

Adopting the Prodigal – Luke 15:11-24

I. Introduction:

- A. Most of you are familiar with the Lord's **parable** of the **prodigal son**.
1. This morning, I would like to apply that story in a slightly different way than usual.
 2. And ultimately, I'd like to consider the **Biblical doctrine of ADOPTION**.
- B. One of the books I am currently reading is **T.P. Simmons' "A Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine."**
1. While looking at the New Birth or "**Regeneration**," Simmons has a single paragraph about adoption.
 2. He says, "**The New Birth is not adoption.**"
 - a. **Adoption is a legal term. It is the immediate result of justification. It is not the same as regeneration.**
 - b. **Adoption makes us children of God legally, while regeneration makes us children of God experientially.**
 - c. **Adoption brings a mere change of legal relationship. Regeneration changes our moral nature.**
 - d. **Adoption has to do with us as the spiritual and moral children of the Devil by nature.**
 - e. **Regeneration has to do with us as those who are by nature devoid of spiritual life.**
 3. That statement put me on a course of my own investigation of adoption.

II. And I'll get to that after we reconsider this Prodigal child.

- A. "**Prodigal**" means "**wasteful**," or more specifically "**extravagantly wasteful**."
1. I have already said that this is one of the Lord's "**parables**" – a story used to teach a spiritual lesson.
 2. But I have to qualify my statement. While **it IS** used as a **parable**, it involved **an actual family**.
 3. **Verse 11** says, "**And Jesus said, A CERTAIN man had two sons.**"
 - a. There was an **actual man** – a **certain** man – who had two sons.
 - b. So he also had at some point a wife. He may have even had a few daughters.
 4. This certain man was the progenitor, father, the sire, of these two boys; they were born into his family.
 5. And now they were now young adults, and potential heirs of his fortune and estate.
- B. "**And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.**"
1. The man's younger son was already a **rebel at heart**; he was **selfish** – filled with **himself**; he **felt entitled**.
 2. In many ways, he is typical of so many of the youth of the 21st century.
 3. And he was already **pulling** at his father's **reigns**, **chafing** at the **bit** and **kicking** against the **pricks**.
 4. This boy's father, like our Heavenly Father, had been pouring out his gracious bounty on all his family copiously and universally – including this younger son.
 5. But this boy wanted more, and he wanted to be the governor of that bounty.
 6. But he was naive and inexperienced. He didn't know the first thing about real life.
- C. "**And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.**"
1. At his earliest opportunity the young man left, following his heart – which had already rebelled & escaped.
 2. He went as far as he could go to get away from the influence of his father.
 3. "**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.**"
 4. Then he **squandered** his **wealth**, his **education**, his family **religion**, and his **privileges** with riotous living.
- D. "**And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.**"
1. From where did that mighty famine come? It came from the will of the Sovereign God.
 - a. God, in His wisdom, sent a famine into **THAT land**, but it may not have struck where his father lived.
 - b. It was a providentially-sent mighty famine. It was sent with a purpose.
 2. After some time this boy came to see that he was empty; he may not have understood it, but he saw it.
 3. This world is a wasteland – a desert – when it comes to our spiritual needs – that was Jesus' lesson.
 4. The alcohol and drugs, the wild parties and rich food, provided nothing of substance to this prodigal.
 5. His wicked friends were as empty as he was, gobbling up his wealth, but they were still living in denial.

