

## **A Child of God**

Series: I Know Who I Am

Ephesians 1:3-5

January 3, 2016

Welcome again to worship in this New Year. Worship is the most important thing we do – here on earth and when we go to heaven. Being here is more important than anything else in life, so I am glad that as we start a New Year that you are here today.

2016 is 3 days old now. Many of you have made New Year's resolutions. I hope you have not forgotten them already.

Some people say, "I never make New Year's Resolutions anymore. I never keep them, anyway." I can remember all too many resolutions I've made and let slip away, too. But I believe New Year's resolutions are worth making because most, if not all of us, have something in our lives that needs to change, things that we want to do better or goals we want to accomplish.

Myra and I have set down a couple for ourselves in the coming year. We had one of those marathon "budget meetings" that Myra loves so much. We looked at where we spent our money last year, and the goals we have for the coming year, including saving money to go to the Holy Land next year. We also want to do our daily devotions together this year; to read the same passage and devotion together and reflect upon what God is saying to each of us that day. And I will tell you that it is deriving more enjoyment and satisfaction than that budget meeting did.

Many people have their own personal New Year's resolutions. A group did a survey of 5,000 people and found that the top 5 New Year's resolutions for 2016 were:

1. Enjoy life to the fullest
2. Live a healthier lifestyle
3. Lose weight
4. Spend more time with family and friends
5. Save more, spend less

That sounds like a pretty good list. You might have something else on your list; things that you want to do more or less of. Stop cussing out the other drivers on the road. Read more bedtime stories to your kids. Pray more. Doubt less.

One of the things for me this year is to lose some weight. I want to lose about 20 pounds for sure. Now, in my mind, I'm still the skinny kid I was in high school. But something happened with the standard pants size; they have changed over the years. Then there is a very localized, extra pull of gravity right around the scales in the bathroom; gravity seems to be greater every time I get on the scales. And something is wrong with every mirror and every camera in the world, because I look at them and I see a different me than what I think in my head.

I saw this picture as I was thinking about my resolution to lose weight: IMAGE: Before and Now shot. In 2 weeks, Robert... lost his glasses.

The thing is that sometimes, we look at ourselves at the beginning of the New Year, and we see the behaviors, attitudes, conditions, and status of our current lives, and we have the little small voice of accusation that sounds more like a chorus, even a crowd yelling about what we are:

- You're fat.

- You're stupid.
- You fly off the handle.
- You're stuck in the mud.
- You're lazy.
- You're never going to get anywhere.

Anyone heard those voices? Yeah, I bet you have – me too – those and others.

So as we begin a new year, we are going to talk about who we really are. I want us to stop listening to evil voices in our head and remind us who we are to God.

During our series, "I Know Who I Am", we are going to study the book of Ephesians and discover, or rediscover, who we are when we are followers of Christ.

I invite you to turn to the Book of Ephesians with me. This is one of Paul's letters he wrote while he was in prison for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote this wonderful letter to the people of his beloved church in Ephesus, which whom he had been their pastor for 3 years.

He writes in Ephesians 1:3-6

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*<sup>1</sup>

Right off the bat, Paul reminds us that we are blessed. That is a word for all of us in this New Year. You are blessed. Not just blessed, you know, with running water, comfortable homes, cars and football. But you are blessed with every spiritual blessing that can be found in the places of God.

If you find yourself listening more to the big, bad, ugly voices in your head telling you the bad things you are and avoiding the good things, then you need to remember that you are blessed through Christ.

And if that wasn't enough, you have been chosen by none other than God.

We all like to be chosen: for the team, for the play, by the cute boy or girl. But in the greatest tryout of life, to know that you – YOU – have been chosen by God.

How many of you like to go into pet stores and look at all the animals they have available? You get to see the cute kittens or puppies. How many of you like to do that?

How many of you can't stand that at all? That's me. I will not go into a pet store like that, or if I have to, I stay away from the back where the puppies are. I just feel so bad for them stuck in those cages, knowing that I can't free them.

I had to kind of do that the other day.

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God came to the pet store one day and saw you and me in the cage – the cage of our own sin and misery. He stopped by our personal prison, looked us in the eye, read on the piece of paper attached to the door of the cage that said who we are: sinner, liar, cheat, blasphemer. Then God lifted the lock and opened the cage and said, "I have chosen...you." And He pulled you out of the cage you had built for yourself and freed you for one reason: to bring you home and make you a part of His family.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:3-6 (NRSV)

That's what Paul says in verse 5:

*He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,<sup>2</sup>*

God adopts us into his family. We become His children, and He becomes our Father. He makes us sons and daughters of God, with all the rights and privileges that that brings.

Paul says that God becomes our Father by adoption. It is therefore important that we look at what exactly it means to be adopted as children by God. Then we will have a clear view of who we are, who we can be, the privileges that we have and what our final destiny will be.

