

Sermon By Canon Jim Holbeck At The Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney
on Wed 21st December 2005. Reading : Gal 4:1-7
Topic: "*Love Came Down At Christmas*".

We may think in the light of all that is happening in today's world that things can't get much worse. The same could have been said at that first Christmas. There were some good things happening but humans had made a real mess of the world they were in.

In spite of all human rebellion God was working out His purposes for the blessing of humankind. He was over-ruling in all the affairs of the world to send His Son into the world to set people free. Gal 4:4-7.

1. A WORLD PREPARED FOR THE COMING OF JESUS AS SAVIOUR.

i. The right time historically. *4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...*

God had eternally planned that He would send His Son into the world. But it had to be at the right time. We can look back and see how it was just the right time for the Saviour to be born.

The different cultures of the world had brought a situation into being where the gospel would take root and flourish in a way it would not have done in previous centuries.

The Greek culture had brought a common language so that most people could communicate with each other. It had brought an openness to ideas and to new thinking.

The Roman contribution had been in providing roads that were safe and secure with Roman garrisons guarding all the main roads of the day. The Romans had brought order and discipline to society.

The Jewish culture had seen the Dispersion of Jews throughout the known world and the establishment of synagogues where the Scriptures could be read and taught. The Jews were looking forward to the coming of their Messiah, Christ, anointed one.

ii. The right time spiritually. *5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

The Greek gods and the gods of the Roman pantheon had not brought fulfilment to the people of the day.

There was a spiritual vacuum. The other gods had been tried and found wanting.

The Jews were surrounded by occupation forces and longed to become free people once again. They longed to be redeemed, set free.

Set free from the Roman occupation forces.

Set free from the curse of the law that told them how to live but gave them no power to do it. The law that promised life to those who obeyed it brought instead a curse for failing to obey it. Deut 27:26 "*Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.*" No one could observe them perfectly. So all were sinners needing forgiveness.

They didn't know that the Redeemer the Christ the Messiah was about to come amongst them. When He came there were those who recognised Him for who He was. Jn 1:11-12 *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

iii. The right time for the gospel of Jesus to spread. *6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

People were looking for a religion that would captivate their interest and would bring them personal freedom and satisfaction.

Jesus by His birth, death, resurrection and ascension made it possible for people to find peace with God through Him. His death would suffice for the penalty of sin. He made it possible for people to know they were forgiven by God. His resurrection would mean the possibility of a new relationship with God which had been promised in the OT. God would give His Spirit to indwell His people so they would know He was their God and they were His people.

The day of Pentecost saw this happen as the Spirit of God came upon the believers and brought an inner assurance that they were children of God. *6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* This was the cry of a dependent child on a loving father whom the child loved and trusted. Sonship was their status as believers. The Holy Spirit brought them the experience.

2. ARE OUR HEARTS PREPARED TO RECEIVE HIM NOW AS SAVIOUR AND LORD?

We like those early believers can become children of God as well. We too can be adopted into His family.

It's as we receive Jesus in the words of Jn 1:11-13, *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

We can know that our status is secure as children of God and that no one will ever pluck us out of His hand.

We can also have the experience of being assured we are His children. Paul wrote in Rom 8:15 *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

We are loved. We belong. We are the children of God. We can come boldly before Him saying "Abba! Father! Father dear Father. Almost Daddy.

In gratitude we live our lives for Him who gave His life for ours. As Paul wrote, 2 Cor 5:14 *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

I believe He gives us healing in body, mind and spirit to enable us to live for Him to His glory.

A Today illustration

As I was preparing this sermon this morning the phone rang. It was a woman in her 80's. I knew her as someone who has received an incredible amount of healing in recent years. Not only physical healing but deep inner healing. In one of our seminars God used His word to show her that He loved her; that she was His child and He was her Heavenly Father. Her earthly parents had never ever told her they loved her.

As she realised that God loved her so much that He sent His Son to die for her she was transformed. It was almost like a baptism of love, being immersed in the love of God and she knew God was her Heavenly Father.

Her shattered self-image was marvellously healed. She forgave all those who had disappointed or hurt her.

The fear she had known all her life vanished as she realised her guilt had gone and she no longer needed to fear if God was her Heavenly Father. Her fear of people was healed and she found that she could talk to people about God.

She told me of a recent conversation with a taxi driver who was bemoaning the fact that his wife had left him for another man. He had been angry and broken hearted. But that relationship didn't last and the wife begged her husband to forgive her and to take her back. He told this 80 plus friend in the taxi, "I'll never take her back!" He expected to get lots of sympathy from an older lady. She responded "That's not the thing to do. You've got to forgive her." And told him how people could forgive with God's help.

As she got out of the taxi the driver said, "Thank you so much. No one has ever cared enough to talk to me like that."

Her question this morning was "How can I lead one of my friends to Christ?" As a healed person she wanted to lead others to the One who had brought so much physical, emotional and spiritual healing to her personally. It's good to know that God is using the Healing Ministry to heal and to train 83 year old evangelists so that they can share Jesus with others in taxis, convalescent homes and other places.

I told her about the prayer I read in one of John Stott's writings that I had prayed that had opened my own life to Jesus and how I had adapted that prayer to lead dozens of others to the Lord since then.

I felt that if a woman has been healed in her 80's to become an evangelist I might share it with you as well. She wrote down the A.B.C.D. of Christian Commitment at Christmas (or any other time).

The A.B.C.D. of Christian Commitment

A. I need to **A**dmit I am a sinner in the sight of God. That's how God sees us.

B. I have to **B**elieve that Jesus died on the cross for me as an individual. If I had been the only person who ever lived and committed only one sin Jesus would still have had to come to die for me.

C. I have to **C**onsider the cost of becoming a Christian. I recognise that salvation is a free gift to me in Christ, but it cost Him His life. I realise that if He died for me then I must now live for him.

D. I have to **D**o something about it. I have to ask him into my life to be my Saviour from sin and to be the Lord of my life. The picture that helped me was from Rev 3:20 of the Risen Christ knocking on the door of human lives and wanting to enter them. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

I felt the Lord allowed the phone call to come through this morning in my preparation time for a purpose. It may be for someone here to make that commitment to Christ. Or it may be for someone to have that outline in mind over this Christmas period so that they can lead a friend or relative to Christ.

Let me lead you in such a prayer in case you have never prayed a prayer of commitment to Christ before. Or the Lord may give you the opportunity to share such a simple prayer with others so that you can lead someone to Christ over this holiday period.