

I'm Lan. I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new here or you're a guest, I would love to talk with you about the amazing five-year journey of God's sovereign plan for this place, but that won't be now. We'll do it some other time. If you have your Bibles, look at Galatians, chapter 3. I've been given an assigned text, and that's different. It has been a while since I've been up. We're going to look at Galatians 3, beginning in verse 25 tonight. We want to apply this, and we have a lot of work to do, as Matt would say, but what I want to do for a moment is to sort of zoom out before we zoom in.

We've been walking through Galatians for about three months now, and there's just so much we've covered. We've covered a lot of ground, showing the difference between religion and Christianity, between religion and relationship, and we know that even the older testament prophets were justified by faith alone apart from the law. If you look at Galatians 3:12, it tells us "**...the law is not of faith...**" You think, *Really? I thought God gave the law.*

In Galatians 3:15 and 3:17 we find that the promise of the new covenant that was made to Abraham was given to him 430 years before the law was given. So the covenant was not renegotiated later just because the law came on the scene later. In our text tonight we're going to look basically at two themes. We're going to look at *inheritance* and *adoption*. Paul uses this inheritance metaphor to underscore the sequential logic of the gospel story, because this is really important for Paul.

If you look back at verse 19 of chapter 3, and then further in verses Matt covered last week, 22-25, the benefits of the inheritance were unavailable until the rightful heir, who was Christ, comes, and that's really important. This chronological element of the metaphor of inheritance is extremely important, because it was that interval, that between time, before it took effect and its consummation. They're placed in chronological sequence because this is the basis that Paul uses for interpreting the law.

Abraham was already understood within Judaism to be an important figure. So important that his faith had vicarious consequences on the people of God. You could have rightfully asked the question then...*If Abraham's faith was so important, and the consequences were so far-reaching, then what was the need for Christ?* Wouldn't it simply be enough to affirm the faith of Abraham as being sufficient and interpret the figure of Jesus as a faithful follower of Abraham?

That's not a bad question. It's not illogical. But for Paul, the crux of the matter is that that's not the way the story is told. There's a very good book that's going around right now, and the author kind of sums it up. He says that the Jesus story is a saving story because it completes Israel's story. Now for Paul, the Abraham story is taken up into the Christ story, and the Christ story is understood with the hindsight of narrative logic as the sequel to the Abraham story. Paul is perceiving Abraham as being the recipient of a world established by the Christ story.

Paul sees Abraham as the recipient of a promise that was basically "unfulfillable" in his lifetime. It was a promise destined for fulfillment only in his seed, which is Christ. So the logic for Paul in our study tonight is one of narrative character. It's affirming a basic and positive continuity between Abraham and Jesus. One as the prefiguration; the other as the fulfillment within the gospel story.

We know who we are, and when you think about it, despite our bent, our push for freedom and independence, what Paul says in chapter 3, verse 21 is pretty surprising. He says that the law is not contrary to the promises. Look at chapter 3, verse 21. **"Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not!"** But he's making that claim only in the sense that in spite of its negative role, he says the law remains under the sovereignty of the same God who made the promise, and that it plays the part God has designed for it in the redemptive story.

Paul writes this letter to churches in the first century in Galatia, and he's doing a lot of things. One of them is he's combating legalism, among other things, but it's crucial that we understand this. One writer said, "The failure to distinguish between the law and the gospel always results in the abandonment of the gospel." Another one sort of counter-intuitively noted that "a low view of law always produces legalism; a high view of law makes a person a seeker after grace."

You don't really have to be a Christian theologian to figure this out, but theologians pretty much agree that the law is much better at asking for a result than it is at achieving it. You want an example? Speed limits. They can ask for a result, but they can't achieve it. So if you have a Bible, take your Bible and look at Galatians 3, verse 25. If you don't have a Bible, turn to page 974 in the Bible in front of you. If you don't have a Bible you can take that with you. It's for you. But we want to look at this text because it's really important. We're going to come to that word that begins verse 25: **"But now..."** There are some important "but nows" in this passage.

