
Heirs With Christ: The Glories of Adoption pt. 2

John 1:12

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Introduction

Last week we began a series on adoption. This week we will end the series on adoption. Last week we focused mainly on spiritual adoption. This week we will focus mainly on earthly adoption. Last week we considered earthly adoption as a shadow of spiritual adoption and it helped illustrate the higher beauty of spiritual adoption. This week we will consider earthly adoption as an expression of our “commissionality” at the Chapel.

Nothing done in the Church should ever be done for its own sake, even earthly adoption. The church is the Lord’s and it follows that all that is done in the Church is for him and his glory. As I shared several weeks ago from a song we are currently singing at the Chapel – “may the glory of the Lord be the passion of the church” or as Paul said in Ephesians, “*to him be glory in the church*” (3:21), or as John said in Revelation, “*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord God our Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come...’*” (19:6-7). This is the church, always preoccupied with glory-making for God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this spirit then, I want to do three things tonight. First, I want share with you how adoption fits into the Great Commission for the church. Second, I want to answer some frequently asked questions about adoption. And third, I want to share with you about the adoption fund that has been started here at the Chapel. [Let’s Pray]

Adoption is Commisional

I hinted last week a little bit toward where we were going to go this week – it sounded something like this: Coming out of our commisional series 2+ years ago, came a kingdom expansion series 2+weeks ago, and now, quite naturally flowing from this stream, an adoption series. My first point is this...

Adoption is Commisional Because It is Consistent with the Character of God and His Call Upon The Church

There is a very quick and easy litmus test that you can apply to any activity the Church is considering to make at least an initial determination of whether or not the Church should be involved. Simply ask this question, “Is this or that activity consistent with the character of God, as he has revealed himself?” You can see Paul applying this logic in 1 Corinthians 14:33 when addressing the issue of tongues in the church. After explaining to the Corinthians what good order in the church looks like around this activity he says, “*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*”

The Great Commission itself flows directly from the character of God in so many ways. One example is John 17. Jesus tells us that God is seeking to create a unity among believers that reflects the unity of himself, the holy trinity. This character of God issues forth in distinct action - God sends Jesus His Word, Jesus sends the Apostles with the Word, and the Apostles deliver the Word *"...so that they may all be one."* And this unity itself has a very distinct purpose: *"...that the World may believe that you [God] have sent me [Christ]"* (John 17:18-21).

So, a simple question we can ask when it comes to the activity of adoption in the church is, "Is God an "adopting" kind of God?" If he is not, then certainly the Chapel has no need to consider the matter further. If he is, then perhaps we should consider the matter further. Based on the teaching last week we can answer this question very quickly, "You betcha God is an adopting kind of God." The New Testament presents a very clear picture of this. But I want to build the case just a little further from one or two additional vantages on God's character in this in area.

Do you remember our series on hospitality? One of the main conclusions from our study of hospitality in both the NT and OT was that the gospel itself was an expression of God's hospitality – God bringing strangers in to feast around his table. To appreciate that picture we looked at a lot of passages that sounded like this:

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, you shall love him as yourself. (Leviticus 19:33-34)

[God] He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him... (Deuteronomy 10:18-19)

Cutting right the point, this is the kind of God we have – he takes note of and address the need of those who are in vulnerable situations, such as strangers, widows, and the fatherless. While the gospel is the best and complete fulfillment of this, the practical and earthly application of the call is not negated by the coming of Christ. We still find such calls in the New Testament, James 1:27 being the clearest: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* To be clear, James is not making a categorical summary statement of all that Christianity is, nevertheless, he is certainly doing no less than giving us clear examples of what the hearing and doing of Christianity looks like. And keep in mind where James is headed... *"So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"* (James 2:17)

We could say much more – but let me simply challenge you with the thought that when Christians adopt, they are acting in a manner consistent with the character of God. It brings him glory. This can become a very clear platform by which unbelievers see an exceptionally accessible example of God-like love. It wasn't more than three weeks ago I was sitting with a colleague over lunch and she said to me, "I can't tell you how much I

think of you and beth for taking these boys in, them being of a different race and all..." It was so easy to simply say that this is exactly what the God the Father has done for us.