Nowadays, when we think of adoption, we think primarily of children. Adoption to us is all about children; it is children who get adopted and adults who do the adopting. The role of adults is to become the parents of children who were not biologically theirs.

In our society, adoption is a means by which children, who for one reason or another are not able to be brought up in the family into which they were born, having a new family and being brought up by people other than their biological father and mother.

However, in the time Paul, the situation was quite different. In the Greek and Roman world, adoption was not primarily about who brought up a child. It was not devised or set-up primarily as a means for children to be brought up in new families.

Instead, it was all about inheritance and family rights. In fact, adults could be adopted just as much as children. An adult man would often be adopted as a son by someone other than his natural father, getting all the privileges that he would have had if he had been naturally born to that father. He would have a full share in the inheritance and the estate of the father, alongside any sons who were born into the family.

Sons adopted into the family would have exactly the same status as those who were born into it. Wealthy or powerful men would sometimes adopt younger men, often unrelated, who they wished to inherit their wealth or their power. Indeed, several Roman emperors were succeeded by their adopted sons, who they had adopted just so that they could succeed to the throne.

As well as joining a new family, they would also be cut off from their old family. These adopted sons received all their inheritance from their adopted fathers, receiving nothing at all from their original fathers, who ceased to have any role in their lives.

Therefore, the blessing of adoption as children of God that we get as believers because of what Christ has done, means two different things.

The first thing that the use of the word "adoption" for us becoming God's children is that we were not naturally children of God. Human beings are not born into the family of God; it is not our natural state to be in His family. Our natural state, as members of a fallen race, is to be totally separated from God, indeed, to be in the family of Satan. While we remain as children of Satan, the inheritance that we get is from our father, Satan, not from God. We will get what he gets.

The second thing is that, although we were not born as children of God, after our adoption, we become His children just as if we had been all along. After our adoption, we have all the privileges of His children – including inheritance – that means sharing with Christ in His eternal kingdom. We become princes and princesses of the kingdom of heaven, not just distant subjects remote from the source of power in the Kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:5 (NRSV)

When we think of privileged beings in the kingdom of God, we sometimes think of angels. However, what we get is far more than the angels get. Their role, although close to God, is not of being children, but of being servants. They are not part of the family and do not share in the inheritance.

Our inheritance becomes no longer that of the kingdom of Satan, but of the kingdom of God. We get eternal life in the kingdom of God; we get the riches and the joys that Jesus gets. We share with Jesus in His eternal and everlasting glory. Nearly everything that He gets, we get as well.

How then does this adoption happen? Nowadays, the adoption of a child does not happen willy-nilly. There are certain formalities that must happen, a legal process by which the child gains new parents, officially passing from the birth family into the adopted family. The same was true of the adoption of adults in Roman society. There were set ways in which it could take place.

That poses the question of how our adoption as sons and daughters of God took place. What means did God use to transfer us from our natural family – the family of Satan, in which the majority of humanity remains – into the family of God, as His children?

It tells us in verse 5:

*He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,<sup>3</sup>*

Paul states that all this happens by Christ. That is the legal process that occurred – the death and resurrection of Christ – was the price that was paid for us. It is only through Him and what He has done, that we can be taken out of the family of Satan and adopted into the family of God.

Jesus is the Father's way of adopting us. Coming to Christ is the way that we can join God's family and become His child, with a full share in the inheritance of His kingdom. And it does not matter how firmly we are entrenched in the family of Satan, we can become children of God, and enjoy all the privileges that that entails.

Dr. James Dobson relates a story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died just a few months prior through a slow developing cancer. Now, several days before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone – so much so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas.

Late that afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold.

She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden Labrador Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, Ma'am. He's six weeks old, completely housebroken." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity of the box.

"Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked. The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope and said, "It's all explained here in this envelope, Ma'am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:5 (NRSV)

Christmas gift to you.” The young man then handed her a book, “How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever.”

In desperation, she again asked, “Who sent me this puppy?” As the young man turned to leave, he said, “Your husband, Ma’am. Merry Christmas.”

She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then.

She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor’s house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of “Joy to the World, the Lord has Come.” Suddenly Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and a wonder greater than the grief and loneliness.

“Little fella,” she said to the dog, “It’s just you and me. But you know what? There’s a box down in the basement I’ll bet you’d like. It’s got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you.”

God has a way of sending a signal of light to remind us life is stronger than death. Light is more powerful than darkness. God is more powerful than Satan.

Have you returned your heavenly Father’s love? Have you completed the family circle? Have you adopted God’s heart, as surely as He has adopted yours?

If you have already been adopted by God, and are now His child, I hope that this has inspired you to rejoice in the privileges that you have got, to remember and know who you are. You are a child of God.

If you have not yet come into His family, that can happen today, and you will become a full child in the family of God.