

Good evening. My name is Geoff Ashley. I serve as one of the pastors here at The Village, primarily at the Flower Mound Campus on Central Staff, so I'm not down here often, but I'm excited to be here with you this evening. When Steve Hardin asked me if I wanted to preach, I was very anxious to do so. This is only my second time to preach here at The Village; I had the privilege of doing so two years ago.

I was very excited about the opportunity, but at the same time I was nervous because I am scheduled to depart on Wednesday (so three days from now) with a team of two other people, Matt Elkins, who is the Northway Campus missions pastor, and Chad Farmer, who works in our operations department. We're going to be boarding a plane to go to Japan to see if there can be some opportunities for long-term ministry for The Village Church in one of the most affluent countries in the world, but also one of the darkest. It actually was just recently named the largest unreached people group in the world.

It will be my second time to go to Japan. I was able to go in 2010 with my mom, my dad, my brother, and my nephew. We are not typically the kind of family that just jaunts all over the world, but we had a good friend who was living in Tokyo and had a high-rise apartment there that his company was paying for. They had an extra bedroom and said, "Come on," so we went. The primary reason we went to Japan was because a little under 60 years ago, that was where my dad was adopted from. He had no idea who he was, who his parents were. Any of those kinds of records were, at least in our minds, long since destroyed.

We had an opportunity where we were able to get in touch with the orphanage where my dad was when he was an infant, and they said they would welcome our visit. So we went. Two years ago, we were able to meet with the director of the orphanage, and after kind of the normal pleasantries that are cultural over there, they took us down into a basement that was just lined with boxes, old, dusty boxes, and for about 90 minutes, all of us (there were about 10-12 of us who were in this little basement) would just go through the boxes one by one searching for something, something that would tell us something about my dad...who he was, who his parents were, something about him.

So we pulled out old photos, we pulled out old records, old documents, some that were crackling because they had not been stored correctly and just kind of been discarded, and after about 90 minutes or so of that, we found a document. It had my dad's name on it, and right there it listed the name of my grandmother, my dad's birth mom. Her name was Japanese, so in an instant my dad realizes after 60 years that he is at least half Japanese. We have no idea who his father was.

I share that for two purposes: One, because the text we're going to be in this morning is dealing explicitly with the topic of adoption. The second is because really where I want to camp out this morning is on the topic of the fatherhood of God. So I thought it would be worthwhile for us to spend a little bit of time with me talking about my dad and my relationship with my dad. So we will weave some of that in as we go this morning.

For some of us, the fatherhood of God is a topic that's not on our radar whatsoever. For some of us when we think about God as Father, it is a comforting experience, for some of us it is a terrifying experience, and some of us are completely apathetic towards it. But my contention this morning, and my encouragement to us and exhortation to us this morning, is that this is an absolutely essential and fundamental concept that we understand from the Scriptures.

J.I. Packer, a great author, wrote this classic work called *Knowing God*. If you've never read it, I highly encourage you to read it. He wrote, "What is a Christian?" Stop and think just for a second about how you would answer that question. Some of you might be skeptics in here, and your idea of what a Christian is is kind of Ned Flanders from *The Simpsons*, or something like that. For some of you, your answer to *What is a Christian?* is someone who goes to church all the time.

What is it that J.I. Packer identifies as a Christian? He says, "The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father." So at the foundation of who we are as Christians is a realization of the fact that we are sons or daughters of a Father. So open with me if you will to Galatians, chapter 3. We will start in verse 23 and will read all the way through 4:7.

The apostle Paul writes, **"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you

are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Let me pray for our time together.

Father, thank you for the privilege you have given to us that we might open your Word, and I pray as the psalmist prays, that you might now open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things in it and that you would, as you did with Lydia in Acts, open our hearts to respond to the things you have revealed. We ask now for your blessing upon this time. In Jesus' name, amen.

Again, I'm grateful to be here as we consider this text of Scripture. You might not have noticed it, but this text of Scripture has some of the most magnificent doctrines of the Christian faith wrapped up in it. The image I got as I was reading it is it's almost like the apostle is taking us higher and higher and higher and higher, and each time he reaches a new peak of Christian truth, he expands the vision we have of God and his glory. We're able to see with fresh eyes just how vast God's plan is.