So let's look at Galatians 3:25: **"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..." We'll come back to that. **"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."**

Father, we have some fleeting moments tonight, and as always we ask that you would give us the grace and the guts, both to understand and to apply your Word. Father, this text has life-changing ramifications for all of us. For those of us who know you as Lord and Savior, Father, free us from the identity crises that we have. May we understand anew and afresh what "in Christ" means, right here, right now. We thank you for your presence among us. In Jesus' name, amen.

In verse 25 when Paul says, "But now," he is underscoring the fact that what we are now is altogether different from what we were. He says we are no longer condemned and imprisoned under the law because we are now in Christ. We're both united to him by faith as well as accepted by God. There's a great preacher of the last century (he died this past fall) named Dr. John Stott. He was pastor of All Souls Church in London, England. He was a prolific author, and a tremendous preacher. He literally led a generation of preachers through his writings.

Back in the summer of 1980 (yeah, I know; most of you weren't born...shut it) I was studying at Oxford. I came down one weekend, and Stott was Pastor Emeritus of this church, but everybody was on holiday, and so he was filling in at his former church. So I got to hear him at his own house in person. It was a tremendous experience. I love the way Stott talks about these last four verses of Galatians, chapter 3. He says they are full of Jesus Christ.

I mean look at it. He says those who have been baptized *into* Christ have put *on* Christ. This is a big deal for Paul's writings. This is one of his favorite metaphors. Not only is it found here in Galatians; it's found in Ephesians, it's found in Romans, and it's found in Colossians. It's literally a reference to the *toga virilis*, which a boy would put on when he had entered into manhood. It was a sign that he had grown up, which is interesting in light of the fact that in *our* society, the polar opposite of that would be a college toga party, made famous by John Belushi in *Animal House*. That is a sign that you *haven't* grown up, the exact opposite of what Paul is talking about here.

This is really important. Those who are in Christ... Look at it. He sums up what a Christian is. He says, "A Christian is one who is *in* Christ, one who has been baptized *into* Christ, one who has put *on* Christ, one who *is* Christ's." So in these verses, Paul is unpacking for us what being united to Christ actually looks like. First of all, look at verses 26-27. He tells us that we are children of God. How do we know? Because God is no longer our guardian.

I love the way N.T. Wright translates that. He translates it, "babysitter." God is no longer our guardian or babysitter who looks after us until we've grown up. Keep walking. He says he's no longer our judge who condemns and imprisons us through the law. He's no longer our tutor who restrains us and chastises us. But now (and *now* is a 50-pound word here), now we see that God is our Father. In Christ we are sons and daughters of God. We don't fear him, dreading the punishment we deserve; we love him.

Devotion is not a burden, and we're not prisoners awaiting a deserved execution. We're not kids. We're not minors under the restraint of a tutor. We are sons and daughters of God. We are heirs of his kingdom. We revel in the status and the privileges of grownup children. It's interesting that this is the only sense in which the newer testament would acknowledge that one has come of age. Look at verse 26. I'm sure you noticed that Paul used the word *sons*. I used the word *children*. That's all of us. But it's important that we look back at sons.

Now don't go down the offense road and say, *Well why is he using a masculine term here for referring to male and female Christians?* People get offended by that. I find it interesting that in our culture today, even Hollywood... Do you notice that they don't use the word *actresses* anymore? They're all *actors*, but then they'll get offended with Paul, which drives me nuts. Anyway, if you try to take this away, if you try to remove sons, then you are taking away the revolutionary and egalitarian nature of Paul's words, because in most ancient cultures, daughters could not inherit property. The word *son* here means a legal heir. This was a status that was forbidden for women.

But the gospel says we are *all* sons of God, and so if you try to muzzle Paul from saying to women, "In Christ you too are sons, you too are heirs," if you try to take that out or muzzle Paul, then you are literally missing how radical a claim this is. It's not that way everywhere. That's the way it was in the ancient world. I used to listen faithfully, religiously, to the man I called the apostle Paul Harvey. If Paul Harvey said it, I believed it. Paul Harvey would often say, "It is not one world." Friday morning I found that to be true in lieu of this text.

I was talking with a pastor friend of mine. He and his church do a lot of work in Uganda, working with orphanages and education and things like that, and he told me about the opposite reality that's taking

place today in another part of our world. A man with whom he has worked down there for eight or nine years had had to leave Uganda to go to southern Sudan to find work. He found out just this past week that unexpectedly his wife had died, so he had to go back to Uganda for her funeral and to face the fact that he has five children, including a young baby, and no place to live. They're homeless.