- E. *“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.”*
1. The hungry prodigal tried to find human answers to problems which were actually spiritual.
 2. And in the process he ended up in the arms of **satanic solutions**.
 3. The citizen of that far country was a child of the Devil – an image of Satan himself.
 4. No godly man in the society of Israel would be raising swine.
 5. Satan *“was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth”* – in the land of righteousness – *“because there is no truth in him.”*
 6. What sort of promises did that evil citizen promise the gullible kid? More fun, pleasure, wealth, prosperity?
 7. *“When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”*
- F. *“And (the boy) would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: & no man gave unto him.”*
1. This young man was focused on his empty belly, not his eternal condition – his soul.
 2. So he leaned closer and closer to filling himself with nothing but nutritionless junk food, starving his body, brain and soul of that which he really needed.
 3. **BUT THEN – by the grace of God....**
- G. *“When he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!”*
1. Eventually, under the chastening/convicting hand of God, the lessons and blessings of his boyhood began to return to him.
 2. He came to himself – like someone insane, but who is suddenly jolted back into reality.
 3. Like Nebuchadnezzar, he lost his mind under the judgment of God, but had it restored by God’s grace.
 4. He said, *“I’ve been a fool. Look at where I am and what I have given up.”*
- H. *“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”*
1. Please notice that he began to recognize that his sins were not only against his **human father**.
 2. He was a sinner against his **heavenly Father** – against *“heaven.”*
 3. He saw that he was not worthy to be his father’s son; he was not a child of Heaven.
 4. Until we see that – we are not worthy of God, we cannot have any of the blessings of God.
 5. And from where did that idea come?
 6. It may have been in his mind, or you might say, his heart, but it came from the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- I. **Verse 20** is where, I think, a lot of well-meaning preachers go astray.
1. *“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”*
 2. This verse does not say that the broken-hearted father was so grieved over the loss of his son that he had become nothing more than a watchman on the wall, staring up the road his son had taken into Egypt.
 3. This father was not a sleep-deprived wreck, wringing his hands in despair.
 4. He wasn’t living with dust in his hair, fasting, moaning and groaning, *“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”*
- J. If I might make a spiritual leap – since this is one of the Lord’s parables about salvation, I will say that the father knew everything about the turmoil within and around his prodigal son.
1. As I have said, God the Father had sent that affliction into the life of the boy; it was because He loved him.
 2. Yes, *“when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”* but it was not as many tear-streaked preachers want to depict it.
 3. Biblically and theologically, God the Father was in control of that whole chapter in the prodigal’s life.
 4. Everything was designed to bring him to his knees – emptied of personal righteousness and control.
 5. And if you are not a child of God today, don’t be surprised if as soon as you leave home, your life falls apart at the seams – maybe you’ll spend time in jail; in some hospital; in rehab; homeless.

- K. *“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son”* – just as he had rehearsed it.
1. *“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry.”*
 2. May I suggest that **a sacrifice was made** for this humble, repenting, returning child? **Blood was shed.**
 3. And a **righteous robe** was thrown over his shoulders, covering his emaciated body.
 4. The ring of the father was placed on his finger – he was **declared righteous – justified.**
 5. And he was received into the family once again – adopted, if you will.
- L. *“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”*
1. This young man; this child of the family; had been in the devil’s country – far away from his father.
 2. His father said that he was **“dead.”** **But** he wasn’t **really “dead”** was he?
 3. **Yes**, he was. As far as the father was concerned he was dead – dead in trespasses and sins.
 4. He had been lost to the far land, and he was separated from his father – dead – lifeless.
 5. But **now** he was **alive – regenerated**; he was lost, but now he was saved.
 6. *“And they began to be merry”* – who began to be merry?
 7. Earlier in this chapter, the Lord Jesus said, *“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”*
- M. In my version of this story, I have used the words **“regeneration”** and **“justification.”**
1. And then, if you were listening, I added another – **“adoption.”**

