



Sermon

The Spirit of Adoption

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17

Pentecost 9/6/2019

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Today is Pentecost – a great festival of the Church. Let's put it into context.

Jesus ministered publicly for three years before he was killed. He rose again from the dead which we celebrate at Easter. Over a period of forty days, he met his followers multiple times until he left them for heaven – which we celebrated last week.

As he left he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to them¹. They were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the gift the Father had promised which was the Holy Spirit and so they would receive power and they would be his witnesses spreading out to the world.

Luke recorded that 120 believers met daily for prayer as they waited in Jerusalem. Their waiting ended on the Jewish festival of Pentecost. Pentecost was 50 days after the Passover and marked the celebration and thanksgiving for the wheat harvest.

When the day came, the disciples were all together and there was this dramatic event with the sound of a great wind filling the place where they met. Then they saw flames appear over each of them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Wind and fire are common Biblical symbols of the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit being like the wind in that you hear it but you don't know where it has come from or where it is going.² The presence of God was several times seen as fire: at the Burning Bush, at Mt Sinai, with his people when he appeared as a pillar of fire leading them through the Wilderness.

The disciples saw, heard and expressed the powerful presence of God on them and they were transformed! Whereas they had been hiding in fear almost immediately they were standing up publicly to proclaim Jesus as Saviour. Whereas Peter had three times denied he knew Jesus, now he addresses the crowd and even accuses them of killing the Christ and calls for their repentance.

Indeed, as Jesus had said, they would be his witnesses spreading out from Jerusalem to the surrounding lands and to the world.

Even as the festival of Pentecost celebrated the harvest, so here was the beginning of the harvest of souls into the church.

¹ Acts 1:4-8

² John 3:8

But it was not just them and it was not just then. For us and right now – the same Spirit is at work. Sometimes today his presence is dramatic sometimes it is very gentle. But the change he brings in lives is great. It is the Holy Spirit who draws us to Christ and gives us new birth. Now I could readily talk about the gifts of the Spirit working in our lives - those supernatural gifts he distributes among us still today. Most of you have experienced or heard of them being used. But my attention today is drawn in a different direction.

In the gospel reading which is part of what Jesus said to the disciples at the Last Supper, he spoke of giving the Spirit to them and us.

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”³

We are not left as spiritual orphans. How do you resolve orphanhood? By adoption. That is an important part of the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Paul in the reading from Romans wrote about our being adopted to be inheritors of God. The metaphor of adoption came from Roman Law – Paul was a Roman citizen. Adoption was a very serious undertaking: the adopted son (who often had been a slave) became a full member of the family, just as if he were a natural son. He received a new identity; his name was changed; he received new purpose and security and he was invested with all the privileges of that family with equal inheritance rights.

Paul says the Spirit we receive brings about our adoption into sonship. By him, we cry, “Abba, Father” to God.

It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to know Jesus. He is called the Spirit of Adoption. He makes us children of God. The language used here is sons – but that should not be taken to exclude women – the importance is inheritance. In Jewish and Roman law, only sons could inherit so sonship implies inheritance. However, we can see that Paul included women with men in the inheritance because he continues by saying the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children and there he uses the word *tekna* which a neuter noun neither male nor female. It means little children but can also be descendants, posterity. By using children it is plain that men and women in Christ are included as heirs of God.

The Spirit put inside us the right, the ability and the desire to call God, “Father” or “Abba” the Aramaic form of Daddy. This is how Jesus addressed God. It is the relationship that God grants to us. It is the motivation he puts inside us as we address him.

Let’s explore some benefits of our adoption into God’s family.

Identity

When we are adopted into Christ, we have a new identity. John 1:12 says, “To all those who receive him he gives us them the right to become children of God - children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” We are then found in Christ. That is how God sees us – as being in Christ. I remember a girl in my youth group back in 1980. Over and over again she would say, “Who am I? I don’t know who I am.” The time came when she was saved. Not long after that in a Youth group meeting she said, “I know who I am – I am a child of God!” It was a wonderful change from doubt and lostness to confidence, having her bearings and identity.

Purpose

We have a new purpose. In the Letter to the Ephesians Paul also writes about our adoption:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.⁴

³ John 14:16,17a,18

⁴ Ephesians 1:4-6

Before the world existed, God had chosen to adopt us in his love for us. And the purpose? “To the praise of his glorious grace.”

What is the purpose of life? Our current culture says it is all about ME! My personal fulfilment.

But the Bible reveals to us that it's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.

When a person is adopted into God's family and receives a new identity they will learn over time their new purpose in the family and it's no longer about themselves but it's about God....our lives are to bring glory to God: 'we are designed to reflect him'.

In Winchester cathedral there are mirrors to enable visitors to admire the magnificent carvings in the roof without straining their necks. The tourists will have missed the point if they leave the cathedral say “what wonderful mirrors!” They are designed not to draw attention to themselves, but rather to point upwards to the ceiling. We, too, are designed to point away from ourselves. Our purpose is not to bring glory to the human race, but rather to reflect God, in whose image we are made.

This is our purpose, a life led by God to live for his glory. Now exactly how that will unfold will be different for each of us – but that is the big theme – to the praise of his glory.

Freedom

Paul writes that the Spirit sets us free from fear. Do you remember I said that Romans often adopted slaves. Once he was adopted was the former slave still a slave? No, he had become a son – he had freedom, he had legal rights and property. He was a free man. So in our adoption, we are freed from the bondages that held us bound. We are no longer lost in spiritual servitude, condemnation and debt. We are given authority and access to the Father.

Inheritance

Paul says we are inheritors of God and coheirs with Christ. That is amazing! We enter our inheritance in part now with the benefits we have already talked about and more besides. But the fullness of that inheritance is in the life to come – when we shall share in His glory. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”⁵ It is beyond our best imagining – it is glorious!

Brothers and sisters, this is what the Spirit of God does for us. It is he who puts the desire in us to call God Father. It is he who gives you an assurance of salvation and assurance that you are a child and heir of God. It is the Spirit of God who gives you revelation so you can understand the Bible and God's ways. Why wouldn't you want more of him at work in your heart?

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⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:9