



ADOPTION: THE HEART OF THE EASTER STORY
Galatians 4:4-8; Ephesians 1:4-8; Romans 8:15-17; Romans 8:23

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to Galatians 4. If you don't have a Bible, I have done something a little different this week, and all the Scripture that we're going to look at in God's Word is actually printed there in the notes that are in the Celebration Guide that I referenced earlier. So, let me encourage you to pull out those notes as well. You can follow along there in what we're going to look at in God's Word.

It was about 17 months ago that a journey began for my wife, Heather, and me, called adoption. It has been an unforgettable journey, and the video you just saw is a small glimpse of families across the faith family who have experienced that journey. Our purpose this morning is not going to be to highlight those stories or even to highlight my story, our story of adoption, even though you'll hear a good deal about it. I pray, I hope, that our time together this morning is going to give us a great picture of God's story of adoption.

I believe a picture of adoption is at the heart of the Easter story. I want us to see that unfold, I pray, in a way that we will see God's love in a new and a fresh way, maybe in a way that we have never seen His love before. To see the picture of how the God of the universe, who created all things, actually has a desire to adopt us. We're going to see that unfold in a few different passages of Scripture as we think about the death and resurrection of Christ as we celebrate at Easter.

February 15, less than two months ago, Heather and I found ourselves in this obscure city in Kazakhstan. Some of you have no clue where Kazakhstan is, and that's okay. We found ourselves in this city the day after Valentine's Day in a Baby House, which is what they call the orphanages there. We were about to meet our child for the first time. His name is Caleb. At that point that was not his name, his name at that point had a lot of consonants and not many vowels in it, and we couldn't really pronounce it. So, we stuck with Caleb pretty much the whole time.

We were briefed on his medical history, and we turned around, and this little guy is brought into the room, this ten-month-old with inquisitive eyes looking around. Heather, my wife, takes him to hold him, and you can tell he's pretty nervous. He was not really sure what was going on right here. I didn't want Heather to have all the fun, so I decided I was going to have my turn. So, I took him from Heather and put him in my arms, and that is when the wailing began. All of a sudden, I'm looking around, and this room is full of women who are looking at me like I've done something incredibly wrong to this poor little kid. They come and grab him out of my arms and take him out. That was our first interaction with Caleb.

That began a process where we would go to the Baby House every day, two times a day. We would have a time in the morning and a time in the afternoon for an hour apiece, so two hours a day, where we would be able to play with him, to hold him, to crawl around the room with him, to sing to him. They would bring him in, and then an hour later, they would

take him back out. Let me give you just a small glimpse of what some of those days were like.

[Video Plays]

"Okay, this is Day 2 in the Baby House. The first day that we saw Caleb was for about 60 seconds, and it was very quick, kind of tearful, but we're excited that we get to play with him for about an hour. So this is our first time to really interact with baby Caleb."

[Video Ends]

Is he not the cutest kid in the world? The way the adoption process works in Kazakhstan is that you have to spend a mandatory 14 days going to the Baby House and having those visits before you get a court date, where you can go and actually appeal for custody of the child. So, our D-day, so to speak, our court date was March 7. The night before we gathered together in our apartment, Heather and I were with our interpreter and adoption coordinator, and they basically just prepared us, as best as they could, for what would happen the next day. They told us what it would be like in court, what questions we would be asked, the answers we needed to give, all the specifics, how we needed to sit, every detail was spelled out.

Most of the speaking parts belong to the father in this whole process. Heather had one line that she was supposed to memorize and make sure she said at the end of court. So the next morning, we got up, and I got dressed up in my suit, and Heather got dressed up in her skirt. We kind of went through, like a dress rehearsal, "Okay, let's pretend like we're in court. I'm asked this, and I say this; I'm asked this, and I say this," and she has her line ready at the very end. After we finished, I looked over and my wife has got a marker in her hand, and she's writing on her hand. I said, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm going to make sure I get my line right!" So, Heather was prepped, and had her little cheat sheet on her hand there.

We went to the courthouse. This was the day that 17 months was now about to culminate in, and it was pretty intense. The tension was pretty thick as we walked in and sat down, myself, the interpreter, and Heather. When the time was right, the judge told me to stand, and he began asking me these questions. There's a judge, prosecutor, and court officials that are all around us. They start asking me these questions, the prosecutor is asking me these questions, and I answer them, I think, like I was supposed to. Then, I sit down and then Heather stands up.

