

Adopted

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 1:5-6
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We gather this morning as the people of God bought by the blood of Christ and now belonging to the family of God, saved from our sins, given new life, declared righteous despite our former guilt. Biblical salvation is multifaceted and one of the beauties of studying the Bible systematically is you begin to see the many different aspects through which the picture of salvation is given to us. Salvation has many sides. It's so far much more than a momentary prayer at a point in time, that really reduces salvation to a caricature of the fullness of what the Bible teaches it to be. Salvation has many perspectives from which it should be seen. You were dead in sin and in regeneration God gave you new life. You were guilty, in justification God has forgiven your sins and declared you righteous before the demands of his law. You were in slavery, God redeemed you and purchased you out of your former slavery to sin and Satan. The words go on and on and each one is designed to give us a slightly different perspective of the over-arching majesty and wonder of what God has done for us in Christ. The one that we're going to look at this morning is particularly sweet. It is particularly meaningful because you once were separated from God and in adoption, God has brought you into his family and made you his child.

Turn to the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, if you would. We're looking at verses 3 through 6. We looked at 3 through 4 last week. This morning we return to finish this passage together. It is a passage of praise. As we saw a few weeks ago, verses 3 through 14 are one long sentence of 202 words, an entire unit of thought, speaking to this multifaceted splendor, this perfect diamond of salvation and Paul gives praise to God for it. We saw it in an overview fashion a few weeks ago, now we are looking at it from angle by angle by glorious angle. We're going to just read verses 3 through 6 here this morning to set the stage for our consideration of the biblical doctrine of adoption.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of

His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

It takes only 40 seconds maybe to read those verses and the brevity with which you can read through them might tempt you to think that maybe there's not a whole lot there, that the compact nature of it somehow indicates that there's not a lot to detain your attention. Let me tell you, that's not the case of this magnificent passage and particularly this magnificent concept of the believer's adoption into the family of God. Thomas Watson said this and I quote, "Adoption is a greater mercy than Adam had in Paradise." We as believers in Christ, have a greater blessing than Adam had at the beginning of creation, before the fall in the perfection of Eden, we have a better position than Adam did then. It's not difficult to establish that. It wasn't long before Adam fell out of that pristine place and was cast out of the Garden. In adoption, we have been wondrously brought into the family of God never to be cast aside and we have privileges now and an inheritance in the future as a result of our adoption that surpass anything that was present in the Garden of Eden. We must understand the richness of adoption if we are going to appreciate our salvation. Adoption is a greater mercy than Adam had in Paradise. Beloved, you will agree with that statement if you are a Christian before the end of this message.

We're going to see two things from this passage: the reality of adoption and then we're going to see the results of adoption. We're going to see adoption laid out in the passage before us and then we're going to look at some other Scriptures to see what it means for us both now and into eternity and it is rich, it is glorious. There is hardly ever a time where I'm not excited to step into the pulpit and share God's word with you, that's especially true today. This message has the potential to radically change your life. If you have been tempted, if your past teaching has conditioned you to think of God as a somewhat reluctant taskmaster who took you only because he had to, or someone who is an easily irritable deity who is scuffed at each time that you stumble or you somehow miss your quiet time, you need to hear this message and drink richly from this fountain. And those of you that come from a legalistic background in your prior church experience, what we have before us today will show you the once and for all with utter finality, the total shallowness of that approach to the Christian life and will free you to a wonderful affection and respect for God as your Father that will transcend anything that that narrow, shallow soil could have ever produced in anyone's life. We have in front of us today one of the most magnificent doctrines of salvation that we could ever address.

