



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

He Came!

Galatians 4:4-7

David Anguish

A Different Christmas Letter

1. It was Christmas time, 1942, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a letter to friends and former students in which he returned to the themes he favored in his sermons at that time of year:
The joy of God goes through the poverty of the manger and the agony of the cross; that is why it is invincible, irrefutable. It does not deny the anguish, when it is there, but finds God in the midst of it, in fact precisely there; it does not deny grave sin but finds forgiveness precisely in this way; it looks death straight in the eye, but it finds life precisely within it.¹
2. One year later, in December 1943, Bonhoeffer expressed that idea more strongly: "A prison cell," he wrote, "is a good analogy for Advent; one waits, hopes, does this or that — ultimately negligible things — the door is locked and can only be opened *from the outside*" (George). He wrote from Berlin's Tegel military prison where he awaited trial, having been arrested by the Nazis the previous April.
3. In the year Jesus was born, many in Israel probably had feelings similar to Bonhoeffer's. Their people had been waiting centuries for the marvelous prophetic promises to be realized. How much longer would they have to be insulted by the rule of the pagans from the West? Endure the often vicious whims of Herod? Deliverance, salvation, could not come too soon!
4. Unlike Bonhoeffer, they would not have connected that deliverance to a cross. But not many do. That's why many who love the story of the sweet baby Jesus treat lightly, resist, or reject the teachings and way of the adult Christ.
5. Are we among them? That depends on how completely we keep in mind all of the story of Jesus' coming. Paul reminds us in just four verses.

He Came — and Remains — For Our Rescue

I. He Came (Gal. 4:4).

- A. Paul spoke of receiving freedom (Gal. 5:1) and of having burdens (6:2). God's solution is the answer to all burdens.

¹ In Timothy George, "Bonhoeffer in Advent," *First Things*, 12-15-14, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/12/bonhoeffer-in-advent>. Accessed December 16, 2014.

- B. God came here, in his Son, into the messiness of human history: “. . . his Son [was] born of woman, born under the law” (v. 4).
 - 1. As John put it, he “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14); the NET translates it, “took up residence among us.”
 - 2. Luke put it in more concrete terms: Jesus was born — like you and me (Lk. 2:6); his first bed was a feeding trough (2:7), which was where the shepherds who heard the glorious angel chorus found him (2:16).
- C. Paul reminds us that the teaching is that God intervened. He wrote, “God sent forth his Son . . .” (Gal. 4:4), not “God sent Jesus to *become* his Son.”²
 - 1. How remarkable is that? Hear John again: the one who took up residence among us was “with God,” “was God,” and “was in the beginning with God” (Jn. 1:1-2).
 - 2. It’s as hands-on as could be: *God came here!*

II. A Rescue Operation (Gal. 4:5).

- A. Like all the early Christians, Paul knew that the real story is *not* the story of a little baby.
 - 1. Being a baby was just the first step in his complete identification with even the lowliest of us (Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 4:15).
 - 2. In his Son, God became vulnerable; the baby would be *taken* to Egypt for his protection, and then *taken* back to Israel and eventually to Nazareth (Mt. 2:13-14, 21).
- B. That vulnerability was necessary to accomplish his purpose.
 - 1. He came “[in order] to (ἵνα, *hina*) redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:5).
 - a) “Redeem” is ἐξαγοράζω, *exagorazō*; buy back, secure deliverance, liberate.³
 - 2. That was what Israel had been longing to hear (see Lk. 1:51-55, 68-74).
 - 3. The prophets expected it for all (Lk. 2:29-32; 4:18-19; see Isa. 42:6-7; 49:6-8; 52:10; 58:6; 61:1-2).
- C. Redemption is not the whole story.
 - 1. “. . . so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:5).
 - a) “So that” (ἵνα, *hina*) expresses the purpose or intended result of the redeeming (Fung, 182).
 - 2. Paul wrote to both Jews and non-Jews; he was saying that because of Jesus, *all* can be granted the full rights and status as *God’s* sons!
 - a) Even without the problem of sin, that would be amazing! Created beings are described with the same word that was used to describe the one who was with God in the beginning.
 - b) With the problem of sin, it boggles the mind (Rom. 3:23; 5:6-8; see Isa. 59:1-2)!
- D. Surely, we can see how that surpasses the Christmas story as typically told!

III. He Remains with Us (Gal. 4:6-7).

- A. Dependent as we are on the Son for our new status, how do we handle things now that he has returned to the Father? (See Jn. 14:2-5; 16:7, 10; Acts 1:9-11.)

² Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 181-182.

³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 343.

1. As promised, “God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts (Gal. 4:6; Jn. 14:16, 26; 16:12-15) .
2. What does he do? Verse 6 is fascinating: the Son’s Spirit cries “Abba! Father!”
 - a) That is the Son’s prayer (Mk. 14:36)!
 - b) It is the prayer Paul says believers now pray (Rom. 8:15)!
 - c) The sense of Galatians 4:6 is that the Spirit is so entwined into our hearts that he is inseparable from us as we cry out (see Rom. 8:26-27) (see Fung, 185).
- B. Verse 7 adds more: we have completely left behind the status and life of a slave and are so firmly established as sons that Paul can say we are heirs through God.
- C. Verses 6-7 remind us that God’s grace doesn’t stop giving at our baptism (see Jn. 14:18).

God Seeks to Open the Door

1. We return to Bonhoeffer: “A prison cell . . . is a good analogy for Advent. One waits, hopes, . . . [but] the door is locked and can only be opened *from the outside*.”
2. Those words confuse people who think of the season *only* as “the most wonderful time of the year” and want to think only of laughter, gifts, extra kindness, newness, and birth.
3. But, they make perfect sense to those who in this time of year find deep sadness, depression, and, in some tragic cases, even suicide.
4. Those people remind us that we all need something more than the respite of a “wonderful time.” Something only the God of the manger *and* the cross can give. As Bonhoeffer saw clearly: the door must be opened from the outside.
5. Revelation 3:6 tells us that we must welcome Jesus’ help. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” Will you let him in?

December 21, 2014; [Revised] December 14, 2016
www.davidanguish.com