

A Son to Make Many Sons

Galatians 4:1-7

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I have the great privilege this morning of leading you in reflection on the reality of the Christmas story and I count it a privilege and thrill to do so. My week past and the number of radio interviews that I have been doing regarding the book, *God with Us*, at least three times I have been asked by the interviewer, "Where do you think the Christmas story began?" And I want to pose that same question to you. Where did the Christmas story really begin? Did it begin with the manger? Did it begin with the promise of a child to Mary? Did it begin with the conception in Mary by the Holy Spirit? Did it begin with the prophecy that God gave Isaiah, that a virgin would conceive and bear a son, or that later one that a son would be born, a child would be born on whose shoulders the government would sit? Or did it begin way back in the Pentateuch, the first books of the Bible, where we read that one greater than Moses would come? Where did the Christmas story really begin?

To answer that question, I want you to open your Bible to the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1. In Genesis chapter 1, we have the record of the almighty, sovereign God creating the universe. Genesis chapter 1 tells us that He created it with the word from His mouth, and that He liked what He created is very apparent. Because in verse 31 the chapter ends, "And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good."

Then, in chapter 2 we have the discussion of the creation of man and woman, how God created man and then how He created woman, and how He gave them dominion over the earth. They were in full fellowship as sons of God. They were heirs of all of God's creation. They were bearers of God's glorious image. They were without sin. However, when you come to chapter 3, it all changes. Chapter 3 of Genesis records for us that Adam and Eve rebelled against their sovereign, beloved creator, the one who was their Father, the one with whom they had intimate communion and fellowship. They rebelled against Him by disobeying His command from a selfish heart responding to satanic temptation. As a result, chapter 3 records that they were alienated from God. They were headed for death. Their relationship to Him had been destroyed and they had become sons of the serpent, or children of Satan, if you will. That left God with a damned creation dying in alienation from Him, never to have the right to call Him Father, never to receive His inheritance originally created for them, but only to spend an eternity separated from Him.

The question then comes immediately, would God seek to restore fallen man? Would He seek to redeem man to Himself? Would He come up with a plan to make him again a son and a daughter? Would He devise some means by which the lost inheritance could be recovered? And the answer comes in the third chapter, verse 15, where God says, speaking to Satan, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise Him on the heel." It was Satan who had led Eve into sin and thus, Adam as well. And it is Satan who is here cursed. It is Satan whose children Adam and Eve have become. They have chosen him as their father and chosen against God. Immediately after they sinned, we knew

the fellowship was broken because instead of seeking the fellowship with God, they ran from it and hid themselves. And, as if to seal that permanently, God threw them out of the garden of His presence and put an angel with a flaming sword, to make sure they never tried to get back in.

Absolute alienation from God. The question is now that these whom God created to be His children and heirs and to share intimate fellowship with Him and receive His inheritance had violated that relationship and become the sons of Satan, would God do anything to buy them back? And in this verse it says, yes, He would. He starts out by cursing Satan with this, "There will be enmity (or animosity or hatred or conflict) between you and the woman." How? Between your seed and her seed. Your offspring are going to have conflict with the offspring of a woman. Now, we really don't know what he's talking about yet because the word "seed" can be singular or plural. And when He says that between you and the woman and your seed and her seed there will be conflict, He's not very specific. There's going to be a battle and you're ultimately going to be the loser. And then He gets specific. In the end "He" shall bruise you on the head, and now we know He's not just talking about many but He's talking about one. He's not talking about offspring in general but one. He's not talking about descendants but a descendant. There is a "He" here who will come out of the loins of woman who will bruise your head, a fatal blow, and you will only be able to bruise His heel, a temporary and minor wound. The seed of the woman will be in conflict with Satan, and when the conflict reaches its apex, the seed of the woman will only have His heel bruised and Satan will have his head crushed. The curse on Satan, then, is a curse of conflict ultimately to be resolved when one who is the seed of the woman comes to destroy Satan. A man, then, will be born. A man from a woman will be born to take back the domain of Satan and redeem those that are captive to his power by dealing Satan a fatal blow.