Why? They've been evicted from their home, because according to cultural and tribal laws in Uganda, which often supersede the governmental law, property rights are passed down through the females. So here you have a family that's now homeless, they're looking for a place to live, and Dad needs to go back to southern Sudan to work. The irony of that reality is that those tribal laws were put in place and established to combat and to counteract the influence of what has been for years a male-dominated society. So this is something that shouldn't be hard... It's different strokes, different folks.

That's the way it was in Paul's day when he wrote these words. Look at verse 27. Every time we have a celebration service, we have the big hot tub down here and you see people who have committed their lives to Christ, and we find that they go through these baptismal waters, and they signify, they portray their union with Christ visibly. Now this doesn't mean that the dunking itself makes a person one with God. The simple administration of water won't make you a child of God.

We have to give Paul a "C" here for consistent theology. One of the themes of this letter... He has been writing this whole letter pointing to the fact that we are justified by faith not circumcision, so it would be totally unfathomable and incomprehensible for Paul now to substitute baptism for circumcision and tell us, "Well, if you get wet, you're one with God." That doesn't work. Faith here is the means of our union with Christ. You look at this paragraph. He mentions faith five times and baptism only once.

We are all children of God *if* we are Christ's by faith inwardly (verse 26) and by baptism outwardly as a sign of that (verse 27). But that's not the only way we see our oneness. We see our unity in Christ; we see that portrayed for us in verse 28 in our oneness. He says there, "**...you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" The New English Bible literally says, "...you are all one *person* in Jesus Christ." Not only do we belong to God as his children; we belong to each other as brothers and sisters.

This is a huge verse. Why? Because it literally throws out the window every other distinction with which we normally distinguish ourselves: race, rank, and sex. That's what he says here. The fact that there is no distinction of race fulfills God's promise to Abraham. God had called Abraham, called his descendants, the Jewish race, and God had entrusted his self-revelation to them. When Christ came, the promise that was fulfilled is that in Abraham's seed all of the families of the earth would be blessed. Then he says there's neither Jew nor Greek. All the nations of every tribe, color, and language, every race is included here.

Now you talk about leveling the playing field. Friends, this is equality of unprecedented proportions. John Stott again noted, "This is equal in need of salvation, it's equal in our inability to earn or deserve it, and it is equal in the fact that God offers it to us freely in Christ." Then once we have received it, we are transformed into a fellowship that only Christ could create. If you don't think God has a sense of humor, look to your left. I mean we come in here every week... This is a freak show. But God has put us together, and it's amazing, and it's messy, and it's wonderful. I love the way Rick McKinley (he's a pastor in Portland)... He refers to the church as "this beautiful mess." I like that.

So there's no distinction of race, and there's no distinction of rank. He says, "**...neither slave nor free...**" When you think about it, nearly every society in the history of the world has developed its own caste, or class system. We have always been, and in many ways are still, divided by circumstances of birth and wealth and privilege and education. Friends, the big "but" here is that snobbery is forbidden. It's prohibited. And class distinctions are rendered null and void. Paul is saying there's no more distinction of race, there's no more distinction of rank, and there's no more distinction of sex. He says, "**...there is no male and female...**"

Now again, you stop for just a minute. That is an amazing assertion, particularly in light of the fact that these words were written nearly 2,000 years ago, long before any of the advances we supposedly take for granted now. We know that in the ancient world, even in Judaism, women could be exploited and despised. Remember the story in John, chapter 8, the woman caught in adultery, where the Pharisees, the "God Squad," prostituted a prostitute, trying to get to Jesus to coercively catch him in some type of blasphemous conversation?

For those who may read the apostle Paul and think he was an anti-feminist, you haven't read this passage. But I want to give you both sides of the coin. Although we have this amazing statement in verse 28, have you all been looking around? Have you looked inside and outside the church today? Have all the racial and social and cultural distinctions been obliterated? No. You see, the fact is, we do notice skin color, as well as cultural and educational background.