Let's look first of all at the reality of adoption. We saw last time that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. That's the doctrine of election from verse 4. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. We said without hesitation, without qualification and certainly without apology that God chose us based on his own sovereign will. He did not choose us because he saw something good in us; he did not choose us because he looked down the corridors of time and gained knowledge that he didn't previously have that we would one day choose him and he elected us on that basis. No, no, God before creation began, because of his own will, because it pleased him to do so, said, "I will choose these people to be my own." And we said as God's prerogative, salvation belongs to the Lord, it is the gift of God, it is his to do with what he pleases

and those of us that are in Christ have been chosen in such a way that there was no possibility that we could have done anything in life other than to end up to be saved. God did not leave it to you and to your flimsy emotions, to your changeable will to determine whether you would be saved or not, he appointed you for salvation by the power of his indestructible, immutable will so that you would most certainly receive the blessing to which he appointed you before he created the world. That is glorious grace and we must understand salvation from that God-centered perspective if we're going to advance in the Christian life. Any other approach that gives a little bit of credit for you having been smart enough to put your faith in Christ, that would distinguish you from your fellow man who weren't so wise as you, leaves weeds in the garden, the weeds of pride and self-congratulation that need to be pulled up by the roots so that the full flower of the glory of God could be displayed and the splendor of salvation in your understanding and that you would respond to him appropriately in worship. We are saved because God willed it to be so, not because we did. We saw that in John chapter 1, "Not by the will of man but by the will of God," is how we received it.

Now, people object to that. I understand that. Perhaps the majority of those in professing Christendom would object to that and find various objections to it. We addressed some of those last time, those objections. But what we need to see as we focus on the text in front of us this morning is that the Apostle Paul presents this to us in a way that is to provoke our praise. Paul is not apologizing for God in this passage, he does not deal with speculative objections to why did God do it this way and not that way according to human wisdom, what is captivating Paul in this passage is the praise and the blessing of God. That is the entire theme of what is being expressed here in Ephesians 1. Look at verse 3 with me again just to see it, he starts with praise, with worship, with ascribing glory and gratitude to a holy God. There in verse 3 he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then the words, 202 of them just start tumbling out of his mouth because, "Blessed be God because he chose us, because he adopted us, because he redeemed us, because he works all things after the counsel of his will, because the Spirit sealed us and now we have an inheritance forever." There is this woven fabric that is an entire piece which we are to embrace and to see the multi-splendored greatness of salvation and the reality of adoption is one of those great threads of salvation.

Beloved, God did not simply choose us with a cold, mathematical precision in order to accomplish his will. God chose us because he set his love upon us. God chose us in order to bring us into an unspeakably great relationship with him. It is because of his desire for communion, his desire to display his glory to us and that we would thank him for it and give praise to him, but he desired to set his love upon us. Not simply to set us apart but to set us aside for his blessing. Because of his goodness, he did this. Because of his grace, he did this. And so we don't simply stop at verse 4 and consider the doctrine of election, we keep right on going with the flow of the Apostle Paul's thought and see what this means in the spirit with which God did this. Verse 4 says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. In love," at the end of verse 4, "He predestined us to adoption." The word "predestined" means to "mark out beforehand." It's used six times in the New Testament always with God as the subject. If you look down in verse 11 of

Ephesians 1, Paul uses it in that verse as well saying, "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." What does this mean? It means that God is the one who took the initiative in salvation. It means that God appointed us to be saved. Us, those who know Christ. Us who are trusting in Christ alone for our salvation. The fact that we have trusted Christ is an effect of a prior cause that God initiated before time began. He predestined us to be in this position. He ordained, he ordered, he decreed that it would be this way and thus so it is. Predestined, appointed us for it so that for those of us who are in Christ, there was never, ever any possibility that we would ultimately be lost. There was no possibility because God had determined before the foundation of the world what the outcome of your spiritual life would be. And so, while from our perspective perhaps it seems like there were ebbs and flows and we heard the gospel and we rejected it for a time and then we came to faith and we were conscience of doing that, that's simply the working out of these things in time in God's way in the means that God has appointed. Understand that there is a much greater eternal context to the way that you came to faith and the greater context is: God appointed that to happen so that there was never any possibility that you would be lost. God did not allow you to be born into this world as a Christian with any possibility that one day your soul would end up in hell. That's how great his purpose is to us. That's how sure his purpose is for us before the foundation of the world. Our lives, our spiritual well-being is operating according to a divine calendar that cannot be violated. As certain as the stars spin in a mathematically precise orbit, so certain was it that you would one day be saved if you are a Christian. Your salvation rests on the power of the choice of God, not on the passing whims of your changeable heart.