He moves us from the great doctrine of redemption, that we have been purchased from sin, and he moves us into the doctrine of justification, that we have had no righteousness of our own, and we could not *gain* righteousness of our own, and so righteousness of Christ must be imputed, counted toward us, reckoned as ours. But he doesn't stop there at justification. He moves us even higher to the apex of all of the privileges of the gospel, to the doctrine of adoption; that not only are you and I in the gospel saved from sin, but we're saved *to* sonship or daughtership, that in the gospel we have the distinct privilege of calling God our Father. That is a very lofty height. So I'm excited to share it.

In order to really understand this passage, we have to understand some of the context, so by way of recap, Matt has been in this book now... We have worked through this for the past couple of months, so if you've been coming, you have heard some of this consistent language over and over, and I think this is a good thing. As Peter says, "[I seek] **to stir you up by way of reminder...**" That's my hope. You're not getting anything novel today; you're getting gospel. That's what we need. We don't outgrow or graduate from the gospel. It's gospel from the beginning to the end of our lives with Christ, so that's where we're going today.

We want to understand the overarching context of the book of Galatians. In order to do so, flip over to chapter 2, verse 16. If I had to pick one verse that I think summarizes the heart, the centrality of the message of Galatians, I would look at 2:16. It's not a comprehensive or exhaustive statement on the book as a whole, but I think it captures the essence of the book. **"...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."**

Justification is a glorious truth, and it's the heart of this Scripture. We won't spend a whole lot of time in it this evening because it's not the main point of the text we're in right now (although it's the foundation upon which this text is built) but I would encourage you if you haven't been here to go back over the past few weeks, as we have drilled home, hammered home, this idea of justification, that you and I were born with unrighteousness. We were born covered in, and filled with, unrighteousness to such an extent that there is absolutely nothing we can do. So an alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, must be imputed to us, must be counted toward us.

That's kind of the overarching theme if you were to sum up the book of Galatians, but in particular I want to boil this down to the particular context of the passage we're looking at this morning. So look in Galatians 3:19. You'll see four words there. We just read in 2:16 that man is not justified by works of the law, so in 3:19 he asks this question... *Why then was the law given?* If we can't be justified by the law, then why did you give us the law in the first place?

Matt has walked through these a couple of times, so I don't want to spend too much time, but I'll just kind of refresh your memory on that. There are at least three different purposes for the giving of the law in the Old Testament. Once again, this is not a comprehensive or exhaustive list, but it's helpful to know at least a few of them. The first primary reason for the giving of the law was to distinguish Israel from the nations around them.

So in the law, God prescribes, "This is what you wear; this is what you don't wear. This is what you eat; this is what you don't eat. This is a day upon which you can work; this is a day on which you must rest. This is a season in which you can party; this is a season in which you should not party." God is going to prescribe all of these various elements of life for Old Testament Israel. One of the primary purposes is to distinguish them from the nations. God was setting apart, even physically, the nation of Israel.

In effect, he's building a wall around the nation of Israel to separate Jew from Gentile. This is a wall which Ephesians 2 says has absolutely crumbled. It has been destroyed. It has been broken down in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, such that there are no longer those distinctions between Jew and Gentile. We don't come to Christ through the foods we eat, or the clothes we wear. Those walls have been broken down.

A second reason, beyond the fact that he gave the law to Israel to distinguish them from the nations, was that he gave the law to restrain evil. Matt talked about this just a couple of weeks ago. One of the things you need to know is that the flesh (that is the natural principle with which you and I are born, because we are associated with Adam, the first human who rebelled in the garden)... Because of our association with

Adam, we are born with this natural proclivity, this tendency towards sin. It is called the flesh, and the flesh knows absolutely no bounds. It is insatiable in its lust and in its desires.

If God took all of his power and all of his might and just simply stood back and said, "Go and have what you want," it would be absolute and utter insanity and chaos. In all of us is a principle that would look similar to what Hitler accomplished, that would look similar to what Jeffrey Dahmer did. The flesh is absolute and utter insanity, and it knows no bounds whatsoever. But in God's grace, he has established common means of grace.

