

Embodying Grace & Peace | How to Be the Church

“The Big Shift”

Romans 8.14-25; Luke 15.25ff

5.1.22

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³ And not only this, but also, we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. **(Romans 8.15-25)**

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷ "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. ²⁹ "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰ but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' ³¹ "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was lost* and has been found.'" **(Luke 15.25ff)**

Last week we kicked off this season, looking at the role of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, God, the Holy Spirit and His role in the Church – this is the third division of the *Apostle's* and *Nicene creeds*.

This year, in the season of Eastertide and the season of Pentecost (Season of the Spirit) we're looking at Paul's Letter to the Romans CH 8 (all about God, the Doer and God the initiator and

completer) and then CH 12 (all about how our life TOGETHER with the Spirit as the Engine). How does the Holy Spirit inspire a different kind of communal life – a City within the city?

This week is a kind of variation on a theme that we saw in the core teaching of Jesus Christ – the idea that good things can be done the wrong way, with wrong attitudes and wrong motives and...in fact...it's more common than you might think. We could even say that the usual way people practice morality and spirituality and religion is some version of what we might call the Orphan or Slave Mentality.

The Gospel (basic teaching of Christianity) includes an antidote to this typical way of doing life and doing spirituality and religion and that antidote is adoption: God embraces rebellious, excluded, enemies to His own family in an act of free grace, through which we're received into the family, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

This declaration by God – that “you are no longer an outsider but now included”, this doctrine and this experience can change the nature of our good works AND can lead to a kind of freedom, spontaneity and joy not found in typical spiritual/religious approaches. So lets look at :

- 1) **The SLAVE Way**
- 2) **The BIG SHIFT**
- 3) **The SON Way**

As an illustration of the SLAVE WAY, I want to look at the Parable of the Prodigal (wasteful) Sons (Luke 15) but before we go there, let's see it in Paul's view of the CORE TEACHING of Christianity in Romans CH 8.

From the start of this section, Paul makes this contrast between sons and slaves. The ones led by the Spirit of God are not led or driven or forced like slaves but are instead SONS. The Christian has not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear.

Slaves live in constant anxiety that they'll be beaten or worse. They can be treated like property and with no security or assurance. They can be sold or separated from family – we've heard horror stories in movies, Civil Rights museums and books on slavery in our own nation. Slaves have no rights. So Paul uses words that convey this sense of anxiety and yearning, suffering and frustration.

Wherever slavery has been allowed, whether in early America or ancient Egypt (our ancestors in the faith) or ancient Rome (where according to *The British Museum*, scholars estimate about 10% [but possibly up to 20%] of the Roman empire's population were enslaved. That means between five and ten million slaves) where slavery exists there's a class of people who live in despair/hopelessness/insecurity.

So, what would it look like for people to live a religious, moral, spiritual program BASED in this kind of slave/orphan mindset?

Well, in this very famous parable...we find two ways to waste one's life. A person can take what gifts and graces his/her parents supply and prefer the gifts to the giver – the parents. And so the younger son, requests his share of the inheritance (before his father had even died!) He takes his new wealth, goes on vacation, buys a lot of friends and... runs out of money.

And when, out of desperation, he remembered that his father's employees were in WAY better shape than he was... He sheepishly returned home and to his surprise his father is ecstatic to have him home as a SON...NOT an employee. The father immediately covers the younger son's shame and throws a party.

But it's the other son who concerns US... He wastes his life another way. He squandered a relationship with the father NOT through rebellion but through obedience. He checked off everything on the father's daily do-do list... in order to keep the father...away.

Notice some of the characteristics of this second kind of escapism – escape through “obedience” in a merely slavish way. First, here is a very careful and we might say guarded person. When he hears the music, he doesn't enter in, he inquires of a servant (almost like he WANTS to adopt the servant/slave mentality).

He's perhaps feared that this day would come when “this son of YOURS might come home all pitiful...and my naïve old man would be once again suckered into taking him back. When will he learn that compassion doesn't work?” He's careful and you get the idea that he likes control more than surprises!

Second, there's anger. The slave mentality looks around to see that everyone is pulling his weight. We must all do our part and slackers should NOT be rewarded! (v. 28) “He became angry and was unwilling to go in”... The older son doesn't share in the father's core principles... He doesn't WANT to party with Pop and when the father PLEADS with him, the older son reveals a deep sense of self-pity.

“Look! All these years I have been SLAVING (NIV) for you...” (He uses that word usually translated “slave” in the NT) – “SLAVING”? But you're not my slave – you're my SON!”

“I NEVER broke any of your commands...” Never? Really? An exaggerated self-image and record. And he also exaggerates his brother's record of wrongs – he mentions prostitutes (where'd he get THAT idea?)

And while “I NEVER neglected a command of yours – YOU NEVER given me a young goat to celebrate with my friends”. A young goat? Are you kidding me?

“I would have given you anything – all that’s mine is YOURS” – We wonder if the older brother HAD any friends. AND if he’s so obedient to the father, why does he NOT share the father’s heart for reclaiming the father’s lost children and rejoicing when they come home... In fact why didn't this older brother go FIND his brother in the far country (distant land) and bring him home? He claims to be totally obedient but doesn't share the heart of the father.

