

I Have Been Adopted!

Romans 8:12-17

Introduction

About two years ago – in August 2018 – Good Morning America ran a delightful little story about a 10 year old girl named Ivey. Ivey had been foster care for three years. She has two siblings: Kai (who was 3 at the time of the story) and Lita (age 2). All three of these siblings had been removed from the home of their biological parents. Over a period of a few months, starting in 2016, all three of these children were placed in the same foster home, the home of Daniel and Paige Zezulka.

At first Daniel and Paige were committed to foster care only, but before long they knew they wanted more. They had fallen in love with these three kids, so they began the arduous task of adopting them. Now, the primary goal of the foster system is always to seek a reunification of the birth family, so that means that adopting a foster child takes a lot of time, and patience, and love.

The first day that Ivey moved into the home back in 2016 of Daniel and Paige, she asked if it would be okay to call them “Mom and Dad.” On the second day, Ivey asked if she could stay there forever.

Daniel and Paige never shared their adoption plans with Ivey. They didn't want to break her heart in case it wasn't going to happen. But when all the adoption details were finalized, Daniel and Paige gave Ivey a special gift. Watch this video:

[SHOW VIDEO]

All three of the children – Ivey, Kai and Lita – were all adopted on the same day, August 23, 2018. A wonderful, wonderful story.

Throughout the pages of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses a lot of word pictures to describe what the Christian life is like:

- We are the Body of Christ
- We are a building, built on the foundation of Jesus
- We take off one set of clothes and put on new set.

In today's text, he uses the imagery of adoption. Like Ivey, Kai and Lita, Paul declares that every person who has come to faith in Jesus Christ can proclaim:

“I HAVE BEEN ADOPTED!”

Paul is writing to the church in Rome, so his adoption imagery resonates well with his readers. You see, the Romans had a rule of life known as:

PATRIA POTESTAS
(The power of the father)

This rule governed how life happened in a family. The crux of it all is this: No matter how old you were, if your father was still living, he had absolute and total control over your life. That included the right to inflict capital punishment if he thought that was necessary. No male was ever considered to be an adult – or even free – until his father died. So, to put this in personal terms, even though I am 62 years old, and haven't lived in my father's house for over 43 years, I won't be an adult until my now-85 year old father dies. He is still in charge.

Females, unfortunately for them, never got to experience their freedom. They were always considered to be under the power of a father. When they married they were transferred from the power of their birth father to the power of their husband's father. So, to again make it personal, my wife Karen went from being under the power of her father to being under the power of my father.

When the day comes that my father dies, I will finally reach adulthood and the power of the father transfers to me. And on that day Karen would become subjected to me.

That's assuming we live like Romans. Which we do not.

Because of this law, in order for an adoption to occur, the child had to be sold. That is, the birth father had to be properly compensated. This was known as:

MANCIPATIO
(Emancipation)

Three times the birth father and the adopting father acted out a little drama. Two times the birth father would sell his child and then immediately buy him back. The third time he would not buy him back and the child would be emancipated from his birth father's power.

Then came the:

VINDICATIO
(Vindication)

The adopting father would ask the courts to transfer the power of the father to him.

That's the background that would have been in the minds of those who read these words of the Apostle Paul:

... the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. (Romans 8:15)

These first readers – and those of us today – would also understand three truths. Because of the work of Trinity in your life:

#1: YOU HAVE A NEW FATHER

Look at verse 16:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. (Romans 8:14)

Every one of us has an earthly father, but we also have a spiritual father. There are only two options. Jesus points out the first option when the Jewish religious officials challenge His right to heal someone. He makes their spiritual heritage quite clear:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. (John 8:44)

That same gospel also outlines the other option:

Yet to all who did receive (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12)

By faith in Jesus Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit in us, we now live under the power of a totally different Father. That means we can rightfully pray "Our Father, who art in Heaven." It is not symbolic. A fully legal transaction has occurred, paid for by the blood of Jesus. That's why the Scriptures teach us:

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

The Roman Emperor Claudius didn't care much for his natural sons. He thought they were too weak to rule the empire. He did, however, greatly admire his stepson – the son of his fourth wife. That boy's name was Nero. Claudius wanted Nero to eventually become the emperor. But for that to happen, Nero had to be adopted. In the eyes of the law, Claudius had to be his father. And that's what happened. Nero turned out to be a very bad choice, but he got a new daddy.

Our heavenly Father loved us so much that He paid the ultimate price – the sacrificial death of His son Jesus – so that you could be adopted in His family. So today you and I can stand with every other believer throughout all time and proudly say "I have been adopted, and now I am a child of God." I have a new father. No longer am I under the power of the devil, I live in the power of God the Father.

But there is more ...

#2: YOU HAVE A NEW LIFE

Because you have been adopted, you have a new life. Look again at verse 15:

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. (Romans 8:15)

What a contrast! From slave to sonship.

I don't know what Ivey and Kia and Lita's birth family was like. It's probably not right for me to speculate. But I have a pretty clear picture of what their new adoptive family was like. It was the kind of family that made Ivey – on the second day she was there – ask if it would be possible to live there forever.

- Whatever the circumstances may have been for Ivey and her siblings in their former life, they have a new life now. And in this new life they have the chance to thrive.

In another one of his letters, the Apostle Paul describes our condition before we came to faith like this:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.
(Ephesians 2:1-3)

He then contrasts that with the new life we have:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
(Ephesians 2:4-7)

The Scriptures are filled with other descriptors of this life: It is abundant, eternal, filled with hope, joy and peace even in the midst of life's turbulent storms. Why? Because you have been adopted. And with your adoption, your old life is no more. You have a new life in Christ!

My Mom sang in a ladies trio. One of the songs I heard them sing many times was this John Peterson number. Here's the chorus:

New Life in Christ! Abundant and free!
What glories shine, what joys are mine,
What wondrous blessings I see!
My past with its sin,
The searching and strife,
Forever gone, there's a bright new dawn!
For in Christ I have found New Life!
(Tune and lyrics by John W. Peterson, used by permission)

And in the words of those TV Ad pitchmen: But wait! There's more!

#3: YOU HAVE A NEW FUTURE

I love this part. Look at verse 17:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...
(Romans 12:17)

Can you imagine? You saw that in the verses from Ephesians 2 that I quoted earlier:

... that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7)

Not only has God made me His child and rescued me from my old life, because of my faith in Jesus Christ I am an heir to His incomparable riches of His grace!

I don't have the time to tell this whole story, so you will need to ask me about it sometime when you have time to listen to one of my long drawn out stories, but here is the short version. In 1985 Karen and I had a pressing financial need – essentially because our second child was due. As we prayed, we were reminded of this verse of Scripture:

Listen, my people, and I will speak ... I am God, your God ... every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:7, 10)

Karen is a farm girl. Every year of our marriage we have purchased a half of beef from her father to fill our freezer. We did the math and asked God to send us three cows to meet that financial need.

- Now, when we get to heaven, you all are going to inherit three more cows than I get. But I'm not worried! Everything belongs to my God, and I can never run His resources dry.

My God promises me a home in heaven, a place with golden streets filled with worship and praise. The inheritance of my life before Jesus was filled with guilt and shame, pain and sorrow, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

You see ... I have been adopted.

APPLICATION

When you become a Christian you enter into the very family of God. You have done nothing to deserve it. But nonetheless, God, the great Father, in His amazing love and mercy, adopts you into His own family. You have a new Father, a new life and a new future.

This story probably won't air on Good Morning America. But it is still a wonderful story to tell.

Amen.