

Galatians 4:4

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[0 : 00] What were folk celebrating on Wednesday? Can you remember that far back? Wednesday. What was going on on Wednesday? The big celebrations on Wednesday. Well, many were celebrating Halloween, while others were pulling the curtains, turning all the lights off, and pretending nobody was at home. I hope none of you were so mean-spirited as to do that.

So I can think of one or two who were, I can think of somebody who went to the extreme of parking their car in the Cults Academy power park to make the impression of being nobody at home even more convincing. A miserable thing to do, I have to say. Well, you can try and work out who that miserable person was. Well, that was Wednesday, and many were celebrating Halloween. But on Wednesday, the 31st of October, less popularly, is a day in which some were celebrating Reformation Day, in remembrance of what happened on the 31st of October, 1517, when the Reformer Martin Luther posted on the doors of the Castle Church at Wittenberg his 95 Thesis on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.

Luther's righteous indignation had been stirred by the sale of these indulgences, and the proceeds of these indulgences partly used to fund the building of St. Peter's in Rome. The one responsible for the sale, certainly where Luther was, was the infamous Dominican preacher, Johann Tetzel. And Tetzel claimed that forgiveness for the living and release from purgatory for the dead could be secured by the purchase of these indulgences. It's a monstrous acclaim, memorably preserved in the reputed ditty of Tetzel.

As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs. Well, it does have a certain ring to it, even if we find the content of it so objectionable. Now, our own response to such flagrant abuse of religious power and exploitation of religious ignorance is, even some 500 years later, one of dismay. And we do thank God for the courage of Martin Luther in taking his stand at huge personal cost. But as so often is the case in the midst of error, there are elements of truth. Indeed, error is all the more convincing when it is mixed in with truth. And in the case even of Tetzel's indulgences, there is truth intertwined with error. And two truths stand out in particular. The first is that these indulgences and the concern of folk to purchase them reveals the felt and actual need for redemption. There is indeed in men and women a felt need, but it's more than just a felt need. It is an actual need for redemption. And the indulgences, in a sense, exploited that reality.

But secondly, there is also the recognition that redemption comes at a price, that redemption isn't cheap. Luther was a man who knew only too well of man's need, very especially of his own need for redemption. And he also knew that redemption doesn't come cheap. A price must be paid.

[4 : 04] Of course, the key question concerned who could pay the price. And Luther discovered in the gospel that God himself pays the price for man's redemption. This liberating message rings loud and true throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament and in Paul's letters.

And in all of Paul's letters, the one most associated with Luther, on account of a famous commentary penned by the Reformer, is the epistle to the Galatians, from which we have read this morning.

And at the heart of this epistle, at the heart of this letter, we find a memorable and profound description of God's redemption, of the price God was willing to pay to rescue a lost humanity. We'll read again verses that we read already, and we'll simply limit ourselves to those where we'll be focusing our attention, particularly this morning in Galatians chapter 4 and reading from verse 4. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son, but a son. And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. At the heart of the letter, these truths concerning redemption, concerning God's redemption, concerning the price that

God has paid for our redemption. And at the heart of these verses that we have read, we find God's activity in our favor to redeem. God sent his Son to redeem, to redeem those under law. Here, Paul deals with God's work of redemption. And what does he tell us about God's work of redemption? Well, he tells us several things. Now, notice some of the things that he mentions, and we'll then consider them. He speaks of

[6 : 34] God's time, God's time of redemption. He speaks of God's Son as God's Redeemer. He speaks of God's Redeemed, of those who are the object of God's redeeming work. He speaks of God's redemption, of the manner in which he has purchased our salvation. He speaks also of God's purposes in redemption.

If you wish, in these verses, we can identify the when of redemption, the who of redemption, the how of redemption, and the why of God's redemptive initiative. And we'll think of these things in a moment. But before we do launch into considering these different elements of God's work redemption, we would do well to get a handle, at least fleetingly and in some measure, on what the word means, what this verb to redeem means. We have the word there in verse 5, to redeem those under law.

But what does that word mean? We'll think about it a little bit more later on in the sermon, but even at the very beginning, it's good to have some concept of its meaning, to be there in the background, as it were, as we proceed, to think about these other aspects or elements of redemption. Well, what does the word mean? Well, the Greek word that is translated here in the English as to redeem is a word that literally means to buy back, to buy back. It's a word that is taken from the marketplace and significantly as a word that could be used to describe the transaction involved in the purchasing of a slave's freedom. Not the only way the word could be used, but this is one way in which the word could and was used to describe that transaction when a slave was the object of a price being paid that resulted in the slave's freedom. So, the slave is, if you wish, redeemed by the payment of the redemption price, and so is set free. This is the language that Paul is making use of here. And these elements that we have identified in the case of a slave whose liberty is bought, these elements are also present in the use of the word by Paul in presenting God's redeeming work. Men and women, humankind, under the curse of the law, slaves to sin, slaves to the law. But there's a redemption price that is paid on our behalf. And as a result of the payment of that redemption price, so we are set free.