The question is who is this "he?" Who is this man. Who is this offspring of a woman? Well, here all we know is that he will come out of the loins of Eve, but that includes everybody. It isn't long, however, until in reading the Book of Genesis we come to the flood. And at the time of the flood the whole world is drowned with the exception of eight souls. And so the line through which the seed that will bruise Satan is coming is narrowed down to the family of Noah. And Noah had three sons and one of them was chosen to be the line, Shem. And as we read following that through the book of Genesis, we find that Abraham, who was in the line of Shem, is promised that his seed will bless all the nations of the earth, Genesis 22:18, and so the offspring is going to come through Eve through Noah through Shem through Abraham.

The promise then moves through Abraham's second son, first son by Sarah, namely Isaac. And Genesis 26:4 promises the seed will come through Isaac, and then through Isaac's second son Jacob. Genesis 28:14, the seed will come through his loins. And then through Jacob's son Judah, Genesis 49:10, Shiloh comes through the line of Judah and through Judah's royal son David, 2 Samuel 7:12 and 13 says. But the beginning of it all is right there in Genesis 3:15. A man will be born who will come into conflict with Satan and that man will win the conflict that no other man could win. That man born of a woman will deal a fatal blow to Satan. And he will come through Eve and he will come through Noah's line and then Shem and then Abraham and then Isaac and then Jacob and then Judah and then David. And the seed flows all the way down until we read in Matthew 1:1, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, and the Holy Spirit follows the track, to Abraham was born Isaac and to Isaac Jacob, and to Jacob Judah and follows the flow all the way down until verse 16 of Matthew 1, "And to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary by whom was born Jesus who is called Christ."

The seed was promised in Genesis 3:15. Jesus Christ was born as the fulfillment of that promise. He came to engage in a fatal conflict with Satan that would result in Satan's destruction and devastation and the liberation of many slaves to become sons of God, which was their intended purpose in the beginning.

Turn with me to Galatians chapter 3. I draw your attention to two verses before we look specifically at our text. Galatians chapter 3 and verse 16 gives us the end of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15. Now, the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. It went, as I said, from Eve to Noah to Shem through the line of Shem to Abraham and then to his seed, and the promise, he does not say "and to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one and to "your seed," that is Christ. One is coming, he told Abraham, out of your loins that will be Christ, and so the one that was born that day in Bethlehem was the seed of Abraham, seed of David, the seed who is Christ who came to bruise the serpent's head. Now it is not without price, for the serpent will bruise His heel, inflicting Him with a painful but temporary wound, and this speaks of course of His death on the cross. He will come; He will engage in conflict with Satan, Satan will bruise Him temporarily; He will rise from the dead and deal a crushing blow to Satan. And so verse 26 of Galatians 3 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." There it is. Paradise regained.

We are sons of God again. The redemptive, restorative process which God set in motion with the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 finds its culmination in the seed who is Christ who dies the sinner's death as it were, who rises to live new life, granting that same life to those who believe in Him, who thus deals a crushing, killing, blow to Satan and frees all who have been in slavery to him, to become sons of God. This concept of son-ship then lies behind what we see in the fourth chapter of this wonderful epistle.

Listen as I read the first few verses: "Now I say as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons and because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of His son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father. Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a

son, then an heir through God.

When man was originally created he was a son and an heir. When he fell into sin he became a slave of sin, a slave of Satan. Paul writes that God sent forth His Son to buy us out of the slave market, redeem us and make us sons. As we look at this text, the first thing that strikes my mind is the analogy in verses 1 and 2. Let's look at it very briefly. This sets the preparation for son-ship in place.

"Now I say as long as the heir is a child he doesn't differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything. But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father." That is just a simple, human illustration. What it says is that you have a little child in a family; that child may be the rightful heir to everything in the estate; he may have a right to it all. There's a sense in which he owns it all because it will be passed to him. But as long as he is a child, he is not different from a slave even though he owns everything. Why? Because as a child he is under authority and control by those people who are put over him. He is the same as a slave. A child and a slave do not differ even though the child be the heir to everything. The child is commanded; the child is reprimanded; the

child is instructed; the child is taught; the child is threatened; the child is made to conform, disciplined, taught to obey just like a slave. There's no difference, because the child is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. When the father says, alright, you're no longer a child, you are now a son. And then he differs. He is delivered from the bondage that he once experienced like a slave experienced, where his life was totally controlled by somebody else.

