The glorious grace of adoption in Christ

Text: Ephesians 1:5-6

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**Scriptures:** Proverbs 3:1-12; Hebrews 12:7-14; Ephesians 1:1-6

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 193, 168, 119:17-24, 204, 103

Series: Ephesians (Sermon #3)

Theme: The Apostle Paul praises God for the spiritual blessing of adoption in Christ, His Beloved Son, in which, according to His will, God chooses to bring aliens into his family so that He would be praised for His glorious grace.

Proposition: Brothers and sisters, praise God for His grace in adopting us into His family in Christ.

**Introduction**

What images come into your mind when you hear the word ‘alien’? Perhaps an extra-terrestrial creature from a science fiction movie with a long neck, big bug eyes and a sunken nose? The dictionary definition is much more ‘down to earth’: an alien is “*a person of another family, race, or nation*”. An alien is somebody who doesn’t belong.

In the Maori language the word ‘turangawaewae’ describes a place where one has the right to stand; a place of belonging which comes through kinship and whakapapa (genealogy). When someone does not have a place of belonging, a ‘turangawaewae’, they are alienated, detached, separated, alone. The vital importance to human health of ‘belonging’ is widely recognised by psychologists, even though most do not understand that we are fundamentally designed by our Creator to live in families, in communities, not in isolation as aliens.

Swiss physician and author Paul Tournier (1898-1986) wrote (‘A place for you’): “*The child who has been able to grow up harmoniously in a healthy home finds a welcome everywhere… Wherever he goes he will be able to make any place his own*”. “*On the other hand when the family is such that the child cannot fit himself into it properly, he looks everywhere for some other place, leading a wandering existence, incapable of settling down anywhere. His tragedy is that he carries about within himself this fundamental incapacity for any real attachment*”.

It could be said that the root of every problem we have in our relationships with one another stems from the fact that we all grow up in homes which are not completely harmonious and healthy. There is always some degree of dysfunctionality. In her work as a voluntary counsellor in a local high school, my wife Jenny has observed that by far the most common factor in mental, emotional and spiritual turmoil that she observes in students is brokenness in families. Students come to her in great need because they do not feel that they belong in their families.

It’s easy for us to sit in a church like this and look at some other family groups and think ‘they have it all together, they don’t have any problems like we do in our family’. My years as a pastor have taught me that this is not true of any human family. Of course, some people are blessed with much healthier and harmonious homes than others. Therefore, some people struggle with belonging much less than others - as Paul Tournier rightly identified.

However, fundamentally, we all naturally lack a place of secure belonging because we are alienated from God, estranged from Him. God’s ‘family’ (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is holy and we are by nature unholy.

In our text from Ephesians 1:5-6, the Apostle Paul praises God for the spiritual blessing of adoption in Christ, His Beloved Son, in which, according to His will, God chooses to bring ‘aliens’, estranged people like you and me, into his holy family so that He would be praised for His glorious grace. Our focus today is upon **adoption** and we’ll look at this under three headings:

1. Adopted by God’s prior choice in Christ

2. Adopted to bring praise to God in Christ

3. Adopted to receive blessings in Christ

1. **Adopted by God’s prior choice in Christ**

In the make-believe movie world, ‘superhero’ films have become very popular with regular new releases. To be a ‘superhero’ you need at least one “superpower”. Superpowers include: the ability to change the ‘laws of nature’; teleportation – being able to be anywhere instantaneously; ‘telepathy’ – being able to read the thoughts of others.

These ‘superpowers’ are abilities which in reality God alone possesses. His power is so almighty, so complete that He can, and does, predetermine every single event, however great or small. The Apostle Paul describes this ‘superpower’ in verse 11, writing of God “*who works all things according to the counsel of his will*” (Eph 1:11).

God exercises His authority over everything and everybody in such a way that He does not in any way violate the choices we make in life. He is never responsible for the things which we do, say and think against Him and against one another. A single Bible verse which demonstrates this profound and mysterious reality is Luke 22:22 “*For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!*". God the Father determined to send His Son to be betrayed unto death However, it is equally true that Judas Iscariot made a free-will decision to betray Jesus, for which He was fully accountable.

