

The Seed

Christmas in Perspective

Galatians 3:19-29
December 21, 2003
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Twenty-four years ago today, I got a phone call at work. Our first child was due on Christmas Eve. However, my wife thought we'd be going to the hospital that day, and she was right. I had learned in prenatal classes that the average time for labor with a firstborn is twelve to eighteen hours. I bought film, drove home, made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, gathered things and dawdled. In contrast, my wife believed things were more urgent, and she was right. As a former ambulance driver and attendant, I gave her a smooth, comfortable ride over and around the Kentucky hills that separated us from Lexington and the hospital. For the first time I can ever remember, she said to me as I was driving, "It would be good to go faster;" and she was right. At the hospital my wife told the attendants she thought things were progressing. In a very short time, much sooner than the nurses, doctors and I expected, we had a beautiful little girl... and my wife, well, she was right.

The arrival of a baby changed our lives forever. First, it gave us a new identity. We now were parents. Second, it gave us a new responsibility. A little life depended on us, and we were accountable for her well-being. Third, it gave us a new reality. That sunk in on Christmas Eve when we took Sarah home. We discovered that night that our needs and wants are secondary. Sleep is an important thing, but a crying baby is even more important.

The two most life altering events outside of a spiritual conversion are a wedding and a birth. They bring profound change because they impact our identity, responsibility and reality.

They call for new attitudes, new actions and new habits because our life is altered. They really are seeds, full of potential. They are seeds of maturity. They call us to mature, unselfish thinking. They call us to mature, unselfish planning. They call us to mature, unselfish living. They are seeds rather than pills. A pill changes the chemistry and induces things in you without your response. A seed, however, draws from the soil. A seed does well in some soil, lays dormant in others, and is even removed from others. Marriage and birth call us to maturity, but they don't produce it without our cooperation. We can be self-centered, insensitive, unhealthy, immature spouses and parents. Indeed, each of us has habits that cause our families pain. In some parents the habits are so destructive that the child or seed is removed.

In this same way, what arrived and lay in the manger at Christmas was a seed. Indeed, *The Seed!* The Apostle Paul wrote about Jesus as *The Seed*. He was discussing the promise of blessing that God made to Abraham. All nations would be blessed through Abraham and his seed. Now, Paul understood that the word choice was important. God could have promised blessing through Abraham and his seeds, meaning his many descendants. Instead, the Scriptures spoke of seed in singular form. Christmas is all about the seed, a child that was planted as a seed among us.

Now when Paul wrote about this, he was confronting people who trusted that their good behavior, their observance of God's law, would commend them to God. It would gain their approval. Paul told them that the law would not bring their approval. Instead, it shouted their condemnation. It revealed their unbelief and sin.

Last Wednesday, I met with our confirmation students. They are a terrific group of young people. I am so impressed. They are bright and insightful. I'll tell you a secret. It is such a privilege to work with them. Anyway, I said to them, "Some time in the future you will be put

on the spot. We all must give an account to God. I'm going to put you on the spot now in preparation for the day you are on the spot with God. Suppose you died, are standing at heaven's entrance and an angel asks why he should let you in. How would you answer?" I provided a place in the blue insert for you to give your answer. I encourage you to write your response now. Slowly, each student gave me a reason why he or she should be let in heaven. They were thoughtful and serious. They did not jump into their answers. They did not take it lightly. Often, when people answer this question they point to their belief, their commitment, their practice, their sincerity, or their fulfillment of some religious formula ... like they prayed to receive Christ. Now I don't want to denigrate those answers because the Scriptures say we are *justified by faith* (Galatians 3:23): "*Whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13). My concern is that the focus is on our response to God's word. That is the same focus that the Galatians had. They saw their response to God's law as their religious formula to approval. Some think confession, profession of faith, and baptism is the formula that wins approval, but how would that differ from observing the law? Paul wrote:

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. (Galatians 3:19, NIV)

You see Jesus is not a new law. He is the seed. Belief describes the soil's receptivity to the seed. Commitment describes the soil's receptivity to the seed. Prayer describes the soil's receptivity to the seed. But salvation is in the seed. It is not in the soil. It is in what the seed does. It is not in what the soil does. My answer to the question of why I should be let into heaven is this. "Jesus paid for my sins. They are gone. Jesus promised eternal life. He paid for this, he promised this, and he prepared this for me." There is a world of difference between trusting what Jesus did and said and trusting what I have said and done. My faith is imperfect,

but Jesus promise is perfect. My actions are faulty, but Jesus' actions are faultless and sufficient. I'm the soil, but the seed produces in receptive soil and makes the difference.

God came into the world, not in flaming judgment, not as a judge sorting the sheep from the goats, not as a king rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, not as a warrior putting everything right and destroying everything wrong. He came not as a pill that induces some automatic response. He honored our role as masters of our lives, as people made in God's image, meant to rule. Indeed, the work of Christ is to restore us as rulers, not subvert us. Paul wrote:

If, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive... reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Roman 5:17, NIV).

How ingenious it is that God came as a baby! The manner of his coming reveals the manner of his work. He is *The Seed*. He brings a change in our identity, responsibility and reality. Has that happened for you? Do you understand your new identity? Have you seen your shift in responsibility? Are you aware of the new reality?

Have you wondered why God doesn't just zap you so your problems are gone? He's made you a ruler. He has come as the Seed that births solutions in your life. Rather than you just being passive and watching what he does, he calls you to cooperate. As you do, new attitudes, actions and habits are born that create new destinies. God doesn't transplant righteousness. He sews it. He doesn't transplant success, he sews it. He sent the Seed that produces fruit.

Jesus spoke to his disciples of four responses or four types of soil. There was the hard soil or hard heart that was hostile to the seed and wanted no part of Jesus. There was the rocky soil or faint heart that because of resentment or fear would not let the seed grow much. When

tough times come, as they do, Jesus was unwelcome. There was the weedy soil, the half-heart. The seed couldn't grow because there was too little place in that life for Jesus. Finally, there was good soil, the hungry heart that was ready for the seed. Indeed, it is devoted to the seed! What are you? What kind of soil are you?

What do you see in the manger? Do you see the Seed? Do you see your promise of heaven? Do you see the seed to your freedom and a new life? What do you see in the manger and how will you respond?