At this point, she basically has a couple of "Yes" or "No" questions that she is supposed to answer, but after she had answered "Yes" or "No" to a couple of them, the judge threw a curveball. He looked at her, and he said, "Do you have anything that you'd like to add?" The answer at this point was supposed to be, "No," but I heard her pause. I thought, "Oh no", and I look up. Heather is panicked, thinking, "What do I add; what do I add?" She looked at me, and of course, I can't say anything; she looked at the interpreter, and she's not supposed to say anything. Heather is panicking, the prosecutor is staring a hole right through her.

So, my precious wife just raises up her hand and starts to read her line. It wasn't time for her line, but she did well with it! The judge said, "'Just have a seat,'" and we moved on. We got to the end, and I stood up and gave a speech that was about a minute long, if you can believe that! I gave about a one-minute speech, and then Heather gave her line, and the judge made his decision. He declared that they would grant this application for adoption and

this child would now belong to us. In that moment, everything changed; everything changed. The first and most fundamental thing that changed was the fact that this child, who at that point, belonged to a government, now belonged to us. His whole status was changed in that one judge's declaration.

God changes our status.

I want us to begin to think about the parallels between any adoption story we might have and God's story of adoption. Because, God, with His infinite love and His desire to adopt you into His family, brings about all kinds of changes in our lives. The first and most fundamental thing that He changes when He adopts us into His family is our status. So, God changes our status. If you've got that in your notes, write that down. He changes our status.

I want you to look with me at Galatians 4:4-8. You've got the verses there in your notes, and I want you to follow along with me. I want you to picture how the Bible describes God's adoption of us. Listen to this:

"When the right time came, God sent his son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could [and you might want to underline it] adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, 'Abba, [which literally means 'daddy'] Father.' Now you are no longer a slave, but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir." (Gal. 4:4-8)

Do you see the change of status that's unfolding here in this passage? In the very beginning of this passage, we are described as slaves to the law. Now here's, basically, what that means. To be a slave to the law is, basically, the fact that all of us in this room, every single one of us, has a moral awareness. We know right and wrong. We know the difference between the two. We know there's right, and we know there's wrong, and all of us in this room have done wrong. We have broken the law, so to speak. That's what the Bible calls "sin." We've all sinned, we've all done things our way instead of God's way. We've all said, "You know, I know what's better for me in this situation. I am in control here; I am in control of my life." We have taken God off His throne, as our Creator, and we've put ourselves on the throne.

Now, the result of this is, we are not, not one of us in this room, according to the Bible, no one of us is naturally a child of God. Are we created by God? Yes, undoubtedly. However, all of us have turned from God, sinned, broken the law, slaves to the law. Instead of being a child of God, we are slaves to the law, slaves to ourselves. As a result, we are susceptible to the judgment of God.

Now, I know that sounds a little weird to talk about the judgment of God, but God, because He is infinitely good and holy and just, His very character is set against sin. That's a problem. Because if we have sin, every one of us in this room has sin, and God in His character is set against sin, then we have got an infinitely important problem here.

I believe it puts in front of us the ultimate question that every single one of us in this room has to face at some point or another. I believe it is the most important question we will ever face in life; more important than any other question. The question is simple: "How can I, a sinner, be made right with God, who is holy?" I say it's the ultimate question because our

eternity in this room...every single one of us, our eternity is based on how that question is answered. "How can I, a sinner, be right with God, who is holy?"

Now, this is where the importance of our status comes in, because if we have sin, then we cannot be united with God. There is a legal problem here; there is an infinite chasm that has separated us from Him. Now, at this point...and anybody who has been through adoption before knows that there is legal red tape that you have to cut through at every single point. I want you to think about the legal red tape in God's story of adoption. Because there are certain requirements in order for this adoption to happen, in order for any adoption to happen, but particularly us in our relationship with God. In order for that adoption to happen, there are different requirements that need to be crossed off.

Adoption requires someone who comes at the right time.

First of all, in order for an adoption to happen, it requires that someone comes at the right time; someone must come at the right time. If you've adopted internationally...this is our experience, and so this is what we're most familiar with...different countries have different rules, but most of them have different rules and regulations about when a child in another country actually becomes eligible for adoption. In some countries, it's this amount of months, and so they must be in the orphanage before they are eligible for adoption. Other countries, they have to have been this amount of time separated from mother or father or anybody in their family. In some countries, it's even a certain amount of time that you have been an orphan and no one has come to visit you, then you become eligible for adoption. There are all kinds of rules and regulations, and no real rhyme or reason to it. You'd think it would be as easy as, "There are needy kids here, and parents that want to love them here. Let's put this thing together." But that's just not the way it works. It doesn't make a lot of sense. But there's got to be a timing issue that is there.

