

Something Even Better than Forgiveness

Sermon for Sunday, January 17, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 1:10-14; 1 John 3:1-10

1) The privileges of being a child in a family

I have warm memories of my childhood. We lived in Moose Jaw, a city the size of Chatham. Our house was right on the edge of town, so it was almost like living in the country. Walking north from our place, I would go through a school yard, scramble down the steep, bushy hill where we used to play tag and hide and go seek, cross over a small creek, and climb under a railway bridge to get to the golf course. After sneaking across two or three fairways, I would be standing in wheat fields. I knew where the jackrabbits had their holes, although I could never quite catch one. In a hidden corner of the golf course, there was a large pond where we would go rafting (hoping our parents wouldn't catch us!). In the winter, we skated on the pond, and went tobogganing on the hills of the golf course.

After a long, hard day of playing out there, it was good to get back home. We knew that that's where we were safe and secure, with loving parents, good food and a warm bed. That was especially true when we were in trouble. One day a group of us were rafting on the pond when the water was low. An island had appeared in the middle, so we went out to explore it. I jumped off the raft onto the island, and immediately sunk in the mud up to my knees. We tried desperately to get me out, but I was stuck fast. By then it was getting dark, so my brother ran home to get our dad. I knew I was going to be in trouble for breaking our parents' rule about rafting on the pond; but I also knew I could count on him to get me out. I knew that even when my parents disciplined me, there was no question that they still loved and accepted me.

Being a child in a family has privileges as well as responsibilities. Some of the privileges I already mentioned. Some of the responsibilities are: helping with the work, obeying rules, accepting what is given, being thankful, loving and honouring one's parents. As the child grows up, the responsibilities do not change: the child is simply expected to fulfill them more.

2) Remember last week... about the greatness of grace?

I'm going to pause here in my talking about being a child, and will return to it later. Right now, I want us to recall some of the things I spoke about last week.

- We may not be horrible, wicked people, but we're pretty decent folk.
- God is pure and holy, far more than we are.
- When we look at ourselves next to God, even our little faults show up for what they are: sin. We are not even close to God, and can never come close to him.
- That's where *grace* enters. In Jesus Christ, God forgives our sin, and we are reunited with God.

3) Something even better than grace: adoption as God's child

Grace is the difference between being in the darkness, shut out of God's kingdom — and being united with Jesus in heaven. Grace is one of the most beautiful terms in the Bible. But there's another term in the Bible which is even more beautiful. Salvation is a wonderful, precious gift. But there's another gift which is even more wonderful, more precious. That term, that gift, that glorious state of being is to be *adopted as a child of God*.

Here's why. Salvation is a *criminal* idea, conceived in terms of *law*, which sees God as *judge*. In salvation, God declares that believers who confess their sins are not, and never will be, liable for the punishment that their sins deserve. This is because Jesus Christ paid the penalty in their place on the cross. This is nice enough, but it does not imply any intimate or deep relationship with God the *judge*.

Contrast this now with adoption. Adoption is a *family* idea, conceived in terms of *love*, and viewing God as *father*. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship, and establishes us as children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the father is a even greater.

I started this message with my fond memories of what it was like to be a child of my parents. Now let your imagination soar with the wonder of what it means to be a child of God!

1 John 3:1, New International Version:

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

In the gospel of John, right in the very first chapter, this blessing is announced:

John 1:12-13, New International Version:

Yet to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

We should note something important here. When we are combating racism, it is very common for us to talk about everyone being “a child of God,” regardless of their colour. The Bible writers, however, use the term “child of God” in a very special sense, quite different from above. In Jesus' words, quoted above, we hear that “children of God” are those people “who believed in his name.”

I began by talking about the privileges and responsibilities of being a child in some family. To be a child of God is similar, but on a much higher level.

4) Privileges of being a child of God

- home (kingdom of God)
- family (the worldwide communion of Christians)
- security (the abiding, forgiving, unconditional love of God). Compare this for a moment with the imperfect love of some human parents: they abuse their children, call them terrible names and bruise their spirits, even throw them out of the family home, no longer calling them their own.
- love (as only God can give it)
- acceptance (even though we are not the most beautiful, athletic, smart, wealthy)
- caring parents (looking after our needs; granting us our requests, when they meet with God's wisdom).

5) Responsibilities of being a child of God

- help with work (spreading the gospel; helping people in need; spreading love to all)
- obey rules (seek to know God's will, obey it, follow the life that we see in the Scriptures) accept what is given, and be thankful. love and honour the Father, seek to please him.

Of course, as the child grows up, the responsibilities do not change: the child is simply expected to fulfill them more. As the Christian becomes more mature, she/he is able to do more of what is needed.

Most sermons conclude with a challenge to do something, to change our way of living. Not today. All

I'm asking is simply this: Enjoy God. Revel in your position as a child of God.

You know how much I love snow, right? Here's an example why. When our children were little, we taught them how to make face prints in the snow. You find a nice fresh pile of snow. You get on your knees before it, put your hands behind your back, and fall face-first into the snow, with absolutely nothing to break your fall. When you get up, there's your face print in the snow. Why do we do this? For no other reason than the pure joy of it!

That's what I'm asking you to do: to enjoy God, not out of duty or because I said so, but just for the pure joy of knowing God.

Today's message can be summed up thus:

I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer. My Saviour is my brother; every Christian is also my brother and my sister.

We would do well to dwell on this daily.

When you come back next Sunday, we'll gather as the family of God around the dinner table. What I mean is, we'll have the Lord's Supper together.

Theme for today: An elderly woman lives alone in the same home in which she raised her family. The children's bedrooms are still there, put to full use at Christmas when the family — much larger now, with spouses and grandchildren — come to visit. But for much of the rest of the year, she sits and waits... hopes to hear the phone ring, for a letter to come in the mail, or ever for a surprise visit. But her children are too “busy” — but the real word is “priorities.”

Similarly, God our heavenly Father, yearns for a deeper relationship with his children. Again, it's a matter of priorities.