Adoption is Commissioned Because It is Gospel Proclamation to the Neighborhoods and Nations... in Our Own Homes

A second reason that adoption is commissioned is that it is gospel proclamation to the neighborhoods and nations... in our own homes. It is what some have called "reverse missions." Instead of going out into all the world, you bring the world into your own home. In this sense, adoption is more fundamentally about building the church than it is building a family. I doubt many of us go into family life, whether adopting or not, with this view in mind. But as we mature and grow as believers we come to understand that there is no more glorious hope we could have for our children, no better thing we could want for or give them, and no better way to bring God glory, than making our home a place where the gospel in all of its facets is regularly demonstrated, talked about, and proclaimed. Through adoption, Christian parents are participating in a long-term commitment kingdom expansion one heart at a time... and there are not furloughs from this mission (as I was reminded at 4 am today).

When we think about our homes, our children, our parenting, I don't think we are "getting strange" if our approach is very similar to that of Paul among the Corinthians – let me remind you briefly of the clarity he had about his mission, he says, *"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 2:2); *"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..."* (1 Corinthians 15:3).

As we have often taught at the Chapel, we are a family of families. When we say this we are not suggesting that the home is the pattern for the church, but rather that church is the pattern for the home. Every parent, every day, should regard their home as a gospel outpost among their children (whether saved or unsaved, whether adopted or biologically added). With adoption, perhaps, we add an additional layer of intentionality as families actually go from their own heritages, their own people, to the heritages of strangers, people not their own, and bring their orphans, into their homes with the express purpose proclaiming the gospel to them.

Adoption is Commissioned Because It Gospel Demonstration through Love and Good Deeds

But just as James reminded us, and as Jesus does in Matthew 25 as he is separating sheep from goats, Christians are characterized by a "need-meeting" action – an action that extends to strangers, even the *"least of these"* (Matthew 25:40). Be clear however, that the impulse to meet needs is not primarily a humanitarian one, it is a "Kingitarian" one. That is, believers meet needs because they are compelled by love for the king.

The gospel, then, the good news about king and his action on our behalf, must always be first and foremost, characterizing the main point of the church's activity among unbelievers. However, magnifying (though not obscuring!) the gospel, is to be love and good deeds. Galatians 6:9-10 says, "*And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*" The book of Titus is replete with the importance of good works in the midst of an unbelieving world (2:7-8, 3:1-2, 3:14). Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount says, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). Good deeds then are the visible expression of lives transformed by the gospel, giving credence to its power, and glory to God. As a side note, this is why Christianity in America has such a suspect reputation – there are many who claim the name of Christ, but very few, especially public figures, who understand their faith and live up to that claim.

But it is not just about good deeds to an onlooking world validating the believer's claim of all that the gospel is, it also, quite simply, loving – and as we established above – God-like. To adopt a child who needs a home is simply a practical and sacrificial way to love your neighbor. There are over 140 million orphans in the world, many of them within miles of this building. The opportunity to do good is at our doorstep.

Let me read a quote from Tim Keller to you to summarize this point...

If we confuse evangelism and social justice we lose what is the single most unique service that Christians can offer the world. Others, alongside believers, can feed the hungry. But Christians have the gospel of Jesus by which men and women can be born again into the certain hope of eternal life. No one else can make such an invitation. However, many Christians who care intensely about evangelism see the work of doing justice as a distraction for Christians that detracts from the mission of evangelism. That is also a grave error... When a city perceives a church as existing strictly and only for itself and its own members, the preaching of that church will not resonate with outsiders. But if neighbors see church members loving their city through astonishing, sacrificial deeds of compassion, they will be much more open to the church's messages. Deeds of mercy and justice should be done out of love, not simply as a means to the end of evangelism. And yet there is no better way for Christians to lay a foundation for evangelism than by doing justice¹."