One writer said it this way and I quote, "These eternal purposes of God for every Christian are a foregone conclusion because they are grounded in his predetermined will." That's a great salvation, beloved, that is a wondrous thing to contemplate that before God said, "Let there be light," he had already determined to bless you, to pour out blessing upon you in time and in eternity future with such utter certainty that you could never be lost. The question is as you follow through the flow of the Apostle Paul's thought here, he appointed us, to what did he appoint us? What was the goal? How can we understand this? As I said earlier, beloved, we're not talking about a cold relationship of a remote deity to a frightened subject. No, God, look at verse 5 with me, "He predestined us to adoption." Not only that, at the end of verse 4, "In love He predestined us to adoption." In love, he determined to set upon us this great relationship of adoption, this great position of adoption.

What is adoption? Let's define it very simply: adoption is the act of God whereby he brings us into his family through Christ. Adoption is the act of God whereby he brings us into his family through Christ. The practice of adoption, the legal means of adoption has a long history that traces back through millennia. The Greeks and the Romans both practiced adoption. There's not much adoption in the Old Testament. Roman adoption law was similar to ours and at the risk of oversimplifying things here this morning: adoption releases the child from the control of his natural father and places him under the control and care of his adoptive father. Quite simply stated: a child is born into his natural family and in the realm of adoption, a father comes and says, "I will adopt this

child," and legal measures are taken of different kinds over the course of history but all designed to sever the ties of the biological family in a way that brings this adopted child into the realm of this new family. The adopted son in Roman law acquired new status, new privilege and he acquired rights to property – watch this – that would not otherwise have been his. The measure, the kindness, the purpose of the adoptive father – now watch this, this is so critical – the purposes of the adoptive father now intervene and control the direction of the adopted child's life. There is a severing of the prior biological relationship and he is brought by law into the place of and in the position of his adopted father. If a man adopted a child, he changed the trajectory of that child's life. If a rich man had adopted a child out of a poor family and brought him in, the child suddenly had riches that he was entitled to and a status that belonged to him that he never could have dreamt of in his original family. That child, after being adopted, held the same position as a biological son.

Now, here's what I want you to think about: Scripture says that somehow your status with God is like that, that somehow you enjoy a position with God that is like being adopted into a family. Let's just work this out in terms of what it means because it is glorious and it is humbling at the same time. If you have ever just barely missed a really bad car accident, just by a stroke of an instant, and you have that sense of shock and that sick feeling of fear that that could have been disastrous coupled with, "But I'm okay," there's something of that spirit that comes upon us as we contemplate the doctrine of adoption. If you've been adopted, it means that you were delivered from a former family.

Let's think about that for a moment. Let's look at your former father. Let's look at your former father. Scripture says, even here in the book of Ephesians, that before you became a Christian you were a child of wrath and a son of disobedience. That was your nature metaphorically speaking, that was your spiritual biology, that was your spiritual DNA, that is what you were born into. Look at Ephesians 2. Look at the son language. Look at verse 1 with me, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air," in reference to Satan, "of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." That's where you were. That was the realm in which you walked was in the realm of the sons of disobedience dominated by the prince of the air. Verse 3, "Among them we to all formerly lived in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature," here it is, "by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." In your natural condition into which you were born in time, you were a sinful child of disobedience. You were by nature someone who deserved the wrath of God to come upon you. You were dominated by the devil, you were doomed to suffer the wrath of God and you had as your father Satan himself.

Turn over to the gospel of John, chapter 8 to reinforce this point. You see, when you look back on your life before Christ, you should realize that your spiritual heritage was one of shame and danger and threat. Look at John 8:43. When you did not understand the word of God, when you were were rejecting Christ, here is a window of insight into what your nature was. This is your natural born spiritual family we are reading about here. Jesus said, "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot

hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me." Before you were a Christian, you were in that similar state of unbelief. When you were rejecting Christ in your unrepentant stubbornness of heart, you had the devil himself as your father, that one who is a murderer, that one who is a liar by nature, who rejects the truth, who has no truth in him. Scripture says that's the family you came from. Talk about a dysfunctional family. The whole human race is dysfunctional and by nature that's what you belonged to whether you were born into the most pagan family on the face of the earth or whether you were born into a loving, nurturing Christian family. You inherited sin traced all the way back to Adam and you were born spiritually dead even when you were physically alive and your nature was sinful, it was unrenewed and you were dominated by the power of Satan, that murderer and that father of lies. That is who you belonged to. That was your spiritual parent. That is your spiritual ancestry apart from Christ. It's nothing to be proud of. It's something to look at with sobered awe. "Wow, that's where I came from. That's who I belonged to. That was my family, the devil and his minions and all of the unbelievers throughout all the course of time. That's who I belonged to. Those who in their nature, proud, lying, murderers, rejecters of God, rejecters of Christ, rejecters of his revelation."

Now, you manifested it in different ways. Some of you were drunks, some of you were proud people of religion but it all traces back to a common source of lies and deception and separation from God. That was the family that you belonged to right here and look, you were blind to your lost condition, you liked where you were. Some of you I know from talking to you, you reveled in your false religion, you reveled in your sin and you were blind to the fact that you were chained to an evil father who intended your destruction in the end. You were hopelessly, desperately lost in the worst possible family with no way to get out. That's where you came from. That was your former father. That was your former family. But now in Christ Scripture says, you've been adopted. God has taken you from that prior spiritual dysfunctional family, severed your ties with Satan, severed his control over you and transferred you and brought you into a completely different family, a completely wonderful family. And in adoption, you have a permanent status as the adopted child of your loving heavenly Father.

So, beloved, as you think about salvation, as you think about your salvation in Christ, you should realize that one aspect of God's goal in your salvation was to change you from a son of the devil to a son of God, to bring you into his family, leaving the former family far behind. That is an act of unspeakable grace. Go back to Ephesians 1. No wonder Paul says, "To the praise of the glory of His grace." We couldn't work our way out of our former family, that's who we belonged to by nature. There is no working your way out of it. There is no way you could work for your salvation. There is no way that a leopard can change his own spots or that the Ethiopian can change his own skin. Perish the thought! and crucify the pride that makes you think you could. If you are in the family of God today, it is because God had supernatural glorious grace upon you to bring you out of a very wicked family and into his own. The thought of adoption, the scriptural doctrine of

adoption, watch this, the reality of adoption shows the immeasurable kindness of God to you. God willingly saved us. It says there in verse 5 that he did this "according to the kind intention of His will." This is a display of the kindness of God that far surpasses the highest, most noble thing that any earthly adoptive father did to a child who was not biologically his own. What adoption tells you is that God enjoys giving these riches to his children. It delighted God to do this and just as a child adopted out of material poverty should have an everlasting love and affection and gratitude to an earthly parent who adopts him into wealth and privilege, to a far greater extent you Christians should of all people have this unending sense of praise and gratitude and believing wonder at the kindness of God to deliver you from the dark realm of the devil into the kingdom and family of his beloved Son.

This is the power of revealed truth. This is why God has given us the Scriptures so that we can read this and understand it for ourselves. Look at verses 5 and 6 with me again. I want to keep them fresh in front of your mind as we continue on here this morning. He predestined us. End of verse 4, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." See the spirit of it beloved: love, kindness, grace, freely, abundantly bestowed on us in Christ. And embedded into the passage there is an almost passing reference to Christ. He talks about Christ more in the verses that follow and we'll start to look at that next week but he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. The means by which you were adopted was no less than the crucifixion and resurrection of God the Son. It's not just that God did this for you, it's the price and the cost and the means by which he did it. Christ coming from heaven. Christ going to the cross. Christ crucified, bearing the weight of your sin on his shoulders, suffering the punishment that you deserved on the cross, in your place, as your substitute, as your representative. Suffering for your sins in his body so that this transfer of adoption could take place for you. Praise be to his glorious grace. This was no mere legal entry in the transactional books of heaven. This cost Christ to deliver this blessing to you. It cost him in immeasurable ways. It is through Christ that he did this. A wondrous plan of adoption that only Jesus' sacrifice for sin could establish. Only the cross could establish the basis upon which God could receive us into the family because something had to be done about your sin and Christ did it. Praise be to the glory of his grace which was appointed to you as a Christian before the foundation of the world. God had all of this marvelously complex, various colored glory to bestow on you and he established the unfolding of it before time began. That is what you have entered into, into the family of God. That's what salvation has delivered to you. Not just new birth and new life. Not just justification in the declaration of righteousness that satisfies the demands of God's law against you but adoption. His family. Beloved, adoption means you belong to God and that he belongs to you.

