

The New And Blessed Era Inaugurated By The Birth Of Christ.

Text: Gal 4:1-7

1) A New Era

Suggested Hymns:

2) A Blessed Era

626, 44, 630, 839, 22

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 4:1-7, *¹ Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.*

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,

⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman. These words of our text refer to the birth of Christ. Christ's birth is the most important and the central event in the history of this world.

So important an event was the birth of Christ that the angels came down from heaven and sang on the plains of Bethlehem when Christ was born: *"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"¹* And is not Christ's birth the central event? Is not the entire time of this world divided into two parts by the birth of Christ, into the time before Christ and after Christ?

Even the rankest unbelievers and enemies of Christ are forced to number their years according to the birth of Christ, and all attempts to dethrone Christ and to introduce a different division of time have failed.

True enough, the heathens do have their own way of dividing the time of this world. The Jews count from the creation of the world and since last September they have the year 5781. The Muslims count from the hegira, or Mohammed's flight from Mecca, and have the year 1443 now.

But the Christian method of dividing the time before and after Christ has become so universal that even the heathen, Jews, and Islam's have had to adopt it. All the civilised nations upon the earth have adopted it and keep it.

In the year 1793, the freethinkers in France made a desperate attempt to overthrow the universal mode of counting the years before and after Christ. They introduced a different way of counting in France during the reign of terror which they inaugurated. But it did not last. Most of these rioters perished by the guillotine, and after a few years France returned to the old way of counting.

So God has shown, and shows to this day, that the birth of His dear Son is the great event in the history of this world, the pivot upon which history turns. Yes, Christ's birth has inaugurated a new era, and has brought a most remarkable change.

This is shown in our Epistle in which the Apostle says that God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, "*when the fullness of the time had come.*" Let us consider, *The New And Blessed Era Inaugurated By The Birth Of Christ.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A New Era.

A new era dawned upon the earth when Christ was born. The time after Christ's birth is not a continuation of the time before His birth. The old time was ended then, and the world entered upon an entirely new period, upon the time of the New Testament, upon the time of which Jeremiah says: "*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.*"²

Now, how does this new era which has been inaugurated by the birth of Christ differ from the old dispensation, or how does the time of the New Testament differ from the time of the Old Testament?

In the first place, in this respect, that formerly the Law ruled in the world, and that now the time of the Law's rigid domination is past. The Apostle says: "¹ Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."

Here the Apostle speaks of the time of the Old Testament. And what does he say of that time? He says that it was a time of bondage, and that the believers were kept under the Law and had no liberty, like children who have an heirloom coming to them, but are not of age and must be under their guardians, tutors, and governors.

And if we read the Scriptures of the Old Testament, especially those books that went by the name of "*the Law of Moses*," those numerous ordinances and commands which the people were obliged to keep, must we not wonder how the Israelites could remember them all, not to say anything about keeping them?

There was not only the moral law, contained in the holy Ten Commandments, but the ceremonial law also, which prescribed the religious exercises, and the prayers, and the sacrifices, and the political law, which dealt with the form of government.

There were laws as to different kinds of sacrifices to be offered at certain times and occasions; laws as to purification, when any one had defiled himself in any way; laws as to meat and drink, what they were allowed to eat, and what was forbidden, and when they were to fast; laws as to certain holy-days, and new moons, and Sabbath-days.

In short, the Israelites could hardly move without fear lest they might transgress the Law, and commit an act which was displeasing to God. The Law ruled over them with an iron rod, and rested upon their shoulders like a burden, like a heavy yoke.

But what a change Christ's birth has brought! Christ's birth has inaugurated a new era. With Christ the days of the new covenant have come which Jeremiah

foretold. True it is that the moral law is in force to this day, namely, the Law which God wrote into man's heart at the creation and which afterwards He revealed from Mount Sinai through Moses in the holy Ten Commandments.

But the time of the New Testament differs from the time of the Old Testament in this respect, that the dominion of the Law has ceased, that we are no longer servants of the Law, no longer "*under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.*" ³ *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world*" as the Apostle says.

There are no more precepts as to the commonest functions of everyday life. A new era has come. The burden, the yoke of the Law, has been removed and no man shall judge us in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath-days.

Another great difference between the Old the New Testament is this: The time of the Old Testament was a time of longing and expectation, of looking forward for the promised salvation, but the time of the New Testament is the time of fulfilment and of the actual possession of that which formerly they had been waiting and longing for.

The Apostle says, 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.*

Behold, the fullness of time had to come, that is, the time had to be fulfilled before Christ could be born. God had fixed the time when His dear Son would come into the flesh, and had promised His coming from the beginning of the world. And the nations of the earth wished and longed for Him to come!

