

Children of God | Living with God as Your Father

The Children of God

Romans 8.18-25, 28-29; Luke 3.21-25, 36-38

6.21.15 (Father's Day)

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 hope²¹ 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...²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren

(Luke 3) Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened,²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."²³ When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli,²⁴ the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,²⁵ the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos...

...the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,³⁷ the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan,³⁸ the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. (Luke 3.21-38)

Today, begins a series, using (as a framework) a book by the Scottish writer Sinclair Ferguson called *Children of the Living God* (see S.A.L.T. shelves in back), we plan to look for the next several weeks at what it means to have God as one's Father. This is also known as the doctrine of "adoption" or "sonship".

I remember a professor from seminary saying this was a neglected biblical emphasis. I tried to do a little planning with our Worship Leader this week and as we looked at hymnals and songs, we found that to be true: this is a truth the church seems hesitant

to celebrate...and what a great loss we suffer as a result because, as we'll see today and in coming weeks, this teaching could be called the climax of the Bible (J.I. Packer) and it has tremendous comfort and tremendous power to change a lot of the stuff (actually ALL the stuff) that gets us bogged down or hung-up, in our practical day-to-day lives.

I want to introduce the topic today (Father's Day) and begin to show that this neglected teaching of the Bible (esp. the New Testament) is not only a major theme of the Bible and CENTRAL to what Christianity IS but it's also "good-for-what-aills-ya" – it's like chicken soup for the soul (as those books put it) and it's universally applicable to every difficulty, every relationship, every situation we can ever face.

So let's look at 1) Living in the Age of Distraction 2) The Enthralling Embrace 3) How to Live With the Magnificent Obsession of Sonship (an invitation and intro).

Speaking of the STUFF that gets us bogged-down and hung-up... I read a great article and a review of the article from the current issue of *The New Yorker* (June 22, 2015 issue). The writer, Joshua Rothman looked at what many have called "The Age of Distraction" – that's our present moment. Our obsession with the little black rectangle...our compulsion to check our texts, check the Twitter-feed, the Facebook updates, Instagram and all the other feeds (that are feeding on US!). And the article called "A New Theory of Distraction" looks at two theories for why we are so distracted.

He writes this: The second big theory is spiritual—it's that we're distracted because our souls are troubled. The comedian Louis C.K. may be the most famous contemporary exponent of this way of thinking. A few years ago, on "Late Night" with Conan O'Brien, he argued that people are addicted to their phones because "they don't want to be alone for a second because it's so hard." ... The spiritual theory is even older than the material one: in 1874, Nietzsche wrote that "haste is universal because everyone is in flight from himself"; in the seventeenth century, Pascal said that "all men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone." ... if the spiritual theory is true then distraction is here to stay. (end)

The article goes on to say - (not *Christianity Today* btw! – *The New Yorker!*) – it says that being distracted makes us feel in control. We feel, when we click, when we drag-and-

drop, when we post, when we leave a conversation to say, “wait one second I gotta take this!” – we step into the illusion of autonomy and independence and freedom. But the irony IS... looking for freedom we’re becoming enslaved by our phones...and by a million other distractions in this, “The Age of Distraction”.

It’s what this first passage calls the anxious longing of creation and creation in its slavery to corruption, creation groaning and suffering pains, groaning within ourselves, the sufferings of this present age, creation subjected to futility. That word “futility” (v. 20) carries the weight of “absurdity”. We’re bent against ourselves, chasing our tails. We’re a paradox to ourselves, seeking to be in control and yet using devices and distractions that eventually CONTROL us! It’s futility. It’s absurdity; self-contradictory.

We want freedom but what we get is like that Blue Whale who wanted to be free from the ocean and somehow got himself onto 1-95 during rush-hour because he wanted what he wanted! But that kind of freedom is only grotesque and horrible. It’s futility and absurdity and in the end, it’s the worst kind of slavery.

The Apostle Paul didn’t have a cell-phone. But he did have distractions, an anxious longing for freedom. Paul was, like Joshua Rothman (from The New Yorker), he was an astute observer of people and of the world. He saw, in himself and IN his OWN distracted age, he saw the whole complex of the human condition. We live in a fallen, often hostile creation that’s NOT what it’s supposed to be; we are hostile toward one another and are even hostile toward ourselves, divided within ourselves and “absurd”. We seek freedom in things that enslave us!

And yet Paul saw something from OUTSIDE the fallen creation and from outside broken humanity that, at a point in time, that interrupted the absurdity. There was a unique disturbance, a one-of-a-kind distraction when God came in the Person of Jesus Christ and introduced a NEW situation not subjected to absurdity...a complete liberation, a birth of a New Creation where the freedom we long for, but can never obtain, could be finally be experienced. Paul called it, “the creation itself [being] set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” The Enthralling Embrace!

