

Timing Is Everything

By Mark Jarvinen

You have probably heard the phrase many times, "***timing is everything***". There is a great deal of truth in that statement. The difference between telling a good joke and a bad one is a person's sense of timing. Similarly, timing is important when dealing with people. For example, you don't ask for a favor when someone is under a lot of stress or angry. Timing is also important in cooking. The juicy hamburger on the grill is raw meat if cooked for too little time and a clump of charcoal if it is cooked too long. In medicine, if you catch a problem early, you will be able to treat it more effectively. Investors know that timing is important in finance. The goal is to buy low and sell high. In the world of music, timing in a choir or orchestra can spell the difference between an excellent concert, or a flop.

Introduction: The Fullness of Time Had Come.

Verse 4 of today's text makes an interesting reference to timing, "***... when the set time had fully come.***" It's the "***fully come***" idea that I find intriguing. What does it mean? It indicates that **all the pieces were in place for God to take action**. From God's viewpoint, **everything was now ready for a new era to begin**. It's as if God had been at the controls of the universe, orchestrating world events, designing the details of his plan of redemption, and now it was time for the launch. This was the **perfect time** in the course of human events, based on how things were aligned ethnically, racially, culturally, politically, socially, and

religiously, for God to send His Son, Jesus, into the world to spend **“quality time”** with the human race. Think of it, the God who created our entire universe, didn’t do so just to leave us to ourselves, remaining aloof and disinterested from his lofty perch in heaven, nor did he drop down a ladder from the sky and say, **“If you want to reach me, start climbing!”** God chose instead to become one of us by living as a fetus in Mary’s womb and then being born as a real human baby boy. **God became flesh!** This fragile infant named Jesus, who would do the things we did when we were infants, such as cry when hungry, thirsty, sick, or in need of a change; was revealed to humanity, by his birth. God’s incredible love for us, expressed in his willingness to meet us on our turf was displayed in the birth of Jesus. **Think about it!** Jesus was born to specific parents – **Mary and Joseph of Nazareth**, within the framework of a specific time and place, first century Judea, in an insignificant little town called Bethlehem, and then grew up under the laws of his Jewish ancestors and the secular laws of the Gentile Romans. This was all by God’s design, with a definite purpose in mind. And so we ask, **“What was the purpose of this new era, spoken of as the fullness of time?”**

I. TO SHOW THAT SPIRITUAL SLAVERY IS BROKEN (vv. 1- 3).

“What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world” (Galatians 4:1- 3).

To properly understand the purpose of this new era, we need to look at **4:1-2**, in which Paul sets up a **household analogy** that would have been readily understood by his readers. In this analogy, according to custom, a male child, probably the oldest son of the master of the household, would eventually inherit his father's wealth and status. However, while still an underage child, this son would have no greater status than the trusted slaves who were appointed to watch over him, until such time as this son was pronounced "a man" by his father, and thereby made eligible to inherit his wealth. Paul's point is that the **"childhood period"** of this son represents the time in Jewish history when the law of Moses was in charge, like one or more slaves would have been in charge of the son as a tutor and caretaker. The law of Moses demanded that certain rules and rituals be kept, special holidays be observed, and a strict diet be followed, in order for a person to attain a righteous standing before God.

The **"inheritance period,"** on the other hand, was, by analogy, the set time inaugurated by the coming of Jesus Christ, in which full rights as God's children would be granted to all who believed that Jesus was the Savior. **The time of the law meant that slavery under works was still the norm, while the time inaugurated by Christ's coming, "the fullness of time," was a time of freedom.** The childhood period was righteousness by law keeping, while the inheritance period was right standing through faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf, i.e. his sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross was in payment for our sin, and his resurrection from the dead, spelled our victory over sin, death, and the powers of evil.

Paul was saying to the church in Galatia, who were being seduced by a group of false teachers called Judaizers, who wanted them to keep one foot in the Jewish world of law-keeping, and the other foot in the world of faith in Christ – **“YOU CAN’T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS – A NEW ERA HAS DAWNED WITH THE COMING OF CHRIST.”** The *childhood period*, with the law in charge, is over. Now, the *inheritance period*, with faith in Christ as the new normal, is the basis for right standing with God.

NT commentator, **Scot McKnight**, comes up with his own analogy to shed further light on the text. As someone who has lived long enough (as I have) to remember how **the old era of the typewriter** gave way to **the new era of the personal computer**, McKnight notes that the childhood era of Israel under the law of Moses was the time in which the Jews, by analogy, hammered out their ABC’s for living (“the basic principles of the world” or “the law” v.3) on a clunky old desktop typewriter; while the new era, featuring faith in Jesus Christ, handles not only the basic ABC’s, but sentences, paragraphs, and even books, (analogous to the gospel of Christ) which are produced in record time with the fullness of technological ease and efficiency on a laptop. **In summary, with the coming of Christ, the fullness of time has come**, and those who have come to faith in Him are no longer enslaved – being forced through self-effort to obtain their status with God. Freedom is ours through faith in Christ. **The law says DO, but in Christ everything necessary for our right standing with God has been DONE!** **Beloved in Christ, we too live in this new era – the fullness of time has come and extends into today!** This leads to our second

and final point this morning. ***This new era called the fullness of time ...***

II. SHOWS THAT WE ARE MADE SONS (vv. 4-7).

“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are his 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 God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:4-7).