One of the means of grace he has established is the giving of the law. The example that Matt used a couple of weeks ago was the speed limit. The speed limit functions in the capacity to restrain sin to some degree. Think about it like this: Most of you probably drove down Walnut Hill here, and the speed limit here is 35, which means you probably drove 45, right? That's something you need to work out with the Lord on your own time; that's not the topic for today. It's not a sermon on speeding.

But most of you, because the speed limit is 35, drove somewhere between 40 and 50, right? You don't have to raise your hand; that would be very embarrassing for you. But most of you drove somewhere between 40 and 50. Very few of you, hopefully none of you, drove 95 down Walnut Hill. Why? You're obviously a lawbreaker. You've already driven 40. Why?

Because what the law is doing is effectively curbing that lawlessness. It's effectively curbing your lust, or your desires, or so forth. Martin Luther, the great reformer, said this: "As a wild beast is tied to keep it from running amuck, so the law bridles mad and furious man to keep him from running wild." The law doesn't keep us from sinning, but in some sense it curbs it. It restrains it. It restricts our sinning, which is a good thing.

Then the third reason Matt has talked about in depth is that the law was given in particular to reveal sin. Luther called it "an usher to lead us to grace." How does it do that? It does that by showing us that we're unable to live up to what the law requires of us. So if you are sitting down, you open up to Exodus, chapter 20, you read the Ten Commandments, and you think, *That doesn't seem that hard*, you've completely missed it. That should be absolutely terrifying. Why? Because you cannot obey fully even one of those commandments.

Especially when Jesus is going to shine light on the true intent of the law, and he says, "Okay, so you haven't murdered anybody." Very few of us in this room have actually physically committed homicide, but every one of us in this room has harbored anger and bitterness and resentment in our hearts, and Jesus says, "It's the same thing." Very few of us, hopefully, have actually committed adultery on our spouse, but

quite a few of us have looked on another with lustful intent, and Jesus says it's the same thing. You have failed in keeping the law.

So the Ten Commandments in particular, just those 10, the big 10, we find ourselves unable to live up to them. John Calvin says, "God awakens us through the law and leads us to acknowledge our desperate condition. It (that is the law) was added in order that we might realize that God is right to condemn us all, and to give our minds no rest from anxious and tortuous thoughts, in order that our despair might lead us to find hope in his promise."

The Enemy uses the law to bring you to a point of absolute despair and condemnation. God's intention in the law is not that we might remain in despair, but that we might find desperation. So instead of attempting to make ourselves right, we might seek God for the one righteousness that truly does satisfy him. That's the righteousness of Christ. That's a bit of the overarching context of the book and this particular passage. Look again in 3:23 as we walk through.

He begins, "**Now before faith came...**" You'll notice that phrase, "**Now before faith came...**" It has a time reference in there. *Now* and *before...* both of those are references that are used in regard to time. Look again in 3:23. It says, "**...imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.**" Skip down to 3:24. It says, "**...until Christ came...**" Look at 3:25: "**But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian...**" Galatians 4:1: "**...as long as he is a child...**" Galatians 4:2: "**...until the date set by his father.**" Galatians 4:3: "**...when we were children...**" Galatians 4:4: "**...when the fullness of time had come...**" Galatians 4:7: "**...no longer a slave, but a son...**"

He has said, *now*, *before*, *until*, *but now*, *no longer*, *as long as*, and *when*, all of these references to time. What he is doing here is drawing a contrast. He says, "There is a contrast between how life was to be lived before and how life is to be lived after. The watershed moment that represents the distinction is the incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This represents such a marked distinction that everything changes. The entire trajectory of God's redemptive movement in the world has shifted."

So I will go to the airport here in a couple of days to go to Japan, and I remember the days when someone could go with me. If I had a friend or a family member, they could go all the way up to the gate with me. Do you guys remember that? Yeah. Your kids will never know that. Not that it's some great and glorious experience to go and wait at the airport, but the fact remains, your kids will never know what that is like. Why? Because something decisive has happened that has forever changed the way we view travel. Among other things, 9/11 happened. That has forever marked a distinction in the way air travel is done in the United States.

