

**Series: God Sent His Son #1068**

**Title: Galatians 4.4-5**

***Introducing Galatians at Christmas***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Beginning today we prepare our souls, our hearts, and our minds to celebrate our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ whose birth at what we now call Christmas brought joy to the world! I think you are familiar with the Christmas carol that captures the *joy* Jesus has brought us. The title is *Joy to the World*. Isaac Watts wrote it in 1719. The words go like this. (You can sing it out if you want.)

1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
let ev'ry heart prepare him room  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ,  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 No more let sins and sorrows grow  
nor thorns infest the ground;  
he comes to make his blessings flow  
far as the curse is found,  
far as the curse is found,  
far as, far as the curse is found.

And then this last, glorious stanza of *Joy to the World*...

4 He rules the world with truth and grace  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of [Christ's] love.

This is one of my favorite Christmas hymns and carols and I hope to share some of my other favorites with you as, together, we make our way to Christmas Day right here on *God Is*. My hope and prayer for each one of us is that our whole being be flooded with true, genuine, and lasting *joy*. As Nehemiah and Ezra said to the Israelite people of God, "The joy of the LORD is your strength!" (Nehemiah 8, verse 10.) Indeed, only Christ provides us with the eternal joy that never fades but only increases the more we get to know and love Him. "The joy of the LORD is your strength!" May that be true of us this Christmas.

As I thought about how we should prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord, I was drawn again to two verses nestled in the heart of the New Testament letter, the New Testament epistle, to the Galatians. The truth in these two verses certainly gives us great joy. Let me read these for you so that we can begin to talk about them in the days and weeks ahead.

If you have your Bible handy, join me in Galatians (it is right after 2 Corinthians and before Ephesians). I am reading at chapter 4 and verses 4 and 5. Galatians 4.4-5, "**4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**"

Our title is *God Sent His Son* and we will walk through these verses prayerfully – seeking our God together and receiving from Him the truth He has for us. But before we drop into these timeless words, I thought it would be beneficial if we first speak of **who wrote to these Galatians, of who the Galatians were, and the content of the letter** (an outline if you please). My intention is to keep this introduction short and sweet, because I really do want to start the exposition of these specific verses as soon as we can. However, context is always important when reading Scripture.

If you take notes, and I know many of you do, prepare to jot down the following in the margins of your Bible, notebook, or on your phone or tablet.

First, in case you do not already know, the author of the letter to the Galatians is the Apostle Paul and the original recipients of this letter were the Christians in the churches in Galatia. (Galatians chapter 1, verses 1-2 reads like this, **“Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),<sup>2</sup> and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia...”**)

When I was a kid I remember that when it came to Christmas Eve and I was scurrying around wrapping Christmas gifts for my family last minute, I would be calling out to my Mom asking for “those stickers, the ones that say ‘from’ and ‘to’.” Do we have any more of those?” Maybe you know the ones I mean. My Mom always had a bunch of these in a drawer somewhere. You just filled in the name of the person who the gift was for. That was after the word “to.” And then next to “from” went my name. I then slapped the sticker somewhere on the wrapping paper.

Well, if Galatians were a Christmas gift, the sticker would read: “From: Paul To: The Churches of Galatia.” And we will learn more about who these Galatian Christians were.

The date of the letter is sometime shortly after the year AD 49. The reason I say this is because in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 1 Paul says that he went up to Jerusalem and we know from Acts chapter 15 that when Paul went to Jerusalem that time it was for the famous Jerusalem Council. That Council took place around AD 49, hence Paul wrote this letter after that. And what did that Council resolve, why, it was the question of how the Gentile people are saved. How does God accept Gentiles? Gentiles being people who were not Jews.

The Galatians were Gentiles, and Galatians addresses this very issue: specifically that Gentiles are saved, God justifies Gentiles, by *faith* (justification by faith).

Galatia (in the modern day country of Turkey) was a region of Central Asia Minor where the Galatians lived. Galatians were a Celtic people that moved into this area from Gaul (think modern day France), they moved from Gaul into Galatia in the third century BC.

If you know your history then you know the Gauls were a fighting people. They battled Rome and won, as well as crossing into Greece and capturing Delphi in 280BC. (Delphi the site of the The Oracle in the Temple of Apollo – very significant in Greek history, mythology, and religion. It was *the place* to consult the gods in the ancient world. Not to mention a stunningly beautiful place, if you have ever been.) So the Gauls were a tough, rugged fighting people. But in 189BC the Romans conquered the Gauls and the area of Galatia and the Galatian people were turned into a Roman province strictly under Roman rule.

The churches to whom Paul writes this letter were located in southern Galatia, and you may recognize their place names if you have read and studied the Book of Acts chapters 13 and 14. If you have not read Acts 13 and 14, I encourage you to do so. The Apostle Paul founded these churches on his first missionary journey. Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (those are the places Paul established churches). This is the only one of Paul's letters addressed to churches in more than one city, and the recipients of this letter were the Galatians.

OK, that is a little about the author of the letter (the Apostle Paul) and the recipients of the letter (the Galatians), and as we pivot towards outlining the contents of the Book of Galatians, I also need to talk about a group of people called "Judaizers." Let me spell that for you: Judaizers. J-U-D-A-I-Z-E-R-S. Who is a Judaizer? A Judaizer is a person who lives like a Jew. The word is used in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 14 and it means to live like a Jew, to follow Jewish customs; to live by the Jewish law. To Judaize was to take Gentile Christians and to force them to conform to the Old Testament Mosaic Law.

In particular, to be circumcised as requirement for salvation. The Judaizers taught that in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he had to live like a Jew, to follow Jewish customs and laws, *then* he would be acceptable in the sight of God. Here is the key: Judaizers taught a combination of grace (through Jesus Christ) *and* works (through the keeping of the Law) was how someone was truly saved; truly Christian; truly acceptable to holy God. They believed in both grace *and* works or grace *plus* works for salvation.

But their teaching was a false teaching. Their doctrine was thoroughly condemned at the Jerusalem Council around AD49 that I mentioned earlier. Again, read chapter Acts 15. And read all the Apostle Paul has to say in this Book, Galatians, because here Paul writes from his heart a passionate and stern correction to Christians in Galatia who were beginning to accept as *true* what the Judaizers taught!

It is very important that we know about the Judaizers before we get to Galatians chapter 4. However, we are almost out of time, so I will come back to them tomorrow. And why am I telling you all of this? It is an introduction, it is background for what we will learn about God sending His Son – who is Jesus – at what we celebrate as Christmas. Friends, Christmas is coming! And we want to be ready. So, join us. And invite a family member and friend to come along as well as we continue to discover who God Is!

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