

Welcome home

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Have you ever been away from home? Maybe for days, weeks, or months. Maybe you were on a trip with your school, or a work trip, or a vacation. Hopefully you enjoyed the trip, but can you remember how nice it felt when you finally got home and were able to sleep in your own bed, prepare a meal in your own kitchen, and get ready for the day in your own bathroom, having everything that you needed and not having to put everything back in your little toiletries travel bag? Or perhaps you went away to university or tried a job in a foreign country for a year or two. It was exciting and new, but do you remember coming back home and sitting with your family, in your city, in your country, eating your kind of food, speaking your language and just enjoying being “home”?

I too, at times, long for home. Family, food, and the ability to function without even having to think much because you are so familiar with your home culture. For others it is even hard to figure where home is. You have moved so many times that you are a citizen of the world, but without a home. Others long for the home that they never had. Maybe you have come from a broken family and experienced the loneliness of a broken world. This longing for a home helps us think more easily about the fact that each follower of Christ belongs to the family of God. It also helps us long for the kingdom of heaven; the place where our true family and our true home awaits us for an eternity. Where we will one day arrive and know that everything is finally as it was meant to be.

We are here today to talk about this family. Our forever family. But to understand it we must start at the beginning.

In Genesis chapter 2, God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so he created the first woman, Eve (Genesis 2:18). We do not know if Adam was actually lonely, or was even familiar with the concept of loneliness. He was in perfect relationship with God, so one could argue that Adam lacked nothing, but we do know that scripture states the that Adam was alone.

For God's purposes in this world Adam would need a companion. From scripture one can see that God would accomplish His purposes on earth in the midst of relationships. This idea would start through family and would grow to include all the relationships that we have in our lives. Through relationships, the realities of forgiveness, patience, love, kindness, and countless other characteristics of God, would be experienced and modeled to the watching world. Becoming like Christ and bearing God's image would only be possible as people related to each other. God's purposes would not be possible through one person living a life of solitude. In these verses we see that relationship would be an essential part of God's plan on earth.

This idea of living in community would clearly be seen through the marriage of Adam and Eve and the concept of family. To us, this first would be a biological term, father, mother, sons and daughters. We then would be prepared to long for and better understand our opportunity to be a part of the family of God.

God came up with the idea of "family" for His purposes in this world. That is why He alone has the authority to define family and marriage, for they are His.

In John 1:12-13 we find these words, ***"But to all who did receive him, 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."***

It was by the will of God that man would be reconciled to Himself. Even though we all had been strangers and aliens, far from God because of our sin, all who received Christ and believed in Him would now be seen as fellow citizens with all the saints and would be members of the household of God.

That is quite amazing. That in the midst of all the sins and selfishness that we have been guilty of in our lifetimes, that we would still be welcomed by God into His household, whose foundation was built on the apostles and the prophets and whose chief cornerstone was Christ Jesus Himself. And it gets even better. The apostle Paul tells us that we too are being built into this same household of God, a structure of which all believers will be a part of, built together to be a dwelling place for God, a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-20). ***"For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people'"*** (2 Corinthians 6:16).

I don't know what passport you have, but I must tell you that your passport is only temporary. As scripture tells us, this life is like a mist or a vapor. It soon will pass away, but our true citizenship, our eternal citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21). In heaven it will not matter what color your skin used to be, what language you used to speak, how much money you used to have, what kind of job you used to have or where you used to live.

By the blood of Christ, all who believe in Him have been ransomed for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9). We are citizens of heaven, we are the dwelling place of God, we are the family of God.

We are all of the same heavenly family because we have the same heavenly Father. This cannot be said of everyone. Since the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, all mankind has been separated from God because of their sin (Ephesians 2:12; Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 4:18). While God is the Creator of all and we all have been created in His image, He is not the Father of all. Only those who by the work of the Holy Spirit have believed in and received Jesus Christ have become children of God (John 1:12-13). The only way to have God as one's father is to have Jesus Christ as one's Savior (John 14:6; 1 John 2:23).

The fact that we have been adopted into God's family is an amazing truth (Romans 8:15). We were lost in our sin, and yet, after all that we had done against God and our fellow man, He still chose to draw us to Himself and receive us into His family. We see a picture of this extravagant grace various places in scripture, but one of the clearest is the story of the prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

The son disrespected and humiliated His father by demanding his inheritance before his father was even dead. He then took the money that had likely taken generations to accumulate, went to a foreign land and wasted it all on wild living. Eventually he spent all the money and then, trying to survive, he found a job feeding pigs. It was at that point that his heart was finally humbled.

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. ²² But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.