Verse 4 tells us that Jesus, God’s Son, who possessed a divine nature, was born of a woman, or became one of us, and lived for a time in the old era of the law (though He was without sin), in order to **“redeem”** those who were still enslaved under the old system of rule keeping. The law had many demands. Don’t drink this. Don’t eat that. Don’t hate. Don’t lust. The list went on and on. And of course, if you failed at this you deserved to die and go to hell. This system of law keeping led to a pervasive sense of futility and hopelessness – a heavy spiritual burden to carry. Those held captive to this system felt like slaves, beaten down and discouraged. **Redemption** in this first century system of slavery was the means by which a slave’s freedom could be purchased by means of a ransom payment. That’s precisely what Jesus did when he died on the cross. Jesus stepped up and said, **“I’ll serve in their place! I’ll do their chores for them! I’ll take the punishment for their shortcomings, so they don’t have to.”** In other words, in the realm of the Spirit, Jesus purchased freedom for those held captive under the law of sin and death, with his shed blood serving as the ransom payment. He redeemed them. His redemption applies to anyone in our day who is

still trying to attain status with God through external religious observances, or some other form of self-effort.

What's the result of this redemption? **Verse 5** clearly spells it out – ***“that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*** Through the redemption brought by Christ, the old prison walls of law-keeping were battered down and a new and liberating reality was set in its place. Through faith in Christ we are now sons and daughters of God! When Paul uses the term ***“sons of God”*** he does not mean that faith in Christ makes us “manly or masculine.” It hearkens back to the analogy in **Galatians 4:1-2** in which, during the period of inheritance, the new era of the Gospel, the son of the household master becomes eligible to be his father's heir. **What then, are the implications of sonship, of membership in God's family, of being God's heir through faith in Jesus Christ?**

A) The 1st Implication of sonship - Live Intimately With God.

In our world of “church going,” being intimate with God is not necessarily the norm. Some go to church out of obligation, others to earn favor with God, still others out of habit. A growing number, tired of religion, no longer see the point and don't go to church at all. But according to Paul, a ***“son of God”*** is one who learns to call God ***“Abba,”*** because God has given His Spirit to His sons. **Galatians 4:6** says:

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

According to McKnight, ***“Calling God Abba is the most intimate language of the family in the Jewish world.”*** (NIV

Application Commentary, Galatians, p.212). We've all heard Abba translated "**Daddy,**" but in the Jewish family context, the term means more than a father sitting on the floor playing board games with his young child. The term "**Abba**" **conveys both relational intimacy and honorable respect.** In fact, according to my NIV study Bible, "**Abba,**" the Aramaic word for "**Father,**" **was used in Jesus' final cry from the cross in *Luke 23:46* – "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** Thus, a "**son of God**" is one whom the Holy Spirit empowers to relate to God with both **love and respect.** We develop this intimacy through a life of prayer and reading, believing, and obeying the Word of God. **As we learn of God's great delight in us as his children, through the Word and in prayer, we grow in our delight of Him and intimacy develops.**

B) The 2nd Implication of sonship - Live Free From the Curse of the Law.

As sons of God we recognize that we have moved into a new era of God's saving activity – from the period of childhood, to the period of inheritance (or from typewriters to computers) according to our earlier analogies.

Parents keep close watch over their children when they are young, because they know that they're not yet ready to make good decisions on their own. When they're little, we help them up the steps of the playground slide and accompany them to the bus stop, help them with homework and a million other things because we want them safe and well guided. But we don't tag along with our children when they go to college, get married, and start their careers. Children get tired of being looked after and constantly corrected.

What a relief for them when they leave home to attend college or go to work. This scenario is similar to what Paul had in mind with reference to our being a **“son of God.”** **A son of God is one who has been set free from the tutelage of the law and turned loose with God’s Spirit to guide them.** No longer suffering the guilt of being a sinner before God, no longer fearing the wrath of God, and no longer being sentenced to death because we have fallen short in keeping the Law, is the new reality we experience as a **“son of God”** through faith in Christ. We know we’re respected members of God’s family.

C) The 3rd Implication of sonship - Live, Being Led By God’s Spirit.

Because we have become sons of God through faith in Christ, **v. 6** teaches that **“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, ...”** implying that we will be led by the Holy Spirit, since in **Romans 8:14**, Paul says that anyone who is a son is **“led by the Spirit.”** In terms of spirituality, everyone is led by someone or something, e.g. legalists are led by the Law, hedonists (pleasure seekers) are led by their desires, materialists are led by their possessions. But **sons of God are led by the Holy Spirit.** In other words, our actions, our behaviors, our decision making process are all led by the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts. Furthermore, sons of God do not fear or worry about where the Spirit will lead them in the future, because we know that He will go before us and guide us into God’s will and His blessing on our future.

All this is possible because God’s timing is everything.

***“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).
A-men.***

Thus, for those of us alive today, the time is now to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and receive the full rights of sons and daughters of God as our spiritual inheritance. **A-men.**