Can I take just a minute for a rant? You know, there have been some well-meaning Christians over the years, and they said that the solution to this problem is that we need to be colorblind. That sounds good, but I think it's heresy. Why? What do you do if you take away color? Have you seen a sunset lately? Have you seen the sunrise? Most of you would say, "No." Well, they have them, but they're early in the morning. I mean, you look at the absolute color... Things are blooming now, and bluebonnets, and all these... How in the world do you take color away from the Creator?

I think the solution is not that we are colorblind; we need to be color *rich*. We need to notice and appreciate and advocate fence-free living. We all come from somewhere, belonging to certain races and nations and cultures and sexes, and Galatians is telling us that Christ has abolished these distinctions, not because they don't exist, but because they don't matter anymore. Of course they're still here, but they do not have to be barriers to fellowship. We see each other as equals, recipients of saving grace, brothers and sisters in Christ. So how in the world could we demonize or patronize someone else if we are one person in Christ?

You see, folks, the reach of this passage literally has no end. It speaks powerfully to every situation in which the church is divided today among ethnic or cultural lines, and that's sadly far more common now than it was in Paul's day. N.T. Wright's notes on this passage got me to thinking about some of the great divisions in Christendom. He noted that we've had a lot of them. He said we had the Eastern Orthodox over against the Western churches, you know, Rome and those that broke away from Rome.

You have the Protestantism of northern Europe and its colonies, against the Catholicism of southern Europe and its offshoots. You have the Scottish/English division of Presbyterian and Episcopalian. You have many of the newer free churches, often reflecting different cultures and social types. But Wright says most of these divisions, though understandable historically, fall under God's judgment when considered in light of this chapter. He says, "A passion for Paul's gospel translates directly into a passion for the unity of the church."

It would have been easy for me to just move on there, as you could too, but folks, we cannot be spectators of the Word of God. That's why we have to think about it, chew on it, let it marinate our minds and saturate our souls, because as I got to thinking about this, I thought, *Nothing has changed*. Even right this minute we just continue this long historic parade of division. We just use different words. Now we use words like *traditional* and *contemporary*; *blended* and *seeker-sensitive*; *attractional* and *evangelical*; *emerging* and *emergent*; *organic* and *orthodox*; *confessional*, *covenantal*, *creedal*.

We can't be spectators of Scripture. As Paul is arguing here in sweeping fashion about the mature and the immature people of God, we have to look into our own mirrors. We have to ask ourselves questions individually and as churches collectively. *Who am I? Am I a grownup or am I a punk? Has the time come for me to pull up my pants?* Yes. Let me answer that for you. *Am I trustworthy, or am I a waffler? Do I really believe, or am I a poser? Deep down would I secretly prefer to be looked after by a babysitter?* You have to answer those questions.

Look at verse 29. It says, "**And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**" Now let's be honest for a minute. I know that's kind of ironic being in church and all, but don't we as Christ-followers often suffer from an identity crisis? One of the things I love about testimonies here

at The Village, not only is hearing what God is doing, but do you notice they're honest? Did you hear Stacey's testimony at the end? Remember what she said? She said, "I have good days and bad days, but God is faithful." Do we sometimes suffer from an identity crisis?

We hear stories about victorious Christian living and faithfulness and fruitfulness and consistency, but we don't see it in our backyard. You hear somebody else's testimony and you feel like a mule entered in the Kentucky Derby. *There's no way I'm winning this deal.* Remember the story of the prodigal sons (there were two of them...one left, one stayed home) in Luke, chapter 15? I think we sometimes get a case of elder brother syndrome. Remember what he was doing? He was outside the party pouting. He wouldn't even go into the party celebrating his long lost brother's return. He's out there, and he's bellyaching for a billy goat for a barbecue when his father had the cattle on a thousand hills. What's wrong with that picture?

I'll just tell you pretty honestly that the biblical record, the Bible, gives me a lot of hope. You know why? Because there are screwups galore. They're everywhere, from the Table of Contents to the maps. You can't get away from them. They're all over the place. I mean you go back to the book of beginnings, you have the blame game in the garden of the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament you have the "duh-sciples." They didn't get it. I mean they spent three years with Jesus and they hadn't figured anything out yet.