Paul is looking, then, at the rights of an infant child as compared with the rights of a mature young man, a mature son. And it would be good for us to note that little phrase at the end of verse 2, "Until the date set by the father," and in so noting, keep in mind that in ancient times there was a very specific point at which a young man passed from childhood into adulthood. It was very definitive and very identifiable, much more than today. Today kids just kind of grow up and we don't make anything about rites of passage or moments in time when we release them to be adults. It just sort of evolves in an almost nondescript and variable way. But in the Jewish world it wasn't so. In the Jewish world for the first eleven years of a young man's life, he was instructed in the things of God; he was led very carefully, if dutifully his father performed the task that he was given, to the place where he understood how to live as a man, he understood the law of God, the word of God, the responsibilities of the society and the community, and at the time that he reached his twelfth birthday there was a very definitive moment in time when he passed from being a child to being a mature son. The first Sabbath after his twelfth birthday, that young man was taken to the synagogue and there he became a son of the law, Bar Mitzvah, no longer the son of his father, no longer the son of his mother, which he was very early on. He is now obligated not to them but to God. He is the son of the law. His authority is the law of God. He has reached the point where he is mature enough to come under its adjudications, judgments and demands. And the father as it is, yields him up to personal responsibility to obey the law of God, that, the first Sabbath after his twelfth birthday.

Upon entering the synagogue the father would utter this benediction: Blessed be Thou, oh Lord, who has taken from me the responsibility of this boy.

The boy then prayed this prayer: Oh my God and God of my fathers, on this solemn and sacred day which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto Thee and declare with sincerity and truth that henceforth I will keep Thy commandments and undertake and bear the responsibility of my actions towards Thee. Amen.

If you are quizzical about how this can happen at the age of twelve, it will tell you a little bit about the educational process that occurred at the feet of the father so that by the time a Jewish boy reached twelve he could say that with significant intent. It was a clear dividing line in his life.

In Greece it was a little different. In the Greek culture, the father controlled the son from the age of seven to eighteen, the mother having the responsibility for the first six years. And then at the age of eighteen the son became *ethovas*, which is the word we would translate "cadet." And for two years he was under the authority of the state. Before he became an *ethovas* he was received into a class at a very special festival in which his long hair was cut off. I know there are a lot of mothers who would like to have that festival themselves. His long hair was offered to Apollo; it was a sign of him passing to manhood. Once again a mature son was a very definitive thing and a rite of passage was celebrated.

Under Roman law the year was not fixed, but somewhere between fourteen and seventeen at the discretion of the father, based upon the development of the son, the family held a sacred festival

called a *liberalia* in which the son was liberated from parental rule. He was taken down to the forum and he was introduced into public life. It was a very definite day and if he was a boy, he took his toys and he put them in the forum and left them there; and if it was a girl, she took her dolls and offered them to the gods to show they were putting away what Paul called childish things.

So Paul says look, you all understand that there is a definitive demarcation point in time at which a father establishes that his children pass from childhood to maturity. You understand that. The time when the heir de jure becomes the heir de facto, that's a very important time. The time when that child under guardians and stewards or tutors and governors and managers, those who controlled his behavior, who administered his estate, disciplined him and all of that, no longer have control, but he is free to act as a son. And to enter into all the privileges and rights that that son-ship involves. When does it happen? The end of verse 2, note this very carefully. It happens on the date set by the father. That's Paul's main point here, that every father sets a date for that release to take place. And then he applies it in verse 3 to the spiritual dimension. "So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world." Paul says there was a time when we were enslaved, when although we were heir de jure, we were not heir de facto. It was already in the plan of God that we would be his sons and heirs. It was already that our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life, even from before the foundation of the world. We were chosen before the world began in Christ. It was already determined that we would be the heirs, but in fact we had not yet entered into that. We had not become mature sons. We were still slaves. He says we were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

What does he mean? That phrase "elemental things" and similar ones are used a number of times in the New Testament, basically means the primitive teaching, the primary instruction, the ABCs, the basics, the simple foundational principles. And as long as we were children we were enslaved to those principles. For the Jew it would be the written law, the law of Moses, the moral code that the Jew was to live by. He was under that; he was a slave to that. As if it weren't enough to be enslaved to a divine law you couldn't keep, the Jews created man-made laws you couldn't keep either and strangled their people in a tyranny of legalism. For the Gentile, it would be enslavement to conscience, or as Romans 2 calls it, the law of God written in his heart, no less a bondage. A person who has never come to mature son-ship in Jesus Christ, who has not yet entered into his inheritance in Christ is enslaved either to a system of codified, religious law which he cannot live up to and which puts him in great bondage and fear or he is enslaved, be he irreligious, to the code of his own conscience or the law of God written in his heart, which is equally tyrannical and impossible to keep. And so be he Jew or Gentile, he is under the tyranny and the slavery of the law, first basic principles of right and wrong, be they written on stone or on the heart.