The Divine ‘superpower’ of being able to determine in advance what will later take place is linked to God’s action in bringing ‘aliens’ into His family in verse 5: *“He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ”.* The Greek word translated here as ‘adoption’ has two root parts: huios = son and tithemi – to place**.** The meaning is literally to “*place one as a son*".

We could say it this way “God determined beforehand to provide a ‘turangawaewae’, ‘a place of belonging’ through Jesus Christ. That place of belonging is within God’s own family, as Paul writes later in this letter to the Ephesian Christians: “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*” (Eph 2:19). God makes a choice to adopt some people into His family “*according to the purpose of his will”.* There is no human decision or human action upon which God’s decision to choose an individual person to save is based (Romans 9:16). God does not select those who are attractive to Him, lovely, saintly and talented and for those reasons decides to save them. As Martin Luther once said: “*God’s will has no why*”.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, the doctrine of adoption was largely seen as being part of justification. However, whilst justification and adoption are closely related (both being legal declarations made by God) they are distinct.

In justification, God declares a person ‘not guilty’ based solely upon the completed work of Christ, that of

a) redeeming (buying back) that person for God through the sacrifice of his life on the cross; thereby turning away God’s wrath from that sinner to himself. God imputing the sinner’s sin to Christ – making Him who knew no sin to be sin (2 Cor 5:21).

b) crediting/imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to the sinner.

In adoption, the change of status founded on the basis of justification, goes further. Adoption brings a forgiven sinner into the closest possible relationship with God the Father. Only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour have been given the right of adoption into God’s family. John puts it this way in John 1:12 “*But to* ***all*** *who did receive him (that is Christ), who believed in his name, he gave* ***the right*** *to become children of God*”

Be assured, if you have turned to God in repentance for your sins and if you trust in Christ alone as the Saviour who died in your place and as the Lord who governs your life now then **you have** been adopted by God as one of his children…praise the Lord!!!! There is no higher status, no greater privilege for the descendants of Adam than this!

Brothers and Sisters *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!”* (1 John 3:1). How inexpressibly amazing the privilege of calling the Creator of the Universe, the Almighty God, the One who possesses true superpowers “My heavenly Father’. To be adopted into God’s family is a blessing of inestimable worth, a blessing which comes with to us as God’s children for a glorious purpose! Let’s look at this now...…2nd point

1. **Adopted to bring praise to God in Christ**

When human parents make the sacrifices necessary to adopt ‘alien’ children into their family for good reason, they do so because they determine to ‘set their love’ on the child or children they chose to adopt. This is also what God does in adopting a family in Christ (ref. Deut 7:7).

However, imagine a couple who adopted some children because they wanted to be well thought of by their extended family, friends and others. If their reason for taking some ‘alien’ children into their home was so that they could be praised by others, we wouldn’t think so well of their motives, rightly seeing them as being very self-centred.

As the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians, he explains that the reason why God predestined them to be adopted as his children was “*To the praise of His glorious grace*”. Is there any difference between God’s reason for adopting ‘aliens’ as His children so that He can be praised and human parents doing so for the same reason? Yes! There is a fundamental difference!

God is perfect in all His ways. He is worthy of all praise from His creatures who are designed to acknowledge the truth of who He is. "*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*." (Rev 4:11) God is to be praised for His glorious ‘superpowers’.

However, not only is He honourable in His exercise of perfect power, authority and justice, He is praiseworthy for His perfect mercy and glorious grace. Grace has been described as: ‘God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense’.

The love, kindness and compassion which human beings exercise at times are characteristics which we have because we are made in God’s image, not because we have generated these traits ourselves. God is always to be praised for the good aspects of His image which are present in us.

Brothers and Sisters, we are adopted into God’s family in order to bring honour and glory to His name as we live out our lives day by day. We are called to live in such a way that we constantly give praise to God for what He, and He alone, has done for us in Christ.

How can we give praise to God for His glorious grace? Paul helps to answer this question inEphesians 5:1-2 “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*”. It is from the Greek word translated as imitatorthat our English word ‘mimic’ is derived. We give praise to the God who adopted us by mimicking Him. We are to show a family resemblance to our Heavenly Father. As the Proverbs wisely state “*A wise son makes a glad father*” (10:1; 15:20; 23:24).