Let me ask you something. When you look at Hebrews 11, the role call of the saints (you know, those heroes), have you ever put yourself in that lineup? You're saying, *Well gosh, no.* Well why not? Why *don't* we put ourselves in that lineup? God doesn't have a B Team. There's no Junior Varsity. We're in that line. Once we were slaves, we're made into sons, and God makes us saints. To be a saint is not somebody who gets your picture somewhere with a halo over it. A saint is one who is a believer, set apart *to God from sin for service.* That's what a saint is.

One of the speakers at the Acts 29 Boot Camp a few weeks ago was talking about how in your life and mine it is the *size* of our domain that is different from one another; it's not the *importance* of the domain. In communication theory, they would refer to that as your "sphere of influence." Every one of us, regardless of how introverted you are, or how isolated you may think you are, you have a group of people, as few as six or as many as 15 or more, that you and you alone can influence. That's a huge deal. The way I put it is that means the scale of our lives may be different, but the trail is not.

This past week marked the 67th anniversary of the day that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed at dawn, martyred by the Nazis at Flossenburg concentration camp. His faithful witness lives on, just as millions have followed the biblical record. It seems that every generation has to rediscover Bonhoeffer, and if you've never discovered Dietrich Bonhoeffer, if you've never read *The Cost of Discipleship*, I would

recommend Eric Metaxas' new biography on Bonhoeffer, helping this generation to rediscover him. It's titled *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*.

Daily, you and I are finding our place in the unfolding purpose of God. Paul says that we are the spiritual seed of our father Abraham. He lived and died 4,000 years ago, and in Christ we have become heirs of the promise God made to him. Being united to Christ, for me, means I belong. It means I am not a member of the unattached. If you're living in isolation, let me tell you, friend, that's a choice, and it's a demonic choice. We're not made to live alone. We find community reflected in the Godhead. We are to live in community, and yes it's a mess, but that's the design.

So for me, "in Christ" means I belong. I'm not a member of the unattached. And the ripples of my faith go farther than I can even see. I find myself related in eternity. First of all, related to God, first of all and above all as his child. I'm related in society as brothers and sisters of the same family. I'm related in history, related to the succession of God's people through the ages. This is what John Stott calls a "three-dimensional attachment" that we gain when we are in Christ. He says this 3D attachment is in height, in breadth, and in length.

This attachment begins in height because I am reconciled to God, the Creator, who is above me and who is above all of us, transcendent over the universe. It's an attachment in breadth, for in Christ we are united to every other believer in the world, from Corinth to Cairo, from Denton to Dubai, from Granbury to Guatemala City, from New York to New Delhi, from San Antonio to southern Sudan. It's an attachment in length, as we join that long line of believers throughout the centuries.

You see, folks, conversion is supernatural in its origin, but it is natural in its effects, putting me where I belong, relating me to God, to others, and to history, so that in Christ I can answer that which is the most basic of human questions... *Who am I?* I know who I am. I am a child of God. I am sovereignly connected to all of the redeemed people of God, past, present, and future, and it is in him that I find my identity. I find my hands, I find my feet, I find my voice, and I find my life.

When you look at this, this is quite a contrast, the picture Paul is painting, contrasting the religious bondage of being under the law, no knowledge of forgiveness, still in custody. Because you see, whether you're in prison or you're in the nursery, it's no fun for a grownup. In Christ we are set free, living lives that are characterized by promise more than they are by law. One writer said, "The law can uncover our lack of love for God, but it is powerless to create this love."

So we look at the last paragraph of our text this evening, and as you look at it, you find that in Galatians, chapter 3, Paul has literally surveyed 2,000 years of older testament history. He has sailed over the

relationship between three of the great figures of biblical history: Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ. God gave Abraham the promise to bless all of the families of the earth through him. God gave Moses a law that did not annul the promise, but actually made it more necessary and urgent. And then Paul is showing us how the promise has been fulfilled in Christ so that everyone the law drives to Christ inherits the promise God made to Abraham.

What Paul is doing in this last paragraph of our text this evening in Galatians 4 is rehearsing this history again. He's looking at man's condition under the law, his condition in Christ, and then Paul makes an impassioned appeal about the Christian life. You notice the sequence of thought. Once we were slaves, now we are sons. If you were to translate this in Cajun, he would say, "How in the world can you crawfish? How can you go back to the old slavery?"

