

(Why the Cross of Christ?) SO WE CAN LIVE IN THE SPIRIT AS CHILDREN OF GOD

Romans 8: 12-18 - March 29, 2020 - Immanuel - Senior Pastor: Dr. Kelly McClendon (*Online Services*)

In my last two “online sermons” I spoke about how weird this online church thing is for me and us preparing it. But last week I got to watch it myself on Sunday - since we prerecorded some of it - and it is even weirder to watch it than to lead it. For example, the people I was with wouldn't stop talking, I kept saying “*Hey, let's listen to the preacher*” (which was me), and they just rolled their eyes. They kept getting up to refill their coffee or go to the bathroom or fuss with their phones or computers - and these were all paid staff members at the church! I'm kidding - they were working on the live stream - and interacting with folks, but still...

From your Facebook posts I know that many of you some doing kinda weird or different things. Some are watching in your pajamas right now (either your nighttime pajamas or your daytime pajamas - I've just learned that's a thing!). Some of you are sitting around with your family eating snacks like it's a movie night. Some of you are doing household chores. Some are watching while others are playing games on another computer. Some of you have a dog listening in. I never thought I'd preach to so many dogs - but that's cool, it's a whole new mission field. The age old question is, “*Do all dogs go to heaven?*” Well they will now!

Whatever new and different things you're doing - I'm just glad you're here to participate.

For now, I'm going to continue our Lenten Sermon series. I've been tempted to have every sermon deal directly with issues related to this public health crisis - but you may be like me - I need a break - and I also need to focus on things that are more certain. It seems like most days we face news or assumptions or theories that contradict what we heard just days, or even hours before. I need a more secure anchor to hold onto in the midst of this storm. I'll make some references to this crisis, but my focus is looking in Romans for answers to the question, “*Why the Cross of Christ?*” Today's answer, “*So we can live in the Spirit as children of God.*”

Some of you, who are regular attenders at Immanuel, may have heard the next story, or illustration that I'm going to share, but it's the best one I have to make an important point.

We've all heard the popular phrase - “Who's your daddy?” Nowadays, most of the time, this phrase is a kind of taunt - a challenge - a way of saying, “*I just beat you, I am better than you, I'm your daddy.*” When I was a kid and teenager it meant something quite different.

When I was 15 my Mother and I moved from San Jose, California to a very tiny town in Southeast New Mexico - culture shock is too mild to describe what I felt. If you were a kid, or a young man especially, and you met an adult you didn't know, the most common and important question they could ask you was, “*Who's your daddy?*” Depending on your answer you were either somebody important, or unimportant. If you named your daddy and the person who asked said, “*I know you're Daddy, he's a good old boy,*” then you were golden.

Well that left me, the new kid in town, with a problem. Because I had to had to start working full-time with the grown ups in that tiny little town. I dreaded the inevitable question. I heard it almost every single working day, *“So, who’s your daddy boy?”* Sometimes people were just curious, but other times, most of the time, people had heard rumors, and they were trying to poke me or remind me of my low standing in the community. The rumors, that were true, was that my biological father left when I was a baby; and I had a step-father for awhile but he was a bum who we last saw on his way to prison. I didn’t always know if people were just asking out of curiosity, or if they were making fun of me, so I just learned to say, *“You wouldn’t know him, but I’m the man of my house, and I’m here to work, so let’s just get to it.”* I had to earn my own acceptance and build my own reputation as a working man. And there are a lot of good things that have come my way because of that difficult experience.

But deep down, what I wanted more than anything was to be able to say, *“My dad is an important man in this town, he loves me and my Mom, he takes care of us, when I grow up I want to be just like him - yep that’s me - a chip off the old block. My daddy is a good old boy.”*

Now, I don’t say that to invite you to a little pity party in my honor (I’m over it).

I say that because I think we each have a similar need in life. We need to have a solid sense of self, and an identity grounded on a foundation that says we’re something good to someone. We need to know we have potential and purpose and hope for the future. We also need to know that we have somebody who’s willing and able to care for us as we go along in the world.

I hope you have now, or had at some time, parents, and other family members that make you proud of who you are and of where you come from. That is so awesome. **I know because I have that now!** I know who I am and whose I am and I am glad to be the child of my Father, but I didn’t have that until I became a Christian. I didn’t have that until I trusted Christ - but when I began that relationship, I also began to know myself as a child of God.

After I became a Christian in college I went back home to work in the oil fields for the summer. I met a new welder on the pipeline crew who said, *“I don’t know you boy, who’s your daddy.”* I laughed out loud, and said, *“My daddy is the Lord God almighty. My daddy is the creator of heaven and earth and the King of Universe. I’m well loved and provided for. Who’s your daddy?”* He said, *“What you trying to be, a preacher some day?”* I said, *“No, not me, not ever. I just love the Lord.”* And I think God laughed at that a little bit. But this time it wasn’t so hard to hold up my head, or stand up straight, or look people right in the eye, because I had a new confidence and a new sense of security that no one could take away.

