

God's Motive — God's Action.

Text: Galatians 4:4-7

1) God's motive is our need

Suggested Hymns:

2) Our desperate need

613, 179, 324, 328, 262

3) God's action

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Galatians 4:4-7, *⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are continuing our series on the Nicene Creed, *Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.* Here we see God's motive and God's action. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God's Motive Is Our Need

Who for us men and for our salvation shows God's motive and our need. With these words, *Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man*, we come to the heart of the second great article of faith in the Nicene Creed each Communion Sunday. And nothing you and I can add or subtract, is going to improve on it.

The great predecessors of our faith who forged the statement of conviction coming out of Nicea to challenge those who would whittle away at the stature of our Lord had no doubts about God's motive: *"For us men and for our salvation."*

And they stated God's actions very clearly: *"Came down from heaven and was incarnate."* That shows us God's motive and God's action. It is the central

fact of Christian truth. It is a mystery. It is a matter of faith. It is to be heard and pondered and embraced — and there is no doubt about it. *“Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.”*

God’s love for us is so great that He sent His Son into the world *“for us men and for our salvation.”* God never has done anything just for Himself or with an eye slanted toward the dividends. ***God is Love.*** We like to put that Scripture text in a picture on our walls. But it is the sort of thing that has a hard time finding a place in our homes.

Scripture says in 1 John 4:16, ***God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*** And in the familiar verses of John 3:16-17 we read ¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.***

This text also shows God’s motive - ***God so loved the world.*** And His actions - ***that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

And as our text says, ***God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.***

God is Love is one of the first things we commit to memory from the Bible when we were children in Sunday School, but one of the last things we embrace with our minds or fathom with our hearts.

Our thoughts run into suspicion. A God of love and unselfishness, a God who does everything for man exclusively and for our salvation, does not quite fit into any of the categories or fall under any of the labels by which we are used to organising things in our own experience.

We read in Luke 1:37 that ***with God nothing will be impossible*** and if He wants to send His Son just for our sakes and for our salvation, we must go along with that since it is God’s way of doing it.

2. Our Desperate Need

What really stops us and leaves a bad taste in our mouths as we let the phrase pass over our lips is the idea that God felt we needed His Son at all. The confession that our salvation is in God has a way of sticking in our throats.

It is the way of man to ponder all the little blanks in his life, the things that are not there and ought to be, like love and kindness and consideration, and if he ever put them together in the proper order, he would find that they spell God. That is what is missing.

We keep thinking the troubles we have are all accidents, and that the answers will come from us. The idea that we need no God has blossomed in our day, but its roots were laid as far back as the tower they built in the plains of Babel.¹

They had a hard time getting together in those days and a harder time staying together. So they erected a monument of togetherness, a lofty tower to demonstrate how, when men join hands and minds and muscle in a common cause, there is nothing, really, that they cannot do.

In addition, it was hoped a common goal might minimise the fractures that were tearing them apart. It takes a lot of pride to work up a boast about your basic weakness. But they had enough. And so do we. So it does not come easy, this admission that we need help from the outside and need it badly.

One of the loudest bangs in the history of mankind, along with the wars that we have been waging over the centuries, occurred when God stuck His pin into that great bag of pride out there at Babel. We read in Genesis 11:5, ⁵ ***But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.***

The phrase ***came down*** means that whenever God intervenes in judgment, He has carefully evaluated all the facts. His judgment is never impulsive or arbitrary.

God's judgment here, unlike at the time of the flood, was not even visible. God simply made some changes inside the minds of the builders. They could no longer understand one another's language. For one thing, that meant that they could no longer work together. Worse yet, they no longer trusted one another. The spirit of friendliness and confidence was replaced by ugly suspicion, and they had to move away from their dream home.

The settlement they had hoped would bring them fame became known as Babel which means “confusion.” Martin Luther called God’s action at Babel a much more horrible judgment than the flood. That divine judgment wiped out only a single generation of humanity.

However, confusing the languages at Babel, has bred confusion, suspicion, and hatred in every generation since then, down to our broken, disorderly world. Why is nation pitted against nation, social element against social element, individual against individual? We have an answer here.

By building the tower the people thought they had replaced God. So it was then and so it is now. But if the creaking in the foundations of the life which man has constructed for himself with its cold wars and hot wars and race wars and poverty wars isn’t enough to convince us that something is needed “*for us men and for our salvation,*” you would think that the knowledge that each one of us has of himself would bring it home to us.

It isn’t only the apostle who finds that “*the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*”² It happens every Sunday and Monday and always, to ourselves. You barely throw back the covers and put your feet under the breakfast table when you could bite your tongue for saying or thinking something that you should not have said or thought.