Because he says, "Under the law you were like a kid who is an heir to a great estate. One day you're going to have it all. It's yours by promise, but not yet by experience. You may have it all by title, but for the time being, you're no better off than a slave. Why? It's simple. You have guardians and managers controlling things. They can order you around, they can direct you, and they can discipline you. You're under restraint. You have no liberty until the date set by the father. You may be lord and heir, but as long as you're a child, you're no better off than a slave."

Look at chapter 4, verse 3. Paul is saying, "This is our story." Before Christ came and we were under the law, we were heirs of the promise God made to Abraham, but the inheritance was not yet ours. Like children, our childhood was a form of bondage. If you look at 3:24, the law was our guardian or babysitter. If you look at 4:5, we need to be redeemed from it, but in this verse, the law is equated with the elementary principles of the world.

We didn't read verse 9 because it's beyond our scope for this evening, but if you look at it, it says that the elementary principles were weak and worthless. Paul means that they are weak in that the law has no strength to redeem us. They are worthless because it has no wealth with which to bless us. I don't know about you, but as I read this, I can just hear Paul's words reverberating in my ears. In chapter 3, verse 3, he said, "**Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**" I can just hear his pen ringing. He is incredulous. "Are you kidding me? You're going back there? These elementary principles, the A, B, C's you learned in school, they're childhood things."

Now understand the canopy under which Paul is working. He has told us that the law was given to Moses by whom? By God. Now, if it was given by God, not to presume upon your intelligence, but that means it was not given by Satan. Look at it. Paul is saying the Devil took this good thing given by God, the law, and he twisted it to serve his own evil purpose to enslave men and women like you and me.

I talked to a guy after our 9:00 service. He said, "Man, that's what I believe Satan is trying to do. He's trying to enslave me." We get this. We understand this. I mean from time to time in the news we hear about a guardian or a babysitter gone rogue. They mistreat or they tyrannize a child in a way the father never intended. Satan has exploited God's law to tyrannize us in a way God never intended. God intended his law to reveal sin and draw us to Christ, to drive us to Christ. Satan uses it to reveal sin and drive us to despair, to shackle us in depression, to handcuff us in shame. What God meant to be an interim step to our justification, Satan uses as a final step for his condemning script for our stories.

I live in a cul-de-sac, so I understand this. God meant the law to be a stepping stone to freedom in Christ. Satan uses it as a cul-de-sac, duping us in his deception into believing that we're just running around in circles, and there's no escape from our chains. I want you to look at verse 4. If you have a pen, get it out, write in your Bible, underline, circle, do whatever you want to do with that "but" in verse 4, because that's one of the best "buts" in the Bible. **"But when the fullness of time had come..."**

One of the reasons that's so large is that man's enslavement had continued for 1,300 years, but when the time of fulfillment, the date set by the Father when the children should be freed from their guardian and inherit the promise, that time had now come. We've been in Galatians now for three months. We've been hearing a lot about the factors that flesh out this fulfillment. We know historically by this time Rome had come. They had conquered and subjugated most of the known inhabited world. The Roman roads facilitated travel. Roman legions guaranteed safety. The Greek language and culture gave society the certain sense of cohesion.

The old mythological gods of Greece and Rome were gradually losing their hold on the common people, and people were longing for a religion that was real and satisfying. This was now the time when the law of Moses had done its work of preparing people for Christ, holding them under its tutelage and in its prison so that they were longing, big time, for the freedom with which they could be made free in Christ. So here's what God did when the time of fulfillment had come. Look at it. First, God sent his Son. Why? **"...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."**

God's purpose is both to redeem and to adopt. Charles Spurgeon, another great British preacher who influenced older generations, and even this current generation of pastors and preachers, says, "God does not come to man to help them when they are saving themselves, but he comes to them and to their rescue when they are damning themselves." Friends, don't miss this. This is not just a rescue from slavery, although it surely is. It makes slaves into sons.

Paul has already told us in the beginning of the letter, chapter 1, verse 4, that the redemption was achieved by the death of Christ. Galatians 3:13 tells us that this death of Christ was a curse becoming, or a curse bearing death, by one perfectly qualified as God's Son. How do we know that? Because he was both human and divine. He was born under the law of a Jewish mother, into the Jewish nation, subject to the Jewish law. While he submitted to all of the requirements under the law, he succeeded where all others before and since have failed. He perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law.

