

January 3, 2010
Christmas 2

“Adopted to Be Children of God”

GALATIANS 4:4-7

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

I once heard a pastor describe in glowing terms what a privilege it was for him to be adopted into a Christian family shortly after he was born. But then he went on describe the greater privilege of being adopted into God’s family on the day of his baptism. I am reminded of the boy who was being teased by other children who said to him, “You are adopted!” He responded to his tormentors by saying, “I know I am adopted. My parents chose me, but they were stuck with you when you were born.”

Scripture uses this picture of divine adoption in the words just read to you and also in Romans 8 to describe for us the amazing way our God made us his children through Jesus his Son. From all eternity you were chosen by God to believe in Jesus as your Savior, and with this belief comes an amazing adoption into God’s family for this life and for all eternity.

During this past year you have had the privilege of living each day of your life as a dear child of your heavenly Father because of your divine adoption. In the year that is ahead you will also have this privilege of again living each day as God’s dear children because of your divine adoption into God’s family through Jesus God’s Son.

The process

When parents adopt children today, it can be a very long process, and also quite costly. Think of what your Father in heaven went through to adopt you as his dear children. “When the time had full come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

“When the time had fully come...” Our loving God has the perfect time, and perfect place, and perfect person for getting the job of adopting us done right. Adam and Eve probably thought their first born son was the one God had sent to rescue the world from sin. That is why they gave him the name “Cain” which means the exalted one or the prince. Abraham probably thought the Savior to bless all nations would come soon after Isaac was born. Moses’ mother probably thought the Lord had special plans for her son Moses. But God waited until the right moment for Jesus to be born. As we are told in Ecclesiastes, “There is a time for every purpose under heaven.” There is a the best time to plant the tomatoes, and the best time to take cornbread out of the oven, and the best time to invest money wisely, but nowhere is this timing more important than in God’s plan to send his Son down to this earth. God’s timing is always perfect because he has to carry out the perfect plan

to rescue us.

God sent his Son. If you have ever lost someone you love, or even a pet that was dear to you, than you know how hard it is to see them leave you. God had to give up his Son to this world to die for us. "God so loved the world he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

"God sent his Son to be born of a woman." This process of adopting you and me as children involved having his Son miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a woman named Mary. You remember the Christmas account that tells us, "She brought forth her first born son and wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger." God chose to have his Son become one of us by being conceived and born and then wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in manger. It takes our breath away to think of how our God had Jesus come into this world to save us.

"God sent his Son... to be born under the law." Jesus lived under the laws of the land and all the commandments. This past year you had to live your lives under the laws of the land of the United States of America. That means you stopped at stop signs, and observed the speed limits, and even paid your taxes when the bill came in the mail. 2010 will be another year to live under the laws of the land and also to live your life under God's laws. God knows how often we have failed to keep his laws as he requires of us. Listen to Psalm 139 that says, "You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways." I read once that Belgium hires blind police officers and uses them to listen to phone conversations to detect background noises and help find the criminals. God hears and knows everything about us. He knew everything about Jesus life lived on this earth, saw every thought and watched every action under the law. Jesus lived the perfect life under the law that we could never live.

And what was the purpose of living under the law? Was it to show us up and even give greater reason for our God to condemn us and cast us away forever? No, Jesus lived under the law in our place, for us, so we could be acceptable to God and loved as his dear children, adopted into his family through Jesus. Look at the front cover of your bulletin. See the footprints in the sand. Every step of Jesus' life was perfect and pure and holy. No think back to your footprints in the sand. See how marred and sinful they were. And what did your God do for you? Look at the process of his divine adoption. He took the perfect death of Jesus and perfect life and substituted it for your life of sin. Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are God's dear children in this life and for eternity through Jesus.

The privilege

What a glorious privilege is now yours and mine. It says, "That we might receive the full rights of sons." The word used is translated as "full rights of sons" and another translation has the word "sonship." At the time this was written the Greek and Roman world made a big deal of young man reaching a certain point in life, usually around 18, where he was presented publicly as young man with the full rights of sons. Remember the movie "Ben Hur" and how the slave "Ben Hur" saved the life of the commanding officer named

Claudius. Ben Hur was then adopted as his son. Or even better think of Jesus' story about the lost son who came home and was given the full right of a son when the father placed a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet, a nice robe on his shoulders, and threw a feast that included the fattened calf. The older brother was jealous of all the attention the dad gave his lost son.

You and I are that lost son. Satan will do everything in his power this coming year to make us feel that we are not really all that special to our heavenly Father. He may even say to us, "You are such a rotten son and daughter, why don't you just give in to your sinful feelings. You are no good anyway. Why not live like the rotten person you are."

But we are special to our heavenly Father through Jesus. 2010 will be another year to live under God's grace. Every day of this coming year our God is going to send his Holy Spirit into our hearts and continually remind us of who we are in Jesus. Romans 8 says something similar, "The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." If you could put some sophisticated counter or tracker on you this past year that records how many times the Holy Spirit reminded you that you are a child of God through Jesus, you would be astounded at how often this happened in your life.

The Holy Spirit who reminds us how special we are also leads us to cry out to our heavenly Father with these beautiful words, "Abba, Father." The Aramaic word "Abba" is a word of endearment. We get to go directly to our Father in prayer. Romans 5 says that because we have peace with God through Jesus we have direct access to our heavenly Father. Think of how often you prayed the Lord's Prayer this past year and how often you will pray it again in 2010. In the Lord's Prayer we do not start with words such as, "Hey, you out there!" or "Hey big guy upstairs, or "O God whoever you are or where ever you are." We pray with the words, "Our Father who art in heaven." Think of how often we are privileged to pray for people who are in need to a heavenly Father who can hear our prayers even before they are spoken on our lips.

Because we are children of God, we are no longer slaves. "So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." It is hard to imagine that over 150 years ago, people still had slaves in certain parts of our country. The children who were born from parents who were slaves were also slaves, owned by the people who owned their parents and subject to being sold to others. I was born into this world on August 29, 1947, as the son of Carl and Lula Degner, but I was also born as a slave. It didn't take me long to begin showing the signs of sin passed down to me from parents. If it were not for God's grace I would still foolishly be enslaved to the idea that I can be a child of God by improving myself and making up for things I have done wrong. The first part of this chapter tells us, "So also, we were in slavery under the basic principles of this world." God's plan was to set me free by adopting me into his family and leading me to put hope for acceptance and love in Jesus. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see."

Listen to the book of John tell us how loved we are in Jesus. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God." And this love that we enjoy now will continue on forever and ever because as sons of God or children of God, we are also heirs of eternal life. If only we could keep our eyes on the inheritance that is waiting that is kept in heaven for us. But then we also have the Holy Spirit who will

remind us many times each day of what is coming for those who have been adopted into God's family through Jesus. This may be the year the heavens open up and Jesus takes us to the place he has prepared for us. Then we will see for the first time the glory of the inheritance that is waiting for us.

You are adopted! You are adopted as God's dear child through Jesus. God choose you from all eternity to have these blessings in Jesus. May we carry this thought of our divine adoption with us every day of the New Year. Then this will truly be a happy new year. Amen.