So, man is enslaved to the law. That prepares him for son-ship. Verse 4 then introduces us to the realization of that son-ship and picks up the idea of that final note at the end of Verse 2, that date set by the father, "When the fullness of time came, at the right date, prescribed by the father, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Christ's coming provided the restoration of lost son-ship, the restoration of the lost inheritance, the restoration of the lost intimacy with God, fellowship, communion. The bondage was long and hard. When God said way back in Genesis 3:15 that there was one coming who would bruise the serpent's head, it was a long time before He came, a long time. But when the fullness of time came, when it was the right time, when it was the perfect time, when it was God's time - I don't know what all that

means. I don't know how God providentially orchestrated history to bring it to the very perfect point in time. I don't know all of those unobservable and unrevealed things that are in His mind. But I know that God knew exactly what He was doing and was exactly on schedule. There have been many who have looked at the coming of Jesus Christ from a strategic viewpoint, from the earthly perspective, with human eyes and said, well, it certainly was a wonderful time for Him to come. Why? Because the Babylonian captivity had purged Israel from idolatry and at least they were focusing on the true God and looking for the Messiah, and so Israel, the people to whom the Messiah first must come, were not engulfed in idolatry but were looking at the true God even if through their own skewed vision and were looking for the Messiah. The canon of the Old Testament had been well-established; the prophecies were laid down; the synagogues had been established so there would be places to go to preach the gospel to people who at least ostensibly were seeking to know the true God in Israel. Furthermore, and thinking beyond that, Alexander the Great had spread the Greek language over the whole known world, certainly the biblical world, so that everybody spoke Greek, so that the Scriptures could be in the New Testament, written in a language that would be understood by everyone. And also the Romans with their powerful *Pax Romana* had brought peace out of diverse cultures and built roads everywhere so that easy access both from the standpoint of travel and from the standpoint of authority would be available for missionaries spreading this gospel. Maybe from that perspective that's significant, but more significant than that is that in God's mind and from God's viewpoint, the time was right for whatever reasons God has in His eternal understanding.

And when it was God's time to fulfill Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2 and all of that, when it was His time it says, verse 4, "God sent forth His Son." What you have there is a statement about the eternity of Jesus Christ. He didn't make Him, He sent Him forth. He was already there in the presence of God, as He says in John 17, "Restore me to the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus was in the presence of the Father as the second member of the Trinity and at the appropriate and proper time, when it was exactly right, God sent forth His Son. And so you have the deity of Christ emphasized, the deity of Christ. The very essence of God's Son implies that He bears the same essence as God. When the time came God didn't make Him, God sent Him. He was already in His presence, the eternal God, second member of the Trinity.

Then secondly it says in verse 4, "God sent forth His son, born of a woman." This indicates His humanity. Made of a woman, born of a woman, He had a human birth. There's no mention of a father here on the earth. Joseph was not his earthly father. Mary had that child conceived by the Holy Spirit when she was a virgin and remained a virgin, the Scripture says, until the child was born. And, by the way, after that she and Joseph had a number of children that are mentioned in the New Testament. But here, born of a woman, without a man, and there may be a hint of the virgin birth in that, Jesus was human. God sent forth from the presence of God man made out of the loins of a woman. In order to save us He had to be God, for only God can overpower sin and death and hell. In order to save us he had to be man because only man can substitute for man and die man's death. He had to be God and man, God to give His sacrifice infinite value, to bear our sins in His own body. Then it says He was not only born of a woman but born under the law. That's a marvelous statement. Like any other man, He was responsible to the law of God. He was born under it, born with a responsibility to obey it. Like every man, He had the responsibility to obey God's law; like no man, He obeyed it perfectly. He obeyed it perfectly. He kept it perfectly. He knew no sin. He was without sin says Scripture.

