**Free as Sons**

I am going to let you in on a little secret this morning. One of our three children is adopted. I won’t tell you which one; you’ll have to guess. Has anyone else here adopted a child? Anyone who was adopted or had an adopted brother or sister?

Since this passage talks about adoption, I started to reflect on our own experiences with this process. To be honest, this happened so long ago and Kathy really was the one who made it happen, so I don’t remember all the details. But I do remember the interviews, the lawyers and their legal fees, the courts, and the day that the adoption was finalized on August 11, 2000. This process took years as it does for most families that adopt. It’s not like going into a store and picking out your child and going home. It takes real commitment and time and effort to make it happen.

We now had the legal document that Jazmine was our daughter. Oops, I guess I let the cat out of the bag, Jazmine was adopted. Perhaps you would have figured that one out yourself.

I remember one occasion when Jazmine was in pre-school and we went to some event with all the kids and families and this was the first time that some of Jazmine’s little friends saw her mom and dad. And I remember this one little girl coming up and Jazmine was on my lap and this girl looks at Jazmine and then looks at me and she looks at Jazmine and she looks at me and finally with this very quizzical look on her face, she says, “Are you really her father?” About that time, her mom grabs her and says, “Let’s leave these nice people alone” and she carries her daughter off.

But to be honest, I have proof that I am her birth father. Now, I need a volunteer to make this happen. Is this a certificate of adoption? No. What does it say? Certificate of Live Birth. And who’s certificate is this for? Jazmine Lynn Higgins. Does this look like an official certificate? And the Father’s name? Lance Erik Higgins. And when was the date this record was filed? May 2, 1997. Thanks for your help.

Now, this is really interesting. The adoption was in 2000, but this Live Birth certificate says it was recorded in 1997. The adoption is complete and retro-active. I am Jazmine’s birth father? Sometimes people ask that question to adopted kids, “Do you know your birth father or mother?” But I am her birth father and I can prove it. The adoption changed everything in Jazmine’s life. Let me read from the adoption papers.

*That the decree of Adoption effects a complete substitution of families for all legal purposes and establishes the relationship of parent and child, together with all the rights, responsibilities, and duties thereof.*

*The from the date of this Decree of Adoption, the adoptee is entitled to inherit real and personal property by, through, and from the adoptive parents in accordance with the statutes on succession and has the same legal status, including all legal rights and obligations of any kind whatsoever, as a child born of the adoptive parents.*

In the eyes of the law and the world, there is no difference whatsoever between Jazmine and our other 2 children. Adoption has changed everything for Jazmine. She got a new name, she got a new birth father and mother, she got a new home, she got a new life, she got a new destiny.

And this passage speaks to our adoption by God the Father. After preparing for this lesson, I would even dare to say that this is perhaps the most important doctrine of the Christian faith that you need to understand.

Last weekend, I was talking to someone who was very new in the faith and he had a lot of questions. This person believed in Jesus, but he realized that he doesn’t always do the right things and he questioned if he really was a believer. So, I began to explain that we don’t earn our salvation, we can’t save ourselves, that is the work that Jesus Christ did on the cross when he died for our sins. And I explained this doctrine of justification that God forgives us of all our sins past, present, and future because of Christ’s death on the cross. And I could tell he wasn’t really getting it. So, I explained that God removes our sin and sees us as totally clean by looking at us through Christ. That didn’t help. I could tell he really didn’t understand what I was saying, so I prayed quickly and I asked God to help me give him some assurance of his salvation. And the thought that immediately came to my mind was adoption.

And so I told him that we are adopted into God’s family when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. And so, just like an earthly father, God is our heavenly father and better yet, he is perfect. And as much as our earthly father will love us no matter what, our heavenly Father will always love us. We cannot do anything to lose our status as a child. It is a permanent deal and that he could be assured of this.

And that picture made sense to him. He had been adopted into God’s family. He understood the security in that. He didn’t need to have it all together. He didn’t need to understand justification. He understood that he had a Dad in heaven and that was enough.

Let me read from another one of my favorite books, *Knowing God*, by J.I. Packer. He explains the importance of this idea of adoption in one of his chapters **<Arrow>**

*You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s Holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he doesn’t understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian, as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God.*

It is my prayer that we all understand God as Father in a more personal way this morning. So, let’s take a look again at the text. **<Arrow>**

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

So, the first thing to point out is that your adoption as a child of God is not automatic. Not everyone on earth is a child of God. The Bible does not teach this. Here, we see those who are IN Christ, who were baptized into Christ and who have clothed themselves with Christ. And if you remember, the Old Testament teaches God as Father not of ALL men, but of His own people, the seed or offspring of Abraham.

