

In the fullness of Time. Galatians 4:1-4:7

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

A time management expert at a conference was to give a speech about her success in business and how time management plays a huge part of business success. She engaged the crowd and they seemed to love her. She was giving tips and sharing success stories. Suddenly, she realized she had been talking for two hours! She stopped to apologize to the wary group and explained that she had left her watch at home. 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; We would have to be vitally interested to stay engaged with anything for that length of time. It's not that it wouldn't be good for both of us, but we feel like we don't have the time. That's like the young preacher, new to a church, so he asks Elders "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 their services. The service will end when everything that needed to be accomplished was accomplished. I was to be 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 endured a gentle scolding from my translator – who knew that I had cut the message – 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 you to give 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 gives the best advice when it comes to the use of our time on earth.

Ephesians 5:15-18 " *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.*"

One of the things that our Thursday night Bible study was surprised to learn was how closely Jesus was watching the clock – or in his case the calendar. You cannot read the Gospels without noticing that Jesus was very aware of his playing a 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 those 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 that ended with his death precisely on that very day; and his return to life some three-days after. Jesus was following a plan and a sense of timing 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, 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 beginning to end – has also been carefully plotted out on some heavenly calendar. So in one sense Jesus arrival on Earth appears carefully planned for that time when most of the human race (from Africa to Europe) was very closely connected under Roman Rule: good roads, one language, and a religious vacuum.

AS the Greek word for fullness implies, it was that time when everything was just right, it is the cup filled to the brim, the net filled to bursting, it was time.

But, on the human scale of time, Jesus birth was more likely 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.*

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 finally took his own life. He sounded like a man with no hope for anything good in life. I hope that Hemingway got a chance to meet Jesus before his own end.

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?"

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

God's answer is: ***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***

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?

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

*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.*

So at the precise right time God sent his son into our world, and in the same way when we are most ready, when we are ripe for the harvest, God sends the spirit of his son into our hearts. God is also waiting for the fullness of time in our lives – for a certain level of 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 you are on vacation your energy runs out before your money does.

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

It takes a while for some people to 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 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 the human soul.

It is God who makes our rebirth possible. We can't do it for ourselves. We can't birth ourselves the first time or the second time around. When the time is right, God comes to each awakens us and calls us to come home. But we do have a small part in our rebirth: we have to answer that 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 is called FAITH. IT'S CALLED SURRENDER.

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. They will cry out, "Abba, Father."

God sends His Spirit to work "on" people all the time. The Holy Spirit is at work in this world to convict the world of sin and convince the world that Jesus is the Son of God.

But God only sends His Spirit into people's heart when they get to the point where they surrender to Christ AND NOT BEFORE! God's timing is perfect!

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

Last week, Marge Maupin having lived a wonderfully generous and faith-full life of 94 years – went home to be with her Lord.

This year also, actor Dennis Hopper died from prostate cancer at the age of 74 and the actor Gary Coleman having all his life suffered from certain medical conditions died at the age of 48.

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 it's a new year, another year for us, and just the right time for us, for 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.'