Therefore, the Church Should Be Poised for Involvement in Adoption

So let me be clear – earthly adoption is not a means to redeem or renew the culture. However, it is a means for us as a church to live out our commissionality in a fully-orbed and biblical way: proclaiming daily the gospel in our own homes all the while sacrificially loving children who have no one that will be a father or mother to them. When the church adopts, it enacts many of the qualities that make the gospel the gospel: saving, rescuing, redeeming, giving, at great personal cost, those who are not our own and

¹ Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*, pp. 141-142

have not earned our love, yet bringing them into a household that will love, care, teach, and train a child. Adoption makes the Lord appear grand and glorious in our midst and to those on the outside who look in to see what it is Christ does among his people. Adoption brings the gospel to children. Adoption is an overt expression of selfless love. The church as a whole is called to be actively involved in the proclamation of the gospel and the expanding of the kingdom. The growth and multiplication of churches should be the main product of this work. Adoption is “A” means by which we can carry out this work. Certainly God will lead and enable different people to be involved in different ways – but a key question for us as a church is this: Why wouldn’t we be proactively involved in promoting and supporting adoption at the Chapel?

FAQ About Adoption

Well, when it comes to the topic of adoption, a lot of difficult issues arise which are generally not present with children who are born into their families (or so we think). Sometimes, these issues become stoppers for those who are interested in pursuing adoptions. I want to just very briefly give you a peek into understanding why Christians, in particular, are so well suited to adopt by responding to four frequently asked questions about adoption. Most of these FAQs address persons considering adoption but they also have applications for those who would support or promote adoption. I also want to preface by saying that I leave a lot unsaid with each of these question and I’d be happy to share more with you on an individual basis.

FAQ 1: Can I Love a Child Who is Not My Own?

If your own abilities and resources were all you had to rely on this would be a valid question. But as believers, this is certainly not the case. Here is how one author responds, “The distance between what we are, and what God is, is infinitely greater than any distance between us and a child we might adopt. God crossed the greatest cultural barrier to redeem and adopt us².” So for the answer we simply look to our heavenly Father. Did he not love children who were not his own? We can look to the church. Are we not called as believers to love our (non-biological) spiritual brothers and sisters in a profound and unique way that will, at times, divide us even from our unbelieving biological brothers and sisters? As I mentioned last week, how many of you would look out across this auditorium and easily say that the people here are more my family than my family? And lastly, we have the wonder of marriage. What is marriage but two people from entirely different backgrounds and gene pools coming together and committing to a lifetime of love. Believers know all these things. Believers have grace to enable them to accomplish all of these things. Believers see these things playing out before their eyes every day. So the answer is yes – any believer willing to repent of sin and embrace grace for change can love a child that is not their biological offspring. And of course, all believers, by definition, are willing to repent of sin and embrace grace for change. You

² Dan Cruver, *Reclaiming Adoption*, p. 103.

can love a child that is not your “own.” So go ahead and confuse the evolutionists, adopt and love a child that is not your own.

FAQ 2: What if It Doesn’t Work Out Well?

Hmmm. Look around the room. How many parents of biological children have gone through, and perhaps are still going through, very hard times with children who run from God? Does adoption introduce some potentially unique problems? Sure. But if we attribute “problems” (and we are usually talking about sin and foolishness) to adoption, we are not thinking biblically. Sin and difficulty come from hearts, not adoption. Adoption simply happens to be the context and therefore may shape the expression of a heart.

In the end, all families whether they have adopted children or not, will go through difficulty. You cannot “reduce your chances” of suffering by sticking to your biological children. All believing families can rest in the sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness of God. Two questions one should ask themselves when they encounter this concern in their own hearts: Is my desire for children primarily about God’s glory or something else? Do I view adoption in a way that affirms it as a “past-tense verb?” That is, as I discussed last week, once a believing family adopts a child, the question of how the child came into the family ceases to be a functional reality. The child is fully your child. There is no going backward and you have an obligation to do all that God calls you to do through His Word for the child. At times, as with any child, this will involve very difficult decisions. Every parent must face the reality that it “may not work out well,” but that God is trustworthy.

FAQ 3: (for the infertile) Is There Anything Wrong with Infertility Treatments?