To many this sounds outrageous. How is this possible that a son could be so disrespectful, selfish and foolish, and yet be met with the best robe, a ring on his finger and shoes for his feet? And then a fattened calf and a celebration? He wasn't getting married. He wasn't coming home from war. He was a foolish son who had done the equivalent of spitting in his father's face and wishing his father were dead . . . and now the father had treated the despicable one as his beloved son.

For many this is too much. This love is too extravagant, but this is a picture of the Father's love for us. That while we were yet sinners He sent His son, Jesus, to die for us (Romans 5:8).

It is to this Father and to this family that we belong. We are the children of God. We sit here as brothers and sisters. When we were far off, He brought us near. We have been adopted, never to be put away. As was in the Bible times in the Roman empire, you could disown your biological children if you so chose, but once you adopted a child you could never disown them. That is the unconditional love that we find in Christ, in the family of God.

Now we must never abuse this eternal security as an adopted child of God. We are not free to receive Christ and then do whatever we want. This in itself may prove that we are not truly a child of God.

Instead, this eternal security, rooted in the unconditional love of God, should compel us to good works as we serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13-15-13).

With God as our Father, we have immediate access to Him, the sovereign King of the Universe, at any time. Hebrews 4:16 tells how we can come before His throne with confidence in our time of need and receive grace and mercy. Furthermore, the Father has promised to give us everything that we need for life and godliness (Matthew 6:31–33; 2 Peter 1:3).

This idea of intimacy with God the Father was so foreign to the people of Jesus' day. God was definitely to be feared, but intimacy with God was a foreign concept. In the Jewish tradition the people felt that the name of God, "Yahweh", was so sacred and holy that a person had no right to even speak it out loud. Their perspective of a distant, almighty God, seemed to focus more on the God who had created the world, judged the world with the flood, parted the Red Sea and brought plagues. He was powerful, and just, but also unapproachable.

It is into this cultural context that Jesus introduced the idea of "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). This would be the equivalent of calling God "Daddy or Papá". How is it that a God like this would call Himself Father, and invite us to draw near?

1 John 3:1-2 we read these words, ***"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God;" and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. We are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."***

Because of the Father's love we are children of God . . . now. He is the "meet-er" of our needs in the present. In the future we will be made like Him. In heaven there will be no more penalty of sin. No more power of sin. No more presence of sin. In heaven, the Father will dwell amongst His children and we will receive our full inheritance. We will receive glorified bodies, and ***"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain"*** (Revelation 21:3-4).

Galatians 3:26 tells us that, ***"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."*** That is an interesting verse. Why would Paul have only mentioned sons? Because they were the only ones who received status and inheritance. If we are going to be children of a heavenly Father who is able to ***"do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work in us"*** (Ephesians 3:20-21), then Paul would not tell his listeners that they were going to be treated like daughters. For men and women to be treated as sons of God would have been truly extraordinary for those in Paul's day, especially the women.

How important is being a member of the family of God? In the eyes of Jesus it is very important. We see this story in Matthew 12:46-50.

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

His goal was not to take away the importance of one's biological family, but only to make it very clear the importance and value of one's eternal family. Our biological family was created by God, but it is but an earthly version that points us towards our true family that will be with us in heaven for all eternity.

It is ideal when one's biological family is also listed among one's spiritual, but many times that is not the case. But even in the midst of being rejected by our family for the sake of Christ, Matthew 19:29 shows us the worth of eternal life. *"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life."*

We are children of God. We belong to the family of God. As we seek to walk in this truth, we first must draw near to the Father. He is the One that we have in common. As we draw near to the Father and see who we are in Him and what we have in Him, this will be the security and commonality that begins to draw us to one another.

In closing, know this. God has brought those who were far away and alienated from God, near to God. He has made those who did not belong, now full citizens in Christ. He has taken the lost and now adopted them into His eternal family, with all the rights and privileges that that entails. All of you who have received Jesus Christ and believed in Him are now children of God. We have the same Father, the same Savior and the same Spirit living in us. Regardless of our skin color, cultural background, economic situation, level of education, first language or country of origin, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are held together not by human bloodlines, but by the blood of Jesus Christ.

So now, our earthly identities become secondary, and our identity in Christ becomes primary. As we walk daily with Christ, this identity as a child of God will begin to move to the forefront. As it does, we will live and love more and more like a child of God should, and our faith will be strengthened as we long for that final homecoming, when we walk through the gates of heaven and are finally home.

As a church family, may we repent of any and all prejudice. Confess any sin that is preventing unity. Prepare ourselves so that we might be ready to help others in need. Reach out to brothers and sisters of diverse backgrounds, living out the unity that we now have in Christ.