Similar to that, something happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has forever changed the way we relate to each other, the way we relate to the law, and the way we relate to God. It says, **"Now before faith came..."** Why does it say before *faith* came? Later on in the next verse it says, **"...until Christ came..."** I think they're the exact same idea; they're just parallel ways of saying it. **"...before faith came..."** and **"...until Christ came..."**

I think it's the same thing. The reason I think that is because faith in its very nature is like a vessel. Imagine it as a bowl. What you fill in that bowl is what really matters. If I'm having a bowl of cereal, it's not the bowl I really care about; it's what's inside of it. It's the cereal I care about. When I grab this water bottle here, it's not that I really care about playing with the water bottle while I'm talking; it's because I'm thirsty and I want water.

Faith is the vessel into which the object is poured, and so faith represents Christ. If I ask you to hand me this bottle, you recognize that what I really want is what's within it. When it says, **"...faith came..."** it's talking about the object of faith, the fulfillment of faith, and that is Christ himself. It says, **"Now before faith came..."** What was the state of Israel? They were **"...held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed."**

So the previous state was one of captivity. It was one of imprisonment. If you read elsewhere in the book of Galatians, it says the law will effectively curse us. So if what has happened in the gospel has marked a distinct contrast between what was and what is, what is the contrast between imprisonment and enslavement? Liberty. That's what we see elsewhere in the book. If you look in Galatians 5:1, the apostle says, **"For freedom Christ has set us free..."** In 5:13 he says, **"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."**

So in the gospel there is freedom, whereas before under the law there is no freedom because it's chaining us, it's restraining us, it's pressing us down. It's not an end in itself; it's an usher to lead the way to grace. It is an usher to lead us to the fulfillment of all things, who is Jesus Christ. He goes on from there, and he says, **"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian..."** That word *guardian* in the Greek is like a disciplinarian. It's someone who constantly whips us, constantly prods us, and constantly disciplines us to lead us to greater obedience.

"...we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." This is the primary thing I want to talk about today, but because it's so important and so central to biblical revelation, I want to put it on hold for a second and come back to it, lest we forget it. So we'll come back to that. Skip over it for now. Verse 27 says, **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on**

Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

What he has just said in verse 28 is a radical idea. It's not quite as radical as some people would like to teach. Some people teach that what Galatians 3:28 is doing is effectively negating all sorts of role distinctions. It says there's neither male nor female, so why is that you don't have female elders? Why is that you don't have female pastors? That's not Paul's intention.

If you were to read 1 Corinthians, if you were to read 1 Timothy, if you were to read Ephesians, if you were to read Colossians, you would see absolutely that Paul has a theology that's going to support the idea that men and women, though they are absolutely equal in essence, in worth, in dignity, in value, are at the same time distinct when it comes to their roles and responsibilities in the home and in the church. I'm not talking about cooking and cleaning and being the breadwinner and that kind of stuff. No, the roles and responsibilities I'm talking about go much deeper than that, but we don't have time to get into all of that this morning.

Suffice it to say, his point is not to say all role distinctions are nullified in Christ. What he's saying is gender and status are not conditions upon which we come to Christ; that we come to Christ and we are reconciled to the Father irrespective of these characteristics. It doesn't matter if I'm male or female. It doesn't matter if I'm a Jew or not a Jew. It doesn't matter if I'm a slave or a free person. My status, my gender, my nationality, or ethnicity, those kinds of things are irrelevant when it comes to the issue of salvation. We come purely by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That's the heart of the gospel.

He moves on from there in verse 29. He says, **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."** *If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring.* He has already talked about us being sons of God, and that's where he's going to go in the latter half of the section in chapter 4 that we will read here in a bit, but for now he says not that necessarily we're sons of God, but he says we're sons of Abraham.

There's a really, really, really important point he makes in here that I don't want us to miss. Abraham is the patriarch of the Jewish faith. Remember, Paul is writing this as a Jew, a Jew of Jews. He's writing this primarily to those who *are* Jews, according to the language, where he says "we" oftentimes. So Paul is writing this, and what he says is our great patriarch, that is Abraham... That those who have believed (so you and I who are Gentiles by ethnicity), that you and I are as much a son of Abraham as a believing Jew; that you and I are more closely related to Abraham than an unbelieving Jew. This is a radical idea.

