

Adopted by God Part #2

“The Riches of Adoption”

Text: Ephesians 1:3-6

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 20, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

SERIES INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** We are doing an eight part series on adoption – that is, on how God adopts us as sons and daughters into his family. Last week we saw that the apostle Paul uses the idea of adoption to tell the big story of the Bible. Each time he talks about adoption he does so to highlight of a period of time within the larger timeline of the Bible’s big story.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** We put it into a chart and saw that when the big story of the Bible is told through the lens of adoption, it can be broken down into five chapters. These chapters move from before creation, through time itself, and stretches on to when time, as we know it, will be no more.
 - Today we are looking at chapter 1 of the Bible’s big story. Chapter 1 describes how God the Father planned this entire story of adoption *before* he created the world. Let’s pray.

INTRODUCTION

- They are the most ridiculous commercials in our culture. But they also contain one of the most profound statements I’ve ever heard. For the past ten years, Scotiabank has ended all their commercials with a tag line. What is the tag line of Scotiabank? “You’re richer than you think.”
 - That is ridiculous. My mortgage is with Scotiabank and, let me tell you, I am not one penny richer than I think.
- And yet this tag line perfectly captures how to live a victorious Christian life. The reason why Christians often lack joy, peace, and hope is because we live like beggars when we are actually wealthy beyond imagination.
 - The key to growing as a Christian is to realize that you truly are richer than you think, to discover what those riches are, and to start enjoying them in your life.
- This is Paul’s theme in Ephesians 1:3-14. Look at verse 3. **READ 3 - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.***
 - Paul bursts out in praise to God the Father because the Father has blessed us in Christ. And our Father is no cheapskate who has blessed us with only a *few* blessings. No! Our Father has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing. And this spiritual fortune is secure, for it is kept for us in the vault of the “heavenly places” where Christ reigns supreme. That’s verse 3.
 - Then in verses 4-14 Paul opens up this heavenly vault to show us some of these riches. The experience of reading these verses is like in *The Hobbit* when Bilbo enters the lost underground kingdom of the dwarves and sees caverns that are filled with mountains of gold and treasure. Verses 4-14 describe these caverns of riches and it is all ours in Christ.
- If you have read *The Hobbit* (or seen the movies), you also know that among all this treasure there is one jewel that is worth an entire cavern filled with gold. It is called “the Arkenstone.” The Arkenstone is a treasure among treasures.
 - When Paul begins to describe the mountains of wealth that are ours in Christ, the first thing he brings up in verses 4-6 is being chosen for adoption. Adoption is a treasure among treasures. Adoption is an Arkenstone.
 - As we saw last week, this jewel has largely remained hidden throughout the history of the church as Christians have rightly enjoyed, and sought to defend, other great jewels like justification. But in this series we are seeking to reclaim this long forgotten jewel.
- To that end I want to divide this message into two parts. In part 1, we will walk through verses 4-6 and *behold the riches of adoption.*
 - Then in part 2 I will *apply the riches of adoption* to the most critical area of your life, which is your identity.

THE FATHER PLANNED HIS UNIVERSE *BEFORE* CREATING IT

- So let's begin. In part 1 let's (**SHOW SLIDE 3**) **behold the riches of adoption.**
 - If verses 4-6 are like a jewel, then adoption is the heart of the jewel. We will look into the heart of the jewel but I don't want to look at it right away. Rather, I want to begin by looking at the many phrases that surround it.
 - If adoption is the heart of the jewel then these phrases are like the many facets of the jewel. So let's begin by looking at the facets and then we will look into the heart of the jewel itself.
- The first thing we see in verses 4-6 is that (**SHOW SLIDE 4**) **the Father planned his universe *before* creating it.**
 - Verses 4 and 5 take us back to a time before there was time – to when only God existed. Here we leave the dimensions of time and space and we enter into the very thoughts of the eternal God. What a rare jewel this is!
- What we see is that God, the Great Architect, sat down and planned out his universe *before* he built it. Verse 4 says that God made a plan “***before the foundation of the world.***” Verse 5 says, “***he predestined***”, which means to “predetermine” or “to decide beforehand.”
 - Verse 6 says all this is “***according the purpose of his will.***” This phrase stresses that his plan cannot be thwarted but it also has connotations of delight and pleasure.¹
 - The Father took great pleasure and joy in developing his pre-creation plan.
- So before there were black holes or blackberries, before there were lily pads or iPads, God the Father made a plan for the universe he would create.
 - With joy-filled delight, the Great Author, planned out the story of the universe *before* the first page was written.