III. The word **“adoption”** is found five times in the Bible, and I’d like to briefly consider each of them in turn.

- A. I see them teaching five different perspectives of the subject.
1. I see **Predestined** and **Parental** adoption, followed by **Public** and **Practical** adoption.
 2. Then ultimately there is **Perfected** adoption.
- B. One of the five uses of the word **“adoption”** is found in **Romans 9**. Please turn to **Romans 9:1**.
1. *“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,*
 - a. *That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:*
 - b. *Who are Israelites; to whom **pertaineth the ADOPTION**, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;*
 - c. *Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”*
 2. Obviously, Paul is talking about his own people, the stock from which he came – Israel.
- C. I hope you remember that God sovereignly called a man named **“Abram”** – **“Abraham,”** and chose to put His divine name upon him. Abram’s grandson was Jacob, also called **“Israel.”**
1. Out of all the people of the earth, Jehovah adopted one people – an entire nation – for His name.
 - a. Let’s call this **PARENTAL adoption.**
 - b. The Lord blessed them; He gave promises to them; He was glorified before them, & He glorified them.
 - c. To Israel, God gave His law and to them He proscribed His sacrifices.
 2. This was a true adoption and every member of that nation was blessed and privileged.
 - a. That nation became **God’s heir.**
 - b. **But among them** there were **Absaloms** along with the **Dauids**; there were **Solomons** and **Zedekiahs.**
 - c. There were people personally redeemed and others who remained children of the Devil.
 - d. And yet they were all children in that adopted nation.
- D. I won’t get into details about the prodigal’s elder brother, because he is an entirely different message.
1. But for the sake of illustration, simply note at this point that the father had two sons – children of his wife.

2. They both enjoyed his home, his food, his protection, his wisdom and a hundred other things.
3. But in this lesson, the Lord Jesus put His emphasis on the special blessings of the one son over the other.
4. They were a part of the same family – national – familial – adoption pertaineth unto both of them.
5. But to the repentant prodigal there were additional blessings – additional adoptions.

IV. And that brings us to our second scripture – Galatians 4:1.

- A. *“Now I say, That the **HEIR**, as long as he is a **child**, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;*
1. *But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father.*
 2. *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:*
 3. *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, **that we might receive the ADOPTION of SONS.***
 4. *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”*
- B. In this scripture we begin to see the **PUBLIC** aspect of **adoption**.
1. And we see **what Paul means** by **“adoption”** – adoption under the laws of Greek society.
 2. Let’s say that a family has been blessed by the birth of a baby boy – loved by his father, cherished by his mother.
 3. As a baby, he does little more than eat, sleep and poop.
 4. As a child he behaves like a child, so he is put under the ministry of teachers – tutors and governors.
 5. And then after years of grooming and preparing, when his education is complete, and he meets the approval of his father, this young man is legally adopted before the eyes of the law.
 6. It is at that point the **POTENTIAL heir**, becomes the **LEGAL heir** to his father’s estate and name.
 7. That was the custom of the day in Greek society.
 8. This can be confirmed by any good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia – like this: ISBE.
- C. Now, think back to the prodigal Son.
1. Was he not the man’s son before he left home? But he was a child – an ignorant child.
 2. Was he not the man’s son when he was living in the far country, hungering for the pig’s food?
 3. Would it be incorrect to say that he was regenerated by the grace of God while still in Egypt?
 4. That was when he came to himself, seeing the sins he had committed against his father.
 5. And couldn’t we apply the word **“adoption”** to the situation when his father covered him with his robe?
 6. I’m not building my doctrine on this parable, but I can see some illustrations of the doctrine in the story.

V. And I can see more of that blessed doctrine in Ephesians 1:1.

- A. *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*
1. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*
 2. ***Having PREDESTINATED us unto the ADOPTION of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,***
 3. *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*
 4. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”*
- B. As it was with the call of Abram, and God’s selection of the nation of Israel, God has chosen certain people to save and bring into His eternal family.
1. There are others, many others, who feast on the Lord’s daily blessings without seeing them as from God.
 - a. The sun shines on both of them, rains water their gardens and snows fill their lakes.
 - b. Their grocery stores are stuffed with produce, and their gas stations have fuel for their cars.
 - c. They have doctors to treat their wounds and medicines to treat their diseases.