Well, is that important? Absolutely. For the sacrifice that was to die as God, giving the sacrifice of infinite value and power over sin and death, as man, to substitute for man, must be a perfect

sacrifice, a lamb without spot and without blemish or He would have had to die for his own sins and could not have died for ours. God, man, perfect sacrifice. This is the seed that was promised would come through the woman to bruise Satan's head. And so it says in verse 5, perfect God, perfect man, and perfect righteousness came. Why? In order that He might redeem those who were under the law, or literally who were under law. He came to redeem. That beautiful word means to buy back, the concept of going into a slave market to purchase a slave and then making him a son or a daughter. You see, back in verse 1 he said an infant son, even though he is a son, by decree and by predestination and by election, he is not a son as long as he is a child. The infant son is under the law and is no better off than a slave. So even though one be chosen before the foundation of the world to be redeemed, as long as he is still an infant, and has not come to maturity in Jesus Christ, he is no different than a slave. The infant son under the law is no better off than the slave. But when Christ comes and provides the sacrifice and by grace through faith he is set free, he then receives, it says at the end of verse 5, the adoption as son.

This is talking about status. This is the status of a son. No longer in bondage to the law, no longer in bondage to the flesh, no longer gritting your teeth trying to perform, now all of a sudden what happens, instead of being under the bondage of works and law and trying to save your conscience and please God with your human fleshly effort, you are a son. And by decree and declaration of the father, provision through Jesus Christ, you enter into the freedom of being a son and you receive your inheritance. As many as receive Him, it says, God gave the right to be called the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name. And so there is the realization of son-ship.

The law could only crush us, kill us, make us guilty, show us our sin. We couldn't keep it, we couldn't perform, we couldn't save our conscience, we couldn't earn our salvation. We were always slaves even though we were destined to be sons. Until Jesus came and purchased our salvation which then being applied to us lifts us out of the childhood of slavery into the maturity of son-ship. The confirmation of that son-ship comes in verse 6. "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father." Listen, God sent Jesus Christ that we might have the status of son-ship. God sent the Holy Spirit that we might have the experience of son-ship. That's the confirmation of it. It would be one thing for God to say I'm a son, it's something else for me to say, yes, and I know I'm a son. But when He gives me the Spirit, the Spirit comes into my heart and causes me to cry Abba, Father, daddy, poppa, father, and pulls me back into intimacy with God and I experience that son-ship. My own heart cries, God, you're my Father. God, I feel intimate with you in person. That's the word "Abba." The Spirit witnesses to us that we are the sons of God, Paul said in Romans 8.

When God said, Satan, I'm going to crush your head, I'm going to crush it with One who is going to be the seed of a woman, and I'm going to capture back from you, implied, those who you have taken as slaves to your kingdom of darkness. He fulfilled that promise when God in the fullness of time sent forth His son born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption as sons. Jesus came to make us sons, sent us His Holy Spirit to confirm that we are sons, and did it all in fulfillment of His promise way back in Genesis 3:15.

The consummation of that son-ship then comes in verse 7. "Therefore, you are not longer a slave but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God." Or perhaps through the gracious act of God. Listen to this, this is paradise regained, isn't it? You're an heir again. You have dominion over everything He's created, again. All things are yours because all things are Christ's and you are joint heirs with Christ. What was lost in the fall of Genesis 3 is restored in the redemption provided by the one who takes us

from slavery to son-ship. Now we have our inheritance back, an inheritance undefiled, fading not away, reserved in heaven for us. Yes, even though we were designated to be sons, we were not different than slaves; we were locked up in a bondage to the law and slave to a self-righteous, fleshly effort to secure our own peace of mind and clear conscience and try to please God by our own works and that kind of slavery got us nowhere but deeper and deeper and deeper into our sinfulness. But God was gracious and sent at the right time His Son into the world to die for our sins, cover them all and then to lift us out of slavery into son-ship and by His own Grace and mercy and based upon His predetermination, to give us an inheritance. And paradise was regained. Then the spirit comes to dwell within us, transforming our hearts so that we experience all the blessedness of son-ship.

This is the meaning of the coming of Christ, God's gracious act to save by grace those who are under the bondage of law. So a Son was promised who would make many sons, a Son of God to make many sons of God. Charles Wesley's carol that we sang says it, "Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth." That's paradise regained. That's the Christmas message.