When Paul thought about this great liberation, he could think of NO trouble, no sickness, not horror, or persecution or famine or peril or sword in this PRESENT ABSURDITY that could negate or even compare with Sonship. Being a child of God, being birthed into the New Creation (we'll talk about that next week), having God as one's Father and eagerly awaiting our full adoption and reunion with our Father OVERSHADOWS even the worst things we can face in this present fallen world. And when Paul spoke of present sufferings, he had some real experience (far more than anyone I've ever met!)

For Paul, this IS the climax of all human history: God becomes Man. The eternal Son of God is manifest and is presented for all the world to see. Adam was the "son of God" but somehow, given the wonderful and terrible power of WILL, Adam abdicated that identity and chose absurdity (like a blue whale wants freedom from the ocean and demands to live in a desert) and Adam, the son of God rejects that infinitely valuable birthright and becomes absurd.

But in the public presentation of Jesus Christ, at His baptism, God the Father declares, "Here is One better than Adam – here is the Son who will not deal falsely (Isa 63.8). My Beloved Son and in YOU I am well pleased." Here is a human being, as human as Adam who has come to reclaim the title, "Son of God" and to share that title with a broken, divided, corrupted and absurd humanity. He has come to be "firstborn among many brethren". The son of God come to claim US as sons and daughters of God, to step into this fallen, futile creation and become just like us but without sin in order to "bring many sons to glory" (Heb 2.10).

The sinless Son is baptized into our guilt that we might be baptized into His status, that WE might be called the sons of God. And when Paul celebrated that reality, the climax of history, and when he felt, and tasted that privilege/status... everything else was small potatoes! Being cut off in traffic just doesn't matter. Being diagnosed with cancer just takes its place. Being shipwrecked or imprisoned or bombarded with rocks, unemployment, even death... it hurts but compared with what is to come, the eternal weight of significance that comes from having God as Father... everything else is chump change... That is...if it's true.

Paul believed it was true. Paul was betting the farm.... he was putting all his eggs in that basket that the climax of history had taken place when Jesus Christ lived the life we should have lived, died the death we deserved to die and rose again that we, the absurd rebels might become the children of God.

Now, if this becomes your undistracted focus (and none of us is really THAT focused) but to the extent that this becomes your magnificent obsession how will it change your day-to-day life? How to make it your focus and how this focus, this magnificent obsession will affect you:

Notice, there are no imperatives in either of these passages today. There are no explicit “to-do’s”, no law, no commands or instructions or mandates... However, it’s all NEWS YOU CAN USE! It is, as I hope to show through out the series, it’s all VERY practical.

There are no direct commands but there ARE a number of implied uses/applications in Romans ch. 8. Paul says, “For I consider the sufferings of this present age not worthy to be compared with the glory that’s coming”. And THAT is a practical example to follow, “I consider”. To consider this, to meditate, to celebrate in song and muse on this is really, really practical and the more you DO IT, the more it will affect every aspect of your life.

You believers in Jesus Christ, daily rehearse this: God is my Father, my Abba, my Papa. Presidents and kings are very exclusive about what phone-calls they receive but even corrupt fathers drop everything when their kids need help. And THIS Father is NOT corrupt but perfect! So, celebrate that and put it at the center...center yourself on it. If you do, everything else is minor – even the really tough stuff like divorce and memories of abuse and experiencing the death of a loved one – that stuff really hurts but to be a child of God to consider this and experience it, changes our response. We mourn but not as the rest who have no hope!

It helps me understand the present age of distraction. It helps me know why the world is groaning and longing and corrupted. Why we seek freedom in absurd self-defeating ways.

As we consider this status of God's children and as we enjoy it and celebrate it, IT ALSO makes us hopeful that we can actually change in this life. In fact, all things are being worked together to shape us and conform us to be like Jesus Christ. God is at work in His children, He's WAY more committed to us than we are to Him. His Spirit is at work through all our circumstances and we sometimes "groan" but we're everyday, one step closer.

And we are, even when bills pile up, or tempers flare or kids don't seem to respond... even when we get distracted and want to be "in control" or powerful... when we consider this, we have HOPE. There's that "bass-note" of hope that can't always be heard but sometimes just felt.

And even that real frustration and futility I have within myself – stubborn habits and repeated failings... bitterness...unforgiveness... BUT when we consider that we are children of God, we can rest. We can know that our failings will fall – can NOT stand. Our liberation is more certain than tomorrow's sunrise. We will be made like the Prototype Son, loving and self-forgetful like our Older Brother.

Also, there's an invitation here. "For I consider" said Paul...so...let's consider this together. That is, stick with us over these next 8-9 weeks and think more deliberately about this neglected truth and find in the consideration what you may have missed and what may really impact you in new ways – new motivation, comfort, security and purpose... even courage!

Today, is an introductory sermon. There are a lot of themes here in Romans 8 that we only introduced but will later develop. We haven't said anything about how one becomes a child of God. MOST of our society has a very different view than what's taught in the New Testament... and lots more...So, really, stick around... and come talk to me after the sermon on any given Sunday.