Once again that dividing wall has fallen, and God's redemptive purposes have now flown throughout the world to all of the nations. The way this occurs is because ultimately God's promises were not reserved for one nation. They were never intended to be reserved to one nation. Flip over to Galatians 3:16. This is an often overlooked little text, but it's packed with a profound theological truth. Paul writes, **"Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ."**

So when Paul thinks about the promises Abraham was given back in Genesis, he says those promises were most directly and ultimately promised not to the physical descendants of Abraham, not to the physical descendants of Isaac, not to the physical descendants of Jacob, but those were ultimately and primarily directed to one descendant, that is Jesus Christ. He is the heir of all of the promises of God. All of the promises that were made to Abraham were ultimately made to Jesus Christ, and if we are united to Jesus Christ by faith, then we become co-heirs of those promises.

What is it that is our inheritance? Well, we share in whatever it is that Christ inherits, and according to the Scriptures, Christ inherits all things. So you and I, if we have been united to Christ in faith, become co-heirs, co-sharers in all things, in all of the promises God has made toward his children. And it's a promise, not a transaction. That's a beautiful reality, heirs according to promise. We don't have to work for it. Indeed, we *can't* work for it. It's simply freely given.

There's no later ratification. It's not like God makes a promise and then later he changes the rules of the promise. He simply freely promises this to us because we are united to Christ and the promises flow through him. As 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, all of the promises find their "yes" and "amen" in Christ. Because we are in Christ, we receive; we are the beneficiaries, the recipients of those promises. In chapter 4 he begins to work out again this contrast between then and now. He says, **"...the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave..."** Once again he is talking about the difference between being a slave and being a son.

He moves on from there looking in verse 3: **"In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."** So the law, as we talked about, has this purpose of revealing sin. It leads us to despair, but not that we might stay in despair and feel shame and guilt and condemnation all of our lives, but that that despair might lead us to desperation that runs entirely to Christ, that we might rest in Christ, that we might be able to say along with the psalmist in Psalm 16, **"...I have no good apart from you."**

That's the point of the law, that it's pressing us toward recognizing we have absolutely nothing to give. All we are are those who can receive from the Lord, if only we would lay down our attempts at self-

righteousness and receive from the Lord. Once again the contrast in 4:4: **"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..."** Why did he do it? **"...to redeem those who were under the law..."** This is that doctrine of redemption, that we have been purchased back from sin, and that leads the way to the peak of justification, that we have had a righteousness imputed to us.

Not only is our unrighteousness accounted for, but we actually have righteousness counted to our accounts. But it doesn't stop there. Although justification is at the heart of all of the blessings of the gospel, and it is a foundational and central privilege of the gospel, it's not the highest privilege of the gospel. The highest privilege of the gospel is what he says right after that when he says, **"...so that we might receive adoption as sons."** The highest privilege of the gospel is our adoption as sons.

John Piper said, "The greatest good of the gospel is that you get God." There's a big difference between saying, "I want to go to heaven because I don't want to go to hell," and "I want to go to heaven because I love Jesus and I want to spend eternity with him." There's a big difference between saying, "I don't want to go to hell because I hate suffering," and "I want to go to heaven because I want to look fully upon the face of the Father." Those are worlds apart, and the greatest good of the gospel is that we get God, that we get to be reconciled into relationship with the Father through the Son.

The key for us this morning is that we might not think of God only as our Sovereign, or only as our Savior, but that we might think of him as our Father and as our Friend. But for many of us, the image of father has negative connotations. Many of us were abused, abandoned, neglected by our fathers, and so this image that we have because of the way our earthly fathers have treated us has corrupted our ability to understand and relate to God as our heavenly Father.

My dad, when he was growing up, had three fathers. The first, as I mentioned, he never knew. We don't know anything about my dad's birth father except that at some point in 1950 he was in Japan. Whether he was passing through or Japanese we don't know. My dad was adopted, and my grandmother and, we'll call him "Grandfather #1," adopted him. They were married at the time. They were in the American military and traveled around the world.

