

Who's Your Father? A Father's Day Sermon

Have you ever noticed how many Hispanic last names end in -ez? Have you ever wondered why that is? In Old Spanish, -ez meant "son of." Therefore, Gonzalo's son would be called Gonzalez, Domingo's son would be called Dominguez, etc. And almost every language has the same thing. For the Armenians, it's the names that end in -ian. The Poles use -ski. For the Irish, it's the names that begin in O-; the Scots use Mc-. It's easier to see in modern day English, with Johnson, Williamson and Robertson. The point is that for centuries, men have identified a man by who his father was.

Many today are led to a saving faith once they become parents. Suddenly, one's life takes on an entirely new perspective. It is an awesome obligation to realize all at once that **you** are responsible for that precious little child, and that **you** are going to wield a very strong influence on how that tiny bundle is going to live his life, both now and in eternity! Passages such as the following take on a whole new meaning:

“Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers. A righteous man that walks in his integrity, blessed are his children after him. Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 17:6; Proverbs 20:7; Proverbs 22:6)

Undoubtedly, this profound effect on one's own spirituality is one of the reasons we are told,

3. Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. 4. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. 5. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them!” (Psalm 127:3-5 [RSV])

In Matthew 6:9-13 [RSV] is recorded what is commonly referred to as the Lord's prayer. Jesus said, ***9. Pray then like this: Our Father Who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.***

11. Give us this day our daily bread; 12. and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; 13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Did you know that, contrary to popular opinion, Jesus does **not** believe in the universal brotherhood of mankind? He is not inviting just anybody to pray, ***“Our Father.”*** No, only His followers, His disciples, are given this distinct privilege and honor. And there is only one reason that He gives His followers the right to call upon God in these terms, and that is because of Who He is as the only begotten Son of the Father.

Jesus' followers get to know God as Father because Jesus Himself uniquely knows God as His Father, because Jesus is His only begotten Son. He proved this by doing everything that was the Father's will, regardless of the personal cost to Himself.

John 1:12 tells us that Jesus came to give us the right to become children of God. And because of His sacrifice, we can now be called the sons of God.

The Apostle Paul had some interesting things to say in Romans 8:1-17. If you have your Bibles with you, and it is convenient, please follow along while I read from this passage.

1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. 3. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4. in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

6. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; 8. and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. 10. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. 11. If the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He Who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit Which dwells in you.

12. So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – 13. 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. 14. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16. it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17. and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with

Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are sons of God *if* we are led by the Spirit. Paul is stating this in opposition to being led by the flesh, which is our “sinful nature.” So many things that are seen as “natural” are things that go against God.

As children of God, our minds need to be set on what the Spirit desires. Can you say that your mind is set on what God wants? Are your daily decisions guided by what God’s will is, by what is best for the Kingdom of God, by what fits best with what His Holy word says?

Now that Jesus is resurrected and at the right hand of His Father, we pray to God as Father through Jesus. He is our Mediator, the One Who is between us and the Father. He represents us to the Father and He represents the Father to us. He has this role because He is the Eternal Son of the Father, and because He has faithfully carried out His mission, which was to be the perfect atonement for our sins.

Jesus represents us to the Father as those whom He has bought with a price, and whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren.

And so it is through saving, obedient belief in Jesus as **THE** Son of God and turning to Him and following Him – in being His disciples – that we have the privilege to be called children of God.

Let us now and turn to 1 Peter 1:14-17 and see what the Apostle Peter has to say.

14. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15. but as He Who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16. since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17. And if you invoke as Father Him Who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

The apostle is telling us here that our that calling God “father” obligates us to live holy lives, for He is holy. We should do nothing to bring shame to Him in how we live our lives.

It is also interesting to note that Peter refers to our time here as our time of exile. What a wonderful thought! We need to keep this thought in mind constantly, and truly believe and understand that this life is not all there is for us. We are here as strangers in a strange land. We are but sojourners passing through on our way to the Promised Land of heaven, wherein lies our citizenship. When we became

washed in the blood of Christ and clothed in His pure, unspotted garments, then we became members, we became citizens, of the Heavenly Kingdom. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19-22 [RSV], **19. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20. built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, 21. in Whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy Temple in the Lord; 22. in Whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**

We who are called children of God are of the same community of Abraham. The Hebrews writer tells us in Hebrews 11:8-10 [RSV], **8. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. 9. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.** So even though Abraham entered the Earthly land of promise, he still looked forward to the final reward of being in the City made by the hands of God Himself. Abraham was such a great man of faith that he understood something greater awaited him and all those who seek to have God in their lives. This is the same reward spoken of by the Apostle Paul, who said in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 [RSV], **7. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.**