Wow. Delicate question. What I’m not addressing here is the ethical decision about which treatments are biblically allowable for believers. Beth and I did undergo infertility treatments up to a point. Beyond that point we felt we were in questionable territory. But that was a decision we worked through together and with the counsel of wise advisors. The question I’m asking is more basic than this – Here is another way to say it, “Why would I pursue infertility treatment when there are many, many, many children who need adopted?” As I said, delicate, sensitive, loaded question. Beth and I had to wrestle directly with this question. There is something that “feels” hardwired about the desire and wonder that a couple shares in contemplating what the combining of their gene pools might produce. For Beth and I, as we began to peel back the layers of this sentiment, all that was left at the core was a self-aggrandizing pride... covered over by layers and layers of unbiblical yet highly culturally valued ideas propped up by many social, historical, familial structures. But this was *our* discovery in *our* own hearts – every couple struggling with infertility and desiring children needs to work through this question on their own. There may be very practical reasons to pursue some treatments such as relative cost and complexity when compared with adoption. With the Bible in hand, and wise counselors at your side, believers can be 100% confident that they will be able to work through even such delicate questions as this... Remember what Peter has told

us: He has given us everything for life and godliness. The Word is sufficient (2 Peter 1:3-4).

FAQ 4: How Can I Afford Adoption?

Lastly, a very practical question often comes up. "I would like to adopt. We would like to adopt. But we have no idea how we could afford it. I've heard it can be quite expensive." It is true. It can be quite expensive in the State of Ohio. The range varies widely depending on if one fosters to adopt, works with a private agency, works just with a lawyer, goes international, etc. The cost can be several thousand dollars or it can be tens of thousands of dollars. In our case, each of our children were adopted through what is called a private agency adoption. All said and done, our fees totaled around \$18,000 per child. Generally speaking, it is a cash on delivery system. This can represent a major hurdle. So... this moves us to our last point this evening.

The Adoption Fund

I'd like to use our remaining minutes to tell you about an initiative we have undertaken at the Chapel to encourage adoption among our members. It is called the Clearcreek Chapel Adoption Fund. Let me start by sharing with you the mission, vision, purpose, and oversight for this fund:

Mission: To help Clearcreek Chapel families overcome the financial obstacles to adoption.

Vision: To bring glory to God, who has adopted us as sons, by providing financial assistance to Chapel families desiring to adopt children close to home and around the world.

Purpose: Bring children into Gospel-centered homes as part of our Great Commission mandate and to magnify the gospel in the church, in our families, and in the world.

Oversight: The Adoption Fund falls under the purview of the Elder for Stewardship, Steve Vaughan. In addition, a deacon or deaconess will function as the person who coordinates activities concerning the fund. Presently, this person is Beth Berry.

To make the Adoption Fund happen, the Chapel has teamed up with a non-profit organization called the ABBA fund. The ABBA Fund is a freestanding ministry entity that exists to promote adoption in the local church. One of the main services they provide is assistance in establishing and administering church adoption funds. ABBA has been in existence since 2004 and is a member of the EFCA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability). Prior to partnering with ABBA the Elders thoroughly reviewed the organization. We also dispatched Roger Craft to review the organization and speak personally with their staff. All concerns and questions were satisfactorily dealt with and we are pleased to have established this relationship.

After two years of work, we now have in place a mechanism for providing interest-free loans (or gifts) to Chapel members who want to adopt. The big idea behind the fund is that once monetized it will be self-perpetuating. That is, because the money will be continually replaced it will always be available for others interested in borrowing. Do note that I said "once monetized," we'll come back to that in a moment.

There are, of course, a lot of details – but this is the big idea. I want to outline the rest of the information by following an imaginary couple through the process.

Overview: Let's say Terry and Dottie, members at the Chapel and part of Franklin Monroe Flock, would like to adopt. They have prayed much, done their research, and sought out council and are sure this is what they would like to do. There is one hurdle however, they plan to work with an adoption agency and are being told that the cost is going to be somewhere between 10 and 15K dollars.