Not only the Jews, to whom were entrusted the oracles of God, were constantly wishing and praying for Him to come, and were therefore saved, not by keeping the Law, but by faith in the future Messiah, but among the Gentiles also we find traces of longing and expectation during the time of the Old Testament.

The message had been spread, and was persistently kept up, that a great king would come from the East³ who would bring happiness to the people. But what a change Christ's birth has brought!

Christ's birth has inaugurated a new era. When Christ was born, the fullness of time had come, the Promised One had appeared at last for whom the nations of the earth had been waiting and longing.

The time of the New Testament is not marked by longing and expectation, not by a universal desire of the nations of the earth for a Deliverer to bring them happiness and peace, but the Deliverer has come.

All the promises of God are YES in Him and in Him AMEN, and He has established His kingdom in the hearts of people everywhere, in all parts of the world, and is worshiped in all the nations, and kindred, and tongues, and people.

Now as children of God we do not view our salvation as pending in the future. We do not worship in types, and figures, and shadows, but we have the body, we look back, to our salvation as an accomplished fact.

We are not still to be redeemed, but we have been redeemed by the Saviour's blessed work, who was made under the Law for us, kept the Law for us, and bore the punishment for our sins.

We are not looking forward for the time to come when we shall enjoy liberty, and all the rights and privileges which the Saviour brings to His people, but we have already received the adoption of sons, and need not wish and long for anything more as to our salvation. This is the new era inaugurated by the birth of Christ, new, because it is entirely different from the time of the Old Testament.

2. A Blessed Era.

And it is a blessed era. This is the second part of our meditation.

Are we not blessed indeed, being privileged to live in this new era? Would we wish back the old time of the Law's dominion? Would we prefer to bear the yoke, and to be burdened with laws and statutes? Let us rather thank God for having made us free by the advent of His dear Son.

The time of the New Testament in which we live now is a blessed era indeed, an era of liberty and freedom, an era in which the way of salvation is made a great deal easier than it was. We are no longer required to observe distinct rules and regulations, and bring numerous sacrifices that we might be numbered with God's chosen people. Nothing more is required of us than that by the Law we

know our sin, and that by faith in Christ Jesus we accept our salvation which He has procured for us.

What a blessing that salvation is no longer confined and restricted to a certain nation and people, but that it has been made universal! In the time of the Old Testament you had to be a Jew to be saved, and nobody could reach heaven unless he became a proselyte and joined the nation which God had chosen and selected from out of the nations of the earth for His own people.

But now the Church of God is gathered in all nations, and many come from the East and from the West and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. O the blessed era inaugurated by the birth of Christ! What blessings it brought to the earth!

Formerly, darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people, but in Christ the Light has come which shines into the uttermost parts of the earth.

Formerly, even the leading nations of the world, standing at the head of civilisation in culture, literature, and science, were given to the grossest idolatry, to superstition, and to the most abominable vices. But consider the many blessings Christ's birth brought to the nations of the earth!

How wonderfully the Gospel spread in all lands, changing the hearts of people, turning the most benighted races into civilised people! No one can deny that the changes for the better throughout the world are due to the gracious influence of Christianity which raises the moral standard and brings true happiness to the individual and to the community.

O blessed era inaugurated by the birth of Christ! It is the time of which the Apostle says in Acts 17:30, ³⁰ *Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.* It is the time for all people everywhere to repent, the time in which salvation is near to all, and in which all can be made sure of the fact that they are God's dear children through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what blessedness they experience who have been made God's dear children through faith! The Apostle says, 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."*

This is the great privilege of the true believer, that he is endowed with the Spirit of Christ, that the Holy Spirit puts up His abode in the believer's heart, and dwells therein, and enables him to speak to the dear Father in heaven as a child would speak to his dear father.

Is not this a great blessedness to stand in such close relation to your heavenly Father that you can address Him in the most familiar terms, and expect all good things of Him?

Examine yourself, then, my friends, whether the Spirit of Christ be in you, crying, Abba, Father! If this Spirit is not in you, if with your heavenly Father you are not on the most intimate terms, you are not a true Christian, and you are not benefited by the new era in which you live, and which has been inaugurated by the birth of Christ.

For the Word of God distinctly says in Romans 8:9, *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.* But if you do not have this Spirit as yet, you may still receive Him. Call upon God with all sincerity of mind that He should create a clean heart in you, and renew a right Spirit within you, and not cast you away from His presence, and not take His Holy Spirit from you.

God will surely hear your prayer. The Spirit of Christ will enter the temple of your heart, and bless you, and assure you by the divine Word and the holy Sacraments that you are truly a child of God and an heir of eternal life through Christ, to whom be honour and glory forever and ever! Amen.

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

¹ Luke 2:14

² Jeremiah 31:31

³ Isa 41:2