How can you declare the wonder of that? What words can we give that would adequately describe how valuable and precious and gracious this is? Who is adequate to say anything of the sort? God the Father purposed it. Christ the Son shed his blood to secure it. Beloved, step back and see again that in salvation is fully manifested the saving love and work of God toward you by name. Paul said, I never get tired of reminding you of this,

Galatians 2:20, you don't need to turn there, where Paul speaks in the first person and says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me." This was no mass transaction where the borders of heaven were opened up and just a flood of immigrants were allowed to come in in a nameless barrage on heaven, this was something that God did personally for you by name. He appointed you for this by name before time began.

And so, as we look at that we see that God has generously shared blessing with us. It delighted him to do so. It was exceedingly gracious of him. And the goal of our salvation is that we would praise him for his glorious grace. Brothers and sisters, the Father shared blessing with us that we had no claim on. That's the bottom line of salvation. God has given us that which we did not deserve and which we could never have earned and which we had no basis upon which to ask and yet here we are embraced in the family of God through adoption. There are two words that should be echoing in your heart. The presence of them would affirm your salvation, the absence of these two words should convict you that you must not be a Christian if this doesn't spontaneously rise up in your heart in response to what Scripture has shown us. Two words: praise God. Praise God that he has done this for me. That is the reality of adoption.

Now, let's look at this a little further with our second point here this morning. What are the results of adoption? The results of adoption. We've seen the reality of adoption, what are the results of adoption? The reality of adoption was our former father, the devil, now our present Father, God in heaven, secured at the cost of Christ. That's the reality of it. Our former relations severed and a new eternal relationship in the family of God established. What are results of adoption then? 2. I want to give you three headings to help you with your thinking on this and I want to preface it by saying this: if we're adopted, then God is our Father and for some of us the idea of "father" has rich and warm connotations. You had a good father who was kind and provided and faithful. Maybe for more of you, the reality in your earthly father was something different: a man who failed his duties and betrayed his trust and was unkind and took advantage of you in ways that shouldn't even be spoken. What I want to do for you today, also let me just acknowledge this: some of you are in a position like I am where your father is gone and whatever you would want to say to him you can't because the veil of death has intervened and you can't get through to say it anymore. What I want to do for you today is let's try to put aside all of our earthly thoughts about our earthly father, realizing that God has the power to redeem the good things and the bad things out of life, the sorrows of life, and let's look upon what God has done for us as our spiritual Father, what he has adopted us into in his family.

First of all, what is the results of being adopted? What does it mean to have God as our Father? Well, there's an aspect first of all, of present trust. Present trust. Write that down. If you have a pen and paper in front of you, I want you to write these three things down because this is going to define for you what the parameters of having God as your Father means. The first aspect of it is a present trust. Adoption established you in a loving, trusting relationship with God the Father. You have assurance of his eternal care. God

adopted you in part to care for you, to provide for you, to watch over you, to protect you. Just turn back a couple of pages in your Bible to Galatians 4. As we talk about our fathers, one way or another the very term engages our emotions, doesn't it? The very term engages thoughts. Well, that should be the sense in which we think about God the Father but it's all going to be sanctified in a very gracious, warm and trusting way by what we're considering here this morning. One of the results of adoption is a present trust. Look at Galatians 4:4, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Watch this, because you are sons, verse 6, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Verse 7, "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." Verse 6 says that he sent his Spirit into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!"