Eventually they divorced, and my dad and that father stayed relatively close. Until one day my dad was driving back from Big Bend National Park, which is where we like to camp, and was passing through San Antonio. He had been on the road for a few hours. He had gotten a later start than he had hoped. My grandfather lived in San Antonio and had asked him to stop by to have dinner. My dad decided he was tired, so he was going to catch him on the next round. That offense, that slight, for whatever reason, my grandfather took it personally and basically said, "I don't want to have anything to do with you again."

We never heard from him again. Whether he's alive or dead we really have no idea whatsoever. That was my dad's second father. My dad's third father... Once they got divorced, my grandmother remarried and married the man I knew as my grandfather most of my life. About a year and a half before he died, he looked at my dad and said, "I don't want anything to do with you. I hate you," and walked out, and that was the state in which he died, completely estranged from my father. So my father has known three fathers in his lifetime. All of them have abandoned him to some extent.

It wasn't until he met my mom's dad that the image of a father began to be redeemed for him. My mother's dad was a very generous, a very gracious, a very loving, a very kind man. So whereas my dad for his entire life had these poor images of fatherhood, that began to be redeemed when my dad met my mom's dad once they got married, and it has forever changed the way he views fatherhood. My dad was abused as a child; he has never raised his hand against me except to spank me. He was abandoned; my dad has never abandoned me.

So all of that is just to say if this idea of the fatherhood of God is somewhat terrifying to you, I would say press into that terror. Figure out what's going on. There is a possibility of redemption. Even if it's not redeemed by seeing an earthly father figure here, allow by way of contrast for God the Father himself to redeem that image. Your father abused you; this Father is gentle. Your father abandoned you; this father is forever faithful. Allow the fatherhood of God to change you, because it's foundational to how we relate to God.

J.I. Packer in *Knowing God* wrote this later: "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 he does not 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."

What Packer is saying in this quote is it doesn't matter if you have a doctorate in theology, or a masters of theology, or you're a pastor, or you've led a Bible study for 30 years, you have all the pins of perfect attendance. Those things don't matter. If you don't relate to God as a Father, you don't understand

Christianity very well at all. I'm not saying you're not a Christian if that's not the primary image you have of God, but I'm saying you are playing in the shallows. You're avoiding the depths. So my encouragement to us is that we might run toward the depths of the gospel.

One of the amazing things I've found as I've really considered over the past really two years the Lord has been working this message in me... Three years ago, Chandler asked me if I ever wanted to preach and I said, "No." There was just no question whatsoever. Two years ago he asked me to preach again, and this time I said, "Yes." I had this idea I wanted to preach, and I wanted to talk about God's fatherhood. It's an idea that really has historically been somewhat alien to me, so it's not that I've arrived in it, but I found so much hope and joy and life change by understanding this concept of the fatherhood of God.

So I thought of just a few areas, in particular where the fatherhood of God speaks to our struggles or fears. One of them is sanctification. I tried to think of specific texts that relate victory in a particular area, or a particular struggle, with the fatherhood of God. One of them is the area of sanctification, that how we relate to sin is affected by whether or not we see ourselves as sons and daughters.

One of the primary texts for that is in Romans 8, where he says, **"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"**

If you want to find victory in the area of sanctification, it has to begin with seeing yourself as a son, because a son delights to image his father. He delights to do the things his father does. Who has seen a child, a little boy who has a hammer, who has no idea what to do with that hammer, but he's just doing something with it because he saw his dad do it? Children delight to follow in their father's footsteps. The Father is absolutely holy, so God's children pursue holiness.

It also has implications for the way we view prayer. Matthew, chapter 7 is one of the best places to go for that, where he says, "Ask, seek, and knock." The reason he gives is because he says, "I am a good and generous Father. If you ask me for fish or bread, I'm not going to throw a snake at you. I'm not going to throw a stone at you. What kind of a father would I be if I did that? So knock constantly at my door, because I love you and because I am generous." So if you want to grow in your prayer life, think about God as Father.

There are other areas... Anxiety. The Sermon on the Mount talks about that and relates it to fatherhood. Fear, loneliness, depression, anger... All of these issues the Bible speaks to and says that one of the

prescriptions for it is to really find yourself and ask yourself the question...*Do I relate to God as my Father?* If we're going to do that, we need to consider the Son. If we're going to consider the Father, we need to consider the Son.