When we read of God wanting us to be holy because He is holy, this is because He is wishing for us to remember who we are. Do you remember the movie *The Lion King*? It was a modern-day takeoff of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and in this Disney version and retelling of *Hamlet* the story revolves around the life of a young lion who is the son of the king. The lion runs away when his father is accidentally killed by stampeding wildebeests and the cub is made to feel responsible for that death by his evil uncle who seeks to usurp the throne. The young lion then takes refuge with a pair of insectivores, and we see the king of the beasts reduced to a life of eating bugs. Then, at one point and late at night, his dead father appears to him (if any are concerned by this, remember that this is a movie about animals that talk!) and says to him, "Remember who you are." The young lion had forgotten who he was. He was not a bug eater, and he had not been born to be a bug eater. He was the son of the king. When we have been reborn in the water and the Spirit, our sins washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, God says the same thing to us: "Remember who you are." We are to live as sons of the King!

Paul told us in Romans 8 that we are no longer to be slaves to fear, but sons. Life and peace are available to those who are sons of God (verse 6). Following

the path of the world leads to strife and death. It does not take much investigation to see that principle at work in our world. Following the leading of the Spirit, however, leads to life and peace.

We are to submit to God's law. Even as sons of the king, we are responsible for following the King's commands. We are not above His commands, even though we are His children. And as His children, this means we are also heirs with Christ. What a glorious image this is! Even though we are adopted sons, we have become co-heirs with the One and only Son.

We are not children by right, by bloodline, or by natural descent. If we are children of God at all, it is because we are His adopted children.

Adoption is the highest privilege of our lives as Christians. Adoption is the heart of salvation in Christ. There is no greater, no grander, no more wonderful truth than that we, rebellious sinners worthy only for the punishments of Hell and at enmity with the Creator God, can now through Jesus Christ come before this holy God and know Him, and know Him intimately as Father.

If we have lost a sense of the wonder and privilege of our adoption as children of God it is because we have lost a sense of God's holiness and majesty. God has become so familiar, so easy to approach in our minds, like a big errand boy in the sky, our buddy, our helpmeet. But He is none of these. He is the Holy One, the God of Heaven, the Judge of the Earth. Our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

We have in Christ appeared already before this consuming fire, this Judge of the Earth. We have in Christ stood before His great, mighty and majestic throne. We, as unworthy, disrespectful rebels, have in Christ come before the bar of His Father's justice. The Judge of the Earth has looked down upon us and, though we were worthy only of condemnation, has, in His infinite mercy, taken our filthy rags, our unrighteousness, our sin, our evil, and laid it all upon His perfect and only begotten Son. He sent His Son away from Him and the glory of Heaven that was His to suffer our death sentence in our place. Then the Father takes the beautiful, immaculate clothes of His perfect one and only Son and wraps us up in them when we come in obedient, saving faith and have our sins washed away during baptism. He clothes us in Christ and declares us to be righteous in His sight.

As joint-heirs of the Son, we are to share in His sufferings, too. This is a part of the Gospel that we often miss. Jesus said that in this world we would have tribulation (John 16:33). Paul and Barnabas taught their converts in Acts 14 that they would have to suffer to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). Paul said that he wanted to share in the suffering of Christ in order to share in His resurrection: ***8. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all***

things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ 9. and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; 10. that I may know him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, 11. that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11 [RSV]).

We who are children of God get to share in Christ's glory. Let us look again at Romans 8:18 [RSV]: **"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."** Even if we suffer in this life, can we compare that suffering to an eternity of glory? What if we laid out all of eternity in a long line which had no end. How much of that line would represent our life on Earth? Even a speck would be too big. It is not too much to suffer in this life in order to gain an endless life of glory.

So how do we become sons of God? John 1 tells us that we have to receive Jesus. We become sons by faith. There is no way to buy it, there is no way to earn it. It does not depend on humans. We receive Jesus when we come to Him in obedient, saving faith, and we do so by submitting to baptism. We put on our Savior and become sons of God at that point. Paul tells us in Galatians 3:26-27 [RSV], **26. for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**

Jesus is God. He is the Creator, the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega. He is so far greater than us that we cannot even imagine it. How can mortals even dare to approach the only Immortal?

He is our Father. **That's** how. Hebrews 11:5 [RSV] tells us, **"By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God."**

Enoch pleased God. Is God pleased with you? Is God pleased with the places you choose for recreation? Is God pleased with the books you read? Is He pleased with what you watch on TV? Is God pleased with the words you use and the conversations you have? Is God pleased with the plans you've made for your future? Is God pleased with how you are raising your family?

Enoch's walk of faith delivered him from death. Your walk of faith has already delivered you from death, the death called damnation, if you have given yourself to the Lord in obedient faith. If your faith is in Jesus, you shall be spared the second death, which is eternal separation from the Father. Why? Because God **is** a loving and merciful Father: **"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him."** (Psalm 103:13 [RSV])