And with this in mind, with this idea or description or definition of what it means to redeem, with this in mind, we can proceed to notice how in these verses, in verses 4 to 7 of Galatians chapter 4, we can look at these different aspects of redemption. God's time, God's Son, God's redeemed, God's redemption, and God's purpose. First of all, then, God's time, or God's time of redemption.

In verse 4, there is this very telling and explicit reference to the time of all of this. We read, but when the time had fully come. When the time had fully come. And so, in answer to the question, when did God execute His plan of redemption? When did He purchase our salvation? Well, the answer is given to us, when the time had fully come, or when the fullness of time had come, as it is expressed also. And what does this expression, the fullness of time, what does this tell us about God and about the time of His redemptive initiative? Well, at heart, what it tells us is of a God who is over time and who governs time. Time is His time. God did not, does not, and cannot ever act under constraint. Time is never

[11 : 11] God's enemy. So different from us who, I imagine, even in this week that has passed, have been so conscious of time as that which constrains us, as our enemy often. That is never so for God. He knows nothing of the pressure of time. He acts in His time. And in the case of our redemption, when the time had fully come, when His time had arrived, in God's time, God acts. Well, that's a very general truth, a very important truth, but a very general truth. But we can notice three further related truths regarding the fullness of time vis-à-vis redemption very particularly. We can say this, that this was the time determined by God in eternity. The time determined by God in eternity. In eternity, the triune God conceived His plan of redemption. And in eternity, the time was set. The red-lettered day of redemption was marked in the divine calendar. And when the time was fully come, God sent His Son. This was the time also for the fulfillment of God's promises and prophecies and purposes. Indeed, the reading that we've read, though some of it difficult to understand at first glance, really speaks of that time of preparation that reached its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus. And so, this was the time for the fulfillment of

God's promises. From the time of man's fall in the Garden of Eden, God had graciously promised a coming Redeemer, the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. Through the prophets, God had foretold the coming Redeemer, the coming Messiah. By the giving of the law, God had provided a schoolmaster that would in due time lead those under law to the one who alone would fulfill the law.

And so, this was the time for the fulfillment of God's promises and prophecies and purposes. This was the time prepared by God not only for the coming of His Redeemer, but for the proclamation of the good news of His coming and redeeming work to the ends of the earth. On this aspect of the fullness of time, I simply quote from John Stott's commentary on this passage. Listen to what John Stott says in this regard. It was the time when Rome had conquered and subdued the known inhabited earth, when Roman roads had been built to facilitate travel, and Roman legions had been stationed to guard them.

It was also the time when the Greek language and culture had given a certain cohesion to society. At the same time, the old mythological gods of Greece and Rome were losing their hold on the common people so that the hearts and minds of men everywhere were hungry for a religion that was real and satisfying. The time had come. The time had been prepared. The time determined in eternity.

The time promised. The time promised. And the time that had been prepared. That with the coming of Jesus, the good news of Jesus could then spread out throughout the world. The time, God's time of redemption had come. But in these verses, we also hear and learn of God's Son. But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son. If God's time speaks of the when of redemption, God's Son speaks of the who of redemption. Who redeems? Who is the Redeemer? Well, these verses make very clear that redemption is a work of the triune God. God the Father sends the Son. God the Son, driven by loyalty to the Father and love for the lost.