THE FATHER HAD A *PURPOSE* FOR HIS PLAN

- Let me turn the jewel now and show you a second facet. In the second place we discover that, (**SHOW SLIDE 5**) **the Father had a *purpose* for his plan.**
 - Even though the Father made this plan before time began, he looked ahead to when time, as we know it, will end. His pre-creation plan had an ultimate purpose that it was designed to achieve.
- Look at verse 6. The plan is **READ 6b - *to the praise of his glorious grace.*** So when God was planning the universe that he would create, the thought that drove his plan was how to create a universe that could most clearly display the glory of who he is, especially the glory of his grace.
 - The universe, therefore, is a theatre in which the drama of God's plan unfolds. As this story unfolds, and particularly when the final curtain falls, God's ultimate purpose is that millions of angels and millions of people will rise to their feet in thunderous applause and shout, “Oh what a gracious God! Oh what amazing grace!”

THE FATHER'S PLAN IS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH JESUS

- Let's turn the jewel again and see yet another facet. In the third place we discover that (**SHOW SLIDE 6**) **the Father's plan is accomplished through Jesus, particularly through his death.**
 - Notice that even though verses 4-6 are about God the Father and his pre-creation plan, Paul cannot speak about the Father's plan without constantly referring to Jesus. In verse 3 all the spiritual blessings are given “***in Christ.***” In verse 4 we are chosen “***in him.***” In verse 5 this predetermined plan is accomplished “***through Jesus Christ.***” In verse 6 the blessings of God's grace are given “***in the Beloved.***”
 - So all the gracious blessings of this plan are given only to those who united to Jesus – to those who are “***in Christ.***” Additionally, this whole plan is accomplished “***through Jesus Christ.***”

¹ Markus Barth says we are not to imagine “a grim Lord watching over the execution of his predetermined plan, but a smiling Father . . . [who] enjoys imparting his riches to many children.” Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2008), 81.

- Paul will go on in verses 7-12 to focus on Jesus and his role in the Father's plan. The first thing he says in verse 7 is that Jesus' role was to die a violent and bloody death for he says, **"In him we have redemption through his blood."**
- We learn from this that Jesus' death was planned before God created the world. So Jesus' death was not an accident that somehow surprised the Father. It's not like Jesus' crucifixion set off alarm bells in heaven that caused angels to scurry everywhere in panic. When the nails pierced Jesus' hands, God the Father did not yell for an emergency meeting with Michael the archangel to figure out how all this could have happened. No! It was all part of the plan.
 - The death of Jesus was not some sort of Plan B after Adam and Eve messed up original God's Plan A. No! The death of Jesus was Plan A for the Father's pre-creation plan is accomplished **"through Jesus Christ."**²
- So what is the plan? What is this plan that the whole universe was built for? What is this plan that calls for the Father to give up his own Son to die a violent death on a cross? What is this plan that reveals the tremendous grace of God in such a way that Paul bursts out into praise?
 - Let's look now at the heart of the jewel.