What a false, fake substitute the world puts forth at this time for that true message. Do you remember these words? "You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. He's making a list. And he's checking it twice, going to find out who's naughty and nice. Santa Claus is coming to town. He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good. So be good for goodness sake. You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town." Now, does that threaten you? That's a very threatening poem. That's intended to scare children.

Now, listen, if you look at the letters of Santa, you'll see that Satan is hidden in Santa. When we teach a child to sing this song, we're teaching him a false theology. We're teaching him a false set of doctrine. Let me see if I can explain it to you. First, that song teaches that Santa is a transcendent being. He lives on a higher plane; he lives on another level; he transcends time and space. He has powers equal to whom? God. Not only that, he knows everything. He is omniscient. He knows when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows when you're naughty. He knows when you're nice. He knows everything. Not only that, he's everywhere. He sees you when you're sleeping. He's not only omniscient, he's omnipresent. And he's watching to see whether you've been good or bad. Not only that but he bestows favors. Now on what basis does Santa give his favors? What must I do to receive good things from this transcendent being called Santa? Well, it's very simple. I have to be what? Good. I can earn Santa's favor. If I'm good, Santa will give me gifts. After all, he's making a list. And he's checking it twice to make sure that we've been either naughty or nice and on the basis of how we've been, he'll deal with us. And if I'm not nice and good, I won't get any gifts. So I better be good for goodness' sake, not to mention for my own sake or anybody else's sake.

But you want to know something about Santa? He may be transcendent and he may be omniscient and he may be omnipotent, and he may be omnipresent, he may be dispensing all the good things, but you know what? You can't trust him. You can't trust him. Say what do you mean by that? It says he's checking to see if you're naughty or nice and you better be good for goodness' sake because if you aren't good, you won't what? You won't get anything. You want to know something? That's not true. Plenty of times I haven't been good and I get something anyway.

Every year I get something. And you want to know the truth of it? There are a lot of naughty people get a lot and there are a lot of nice people don't get anything. You know what about Santa Claus?

You can't trust him. He doesn't even stay true to his own word. He's blustering around and warning everybody to mind your manners and be good all the time. Be nice and not naughty and good and not bad. And then, you know what? When Christmas comes he caves in. And even when we've been naughty he gives us all that stuff. And sometimes he overlooks people that are nice. He really can't be trusted. His threats are meaningless and so are his promises. But that's good because it takes the sting out of them. And there's another good thing about Santa, you only have to worry about him once a year. He only shows up once. And you know when it is. It's always on December 25th, so you can get your act together just a few days before.

You say, well, where is he the rest of the time? Oh, he's in the North Pole. Could that be heaven and Satan's little scheme? What's he doing? Oh, he has all these elves around him. What are they doing? Whatever he tells them, mostly meaningless things like make toys. He's sort of inane, isn't he? He threatens but never fulfills his threats. He promises but doesn't always fulfill his promises. Is it any wonder that if I believe all that as a child, when I come to be an adult, I might have a hard time believing in a transcendent God who does know everything? Who is everywhere? Who does have all power? Who does keep His promises and His threats? And who does not save me and give me good gifts on the basis of my works but on the basis of His grace? If Santa has been my understanding of God, I'm in trouble. That's why I say hidden in the letters of Santa is Satan.

I'm glad for a God who is absolutely dependable. I can trust His promises. I can trust His threats. He is everywhere at all times and He doesn't just show up once a year. He's here all the time. And He gives His great gift, not on the basis of our works but on the basis of His grace through faith. As we look at Christmas this year, let's see it for what it really is. Let's look at the true God and the true Redeemer and the true provision, the Son, the seed of the woman, born to make many sons and to deliver them from a system of works' righteousness in which Santa and his ilk exist to no good, into the domain of son-ship in which Christ rules and reigns supreme.

Father, we thank you again for the reminder of the true significance of this season. Forgive us for foolishness and foolish thoughts and for our inability to see the subtlety of Satan's deceptions. We thank you for Christ who always keeps His promises and always His threats; who takes us out of slavery into son-ship not by something we have done, but by what He has done; who blesses us forever and ever not according to our works, but according to His mercy. We thank you, Father, for the Son who came in the fullness of time to give us back paradise, to make us sons and heirs of all that You possess. We pray in His blessed and holy name. Amen.

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