[15 : 33] That would be you and me, just to be very clear. Willingly takes on the redeeming work commended to Him. And as we will see just in a few moments, redemption involves a second sending, the sending of God the Spirit into our hearts. So, the work of redemption is the work of the triune God. But this morning, and justified by the text that we are dealing with, we will focus particularly on God's Son as the one commended with executing, if you wish, God's work of redemption. And what can we say of the one sent by the Father? Well, what does Paul say? Well, there are three core truths in few words that Paul shares with us concerning the Redeemer. We're told, but when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law. Let's just think of these three things briefly. God sent His Son. His Son, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. In the words of John, so familiar to us, God's one and only Son, God's only begotten Son. This is the One who was sent, His Son in a unique and exclusive way. Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is truly and eternally divine. This is the One who was sent as the Redeemer. But Paul tells us more about the One sent. We're told that He was born of a woman. The Son of God, yes, but born of a woman. Words that imply no more and no less than that Jesus had a true human mother. He was, He became a man, truly a man, a human being like us, truly and from the moment of His conception, eternally human. God sent His Son. God sent His Son born of a woman. God sent His Son born of a woman, born under law. What does this mean? This isn't something maybe that immediately is clear to us. What is the significance of this expression, that Jesus was born under law? Well, we can certainly say this, that though He was the author of the law, He willingly placed Himself under the law, subject to its demands, and charged with perfectly fulfilling its righteousness. Jesus became, in a sense, a slave to the law, born under law. So, we see in these few words the manner in which Jesus is so uniquely qualified to be the Redeemer of humankind, so uniquely qualified to reconcile men and women to God, so uniquely qualified to stand in the breach between God and humankind. For He was and is fully divine, fully human. He is the one who both submitted to God's law and succeeded in rendering perfect obedience to God's law. And so, Paul presents to us God's Son, the appointed Redeemer, the one sent to redeem those under law. But we can move on and consider, in the third place, God's redeemed. We've considered the when of redemption, when the time had fully come. We've considered the who of redemption, as regards the identity of the Redeemer. But the who of redemption is not exhausted by identifying the Redeemer. We must also identify the redeemed. Who are the redeemed? For whom was Christ sent? Well, what does Paul tell us here? And it's evident that what Paul says here isn't exhaustive in its treatment of treatment of this question, but it gives us a clear answer of who the redeemed

are.

Well, the answer is there in verse 5, to redeem those under law. Christ came to redeem those under law.

[20 : 16] Paul is using, if you wish, theological shorthand. And under the umbrella of this very brief statement, we can identify certainly three core truths that are, if you wish, understood or come under this umbrella expression, those who are under the law. Certainly, what it implies and declares is that all are subject to God's law. Now, this was very particularly true for the Jews who were under obligation as the recipients of, if you wish, the law of God. But it is interesting that when Paul expresses himself here, when he speaks of God's Son coming to redeem those under law, he doesn't use the article, almost as if there is a deliberate intention of making it clear that here he is speaking not only of Jews, but of all men and women who are subject to law. All men and women are under obligation to law and to keep God's law. So, we can certainly say this, that when God sent His Son to redeem those under law, there is a recognition that all of us are subject to God's law. But there is also a recognition that all are lawbreakers. This is the great problem. It's all very well there being law and it being perfect, but the great problem is that we don't keep the law. We are lawbreakers. Paul doesn't say so in these verses, but he's eloquent on the matter elsewhere. Indeed, even in this letter and if we were to look beyond these immediate verses that we're looking at. We are lawbreakers. We are subject to God's law. In that sense, we're under law, but we're also lawbreakers. And so, in that sense, under the law, under the curse of the law, to use the language that he uses a few verses previously. But we can say a third thing in this regard, and that is that we are all under, and to use this expression particularly that he uses in chapter 3, we're all under the curse of the law. As lawbreakers, the law both enslaves and accuses us. We're enslaved because we're incapable of keeping this law that we are subject to. And not only are we enslaved, but the law accuses us. It accuses us rightly and justly as those who break the law. And there is nothing we can do about it. There's nothing we can do about it. We can't reform our lives. We can't make that little bit of an extra effort and sort out the problem. No.

We're subject to law. We're under obligation to law. We're lawbreakers, all of us, constantly breaking the law, and so under the curse of the law. It is for such that God sent His Son to redeem those under law. And again, to make it abundantly clear, that would be you and me. God's redeemed. But we also can make reference and must make reference to God's redemption. We've noticed the when of redemption, when the time had fully come. We've noticed the who of redemption in two senses, who is the Redeemer and who are the redeemed. But we also clearly have to ask the question concerning the how of redemption.

How does God, through His Son, redeem His people? How does He do that? What does that involve? In these verses, in verses 4 to 7 that we're thinking on this morning, Paul doesn't explain the how.

He doesn't go into a description of what redemption involves. But even if we limit ourselves to a further consideration of the Word itself, of the Word redeem, that will allow us to comment on the how of redemption. How does it work? What does it involve? Remember what we said at the beginning. Remember that to redeem, the word to redeem means to buy back or to pay the ransom price. Now, we know who is being bought, those under law. We know who is doing the buying, God's Son, who has been sent to redeem.

But how does He do so? What is the price that He pays? And we can do no better in answering that question than to allow Jesus to speak for Himself. Listen to what Jesus says in answer to that very question. What is the price that is paid for our redemption? In Mark, in chapter 10 and verse 45.

[25 : 30] Listen to what Jesus says, For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. This is Jesus' answer to the question, well, what is the redemption price that is paid? How is it that those under law? How is it that those under law are redeemed? For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many? His life, the life of Jesus, as a ransom. At heart, this points to the giving of His own righteous, law-fulfilling life over to death in our place. His life, His life, His shed blood, His death is the price paid to redeem those under law, to redeem the lost. No higher price could have been paid, and no lesser price would have sufficed to secure your redemption. Let me just say that again, and may it be engraved on our minds. No higher price could have been paid, and no lesser price would have sufficed to secure your redemption.