THE FATHER'S PLAN WAS TO ADOPT A PEOPLE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** In the fourth place, **the Father's plan was to adopt a people whom he would choose for himself.**
 - Look at verse 5. **READ 5a - he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.** In the Greek the word "predestined" is connected to the verb "to choose" in verse 4. The connection can be taken in a few different ways but it seems that Paul is saying the Father chose us because he had predetermined to adopt us.
 - Of all the children in the world, my wife and I chose Josh. Why? Because we had a plan to adopt a son.
- Do you see it then? Adoption is at the very centre of why God created the universe.
 - When the Father was thinking about how to create a universe the thought that drove his plan was how to create a universe that could most clearly display his grace.
 - God decided that the greatest way he could display his grace was to choose a people whom he would adopt through Jesus Christ.
- So how does adoption display the grace of God?
 - Oh look into this jewel. It shines with the grace of God.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** **Adoption displays the amazing grace of God because the Father did not need to adopt anyone.** He already had a Son and he was "his beloved Son" (Col 1:13). As the great Puritan Thomas Watson writes, **"We needed a Father, but he did not need sons."**³
 - But in an act of astonishing grace, the Father planned to enlarge his family by adopting mere creatures like you and I. Amazing grace!
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** **Adoption displays the amazing grace of God because of what we were before the Father adopted us.**
 - Let's be clear on something here: as the Father developed his plan he did not look through time and see cute little orphaned babies who attracted his heart or well-behaved children who deserved to be adopted.

² Other scriptures also make it clear that Jesus' death was planned before the creation of the world. 1 Peter 1:20 says, "[Jesus] was foreknown before the foundation of the world." Acts 2:23 says Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Acts 4:27 says that all the people who had a hand in Jesus' death only did "Whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place?" Revelation 13:8 refers to Jesus as "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." As John Stott says, "He determined to make us (who did not yet exist) his own children through the redeeming work of Christ (which had not yet taken place)." John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 36.

³ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Banner of Truth, 1957), 235.

- No, as the Father looked through time he saw a world in rebellion against him. And yet, as Romans 5:10 says, it was **“while we were enemies”** that He sent Christ to die for us.
 - In Ephesians 1:3 the Father chooses us **“that we should be holy and blameless before him”**, which means that apart from adoption in Christ we are unholy and worthy of blame.
 - Ephesians 2:2 explains this saying that we are all **“sons of disobedience”** and Ephesians 2:3 declares that we are all **“by nature children of wrath.”**
 - So before creation, the Father chose to adopt those who were his enemies. Before creation, the Father planned to make “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:4) into “children of God” (Rom. 8:16). What incredible grace!
- Ah but keep staring at this jewel. **(SHOW SLIDE 10) Adoption displays the amazing grace of God because of what it cost the Father.**
 - You see, the Father could not adopt us while we were under judgement and wrath. And so, before creation, the Father planned to give up what was most precious to himself, namely, His own Son. The Father planned to send His only Son into the world and for Jesus to go to the cross where He would take the wrath and judgement that was due to us upon Himself.
 - The Bible’s word for this is “propitiation”, which means, “to turn aside wrath.” In his death, Jesus turns aside the wrath that is due to us and makes us **“holy and blameless”** in order that the Father might adopt us.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 11) J.I. Packer writes this: “Were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be adoption through propitiation, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that.”**⁴
- Lift up your heart in praise to the Father for this entire plan was made before the foundation of the world. Plan A was to create a universe in which the Father’s children would be lost from him through sin but a universe in which the Father would give his only Son in order to rescue them in order that he might adopt them to himself.
 - So adoption is not God’s second best plan for his universe. It is *the* plan. Adoption is not an afterthought in God’s mind. It is *the* thought.
 - It is not too much to say with John Piper that, **“adoption is greater than the universe.”**⁵ It is greater because the universe exists as the theatre in which God displays his grace in the story of adopting sinners through Jesus Christ.
- Behold the jewel of adoption! Adoption is an Arkenstone among the treasures that the Father has given us in Christ. That is part 1.