Now again, I hope you have or had, a good relationship with your earthly parents, and if so - that is wonderful. But as great as that is, it is even more important to know, for you as well as me, that if you are in Christ, then you have the same heavenly Father as I do.

So if someone were to come up to you and ask, “Who’s your daddy?” You might want to say, *“My earthly father was so and so, and I love him and am proud to come from him.... but my heavenly father... my heavenly father... is the Lord God almighty, the creator of heaven and earth and the King of Universe. I am well loved and provided for.”*

In the passage we study today Paul wants us to know something about our heritage. As believers in Jesus Christ we are the children of God. In verse 15 we are told, *“those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”*

The word ‘children’ used in most translations is actually ‘sons’ in Greek, but it applies to men and women alike. In the context it is a rich term that means those “adopted as sons” and of course it also means those adopted as “daughters.” I think Paul intentionally used the term “son” because, in those days daughters didn’t have the same rights, privileges or inheritance as sons. Paul wanted us to know what kind of full inheritance God gives to all His children - and the rest of the bible makes it clear that the sons and daughters of God share equally in all the benefits of being a part of God’s family.

In the culture of Paul’s era - adoption was an elaborate process where several things happened. First, the person adopted became part of a new family. His old family relationships were ended and he became a legitimate son in the new family. Second, as a member of this family, he became a full heir in the Father’s estate. Third, all his debts from the past were cancelled. He was seen as a new person with a new name and identify.

The idea of adoption is a rich picture for believers. Through Christ we are made a part of the Father’s family; we are freed from our old sin nature; and the debt of our sinful past is cancelled - so now we can enjoy a full share of the inheritance of Christ.

Before I continue, please know this, every person is a precious part of God’s creation. Every person is created in the image of God. As a result they have a great intrinsic value and they deserve love and respect; and compassion and kindness. However, apart from Christ, all people are captive to their sinful nature, so they live by the flesh and not by the Spirit, so they cannot live as children of a holy God. That is why God sent Christ to bring us into His family.

In John 1:12-13 we read,

“But to all who did receive him, [Christ] who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

In this text from Romans I want to lift up Four practical implications.

1. When we Live in the Spirit, as a Child of God, We must Embrace Our New Identity.

When we put our trust in Christ the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us.

The Holy Spirit gives us the opportunity to change. We can still choose to give into the sinful nature that remains in us - but we can also choose to live into the new identity God makes possible for us. When we are led by the Holy Spirit we are living as a children of God.

When you are a Christian, with the Holy Spirit living within - your basic identity has been completely changed. You can chose to deny that - and live as a contradiction - but the “real you” is always and forever a “child of God.” Your true self is the one “led by the Holy Spirit.”

Listen again to verses Romans 8:12-14, *“So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”*

That tells me that we need to make the choice - every day - to use the power God gives us to embrace our identity as a son or a daughter of God.

When I was in seminary, one of my teachers was Dr. Will Willimon. He wrote a book in which he told the story of how his parents would encourage him to do right as a child and youth. Before he would leave to go play, or out on a date, or to his first job - they would take him aside and very seriously tell him, *“Remember who you are.”*

It might have been from Willimon’s book that the movie the Lion King got the same line - *“Remember who you are.”* In Willimon’s case it was meant to remind him that he came from a good family, with high morals and high ideals, and his family name deserved to be treated with honor in his words and behavior.

It was also meant to remind him of his identity in Christ as a child of God. That was meant to comfort him - but it was also meant to challenge him to make good choices.

In much the same way, the Apostle Paul wants us to understand that with our new position in Christ, there is a new power, but also a new responsibility to honor our Lord and to live wisely.

2. When we Live in the Spirit, as a Child of God - it means we can be Set Free from Fear. Verse 15 says, *“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.”*

In 2 Tim. 1:7 Paul writes, *“God did not give us a spirit of fear [timidity], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”* What is it about being a part of the family of God that enables us to live life without fear? Let me give you several reasons we don’t have to be afraid.

We have a guide who can lead us beyond anything that might cause us to fear.

If you were walking alone through an unfamiliar or remote wilderness, it could be very scary. The threat of becoming lost forever would be a real concern. However, if you were walking through the forest or desert with a person who knew the way out - you would no longer need to fear. You would trust the leadership of one who had proven able to successfully make that journey. You would also be very careful not to wander off on your own - right?

Christ has been through whatever we're going through and He emerged victorious. We can trust Him to lead us through and to help us stay connected to our loving Heavenly Father.