That's exactly what the Bible is talking about in Galatians 4:4. It says, "*When the right time came...*" You see, up to this point, what you've got in the first two thirds of the Bible is a picture in the Old Testament. Over and over and over again, it was demonstrated, that no matter how good man was, no matter how religious man was, no matter how spiritual man was, no matter how many things he did to try to get to God, it had become very clear that there was a chasm that needed to be bridged between man and God, because it could not be bridged by anything man could do. The whole Old Testament is a picture of how man...none of us in this room...can be made right with God on our own. So, the stage was set in the Old Testament for the right time to come when Christ would come, at the very right time.

Adoption requires someone who possesses the right qualifications.

Not only the right time, but in order for an adoption to happen, second, someone must come who possesses the right qualifications. You've got to have the right qualifications in order to adopt. If you've adopted before, you know that there are all kinds of hoops that you have to jump through. It seems like you are doing your best to convince two different governments that you are the ideal family for adoption. The first step is a home study, where they come in and investigate your home. They make sure that it's suitable for a child to come in.

Now, this was a problem for us, because we had been living in New Orleans and our home was under water, and that's not a good, suitable home, for a child. So, our first major problem was to find a home. We were living in Atlanta, kind of dislocated there. My brother had a condo that he hadn't been able to sell, so we moved in there. We brought as much furniture as we could in, made it look like a home, and started living there so that this lady could come look around and make sure we had all the child safety stuff there, this and that.

She asked us all these questions about our marriage, our philosophy of parenting, and I'm thinking, "Not every parent has to answer all these questions." But she is just drilling us over and over again.

Then, we had to get physicals and make sure we were in perfect health. I remember when we did our physical. Heather and I did it together, and I was getting blood drawn, which I'm not a big fan of; I don't like the process at all. I always get a little light-headed. So, they drew the blood, and then the very next thing that was going to happen was that they were going to take our eye exam. So, we walk out into the hallway, after drawing blood, and I still maintain that that hallway was dark; it was dimly lit, but there is the eye chart at the end of the hallway, and I'm up first.

So, she says, "Put your hand over one eye and read these letters." So, I start reading, and the big letter I can get, but then we start going down, and I start really struggling. I just...I can't see; I'm panicking, "Am I going to fail this thing and not going to be able to adopt because I can't see E-F-L-B? What's the deal?" Heather's kind of laughing at me in the background, and then finally, the lady can tell that I'm struggling and she says, "Why don't you try your other eye." So, I said, "Okay." Then, I took my hand off my eye, and the only problem was that I had been so nervous, I had been pressing this left hand into my eye, and so I take my hand off and everything is blurry now. And I say, "Man, I can't see a thing." So, the lady's like, "Why don't you compose yourself and just step to the side, and let your wife go." So Heather went, and she's passing with flying colors, and I'm over there trying to get my vision back. While she's still going, now that I've got two eyes, I look down and I memorize the lines. So, I step back up, "Oh, E-F-L-B-C, easy. Look, I can do it with this eye; I can do it with both eyes closed. Look!" You've got to be perfect, it feels like, in order to go through this whole process!

Well, I am exaggerating, but what Scripture teaches is very clear. In order for any one of us to be adopted into the family of God, we must have someone who has all the right qualifications. There are three that are listed here in Galatians 4. The first one is that, in order to bridge the infinite chasm between us and God, the person who comes to adopt us must be like both God and us. This is the whole picture of why it's so important that Jesus, in Scripture, is fully God and fully human; that He is like God. Paul says it here in Galatians 4, "*God sent his Son...*" to reference the fact that He came from God. But then he says, "*...born of a woman...*" In other words, "Like us, familiar with what it's like to be a human, and the weaknesses that are there." So He's got to be like God, like us, and living in this life, completely and perfectly obedient to the law. If somebody messes up and does something wrong, then how can they pay the price for all of our sins that we've done wrong. Someone must be perfectly subject to the law.

Now, I ask you, on the landscape of human history, who, if anyone else, besides the person of Jesus Christ could ever fulfill those qualifications: Like God, like us, and perfectly subject to the law? There is no one else apart from Jesus. He has, He possesses the right qualifications.

Adoption requires someone who has the right resolve.

