the middle of caravan routes going north, south, east and west.

So God chose the right time and the right place to introduce the **right person** to all the world. Who was this right person and why was He chosen above all others? Those who are familiar with the Scriptures immediately know the answer. The right person was none other than Jesus, the little boy of an impoverished Jewish couple. At first glance, that seems an unlikely choice. Why wasn't Jesus born to a royal family with connections to the rich and mighty, perhaps the son of an emperor? The answer is found in the identity of His upbringing. In that same verse in Galatians, Paul tells us that "God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Yes, Jesus was born of a woman like every child who has ever been born, but not just any woman. He was born to a Jewish woman, a woman who along with her husband raised up a child who was dedicated to God. From an early age He was taught that there was one true God who had revealed Himself in the Old Testament. Like every Jewish lad, He received a good education at the local synagogue. He could read and write and was fluent in Hebrew and Aramaic, a Semitic language similar to Hebrew. He was also probably conversant in Greek, since He grew up in Nazareth. Located in Galilee, the northern part of Judea, Nazareth was near the Decapolis, ten cities that were populated by non-Jewish, Greek speaking Gentiles. So Jesus was familiar and knowledgeable of a culture far different from His own.

Even more importantly, when Jesus began His earthly ministry, He spoke to a world searching for God. That included His own people, the Jews, who desperately longed for God to speak to them once again, just as He had in the days of Moses and the prophets. It also included the Gentiles, those non-Jewish people who lived around Him. They too wanted to be introduced to the one true God. Many of them had abandoned the gods of their pagan ancestors. They knew that all those stories about ancient deities were nothing more than make-believe fantasies. They were attracted to the God of the Jewish people and began to worship Him, even though they did not keep all of the religious traditions and customs of the Jewish people. These people were known as "God-fearers" and there were a growing number of them throughout the Roman Empire. As you can see, God chose the right kind of person to introduce Himself to the world. He came from a Jewish family who honored and revered the Lord. Additionally, He was a member of a group of people, the Jews, who were now not only living in the land of their ancestors, Judea, but who were now also scattered throughout the Roman world. They were engaged in business and various professions in every city and province of the empire. Through them the Lord could reach out to a vast multitude of people. God chose the right time, the right place and the right person when He decided to enter into our world through Christ Jesus.

Finally and most importantly of all, God chose the **right purpose** for His Son's entrance into our humanity. Once again Paul tells us why. In that next verse of the book of Galatians, he says that Jesus came "to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption as children" (Galatians 4:5). Now what does this mean? When God sent Jesus into our world, He had a special purpose, a special mission in mind for His Son. It was redemption. His job was to purchase the freedom of mankind. Condemned by disobedience to the law of God, humanity was incarcerated in a prison of their own making, separated from God and one another. The time had come for someone to free them from the pain and suffering of their misconduct and that someone was God's Son. In fact, this is what Jesus said about Himself when He spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, His hometown. Reading from the scroll of the book of Isaiah He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Little did those hearing these words realize that their freedom would be secured by the life of the very One who was speaking to them. Jesus would redeem them, literally pay for their release by giving His life in exchange for theirs. He would die on the cross in payment for their sins. Both they, and indeed all of us, can, therefore, be adopted into the family of God and receive the inheritance of an eternal life. Additionally, because of what Jesus was willing to do for us, we can address God not only as our heavenly Father, but also as our "Abba," our Daddy.

So if you're still wondering why I named this sermon "Mission Impossible," here's why. Like the team of experts who rescued those in distress on TV

and in the movies, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. What would otherwise be impossible for us to achieve on our own, became a reality, because as Jesus Himself said, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). When the Lord sent His Son into our world, He chose the **right time** and the **right place** and the **right person** for the **right purpose**. He sent Him to deliver us from our sins and to grant us eternal life. That and that alone is worthy of being called "Mission Impossible."