And as we think of this great price that was paid, as we consider this matter of how sinners such as we are have been redeemed. We can't, certainly we mustn't, consider the price paid by Jesus simply in a detached, academic manner. We go back to Luther, with whom we began. Luther did not view these matters in that academic way. Listen to the man as he ponders on a price so high, as he considers this very passage that we are considering. And I read from that commentary, and Luther is, as it were, addressing the law that would seek to accuse him. And listen to what he says, O law, you have no power over me, and therefore you accuse and condemn me in vain. For I believe Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Father sent into the world to redeem us, miserable sinners, oppressed under the tyranny of the law.

He gave his life and shed his blood for me. Therefore, feeling your terrors and threatening, O law, I plunge my conscience in the wounds, the blood, the death, the resurrection, and the victory of Christ.

Besides him, I will see nothing. Besides him, I will hear nothing. So those under law are redeemed or freed by means of the price paid by Jesus, the giving of his own life.

But what are they freed from? What are we freed from? We're free. We're liberated, but freed from what?

[28 : 48] Well, in the language of chapter 3 of Galatians that is picked up on in the verses that we're reading in chapter 4, we're freed from the curse of the law.

Then in chapter 3 and verse 13, we read, Christ redeemed us, he freed us, he rescued us from the curse of the law. He redeemed us from the guilt of sin.

We turn just one page to Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 1 and verse 7, we read, In Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

And we're freed from an empty way of life. Freed from the curse of the law, freed from the guilt of sin, and freed also from an empty way of life.

In 1 Peter 1 and verse 18, we read, We are redeemed from these things.

[30 : 04] But there is another matter, because we are not only freed from, we're not only freed from the curse of the law, freed from the guilt of sin, we're not only freed from an empty way of life, though these things alone are marvelous things to be freed from, we are also freed for.

Which takes us on to the final element that I want us to notice this morning, and that is God's purposes in redemption. The why of redemption, if you wish. We've thought of the when, and the who, and the how, but let's think finally on the why of redemption.

And here we will limit ourselves to what Paul says in this passage. Verses 5, the second half of verse 5, through to verse 7. And even these verses we'll deal with only very fleetingly.

We readily recognize that what Paul says here is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation of God's purposes in redemption. But what Paul does do is identify what we could describe as God's central purpose for His redeemed people.

Why does He redeem us? Why did God send His Son to redeem us? Why did He do that? With what purpose in mind? Well, in verse 5 we have what is clearly a purpose statement.

[31 : 28] We read there, if we read it from verse 4, just to get the whole sentence, but when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law. There's an element of purpose there, the purpose of the sending, to redeem those under law.

But then we have, that we might. That's another purpose statement. It's the why. Well, why? Why was Jesus to redeem those under law? Why? With what purpose?

That we might receive the full rights of sons. You see, God's redemption is rich beyond measure. We're not only freed from slavery. We're not only freed from the curse of the law. We are freed for adoption into God's family, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

We can put it this way, that I think summarizes very beautifully what is going on here. The son became a slave, that slaves might become sons.

[32 : 37] That is what redemption is about. The son became a slave, born under the law, that slaves, you and me, might become sons. Members of the royal household, sons and daughters of God.

And the manner we become sons is by the redemption price paid by Jesus. Well, let me put it another way. The manner we become sons is by the redemption price paid by Jesus.

But the manner in which we are made to appreciate and experience our sonship is by the sending of the Spirit of the Son into our hearts.

You see, we are freed that we would become sons of God. And that is achieved by what Jesus has done at Calvary, by the price that He has paid. But our appreciation of what has been achieved, our experience of what has been achieved, is secured by this second sending.

He sends the Son to redeem those under law, but He sends His Spirit, the Spirit of the Son, into our hearts, that we would appreciate what has been done for us and who we are, thanks to the price that has been paid.

[33 : 55] And the Spirit who is sent into our hearts is the one who enables us to cry out, Abba, Father. Indeed, the one who, in a sense, calls out for us.

There is so much that could and should be said of all that is envisaged and implied in our sonship. In this very rich phrase, the full rights of sons, and in our consequent status as heirs, as verse 7 goes on to make clear.

But I will limit myself to one deeply humbling and richly precious observation. When the time had fully come, God sent His one and only Son to pay the ultimate price in the giving of His own life to death on the cross in our place.

And why would He do such a thing? Why would He do such a thing that you and I might be able to call Him and call out to Him, Abba, Father.

For this reason, such a high price was paid that you might be able to cry out to God, Abba, Father. plenteous redemption, plenteous indeed.

[35 : 20] Let us pray. Let us pray. So You