The Apostle Paul had once obeyed in this very way. He could have pointed to his VERY impressive spiritual résumé of obedience to God’s commands (Phil 3.4-7) and said in that exaggerating way – “I never neglected ANY of them!” But, Paul, when he was Saul or Tarsus hated people and HATED that God was so naïve that God would show compassion to slackers – Paul HATED what God the Father LOVED.

But a great shift had taken place. Saul became Paul and the slave became a son. Saul was converted and he was forced to see that he’d obeyed God NOT because he was tuned in to the same frequency as the heart of the Father but because he was afraid of the consequences and because he saw God as a mean and selfish task-master (“Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed.” Mat 25.24; Luke 19.22). But Paul... was adopted by God. He did not think of God as a chummy “Man Upstairs” – he had the highest sense of reverence for God (and even realized that what he used to have, as a slave was not reverence but only raw fear of an Ogre!

But now Paul, the child of God, was NOT merely a slave who doesn't know what his master is doing; but he’s been called a friend of God. (John 15.15) and more than a friend – a beloved, embraced, secure, son who knows the heart of the Father and is tuned into that frequency.

In the parallel passage (Galatians CH 4) Paul wrote of a “double dispatch” a dual sending where God sent His ONLY BEGOTTEN SON to obey the Law for us – to serve and to lay down His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10.45) to redeem those who were under the Law – to obey it IN our place and be judged IN my place because I really have neglected God’s commands and that COSMIC imbalance of my sin, that error in the books had to be balanced, be paid.

AND a second dispatch, sending the One True Son (who did leave the porch and was sent to the far country to find the lost sons – Jesus Christ, the Older Brother we really need!) but then a second sending, the Spirit of God is sent to communicate our adoption to us. Paul wrote (Galatians CH 4), “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.” (vv.6-7)

It’s the eternal plan of God – “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” (Eph 1.5-6)

It's the plan to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2.10) to give us this unlimited privilege and security by "Divine Fiat" – God's decree, planned from eternity, carried out when Jesus, the Eternal Son was broken and His rights and benefits were poured out on the world like perfume (John 12.3) AND the second sending is the Dispatch of the Spirit who actually does stuff in us to allure us to a new and liberated way of living – beyond slavery to sonship.

And that brings us to the final point: The SLAVE Way; The BIG SHIFT (from slaves to sons) and last The Son Way. What does it mean to live NOT simply as a servant of God (which would be a giant privilege in itself [Psa 84.10]) but as sons (BTW: women, fear not, in that culture only the sons had rights but in God's culture/Kingdom we are all, male and female given the full rights that used to be only for males)

Well, we are not merely employees but part owners and that enables us to NOT simply punch a clock but to be round-the-clock engaged in the goals and desires of the Kingdom.

We suffer... truth is we ALL suffer...Christians and non-Christians suffer...Christians should suffer more because we follow Jesus (John 15.18-25) and we serve others BUT all people suffer and no one gets out alive... HOWEVER, sons of God suffer redemptively. It's suffering that accomplishes things in our character, desires and motives. Under the influence of the Spirit of adoption our pains don't make us bitter and disappointed and frustrated – they're more like "birth-pangs" and they produce life. Our sufferings lead to liberation.

And as terrible as sufferings CAN be in this life (and some people suffer a LOT!) our present pains can't compare with the reception we'll receive in the World to Come: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (v. 18)

Additionally, we're led by the Spirit not just the Law. There's an ongoing experience of the Spirit doing things...assuring us that despite what flaws we see and how we just DON'T seem to have the family likeness – we are actually God's own children.

The Holy Spirit allures us toward HOLINESS – toward LOVE (the evidence of His character in a person, the FRUIT of the Spirit. He testifies

Being a son... resonating with the heart of the Father actually makes you like to party. We celebrate when we and others repent and return to God. Rather than standing outside and inquiring so we know exactly what's going on (stay in control!) instead we get out on the dance floor! There's a childlike sense of security and joy at seeing what God, our Father is up to – we don't have to figure it all out because we know it's going to be good!

Also, being a son, being adopted by God doesn't make you perfect. We still groan in this twilight between the declaration of our adoption in the cross and resurrection and our arrival at home... Sometimes we slip back into that punch-list mentality...We forget that we're NOT left as orphans but have a Father...almighty and loving. He delights in us and the Spirit reminds us internally. We still groan with all of creation.

Last, YOU may be listening to me and wonder, "Hmmm... he seems to think we're NOT all children of God...but it's only reserved for some select few."

That's true. We are all offspring of God in the sense that we came from Him but this is an intimate relationship – We call Him PAPA, Abba. (Isaiah 66.12-13). To be reconciled to God and to be adopted is ... not just for a few... it's yours for the taking. John's Gospel opens with these words, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the rights of the children of God, *i.e.* those who believe in His name." (John 1.11-13)

Believe in Jesus Christ and you'll know this new relationship with God – forgiveness, new life and new status – once a rebel and a slave, now forgiven and adopted to live as a beloved child eternally.