And sometimes it is your own fault that things do not go so well at the office, and always, inside, there is this great aching hole that makes you wonder, “*What’s wrong with me?*” It is pitiful the way we try to fill that emptiness with television and a five-day working week. We build our little towers. We will solve it ourselves. We will think of something. But still it does not go away.

But God is not misled. Even if we cannot seem to grasp our desperate need for God, He saw it clearly. Man had made a paradox of the only sense the world had ever known. “*Through one man sin entered the world,*”³ and converted love into greed, trust into suspicion, freedom into slavery, brothers into rivals, desire into lust, laughter into a sneer, and life into a battle.

It is a tragic event in history. Adam stared blankly into the eyes of the woman God had given him, but his mind was thinking how, although God had given her to him, and “*The world and all things that come forth from it,*”⁴ it would be a simple thing to rule out God, and mount to the throne himself.

And then there follows all that history, six thousand years of it, with man telling himself, *“I need no God,”* and setting about to prove it. We are still at it, saying these great creeds of ours, but maybe not really counting on them much.

Just think of your own plans and hopes for the improvement of your lot. Is God, your Hope for years to come, or Social Security, or your home, or your planned program of investments and insurances?

And when our hopes and plans do find fulfilment, that ache is still there with its question still unanswered, *“What’s wrong with me?”* It started with a gleam in Adam’s eye. Sin shut God out, and with Him also went *“the way, the truth, and the life.”*

Since then we are not content to be destined for eternal hell, but go about systematically creating one right here on earth, calling it the best of all possible worlds, all the while brushing the tears from our eyes.

3. God’s Action

For us men and for our salvation — God. And God could see it. So God acted, He sent His Son. And that is the other thing the writers of the Nicene Creed stood up to say. He *“came down from heaven and was incarnate.”* Jesus Christ was *“conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.”* He came down — way down into this world — and was incarnate and became Man. Way down; not just because we have sunk so low but because God is so high.

It has not yet been revealed to us, the nobility and majesty and glory of God’s throne, and we could not comprehend it if it were — that high above us and that wide around us and that deep beneath us! But Jesus came. He came down without a moment’s hesitation *“for us men and for our salvation.”*

And *“became man.”* Imagine that. He was fitted like a horse into the harness which the Bible calls God’s law. He slipped into the coffin we had constructed with our dirty words and idle thoughts and careless actions. That is what being a man is, life under slavery and death. *“A little lower than the angels.”*⁵ Jesus became a man.

Let us recall a few questions from *Luther’s Small Catechism*. **128. Which words of the Creed describe the stages of Christ’s humiliation?** “Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary”

129. What so the Scriptures teach about Christ's conception? They teach that Christ, the Son of God, received a true human body and soul in the Virgin Mary through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, not through a human father.

130. What do the Scriptures teach of the birth of Christ? They teach the Jesus Christ, the God-man, was born of the Virgin Mary.

133. Why did Christ humble Himself? Christ voluntarily humbled Himself in order to redeem me, a lost and condemned person.

Yes, Jesus Christ became a man *for us and for our salvation*. Taking the harness on Himself, He set us free. Laying Himself into our coffins, He raised us from the dead. No wonder God sent His Son. He did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. All this that happened on the paths of Galilee and the hillsides of Judea is not just history; it is atonement.

That vivid story starting in the high priest's palace and ending on the cross is not only an ancient chronicle; it is reconciliation. It is God fulfilling the Law and dying "*for us men and for our salvation*."

One other thing, "*For us men*" noting especially the words *For us*. There is an illustration about some children watching an artist painting at the seashore. One of them asks the artist kindly, "Paint us into the picture."

The whole wonder of God's answer to man's need begins to live and breathe and have real being when you and I are in the picture. For you and I need God, we need Him really, desperately, and immediately.

And the echo of that desperate need has sounded in the councils of God; and that sound has set in motion the grandest answer ever addressed to our trouble.

"*A decree went out from Caesar Augustus.*"⁶ Then a long trip by the Virgin Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, and "*the Word became flesh.*"⁷ God sent His Son into the flesh for you. He became Man for you. Jesus lived and died for you. Even that did not exhaust God's love for you, for the same Holy Spirit who worked the miracle that caused God's Son to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin works another miracle, as He conceives the faith by which that same Son comes into your own heart.

It is almost as if God did not know that anyone else existed; just you and your need and His answer, Christ Jesus.

God's motive is our need. God's action is His Son, "*who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.*"

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist⁸

Now I have found for my salvation
The ground which holds my anchor fast;
'Twas laid before the world's foundation
In Christ, on whom my guilt was cast:
The ground that still unmoved shall stay
When earth and heav'n will pass away. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Gen. 11

² Romans 7:19

³ Romans 5:12

⁴ Isaiah 34:1

⁵ Hebrews 2:9

⁶ Luke 2:1

⁷ John 1:14

⁸ Hymn 328