Now, you've probably heard discussions about this word "Abba." I want to help shift what you've heard just a little bit. Abba was a term of endearment for a child to call his father. We can think in our English language sometimes the first words out of a baby's mouth are "Da-da Da-da." Well, it's not too much of a distance to "Abba, Abba, Abba." Here's what I want you to understand, this is so important: what Paul is saying here in Galatians 4:6, it's not so much the childish expression of "Daddy" that he's expressing here, there is perhaps an element of that but it's more mature than that. This term "Abba Father" as you're going to see by what I show you in a few moments, it's so much more than that. I don't want you to reduce it in your thinking to thinking about it in that childish way even though it's appropriate for an infant. It expresses more than that. It expresses the warmth of "dear father." Think about it this way, think about an affectionate adult child approaching a parent who had proven himself over the years and saying, "Dad. Dad." Not just the word but the affection and the trust that that word represents. "Dad." That's the spirit of adoption, that matured trust that is expressed when a conscious, mature adult child expresses that level of affection to a parent that's informed by years of a relationship that has seen provision and correction and affection, years of a relationship in forming that expression, "Dad." That's the idea. That's the spirit of adoption that was rooted one time in "Daddy" but grew into something more than that. That sense of "Dad" is what's being expressed in the spirit of adoption in your relationship with God.

Present trust. You most assuredly belong to him and you have access to his loving care. Watch this as we go to Matthew 6 and you'll see how this must be something more than, the concept of father, is more than simply "Daddy," at least as we understand that term "Daddy" today in the 21st century. There is more to it than that. I don't want you to have it reduced in your mind to the realm of a two-year-old because it's saying so much more. If you understand this, then your concept of God, your concept of God the Father, opens up to vistas of trust and assurance that Scripture would have you appropriate as the rightful privilege and prerogative of the child of God. Look at Matthew 6:6. The word "father" is sprinkled liberally throughout Matthew 6. We're picking it up halfway through. One day I will preach through Matthew and we'll go through these things in detail, God willing. But in verse 6, it says, "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret." Do you know why you

can pray like that? It's because you've been adopted into his family. God really is your Father because he adopted you and established that relationship with you and so you can speak to him in that way. Now, there is a spirit that Jesus teaches us to pray as we are addressing God as our Father. Verse 7, "When you are praying to your Father, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words." You would never speak to an earthly father that you loved and respected with monotone repetition. "Dad, thank you for being good to me. Dad, thank you for being good to me. Dad, please help me." You would never speak to your father that way. That would be a complete insult to the relationship. That's an affront to a loving, affectionate father to go to him and without thinking just say the same things over and over again. That's a complete insult and while in the religious sphere that may have the appearance of something spiritual, when you understand the nature of adoption you can see why it is detestable in the sight of God. "You think you're relating to me as on the basis of a Father but you're talking to me in a way would never want any of your friends to speak to you as." "Hi Janet, how are you? Nice day today." The next day you see her, "Hi Janet, how are you? Nice day today." Sooner or later Janet is going to say, "What's wrong with you? What kind of freak are you to talk to me that way?" Well look, this is what Jesus is saying, to cast aside, to repent of. He says, "Don't pray that way. Don't use that meaningless repetition."

So what does it mean? So what does the present trust, how does an adopted son speak to God? Verse 8, "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'" There is this relationship of trust in which you understand based on the revealed, authoritative word of Jesus and by the very character of God revealed from Genesis throughout Revelation, that God is omniscient, that he is your loving gracious Father and therefore he totally knows what you need before you say a word. Before the word comes off your tongue, God already knows. He is engaged, as it were, with your life. He knows your strengths and weaknesses; he knows your joys and sorrows; he knows your trials and temptations. He knows what those situations require. He knows. And so when you go to him, you're not pulling on the cape of someone who's walking away in indifference, you are speaking to someone who is engaging you with the full attention of his face to your face saying, "Speak to me. I know. Come to me and declare your need to me and I will receive you." Adoption means that you can speak to God like that and trust him to know and to care.