2. But the fact of the matter is that most of them choose to live their lives in their own particular *“far country.”*
 - a. If they choose to worship at all, it is before idols they have made for themselves.
 - b. They hate a God who is sovereign; a God who created them and brought them into the world.
 - c. They prefer the evolutionary hypothesis which leaves out any sort of Creator.
 - d. They chafe at the Father’s laws of holiness and obedience, and which condemn the sins they enjoy.
3. And it is a fact that only a few of them are willing to say, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”*
4. It takes the grace of God in the heart of the sinner before he will think to say such words.
5. It takes a regenerated heart to believe such things.
6. In fact, as Paul implies here in **Ephesians**, only those who have been **PREDESTINATED** to regeneration and **adoption** will repent and return to their heavenly Father.

VI. Romans 8 reminds us that there is a **PRACTICAL** aspect to this **PREDESTINATED ADOPTION**.

- A. This chapter begins with the very important statement – *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.”*
 1. Following that we have a description of the character and nature of the children of God.
 2. *“They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”*
 3. *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*
 4. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, **Abba, Father**.”*
 5. *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”*
- B. In my research I haven’t read whether or not when a young man was brought before the judges, and when he was *“adopted”* by his father as a full heir, that he was given any documents to prove his new position.
 1. Whether or not that took place in the secular world, when you, as a prodigal were received by your heavenly Father, you were given, and you received, the **Spirit of adoption**.
 2. You were indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.
 - a. And *“if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*
 - b. *“Know ye not that the ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”*
 3. After you were born again and adopted into God’s family, you received God’s Spirit, *“Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”*
- C. After some months ruining himself with riotous living, and then feasting on the empty husks of sin, under God’s direction, the prodigal came to himself, and was drawn by the Holy Spirit to return to his father.
 1. From **verse 17** down to the end of our text, we read the word *“father”* seven times.
 2. But here is something interesting.... the word which both the Spirit and the prodigal use is the common, but formal, word *“pater.”*
 3. But when the saved prodigal has received the Spirit of adoption the relationship changes, and he calls out to his Father in the far more endearing, personal and tender term, *“Abba.”*
- D. It can be argued that among all the **terms** which we might use to talk about **God’s relationship** to His **creation...**
 1. Among all the terms which we might use to speak of **God’s relationship** to His **redeemed...**
 2. There is **none so precious** and **blessed** as the *“abba”* relationship of the fully adopted child.
 3. It is more precious than *“God and His saints,”* and even *“the Saviour and His disciples.”*
 4. And *“the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”*

VII. There is one more verse which speaks of adoption, and we might call it *PERFECTED* adoption.

- A. Once again it is found here in **Romans 8**, beginning this time in **verse 22**.
1. *"We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*
 2. *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for **the ADOPTION**, to wit, the **redemption of our body.**"*
- B. Our opening text from **Luke 15** concludes with the prodigal's return and his father's response.
1. *"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*
 2. *And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*
 3. *But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:*
 4. *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*
 5. *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."*
- C. I hope you are familiar with the words of the Lord Jesus as found in **John 14**.
1. *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*
 2. *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*
 3. *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."*
- D. In the not too distant future, Christ will return to claim what is His, including all those whom He has redeemed and all those whom the Father has adopted.
1. The bodies of the deceased saints will reform and arise from wherever they are.
 2. And the living saints will be changed and caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.
 3. It will be the final aspect of adoption – the completion of every aspect of God's salvation.
 4. *"**The ADOPTION the redemption of our body.**"*
- E. But those who are **NOT children of God** by faith in Christ Jesus will be left to face eternal judgment.
1. Are you prepared to face the judgment of the eternal God of eternity?
 2. Are you still in the far country wasting away?
 3. The worst that any man can face in this world, is but a drop of sulphuric acid on the tongue, compared to what awaits the man who has not been redeemed by God and adopted into the Lord's family.
 4. I plead with you – repent before God – surrender – admit your utter failure and ruin in that far country.
 5. Turn to the Saviour in faith, trusting him to receive you.
 6. Please, please, follow the prodigal back to the Father this morning.