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*Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “Let my son go, . .*

And earlier in chapter 3, Paul explains this promise to Abraham and through him to the building of a great nation in Israel. And here he describes that we who belong to Christ are also part of Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise that God gave to Abraham. An heir is someone who inherits the property and rights of his Father. We have this status as followers of Christ, but this is not everyone in the world. It is a special status that we have in God’s eyes.

The second thing to point out is the phrase ‘children of God’. Actually, the original text clearly states ‘sons of God’ and I am generally in favor of the gender neutral translations like this, but you miss a little of the meaning when you do that here. In the Roman Empire, adopted sons were given the same rights as natural born sons, much like what the adoption documents I read earlier described. So, all the Galatians would understand that they have rights as heirs. This was not generally the case in all societies.

And to be clear, this is not being sexist, just look at the next verse. *Nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*. Far from what some people say, Christianity elevated the position and role of women in society. We are all equal in God’s eyes and even women are equal heirs. In Christianity, women are given equal rights to inherit all the blessings associated with their adoption by their heavenly Father. And that is how the audience would have taken it. A huge equal rights initiative here.

He says the same thing about slaves or free. We are all equal in Christ. He continues with this thought next in this passage. **<Arrow>** .

Paul talks about an underage heir and how they have to wait for the time set by the father to take possession of the estate. Now, another thing that sometimes happened when a wealthy Roman couple did not have a male heir, they would adopt one of their slaves and he would inherit the estate. And Paul makes a comparison like this to us, how we were like slaves to this world and to sin, but when the time was right God sent his Son into the world that we might receive adoption to sonship. **<Arrow>**

Another interesting concept is that God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts and it is the Spirit who helps us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Abba is the Aramaic word for Dad or Pappa and is an intimate expression that Jesus used when talking to the Father. And this is really interesting because our adoption changes our relationship to the Trinitarian God.

God the Father is no longer the judge who condemns us, but he has become our loving father. The image you get is a judge who pronounces judgment, but then he gets down from the judge’s seat and removes his robe and comes down and pays your penalty, then takes you home and adopts you as his son. It is an image of family, of closeness, of intimacy, of a loving family. And now we have a Daddy or Pappa in Heaven who is eternal and who has an eternal home prepared for us.

Some people say this can be difficult for someone who did not have a father in this life or had a bad example of a father. But even if that is so, I think we can imagine a good and loving perfect father. And if you want some views of this look at Jesus and how he describes his relationship with his Father in the Gospels and especially John’s gospel. he gives us some views of this in Jesus’ life. **<Arrow>**

And here in John is the one of the first times that our adoption as children of God is mentioned in the New Testament. J.I. Packer in his book points out four ways Jesus showed us how this relationship with God the Father should look. And in John’s gospel, we see Jesus doing the will of the Father and saying what the Father tells him to. It implies an Authority from God the Father. Second, we see Affection from God the Father. Jesus says on a few occasions that the Father loves the son. Jesus often gets alone to pray and have fellowship with the Father. Jesus also tells his disciples in John 16:32 that a time is coming when they will leave him alone and yet he will not be alone for the Father is with him. And finally, fatherhood implies honour. Jesus said, ‘Glorify your son that your son may glorify you.’ (John 17:1)

And this type of relationship extends then to us as God’s adopted children. The Father loves us as His own son, He is with us and near us. He will never leave us. He desires to give us things to do and say in His name; we need to learn to listen to His Voice. And He will give us honour when we serve Him just as He has honoured Jesus as the name above all names. We aren’t the same as Christ, but we will still be honoured because we have served in Christ’s name. (John 12:26)

That’s our relationship with God the Father. Now, let’s take a look at another passage that is very similar to the one we read from Galatians. It comes from Paul’s letter to the Romans and just to show you this doctrine of adoption is throughout the New Testament. **<Arrow>**

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory*

And here like our passage in Galatians, Paul mentions the Spirit whom we receive and who indwells us and testifies that we are God’s Children. It is like a seal on a legal document that this is authentic. Like the seal on a Birth Certificate shows it’s the real thing, the Holy Spirit is our seal that we have been adopted by God. And it is through the Spirit living in us that we are able to cry out to God as our Father, our Pappa. You can’t approach God like that without the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of Christ.