- We don't need to fear because our Father is the owner and ruler of the universe and our future is in His hands. There is no one who can ultimately or forever hurt us.
- We may suffer some short-term losses - but in the end - we will emerge as the winners in all the ways that matter most. [Death - not going out as a loser, going through as a winner]
- We may lose the physical or material blessings of this life - but children of God live by the Spirit - and no one can touch or destroy us at that level of our identity.
- We are more than the flesh and more than the things of this earth - we are God's children
- We have a great destiny and a great hope for our future. We know that in the end Christ wins - and because we are His, it means we will share in His victory.

This doesn't mean we won't face hostility or pain or suffering in this life, but the end of our story has already been written - actually it is more of a transitional chapter that leads to new beginning. It goes like this - because of Christ we know that we will prevail (here - or hereafter). We will prevail - not by our power, but by the power of God at work in us and through us. So we should have great confidence.

Lastly, we don't need to fear because we have God's promises. God has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. He has promised that He will supply our needs. He has promised that He will use every situation in our lives for our ultimate good - which is not always the same as our immediate good. We need to wait on God to reveal the good.

It is kind of like this - suppose I am selling something and a person gives me a certified check. I can receive that kind of check with confidence that it won't bounce - the funds are guaranteed to cover the check. In a sense, God's promises are His way of certifying that we have nothing to fear in this life. God has promised that we are part of His family and we belong to Him.

3. When we Live in the Spirit, as a Child of God - we can relate to God with Intimacy.

Romans 8:15 says, "*by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'*" The "him" of the verse refers to the Holy Spirit. It is by God's Spirit within us that we are able to relate to God with a new intimacy.

The word "Abba" is often described as the Greek or Aramaic term for "daddy" or "papa."

Most likely “Abba” is just an emphatic way to say “Father.” Like “*O Father*” as you might say when pleading or crying out for help or with deep emotion. Either way, it suggests intimacy.

In Christ, we have a special and unique relationship with God. Like many of you, I may be deeply involved in some important work. However, if one of my sons called and said, “*Dad - help! I need you right now!*” I would immediately drop what I was doing and run to be with them. Why? Because they are my beloved sons and that relationship is unique and special.

That’s the kind of relationship we have with God. It’s staggering to think about. We have access to Him at any time. We can call upon Him at all hours of the day or night. We have the confidence that He will ALWAYS take our call and respond to our requests with wisdom.

Hebrews 4:16 says, “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*” What is the basis of our confidence? Through Christ - we have become children of God.

4. When we live in the Spirit as a child of God - it means we have a Rich Inheritance.

Romans 8:17 says, “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*”

One day Jesus told His disciples, then and now, that we have a heavenly home being prepared for us. In John 14:1-3 Jesus said,

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.”

Let me share an illustration that touches my heart.

During World War II, the Germans forced many twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys into the Junior Gestapo. These boys were treated very harshly and given inhumane jobs to perform. When the war ended, most had lost track of their families and they wandered without food or shelter. They had been traumatized first by fear and cruelty and then with starvation.

As part of a relief program to rebuild post-war Germany, many of these starving and frightened youths were placed in tent cities. Here doctors and psychologists worked with the boys in an attempt to restore their mental and physical health. It was hard and depressing work.

They found that many of the boys would awaken in the middle of the night, screaming in terror. One doctor had an idea for helping them overcome part of their fear. After feeding the boys a large meal, he put them to bed with a piece of bread in their hands, which they were told to save until morning. After so many years of hunger, those boys finally had the assurance of food for the next day, and it enabled them to sleep soundly and to find rest.

In a similar way, the fact that we have an inheritance in Heaven should have a positive impact on how we live now. We should not be so weighted down by the concerns of this life. It doesn't mean life will be easy or painless, but our inheritance should give us a new perspective on the temporary problems of this life. We have the assurance that we have positive future promised to us by God Himself.

Ephesians 1:14 says, God has placed His Spirit in us as a *“deposit that guarantees our inheritance.”* We can sleep soundly and live joyfully knowing that our future is secure.

I said there were four implications I found in this passage - but there is really one more. The last one is an invitation. If you haven't already - it is time to join the family of God.

Listen again to the beginning of the Gospel of John which tells something of why Christ came into the world, *“... to all who believed him [Christ] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan - this rebirth comes from God.”* (John 1:12,13).

God's promise is this - if you will receive Christ - by grace through faith - then God will adopt you as part of His family forever. What happens next?

- As a child of God - your past will be forgiven, and you will be given a new identity and fresh start
- As a child of God - the Holy Spirit lives in you, which gives you the power to grow and prosper
- As a child of God - you can be set free from fear - for God will guide you safely home
- As a child of God - you can relate to God with intimacy, knowing you are well beloved
- As a child of God - your inheritance is secure and your destiny and future is good

So today's answer to the answer to the question, “Why the Cross of Christ?” is this - *“So we can live in the Spirit as children of God.”*

I don't know what is going on in your world right now, what storms are rocking your boat, but that is an anchor of hope that will always be true. Take hold of it - and don't let go