I wrap up by sharing one more story about my father. My father and I had a really rocky relationship when I was growing up. I was very stubborn, and fathers don't like that in their children, so he and I struggled mightily. I always felt like he treated me differently from my siblings. I have an older brother and a younger sister. In addition to this struggle I had with my dad, I also had seasons of real deep depression. I was on medication, I'd see a psychiatrist, I'd see counselors, and so forth, but saw very little victory in that area.

Anyone who has ever struggled with depression knows what it's like. You can be in a room surrounded by people you know and love, and who know and love you, and you feel absolutely and utterly alone. That's how I felt most of my life when I was growing up. I had one friend, my best friend. His name was Kyle. He too struggled with depression, and I remember having conversations with him whenever we would have sleepovers, and we would talk about suicide. We would talk about depression and our loneliness and our sadness in this world. He was the one guy I felt like really got what I was going through.

At 16 years old, he left school one day, drove home, got his dad's gun, and shot and killed himself. The news came to the school. There were a couple of us they went and pulled out of classes. They said, "Go to his house. Just go and be together. Be with his family." So I drove over to his house, which was just a couple blocks away from the school, and after about 45 minutes there, I just couldn't stand it anymore. The sorrow was just like pressing down, almost suffocating, and the look in my friend's mom's eyes was just absolutely hollow and vacant. Just a woman who historically had been really bubbly and full of life and vigor, absolutely empty, blank stare.

I couldn't deal with it anymore, so I took off and drove to another friend's house, and we just sat there in silence for a couple of hours. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to me, my mom had gotten the news at the school at which she worked, and had driven over to my friend's house, only to find I'm not there. I *was* there but I left in sadness. Knowing that I had struggled with depression, she was obviously very concerned. She drove home and had this idea that she needed to look through my dad's closet for his gun. She rummaged through his closet for a little bit and found there was no gun there.

She was certain her worst fears had been confirmed, that I had come home and gotten the gun and taken it. This was before the time of cell phones, or at least the only people who had cell phones back then were drug dealers, or Zack Morris, or something like that. I was neither. So she had no way of getting in touch

with me, not knowing I'm safe and sound at my friend's house, just sitting there in community with him. So frantically she calls my dad. She calls my dad in an absolute panic. He has no idea where the gun is.

He worked, at the time, at the University of Houston. We lived in Baytown. From his office to our house was about a 40-minute drive, and he made that in about 20 minutes, which really means the law was not restraining him at that point. I didn't hear that story for about two years. They kind of saved that story. When I heard it, something in my heart just melted, just absolutely dislodged. Decades of clouds and fog that had obscured my relationship with my dad up to that point, just instantly dissipated, and I realized for the first time that he loved me.

I'd always known that; I'd just never felt it before. But in that moment I did. The image of him driving like a maniac, risking his own life and the lives of those around him in the Houston area... That image for some reason did something in my heart that countless ballgames and camping trips and conversations had never done. I realized my father loved me, and it forever changed the trajectory of my relationship with my dad. I have a *great* relationship with my dad right now. I can look back and say that is a watershed, kind of a place where I put a banner down and say, *This was an important and decisive event.*

The gospel is like that. If we grasp the love of the Father, that he would give his Son for us to reconcile us, not only to save us from sin but to call us to himself and call us sons and daughters, that should melt our hearts. That should dislodge whatever is there. That should instantly cause the trajectory of our lives to change. It should compel us to pursue holiness. It should compel us to a life of prayerfulness. It should compel us to fight fear and anxiety and lust and greed and pride and these kinds of things.

First John, chapter 3. I'll just close by reading this verse and making a quick comment. It says, **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."** That's my encouragement and exhortation to us today, that we might see the love of a Father who would give his Son that you and I might be called sons and daughters. Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful that you have given such great privileges in the gospel, that you would redeem us, that you would justify us, that you would adopt us, and therefore we are heirs of all things. I pray that where our hearts do not anxiously long for the return of your Son when we shall see him face to face, that you would do business with our hearts. Where we are afraid to relate to you as Father, where we are afraid of vulnerability, would you work that out in us, Lord? Help us to find repentance, and to trust you and to relate to you as Father. We're grateful for your Son and the reality that we can only approach you through him. So we pray in his name, amen.