I AM CHOSEN

- Let’s turn now to part 2. In part 2 we will **(SHOW SLIDE 12) apply the riches of adoption.**
 - When Bilbo found the Arkenstone he immediately knew that it was a treasure of great value and yet he would go on to discover that it was worth far more than he originally thought.
 - Although we have seen how great this jewel of adoption is, I now want to apply it to your life in order that you might see that you truly are richer than you think.
- In part 2 I want to apply the riches of adoption to the issue of identity. Identity answers fundamental questions like, “Who am I? What makes me to be me? Where do I find my sense of self-worth?”
 - I want to show you that trying to find your identity in anything but God will leave you utterly impoverished. But when you find your identity in your adoption you will be rich.
 - When you really take hold of your identity as a child of God you can declare three things about yourself – three things that save you from the impoverished way you often live. I will put them in the first person so that you can declare them to yourself.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 13) Declaration #1: I am chosen (so I don’t have to achieve in order to be Somebody).**

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 214. Emphasis original.

⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiKehK1ISFY>

- So often find our identity in what we do. We measure our self-worth based on how successful we are in our careers, in our ability to parent, or in how good we are at music, sports, or school.
 - But trying to find your identity in your achievements will leave you impoverished. You will be crushed when you fail because your whole sense of self-worth is wrapped up in succeeding. You won't be able to handle criticism. You will always feel insecure because you never quite know if you are doing well enough. And even when you are successful you won't be able to rest because you have to keep working to maintain your self-worth.
- Madonna, the worldwide pop icon, once gave an interview where she was really honest about this. She said,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 14) “I have an iron will, and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy...I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I’m mediocre and uninteresting...Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that’s always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I’ve become Somebody, I still have to prove that I’m Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.”**⁶
- You can hear how impoverished she feels. Contrast this now with finding your identity in your adoption. Adoption is *not* something that is earned. Adoption is something that is *given*. Adoption is *not* something that is achieved. Adoption is something that is *received*.
 - Our son, Joshua, did not call us from China saying, **“I propose that I live in your home for a probationary period and if I can be a good enough boy then I will earn the right for you to love me and adopt me as your son.”** No. We chose him. We adopted him. His identity as our son does not depend in any way on his achievements.
 - Paul’s imagery of adoption also comes from the Old Testament when God chose Israel from among all the nations of the earth and adopted Israel as his son. God makes it clear that he did not choose them because of anything they did but solely because of his great love for them.⁷
 - Listen, you don’t have to achieve in order to be Somebody because in Jesus you already are Somebody. You are son in the royal family! You are a daughter in the royal family! You are chosen!
- Before we move to the second declaration let me make quick sidebar comment. There are questions that arise as soon as we start talking about predestination and God choosing to adopt some as his children. What about those whom God has not chosen? Why would he choose some and not others? Those are legitimate questions but we must not let them steal away the joy of what these verses are seeking to give us.
 - Paul’s whole purpose in bringing up election and predestination is to assure believers of their new identity and to lead them to praise the Father for his grace.
 - Many Christians get so upset about God choosing some and not others. This is tragic. It is like if Josh spent his life getting upset with Heather and I and endlessly arguing with us about why we chose to adopt him and not some other boy.
- There may be a time for him to ask that question but I hope Josh spends most of his time enjoying his new life, not brooding over why we didn’t choose some other boy.
 - Here in Ephesians 1 we see that being chosen for adoption is meant to fill you with joy and praise to God. You are chosen, so you don’t have to achieve in order to be somebody.

I AM LOVED

- **(SHOW SLIDE 15) Declaration #2: I am loved (so I don’t need to expect others to fulfill my deepest need for love).**
 - The desire to be loved is a good thing. God has given us relationships to help meet this desire. But no single person can fulfill our *deepest* need for love. You will crush people if you put this expectation on them.

⁶ Lynn Hirshberg, “The Misfit,” *Vanity Fair*, April 1991, Volume 54, Issue 4, 160-169, 196-202.

⁷ Deut. 14:1-2. *Cf.* Is. 43:10; Deut 7:7-8; 9:4-6. Paul makes it clear in his other letters that God did not choose his people because of any merit in them but because of his love (Rom 9:11-12; 1 Cor 1:27-29; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:1-2; Rom 8:33-39; 1 Thess 1:4).