They simply do not have access to this kind of money. So they begin investigating the Chapel Adoption Fund. They get a brochure off of the back table and see that they need to complete a pre-application adoption interest form and have it reviewed with their flock level deacon or deaconess, and Beth Berry. The form is about 1-page long. So they contact Beth, ask for the form, complete it, and sit down to review it with their flock deacon for benevolence, Greg Frye, and Beth. During this meeting the process is thoroughly explained and discussed and Dottie and Terry share their desire as well as their plans. If any concerns were to arise at this point, Greg, the flock deacon would involve the flock elder. And of course, one obvious concern arises, Dottie and Terry are too... attached to their 2001 Camaro convertible, which will never work for kids. So Devon, the flock elder, sits down and discusses the situation with the group and it is quickly resolved.

Next step. Before Dottie and Terry can continue in the process they need to complete their homestudy. The homestudy is the State mandated evaluation process that ensures individuals planning to adopt are going to be what the State feels are good parents. Without a completed homestudy you cannot adopt in the State of Ohio. So the excited and vibrant couple dives in and several months later the homestudy is completed. In support of the couple, Franklin Monroe flock chose to offset a portion of the cost of the homestudy from their own pockets.

Dottie and Terry now return to Beth... driving a minivan. It is time to complete the full application. This application is much more in-depth and asks a lot of questions about your spiritual history, your finances, your adoption plan, etc. It goes directly from the couple to the ABBA fund. So Dottie and Terry get the application from Beth, sigh at how long it is, but realize that they have already prepared a lot of the same information for their homestudy. It will just be a matter of transferring it. A month goes by and they send the application off to ABBA. ABBA reviews the application in 2-3 weeks and makes a recommendation, much as a bank would, about the suggested terms of the loan (e.g. amount, repayment plan, etc.). This recommendation is sent to the Chapel elders for final approval. The elders are free to accept the recommendation as is or to modify it in any manner they see fit. In this case, the elders are satisfied with the recommendation from ABBA and notify ABBA that they have approved the recommendation. ABBA then contacts Dottie and Terry and lets them know that their loan has come through. All Dottie and Terry need to do now is wait for a child to come along.

And eventually one does! They are excited. They are also a little intimidated by the invoice for \$10,000 from the adoption agency that follows days after the adoption. They have 20 days to pay. Several weeks later come lawyers' fees for an additional \$3,000. Thirteen

thousand dollars total. These bills are paid with the loan. In the case of Dottie and Terry, the repayment plan has been set up so that the repayment of the \$13,000 is due annually, each year after they receive their tax return. It just so happens that the Federal Government is giving a tax credit for adoption that is up to just over \$13,000 for all documented expenses. That can change virtually any time but it is in force now and Dottie and Terry are thankful. Over the next three years, with each tax return, they are able to pay off their loan. The money is now available for another family hoping to adopt. Dottie and Terry's whippersnapper is now growing up in the church, hearing and seeing the gospel continually. A sixth family at the Chapel has adopted and the church is beginning to have a reputation in the community – one which points directly to the glory of an adopting God and a saving Son.

Conclusion

So what does this leave? First, we as a church need to build this fund up. Our goal is take \$15,000 into the fund before making the first loan. Therefore I simply ask you to give toward this end. As with all ministry specific giving at the Chapel, we ask that you do this in addition to, not instead of, your regular giving. If you are able and desiring to give, simply put "Adoption Fund" in the memo line of your check.

Second, begin praying and considering the idea of adoption yourself. Many of you might think you are too old. Look at Dottie and Terry 😊, they did it! More seriously, we've met couples who very intentionally decided that their service to the Lord, their kingdom expansion activity in their retirement would be rearing children in gospel-centered homes. Wherever you are in life, know adoption is not only for the young, restless, and infertile. Think it over, pray it over, consider if this form of fulfilling the great commission is right for you.

Third, even if you have no desire or intention to adopt, look to actively support those who may be interested. As we already mentioned, this may be financial. But it may be in so many other ways as well. The adoption process is overwhelming – emotionally, logistically, financially, etc. Consider coming alongside those who are considering adoption. For example, Coopers came alongside us when they declared, "You are going to the conference and we are coming with you!" That was huge for us. By my count, there are five adoptive families at the Chapel: Baumgartners, Berrys, Combs, Favors, and Rechs. Any one of these families could help you understand what support might look like.

Dear church, may we bring glory to God by fulfilling the great commission and expanding the kingdom and may we do some of that by bringing orphans into loving gospel-centered homes.