

Fatherhood of God Part III

Two weeks ago, we began our series entitled the fatherhood of God. We noted the radical teaching that was introduced by Jesus when he instructed his disciples in his Lord's prayer teaching to address God as their heavenly Father.

We then explored the New Testament scriptures revealing that we have a right to adoption and that God has adopted those who have been born again as his very own children.

And as his adopted children we are encouraged to set aside the fear and apprehension that was often part of the Old Testament atmosphere and instead come boldly into the presence of our Heavenly Father. A boldness made possible by the fact that our sins have been forgiven.

Last week we noted from John 1:12 that adoption is the first, the primary, and most important blessing of being born again. The opportunity to be born again makes possible the opportunity for our Father-child relationship with God.

And adoption takes us to a new higher level in our relationship with our Father God.

We noted that our new family status should impact the way we live, that is the way we act, the way we think, the words we use, and the actions we take.

Living every aspect of our lives that would please our heavenly Father and bring glory and honour to his name and our new family.

Love is the dominant driver in this new relationship, love for the Father, who loves us dearly, and love for our brothers and sisters in the Lord just as our Father loves them.

We noted as well that Jesus recognized the authority of the Father and lived out his life here focused on accomplishing the mission he had been assigned. In the same way we should be seeking God's will and purposes for our life and living it out in obedience recognizing our Father's authority.

We also noted how our adoption was superior to simply being declared not guilty. Our heavenly Father did not simply declare us not guilty but adopted us and made us heirs of things to come.

Today we want to move ahead in our study, and it just so happens that today is Father's Day. So today we can be thankful for the role of fathers in our life, and the role of our heavenly Father.

Luke chapter fifteen opens with Jesus receiving some criticism from the religious authorities about his habit of eating with tax collectors and sinners.

They believed that God would not be happy with that habit and not be interested in such evil people.

Jesus then uses words to paint a picture of our heavenly Father.

First comes the story of the lost sheep and how the finding of the lost sheep becomes the priority, culminating in rejoicing in heaven when the lost sheep is found.

Next comes the story of the lost coin. Again, everything else is set aside and no effort spared until the lost is found resulting in more rejoicing in heaven.

And thirdly comes the story frequently referred to as ‘The prodigal son’.

The story is very familiar but is well worth reading on this Fathers Day and is also contains valuable points in our considering ‘The Fatherhood of God.’.

Before we read it, a couple of things to note as we do.

These three stories, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son make up the entire fifteenth chapter of Luke. An entire chapter set aside to underline the father’s passion for the lost.

There are three common elements in these stories. First something is lost, secondly the lost is found, and thirdly there is rejoicing.

These three elements paint a picture of our Father’s heart. Unlike the religious authority’s perception of God, he is concerned about the lost. He is hoping for the lost to be found and rejoices when it happens.

So now we read from Luke fifteen beginning at verse eleven.

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So, his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

“A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.

He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’”

“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’”

“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

The lyrics of Chris Tomlin’s song ‘He’s a good, good Father’ contain these words:

You're a good, good Father

It's who You are, it's who You are, it's who You are
And I'm loved by You
It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am.

I would not be surprised if these words were inspired by the account of the prodigal son.

There are some key points to think about in the context of this story.

First as we have been studying, we who are born again have been adopted. We are God's children.

A good father never abandons their child regardless of what they have done. Unfortunately, in our world today there are many, many fathers who are not good, they abandon their children and the responsibilities associated with fatherhood.

It is one of the underlying causes of poverty in the world. Men who are not good and responsible fathers abandoning their children.

But Jesus was making the point that our heavenly Father is a good, good Father. Regardless of the performance of his children he remains unshakably committed to being their Father. It is, as Chris Tomlin sings, who he is.

Forever imbedded in the nature of our God is his unchangeable nature as a good, good, Father.

The story is set in a time in history when unquestionable obedience to the father was expected and was the norm. The prodigal's demands and actions brought enormous shame to the family.

But because the father in the story is a good father, the son is not cut off.

The son is not disowned. He is not abandoned; is not disliked or hated but rather the door is left open for the lost son who is still passionately loved to be recovered.

Furthermore, there is hope, there is anticipation that someday the wanderer will return as evidenced by the father in the story watching, anticipating, hoping, believing that the son will be coming home.

Now when we consider carefully the details and messages found in this account, it underlines for us the security we have in our relationship with our heavenly Father.

The son rejected his father's authority, brought shame on the family and yet the father did not disown, did not abandon but chose to continue to love, hope for, and anticipate the wanderer returning home.

Who among us has not at one time or another acted in a way that was displeasing to our heavenly Father?