So you have his humanity, you have his divinity, and you have his righteousness uniquely qualifying him to be our Redeemer. Had he not been a man, he could not have redeemed man. Had he not been a righteous man, he could not have redeemed the unrighteous. Had he not been God's Son, he couldn't have redeemed us for God, or made us sons and children of God. But that's not all. We receive adoption *and* we receive redemption. That's why I've thought of this passage under the title... We think about inheritance and adoption; I've thought about it as *The Will and the Decree*, because our notes this week in our home groups gave some tremendous understanding of adoption.

Sinclair Ferguson wrote, "Our sonship to God is the apex of creation and the goal of redemption." J.I. Packer said, "Adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers." He continues. He says, "The idea that all are children of God is not found anywhere in the Bible." Do you hear what I said? Let me repeat that. "The idea that all are children of God is not found anywhere in the Bible. The gift of sonship to God becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again. Sonship to God then is a gift of grace. It is not a natural but rather an adoptive sonship, and so the New Testament explicitly pictures this."

This has profound implications for you and for me and how well we understand Christianity. We have been chosen by the Creator of the universe. I'll never forget a pastor I heard over 20 years ago when his kids were little. Now they're grown up and giving him grandchildren. I was a young father at the time, and I remember his statement. He was having one of those bedtime moments with his daughter, and he told her, "Honey, if they had lined up every little girl in the world, I would have picked you." Wow! I mean what do you think that meant to that kid and has continued to mean to her every day of her life?

Well folks, that's what the Bible is telling us, that God has chosen us. After all, we judge our own and others' fathers by a positive ideal of fatherhood, whether or not that was our experience. Otherwise we wouldn't recognize bad fathers. That's why Packer concludes, "It can be safely said that the person for whom the thought of God's perfect fatherhood is meaningless or repellent does not exist," as we'll see in a moment.

Ferguson is correct when he said that adoption is not a change in nature; it is a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will miss the significance of our adoption. Adoption is a declaration God makes about

us. It is irreversible. It is dependent entirely upon his gracious choice in which he says, "You are my son or daughter. Today I have brought you into my family."

If you've been around here very long, you know that we have a lot of people in our church who are going through the adoption process, adopting children. There are some who are fostering to adopt, and many other things, and I was thinking about this. We know that in our current legal system, there are all sorts of hoops and protocols involved in the adoption process. It can be, and usually is, a long, arduous process. There are classes, and there are affirmations, and there are interviews, and there are home visits, and there are steps forward and there are steps backward, there are court dates, there are hearings, there's a whole lot of waiting, and a lot of uncertainty.

Yesterday afternoon I called up one of our foster-to-adopt parents and was asking him about this. I said, "What's the hardest part?" He said, "Really the hardest part is the weight of waiting." The bottom line for us is that an adoption is not official until the judge makes the decree, the declaration that it is done. But again, in this case, God does not stop with the decree. He doesn't stop with the declaration. Look at verse 6. God also sends his Spirit. This just gets better because he says, **"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"**

Notice in verse 4 the "sent forth" and verse 6 "*has sent*." This is the same word in the same tense, meaning that there was a double sending forth from God the Father. Though theologians didn't use the term *Trinity* back then and the technical terms associated until some time later than Paul, I want you to see the roots of this three-in-one understanding of God as being already present in this, one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest, document we have from the young church. Don't miss the Trinitarian reference here. God sends his Son into the world, he also sends his Spirit into our hearts, and then upon entering into our hearts, the Spirit immediately began to cry, "Abba! Father!"

We see the same parallel in Romans 8, verses 15-17, where we find Paul writing, **"...you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..."** You've probably heard before that this term *Abba* is the one Jesus himself used when he was in personal, intimate contact with the Father, when he was praying to him. It was a shortened, intimate, relational term that we would equate with whatever you use for your dad...Daddy, Pop, Papa, whatever it is.

I love the way J.B. Phillips translated this. He translated this, "Father, dear Father." Don't overlook the fact that it is through the witness of the Spirit that we cry, "Abba! Father!" Martyn Lloyd-Jones reminds us that this is a strong term, and the apostle used it deliberately. It is a loud cry, expressing deep emotion, so it implies a real knowledge of God. God is not some distant deity. He's not merely a God we believe in

intellectually or theologically or theoretically or doctrinally only. I would remind you that a non-believer can do that.