Yet it means something beyond that too. It's not just a subjective sense like that. You can trust God for how he responds to your prayer. Look at Matthew 7:9. We're talking about what it means to have God as your Father. This is utterly defining for the Christian life. Verse 9, Jesus again speaking about prayer says, "What man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" And he's speaking to fathers who respect their position and love their children and want to do what's right, not the perverse exceptions. He's talking about the general order of orderly human life. Fathers should address their children and be this way to their children. A son says, "Can I have bread?" "Here, have a rock. Half ha ha, isn't that funny?" "Dad, can I have a fish?" "Here, take this copperhead. Ha ha." The

wickedness of that and Jesus takes it and applies it. All of us realize that's wicked. No father should do anything like that and Jesus says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" He says, "You can trust your Father to respond to your prayers in a way that promotes your benefit. You can trust him to be good. He knows, he cares, he responds in good ways." That's what it means to be adopted into the family of God. The God of the universe now relates to you in that kind of way so that you can respond to him in trust.

Now, there's more to it than that. Turn over to Hebrews 12 and we'll see a second aspect of it. There is an element of trust and affection that's defined here but there is also an aspect of present respect for a father. Present respect for the Father. As our Father, God will train us in holiness so that we can please him. Hebrews 12:5, we're going to go through this kind of quickly. "You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him. For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.'" Verse 7, "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" And so, God deals with us as sons not only in this trusting, providing way but in this realm of corrective discipline to promote our godly character. Discipline may sting for a moment but it produces maturity which is the goal which a father has for his son. Ultimately, that's what a father wants from his son, is maturity. Verse 8, "But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." Verse 9, "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them," there it is, we respected them, "shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" Shouldn't we respect God the Father all the more like we accord to our imperfect earthly fathers? Verse 10, "For they," our earthly fathers, "disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." Verse 11, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

You see, beloved, a father trains his son, disciplines his son. Sometimes with stinging discipline so that there will be a longer-term benefit produced and that son will produce the proper character at which his father aims. That is a healthy earthly relationship. Scripture says, you have that kind of relationship with God the Father as a Christian, that God will discipline us. He will bring trials and sorrows into our lives at times, not to punish us, not in a sense of retribution because you missed your quiet time on Tuesday but because he has this over-arching purpose to reproduce in your life his own holy character and the only way that you're going to get that is through experiencing those times of discipline that humble you and make you rely on him more. Here's the thing: a son should receive discipline from his father gladly, submissively for the sake of the overall relationship and trusting that his father has his best interests at heart. That's the principle underlying this passage in Hebrews 12 and what the passage is saying here is we are to think about God that way. We are to respect him. We are to honor him as our

Father. And so the term "father" teaches us to trust and to respect God. It's simple, huh? The clarity of Scripture on something so foundational.

You know, I remember, I may have alluded to this last week. If I did forgive me. I remember as a new Christian I went with a group of Christians and they started to pray together and I heard somebody, I don't even know who it was, I don't remember their name at this late date, but they just started praying, "God, our Father, we just pray that..." and they just started to pour their heart out. I hadn't been a Christian long at all and I said, "There's something different about that." There was the echo of reality, the echo of truth in the familiar, trusting, respectful way in which this person prayed. While their prayer was reflecting the spirit of adoption, it's born into our hearts, placed there by the Spirit that we think about God and speak to him that way. Let me ask you, do you know God that way? Or is your praying, if you pray at all, distant? "Dear God," and there's a sense of distance and remoteness to it? Maybe you don't know God is your Father. Maybe you haven't been born into his family because it's the most natural thing for a Christian to speak to God and say, "Oh, my Father." That is part of the fruit. That is the one of the marks of a true Christian is that we speak to God in that way, in those familiar, respectful, trusting terms. Do you know God like that? If not, I invite you to the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can reconcile you to him.

One final aspect of it: we've seen present trust, present respect, you know, the other aspect that we haven't emphasized much is that when a son is adopted, he becomes an heir of all of his father's resources. Galatians alluded to that. We've become heirs of God. We have an inheritance. We share an inheritance, we are co-heirs with Christ himself. Look at Romans 8. To be a son means that you receive an inheritance from your father's riches. It is part of the prerogative of the status of belonging to that particular father. Romans 8:15, we're almost done. "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God," here it is, "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." We have an inheritance, Peter says, reserved for us in heaven that we will most certainly receive. It is more certain than your next breath. That inheritance is guaranteed and it is guaranteed to us by the principle of adoption. We are a son of God and therefore we have the right and the status and the privilege and the position that we will receive what he has to give to us. We don't have it all now, we've just got a little portion. The whole treasure house, the doors of the fortune are going to be opened in heaven and we're going to walk in and there is going to be a glory and a splendor that belongs to us because God adopted us for that very purpose.