Who among us has not at least on some occasion been disobedient and broke our Father's rules?

Who among us has not at one time or another turn our back and tried like Jonah of old to run away from God's presence and his calling on our lives?

The son entered a period of wastefulness in his life. He wasted his monetary inheritance, and he wasted a good part of his life.

Who among us have not wasted time or money that might have been well spent elsewhere for his cause and his kingdom?

The son entered a period in his life marked by immoral relationships, yet the Father was still loving him, hoping and anticipating his return.

Because Jesus was using the story to illustrate the character of our good, good, heavenly Father it affirms for us that we have consistent, unchanging, loving security in our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Regardless of what we have done, or where you and I are in life today, we are not disowned, we are not cast off, we are not disliked or hated.

By contrast we are consistently loved by our heavenly Father who waits with open arms to welcome us home.

Where are you today? Have you come to a point where perhaps you realize that you have wasted a lot of the resources given to you?

Time, money, energy, skills, that might have been used for the Lord had you been focussed on his plans and purposes for you?

The good news is that your good, good, heavenly Father still counts you as a son or daughter.

Your good, good, heavenly Father still loves you and is still hoping for and anticipating your return.

Perhaps you have adopted some habits, some attitudes, some lifestyle attributes that you know are not pleasing to your heavenly Father.

Perhaps even like the prodigal son you have developed some relationships that are inappropriate.

The good news is that your good, good, heavenly Father still counts you as a son or daughter, still loves you and is still hoping for and anticipating your return.

The story when studied carefully affirms that we do indeed have a good, good, Father.

It affirms that our position as a child of God is secure even when we stumble and fall. It affirms that his love care and hope for us is forever consistent.

Now it follows that if our position is secure as a child of God, and if God, our Heavenly Father is a good, good, Father then we can approach life with much less concern and anxiety than the unbelieving world.

The unbelieving world has natural increased anxiety and concern because they must rely on either their own efforts or the provision of government to meet their needs.

So, they become preoccupied and deeply concerned about everything from elections to inflation.

Jesus' words to us as children of our heavenly Father sound a much different message.

We pick up his teaching in Matthew chapter six beginning to read at verse twenty-five:

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are?”

Note here again that Jesus makes the point of addressing God as our heavenly Father and in so doing reminds us we are his valuable and much loved adopted children.

Picking up at verse twenty-seven we read:

Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?”

Now perhaps we tend to think of faith as being related to miracles. Mountain moving faith. Faith to see someone healed. Faith to complete a church building project and so on.

But Jesus here is talking about faith in the heavenly family unit. Faith in our good, good, heavenly Father to meet the needs of his family..

I believe that this is a call for a childlike faith. When I was a small child, I never gave a second thought to things like food and clothes. My childlike faith simply expected mom and dad to be able to meet those needs.

As I grew older, I was reminded frequently that money didn't grow on trees, there were things we couldn't afford, but still there remained a childlike faith that mom and dad would supply.

I believe that Jesus here is encouraging his listeners to exercise that childhood faith. Believe, exercise faith in our good, good Father to meet our needs. And when we do, when we develop and practice that childlike faith, a lot of life's anxieties simply melt away.

Now obviously that doesn't mean that we sit back, put our feet up and do nothing expecting our heavenly Father to arrange to have the groceries delivered and our bills paid.

Scriptures in other places encourage us to be industrious. To use the energy, skills and talents our heavenly Father gave us.

But if we grasp the truth about our Father child relationship, if we can grasp that we really are a child of God and that he is a good, good, Father we can exercise that childhood faith and allow the stress and anxiety to dissipate.

A few years ago, Bobby Mc Ferrin wrote a little song entitled "Don't worry be happy". It became quite a popular song for a while.

But I think Jesus beat him by a couple of thousand years.

Reading on at verse thirty-one Jesus says to his listeners:

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'" These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of

God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

That's an interesting word used here. Dominate. When something dominates everything else is pushed aside.

If worry, anxiety and fretting are dominating your mind, everything else will take a second, or third place. Your focus and energy become consumed by anxiety and worry.

Every believer is called to a life of faith. A belief that our heavenly Father does have plans and purposes for each of our lives.

We are called to that child like faith. Again, thinking back to my childhood I never had to worry whether mom and dad would remember that I needed to eat. I simply believed that they knew my needs.

Jesus simply reminds us, your good, good, Father already knows your needs! Just focus on seeking his Kingdom first, living out what he is calling you to do, let his calling dominate your thinking and believe that he will ensure the rest is taken care of.

I trust that is where you are today. That you have taken the steps to be born again, that you claim your status as an adopted child of our Heavenly Father and you are believing in and resting on the promises made to each one of his children.