Remember what James, the brother of our Lord, wrote? He said that the demons believe and they tremble. So maybe they're one up on us because we don't even tremble. Sometimes we don't even shrug. This is both spontaneous and it's effusive. It's like those wonder years when Daddy walks in, and that little ankle-biter just, without thinking, erupts, "Daddy!" Well, if you're in that stage, enjoy it. It's going to change, because eventually you'll get to those "ugh and shrug" days, when you walk in and you can't get the time of day.

Understand that God's purpose here is not one-dimensional. He both secures our sonship by his Son, and he assures us of it by his Spirit. God sends his Son to give us the status of sonship and sends his Spirit to give us an experience of it. This is a huge truth. This is exactly what Jesus was promising at Pentecost in Acts; that he would send his gift of the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the One to go alongside us, witnessing to our sonship and prompting our prayers.

Folks, this is a powerful, precious privilege for all of God's children. This is not just for some holy huddle of salty saints. You want to talk about power? You want to talk about freedom? This is a done deal. One writer said, "The law breaks false alternatives, and the gospel takes hold to break open the liberty of faith." Look at verse 6: **"...because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts..."**

Now don't hit the pause button; just hit stop. Stop. That's it. There is no other qualification. There is no formula to recite. There's no experience to covet or shop around for. There are no extra conditions to fulfill. Paul is crystal clear about this. If, and because, we are God's children, God has sent his Spirit into our hearts, and his assurance is not some kind of spectacular paranormal gift or sign, but rather it is the inward, quiet witness of his Spirit as we pray.

Look at verse 7, because this wraps up our text. Paul is reiterating the bottom line of this stage of his argument. He says, **"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."** Folks, this missional pastor, church planter, gets down to the front row and up to the last row for our consideration in this last verse, because he's shifting. Up until now he has been talking to all of us. He has been saying "you" second person plural, but in this last verse he comes down, second person singular, to you and to me, to the reader. Not to the person next to you, to you and to me.

If you don't hear these words that way, then this message has not gotten through. He is nailing down his point. *"You* are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then *you* are an heir." It's not our merit, it's not our effort; it is through God. The initiative of grace was his. God sent his Son in that while we were yet sinners,

Christ died for us, and he sent his Spirit to live in us. So it comes down to really just two questions: *Who are you? How are you living?*

Who are you? Are you an adopted child of the King of Kings, knowing and experiencing your status, one of intimacy and proximity and authority and affection? Has the Spirit of God awakened and invaded your heart? Have you submitted your will to him, allowing him to radically redirect the trajectory of your here and now? How are you living? Are you living as an heir, or are you living like the elder brother, bellyaching to God about a billy goat for a barbecue when your Father has the cattle on a thousand hills? Are you living as the heir that you are, with full-on 24/7 access to the Father in, through, and under the lordship of Christ, ruled and loved and accompanied and honored by him?

If not, there are dozens of people here tonight who would love to talk to you about where you may be in your faith journey. Maybe God has been speaking through messages and through other people into your heart for a long time, and you want to talk with someone to clarify that. A young man did this morning. But every week in our service we take this time to stop, and to celebrate, and to remember God's gracious provision when he sent his Son to sacrifice his life to pay the price for our sin. This was the great exchange.

As Matt has been saying, this is the great invitation to you and to me, because we come to the table tonight to literally cry out, "Abba! Father! Daddy, we're yours." If you're a Christ-follower, you don't have to be a member of The Village Church to celebrate Communion with us. If you're not a Christ-follower, we'd ask that you just sit this out and wait, and in a few moments we're going to have the opportunity to offer God our worship and our praise.

Father, I thank you for your Word tonight. Lord, what a powerful passage to remind us of who we are in Christ. There are those of us here who've needed this reminder. There are others here in whose lives you may be working right now, and maybe they have not been found in Christ, but Father, today is that day of salvation. I pray that as we offer you our praise, it would be acceptable in your sight. Lord, help us to remember your sacrifice, and to live our lives to glorify the One who died for us. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.