In His glorious grace, God has given us His Son Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God, both as our Saviour, our Lord, and our Example. It is by coping the character of Christ, who is the image of the invisible, only wise, God, that we imitate the very nature of our Heavenly Father. Throughout Ephesians chapters 4-6 there is practical instruction about what this ‘mimicking’ looks like e.g. Always speaking the truth (4:25); Being careful if we are angry, not to sin, and not to continue in anger (Eph 4:26); Only speaking words which are good for building others up (Eph 4:29); being sexually pure (Eph 5:3-7); not getting drunk (Eph 5:18).

When we live life in ways which imitate the character of God, we praise His glorious grace in adopting us as his children. As adopted children of God, we continue to display aspects of our natural selves: a tendency to sin, to rebel against God, to resist his Fatherly wisdom, guidance and disciple. These are ‘throw backs’ to the original family from which we came. This is the ‘fatherhood’ of the Devil (John 8:44).

But by God’s glorious grace we are **also able** to be nurtured within his family, represented here on this earth by the church community, to more and more imitate our heavenly Father who by an act of His free grace, adopted us and gave us the right to all the privileges of the children of God. Brothers and Sisters *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!”* (1 John 3:1). God has adopted children into his family ‘to the praise of His glorious grace’. In doing so He has ‘*blessed us in the Beloved’*…Which brings us to our final point

1. **Adopted to receive blessings in Christ**

There are benefits which children adopted into human families receive, for example: They bear the surname of their adoptive parents. They are cared for and provided for by their adoptive parents. They are heirs of the family ‘estate’.

Paul writes about the benefits which come to God’s adopted children in our text: “*He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace,* ***with which he has blessed us in the Beloved****.*.

What then are the rights/benefits/blessings of adoption?

1. The Christian has the Father’s name placed upon him/her (Eph 2:19; 3:14-15). Christians are truly ‘*members of the household of God’* (Eph 2:19).
2. The child of God enjoys the daily blessings of the Father’s protection and provision. This includes Fatherly discipline, as we read in Hebrews 12. “*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (Hebrews 12:11). When God disciplines us through unpleasant and difficult circumstances, He is treating us as a good Father would the child He loves by seeking to correct potentially damaging attitudes and behaviour.
3. He/she becomes Christ’s brother or sister. Christ being the ‘elder’ ‘*firstborn son among many brothers*’ (Rom 8:29).
4. He/she becomes an ‘*heir of God, co-heir with Christ*’ (Rom 8:17)

Awaiting him in heaven is his/her ‘*inheritance, imperishable, and undefiled, which will not fade away*’ (1 Peter 1:4).

He/she is assured that he will come into his/her inheritance by the power of God because he/she is ‘kept’, guarded/protected’ (1 Pet 1:5, being ‘*sealed for the day of redemption*’ (Eph 4:30) by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:3).

1. The adopted child of God is assured in every single moment of their lives in Christ that allthings work together for our good (Rom 8:28)
2. He/she is led by the Spirt of God (Rom 8:14).
3. He/she is assured of their place of belonging in God’s family “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (Rom 8:16).
4. “*And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God*” (Gal 4:6-7)

The blessings of adoption by God far outweigh even the most privileged adoptive (or non-adoptive) family situation on this earth. Brothers and Sisters, our Heavenly Father has ‘blessed us inthe One he loves’ with our adoption. Who is the One God loves? Christ is ‘The Beloved One’ (cf. Col 1:13) – He is the supreme object of the Father’s love. It is through Christ, the only Begotten Son of God that we receive God’s great grace to be adopted into His family alongside our ‘elder brother’ Jesus.

Friend, do you have a place of belonging where you are completely safe and secure? Are you alienated from God? Do you desire to be part of His family? If you can respond to the call of Christ with saving faith, then you can be assured that you have been predestined to be adopted as His child through Jesus Christ.

In light of this sermon you may be asking “what shall I do?” (Acts 2:37). "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).

Brothers and sisters, praise God for His grace in adopting us into His family in Christ.

AMEN