Now, this passage also points out a change to our relationship with Christ. It says we are co-heirs with Christ. That we will share with his glory. Now, this makes me feel a little uncomfortable; it almost implies some equality with Christ. But look at what Christ says here after His Resurrection. **<Arrow>**

*Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

*Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*

*Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters*

After the Resurrection, Jesus calls his disciples his brothers and that we have the same Father. Jesus is our Lord and Savior, but adoption means that He is our brother also. Jesus is our Big Brother and He’s not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. And finally, that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family. We say this lightly sometimes, but it is more of a reality than we think. And there is a lot of love and concern for one another here in Fishers Creek. And people think of this as extended family often when many of us live far away from other family. And that is the way it should be.

Our understanding and belief in our adoption as children of God impacts our whole Christian life. Just as Jesus’ understanding as the Son of God impacted his life; we have to let this understanding impact our lives. As a part of God’s family, you want to please your Dad. You love Him and when He asks you to do something, you do it because He gives you so much already. Right, if your earthly dad really needed help, wouldn’t you drop everything and help him. The same for your brother Jesus.

And just like when you were a little kid and you wanted to be like your daddy. We should try to imitate our Father. And our Big Brother is a good example to follow. He imitated the Father perfectly. When we do that, people will praise us and it’s our opportunity also to glorify God our Father and our Big Brother Jesus who taught us how to live.

And now we can talk to our Dad whenever we want. He’s always there. He’s always listening and He always cares. Don’t let your prayers becomes cold and mechanical. You are not trying to appease or argue your case in front of a judge anymore. Jesus told us that your Heavenly Father already knows your needs. Just talk to him like your Dad. He loves you. He wants the best for you. He may say NO sometimes or WAIT, but He knows best.

And we can have confidence to approach God. It is said, that Abraham Lincoln’s youngest son, Tad, would regularly interrupt Cabinet Meetings in the White House with some silly request or just want to chat. And the president never scolded his son or told him to stop, much to the annoyance of the cabinet members. We can be like that. Dad, guess what happened today? Dad, I’m not sure what to do in this situation, can you help me? Dad, I see this brother in need and I want to help, but I’m not sure what to do, can you show me the right thing to do? **<Arrow>**

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

This understanding of our adoption impacts our whole Christian life. These verses come near the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and I would encourage you to read this sermon with this thought about being God’s true son or daughter. You will better understand how Jesus viewed His Heavenly Father and how we should also.

And if you have messed up and have done something that you are ashamed of; just know that you can’t lose your status as a son. Just like you don’t disown your own children even when they mess up; even more so, your Heavenly Father will not disown you. He will continue to love you. Of course, He may be disappointed in you. He may discipline you because He loves you, but don’t think He doesn’t care.  **<Arrow>**

*And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,*

*“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”*

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?*

This is what good dads do. To be honest, I think we in modern evangelical Christianity have missed this. There aren’t many worship songs about our adoption as Sons of God. There aren’t many books about it. And, yet, as I have tried to show you, this understanding of adoption impacts our whole Christian life.

And the question for you today is Do I as a Christian understand myself? Do I know my real identity? Do I know my destiny? You have been given a new name. I liked what J.I. Packer wrote in his book Knowing God **<Arrow>**

*I am a child of God. God is my Father; Heaven is my home; every day is one day closer to that reality. My Savior is my brother; Every Christian is my brother too.*

We need to repeat this to ourselves over and over until it sinks in and hits home. This is truth. For this is the Christian’s secret of a happy life and a God-honoring life.

I want to close by reading some questions at the end of this chapter for us to consider.

Do I understand my adoption? Do I daily remind myself of my privilege as a child of God? Do I treat God as my Father in heaven, loving, honoring, obeying Him, seeking and welcoming His fellowship, and trying in everything to please Him, just as a human parent would want His child to do?

Do I think of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord, as my brother too? Do I think daily how close he is to me, how completely He understands me, and how much he cares for me?

Have I learned to hate the things that displease my Father? Am I sensitive to the evil things to which He is sensitive? Do I make a point of avoiding them?

Do I look forward daily to that great family occasion when the sons and daughters of God will finally gather in heaven before the throne of God the Father and of the Lamb our brother and our Lord? Do I grasp the immensity of this hope?

Do I love my Christian brothers, with whom I live day by day, in a way that I shall not be ashamed of when in heaven I think back over it? Am I proud of my Father and of His Family by which his grace I belong? Does the family likeness appear in me? If not, why not?

Let’s stop here and Pray.

We want to begin to end our services with some simple blessings from the Bible and I picked this one from Galatians to end today. After this blessing, you are dismissed. Please leave quietly for those who would like to remain and pray. There will be a few of us staying after to pray with you also if you like.  **<Arrow>**

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Galatians 3:26-4:7

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.