

**Christmas 1
January 1, 2017**

"365 Days with the Full Rights of Sons"

GALATIANS 4:4-7

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

It says here that through Jesus we have received the full rights of sons. Think of the lost son who came home to his father after messing up his life and squandering his inheritance. The father welcomed him with open arms, put the best robe on his body, put a ring on his finger and called for the feast of all feasts to welcome home his lost son. Even though he did not deserve it, the father gave this wayward son the full rights of a son.

Here we are at the cusp of a new year. Instead of living a miserable life of feeding pigs and starving to death, we are home, in the loving arms of our heavenly Father with the full rights of sons. Every day of this new year is a day to celebrate this unique position we have with our Heavenly Father through Jesus his Son. We don't know what challenging situations will face us in this new year. We do know that whatever the future brings we have this position or status of full rights of sons 365 days in this new year.

The Heavenly Father planned our full rights as sons

You did not earn this position of the full rights of sons. It was carefully planned out and given to you by your heavenly Father who sent you his Son. "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." Our loving heavenly Father chose the perfect time for his Son to come into the world to save us. Adam and Eve probably thought the Lord would send the Savior who would crush the devil's head in their lifetime. Abraham was told that one of his descendants would bless the whole world. Would that be his son Isaac or one of Isaac's children?

Perfect timing is important. Think of the perfect timing that is needed to protect our country from incoming missiles from hostile nations such as North Korea. We have in place a defense system that shoots missiles at incoming missiles. As great as this timing is, it pales in comparison to the perfect timing our heavenly Father had in sending his Son into the world to rescue us and save us. Ecclesiastes says, "There is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven." This is especially true of the perfect timing for sending a Savior.

Our Father in heaven sent his Son. The word used here for sent has the thought of sending someone out to do a job or fulfill a mission. In John 6 Jesus speaks about himself as the Bread of Life who has come down from heaven. Then he says, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him that sent me." God sent

his Son into this world to have him punished in our place for our sins so we can be free. Jesus accepted that job or that assignment willingly. It says in the book of Hebrews of Jesus, "who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame." Everything in that important mission was done perfectly. We live with reality every day of this new year. That is why this will truly be a happy new year.

Jesus was born of a woman. Yes, it really did happen. God's Son who was with the Father from all eternity came into this world born of a woman. Jesus could have simply come to this earth and suddenly become fully human as a grown man. Instead he comes to this earth by being conceived in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. He developed in Mary's womb and depended on the nutrients and oxygen in her body to grow. He came down the birth canal and breathed for the first time the air we humans breathe. He had to nurse his mother Mary and have his diapers changed. Jesus the Son of God was fully human. "The Word became flesh." That's the mystery and wonder of the Christian faith we celebrate every day. As Susan's dad often said "Every day is Christmas."

Jesus was born under law. He had to keep the law perfectly. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all parts as we are, yet he was without sin. Think of Christmas vacation many years ago, fighting with a brother or sister. When someone hurts you, you are tempted to retaliate and hurt them back not just when you were a child but even now as an adult. God's law requires that we be perfect at all times. That is why I cannot have the full rights of sons on the basis of my performance. I have not loved people as I should, even my dear brothers and sisters, my dear wife, my dear children. Jesus did what we could not do. He fulfilled the law in our place. Even when his enemies cruelly taunted him as he was dying on the cross, he prayed, "Father forgive them for they do not know that they are doing."

Our heavenly Father sent his Son, he gave up his Son, he had him punished in our place, so we could be redeemed. Redeemed means to be set free. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."

Let me repeat a story of freedom that will illustrate this point more. Years ago an elderly man was walking down a street. He came upon a boy about 12 years old sitting on a park bench with a rusty bird cage. Inside was a sparrow that he was torturing by poking it with a stick. The man asked the boy what he was planning to do with the sparrow. With an evil grin on his face he said, "I am going to poke it with this stick and then I am going to take it home and feed it to my cat." The man asked, "How much do you want for the cage and sparrow?" The boy said with a greedy smile on his face, "Ten dollars, not a penny less." The man pulled out the ten dollars, gave it to the boy and walked into the park. Then he let the bird go free, put the cage down and crushed it with his foot. Satan loves to torture us not with a stick but with the law. He tells us how worthless we are. Jesus sets us free, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death.

Here you are dear Christian, January 1, 2017. You have another year of life here on this earth waiting for you. You are not being tortured by the law which you have failed to keep. You are free in Christ. You have the full rights of sons. You are home. You wake up each day knowing you have been baptized into Christ and you have put on Christ. The robe of Christ's righteousness is on you and you have the full rights of sons.

What if there are days in this new year when we lose sight of who we are in Jesus? This can happen when tragedies come to us, or we became burdened by our guilt and shame. It can happen when we lose touch with our God because we are not staying close to his Word that he has given to us. During such dark days, we have the assurance here this morning that our God will send us his Holy Spirit to remind us who we are.

The Holy Spirit reminds us of our full rights as sons

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba Father.' It is interesting that the same word used for sending out Jesus is now used for sending out the Holy Spirit. Our God loves us so much that he knows exactly when to send the Holy Spirit to help us remember who we are. Jesus told his disciples that he would not leave them as orphans. He promised to send the Holy Spirit. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth." The Holy Spirit will be with you forever. Romans 8 says, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children." I wish there was some way to count how many times this past year the Holy Spirit testified to you that you are a dear child of your heavenly Father. 2017 will be more of the same. The Holy Spirit is your Comforter. He is your Counselor. He will always be there to remind you that you have the full rights of sons.

The Holy Spirit will be there to lead you to cry out to your God, "Abba Father." The Aramaic word "Abba" is a word of endearment. Children call their fathers, "Daddy" or "Papa." That is how we can talk freely to our heavenly Father. We don't make deals or promise to behave a certain way before we can earn the right to pray. That right has been earned and given to us by Jesus God's Son. Romans 5 says that by being justified freely through Christ we have access to our Father. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock the door will be opened to you."

Just a little story, a true story, about that very special name "Abba." A few years ago we were camping in Lassen National Park. Even though it was summer, there was lots of snow still in the park. We hiked down a trail near the entrance which was lower in elevation. As we started down the trail we met a family who were from Israel. We came upon a snowfield. Two of the Israeli children were hiking ahead of their parents. When they saw the snow field they were so excited. The smaller girl began crying out to her father, "Abba, Abba" because she wanted him to see the snow field.

One of the first prayers I learned as a child was a combination of German words and this Aramaic word for father. The prayer was very simple: "Abba liebe Vater. Amen." We can pray prayers like this as a child or an adult because we are so close to our heavenly Father through Jesus.

Because you are no longer slaves to sin and the law, you have the full rights of sons through Jesus. That means there is an inheritance waiting for you. "So you are not longer a slave, but a son, and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." 2017 could be the year that Jesus returns in glory. Oh, how we long for that to happen. When it does, you will see with your own eyes the beauty of your inheritance, the place Jesus has prepared for you. It's the Holy Spirit who also reminds us daily of this hope of glory that is ours, that is waiting for us.

What will the near year bring for you and me? It will bring one day after another to celebrate that we have the full rights of sons with our heavenly Father through Jesus his Son. The Holy Spirit will not let you forget this. Amen.