It's wonderful to be a Christian today in this fallen world. It is unspeakably magnificent to address you as, "God, my Father." You belong to me and I belong to you. But as wonderful as that is, it's just the down payment, the full inheritance is yet to be displayed to us and it's hard to wait. You want it now. "Oh God, that's going to be so magnificent! I just can't wait to see it! But if you want me to wait a little longer, I will." Look at Romans 8:23, "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit," we have this first fruit of the present trust and the present respect and the full assurance of

our privileged status in the family of God and yet, "we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." There is more to come. We know that. We implicitly sense that. We haven't fully reached home yet here on earth even in Christ because we are appointed for that future inheritance when our bodies are redeemed, we are perfectly glorified, we are without sin. There are no sinners there to disrupt it. There is just the fullness of the glory of God and we belong there and we're at home and finally we've reached the destination. That's what it means to be an heir of God. That is the future reward for which we were adopted into the family of God. For that great moment that will last for all of eternity. That's where we are headed. I don't know what you, but I can't wait to see what that's like. And with me, I'm sure that your heart is filled with gratitude right now. "Oh God, you have done this for me? Oh God, that's what lies ahead? From a child of the devil to a co-heir with Christ? You must be kidding?" And then the word of God comes to you and says, "No joke. This isn't trick-or-treat. I'm not going to pull the rug out from you," God says. "I have bestowed this upon you now and this full reward will close the deal and, my child," he says to us through his word, "you will most certainly receive it. I will not fail you. I will not let you down. I will not leave you. I will not forsake you. You are my child in Christ. I am your Father." Scripture says he's not ashamed to call us sons. We will be heirs with Christ himself.

Theologian Bruce Milne says it this way and I quote, "When we recall what we were in our sins, the thought of adoption speaks most powerfully of the magnitude of God's mercy to us. That we should be pardoned all our sin is wonder enough but that the pardoned rebels should become God's very sons and daughters installed within the intimacy of his own family circle is surely wonder beyond wonder." We as Christians are secure in the family of God. Praise God.

Let's pray.

Father, words fail us. We say with the Apostle Paul, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Father, as your people, with simplicity we just want to affirm to you publicly and in our hearts that we do trust you. Anyone who would deliver us from the family of Satan and bring us into your family is worthy of our implicit, unconditional trust and we trust you like that. Father, we respect you, not as those who are cravenly afraid of you but we respect you for your holiness. We respect your position as our Father even as we respect the position of an earthly father, despite all of their many failings in some cases. Father, we respect who you are. We respect your holiness and because we respect you, we submit ourselves to your wise discipline in our lives. And father, we thank you now in advance before we see what it is like, based on the sheer promise of your word, Father, we thank you for our future reward, for our future redemption when the fullness of adoption is on display and the unspeakable glory and magnificence of our inheritance becomes our conscious, present experience. We thank you for that day. Lord, we eagerly anticipate it. We groan because the expectation is so great and yet, Lord, we are delighted to wait on your timing and on your will and we ask that you would help us be faithful to serve you as loyal, loving sons and daughters of our Father until that great day comes.

Bless these dear brothers and sisters in Christ, O God, wash away the accumulated false notions of your nature that have been instilled in them over time where you were presented to them as someone who was an irritable deity, difficult to please. Father, you are kind and you are gracious and you are merciful and you are loving. Please forgive us for ever harboring any other thought toward you about your nature and character and establish us in the security and the blessing as being adopted sons and daughters of yours. Father, help us to rise to the calling. Help us to live in accordance with the great heritage of our family, the very family of God where our great brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, stands as the exalted head. Our Savior, our Lord, our God, yes, yes, yes and more. We have a brother representing us before the throne of God at this very moment. Praise be to your name our God. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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