He comes at the right time, possesses the right qualifications, and third, in order for an adoption to happen, someone must come with the right resolve. They must have purpose to adopt; they must have the intent to adopt. It goes without saying that we would not go to Kazakhstan if we did not have the resolve to adopt. But that's exactly what we're seeing here in Galatians 4. Three times, the Bible repeats that God had sent Jesus in Galatians 4. Three times. If you look at that passage, you see it repeated: God sent Jesus.

Don't miss this. God purposed to send Jesus for one purpose. It says it right there in Galatians 4:5, "*God sent him...*" Why? "*...to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law...*" Here's the purpose clause: "*...so that he could adopt us as his very own children*" (Gal. 4:5). That's why Jesus came. He came...this is why adoption is the heart of the Easter story: He came, He died on a cross and rose from the grave to adopt us. That's what the Bible is teaching.

One of the most poignant and emotional moments of that whole court proceeding was when the officials from the Baby House were describing Caleb to the judge. They began talking about how he was abandoned by his mother at birth. They talked about how he was taken from the maternity hospital to the children's hospital to be with other kids that no one else wanted. They talked about how he was taken from there into the institutional Baby House to be cared for and how he was put up for adoption in-country. They described how no one in the country wanted to adopt him. They described how he had been completely abandoned by everyone around him. It was in those moments that, if we hadn't been prepped right, Heather and I would have stood up, wanted to stand up, and just shout out, "We won't abandon him! We have come at the right time, we have all the right qualifications, and we have the resolve. We will do whatever is necessary to bring this child into our family."

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you a much, much greater picture than that. That the God of the universe, in your sin, in your need, has stood up and said, "I will not abandon you to your sin." He says, "I send one at the right time with all the right qualifications." And Jesus Christ, praise His name, He stands up on your behalf and on my behalf, and He says, "I have the resolve. I will sacrifice whatever is necessary, even my life, so that you can be a part of my Father's family." Adoption is the heart of the Easter story.

So what I want you to do is, I want to invite you over the next few months to reflect on how the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ show that, He not only came at the right time, with all the right qualifications, but that He has the resolve. Ladies and gentlemen, He had it, and He still has it to adopt you into His family.

It's at this point that we have a tendency to let the Easter story stop, where the death and resurrection of Christ makes us right before God. This though, is where adoption helps us, because this is where the Easter story begins. All throughout this process of adoption, and even especially when, we got word that a child was waiting for us in Kazakhstan, our agency told us to guard our hearts. When we saw his name, he said, "Guard your hearts; nothing is final until the judge in Kazakhstan says it's final, and anything could happen. They could make this fall through." So, when we saw his name, "Guard your hearts," he said. "When you meet him, guard your hearts. When you hold him in the Baby House everyday, just guard your hearts."

So, when we stood in court that day, and the judge granted our application for adoption, his legal status changed, but that was just the beginning. We walk into this side room, and Heather and I, in tears, had the opportunity for the first time to let our hearts go. A floodgate was opened, "We are a mom and a dad now. We have a son to pour out our love on." That is so much more than a legal declaration. The transition in Caleb's life was more than just a legal change from being a citizen in Kazakhstan to a citizen of the United States; that is such a small part. He's not just had his status changed; he's had his entire family changed.

That day was a whirlwind. We go get all these documents signed, go shopping, get everything ready. "What in the world do we feed him?" We don't know what to do. He's actually going to be ours, and so we've got to get ready for him to come to our apartment

that night. So, then we go to the Baby House for the last time, and they bring him in. This time we're not giving him back. We say goodbye to the Baby House, and we leave, not with a change in legal status...how that would minimize the picture...we left as a family. We are now immersed in pouring our love out on him and seeing his love reciprocated and returned.

We have got to be careful in our culture with our view of God, because we are a people who find it very easy to think in terms of "right" and "wrong", "guilty" and "innocent." So, a picture of being made right before God resounds with us; that makes sense. God, as the judge, declares us right because our sin is put on Christ. When God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ. That's a good thing; we are made right before God. That is all true, it's biblical, but we can't stop there. God is so much more than a judge. It's a great thing to be declared "right" before God, the judge. It is a greater thing to be loved by God, the Father.

God changes our family.

This is a whole deeper picture of adoption. Not just a change of legal status, ladies and gentlemen, but God, in His desire to adopt us, changes our family. I want you to see that in Ephesians 1. If you've got your Bible, you might just turn over a couple pages to the next book, or you can follow along in your notes. Listen to these verses in Ephesians 1:4: *"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy, and without fault in his eyes."* God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure.

So, we praise God for the glorious grace He pours out on us who belong to His dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us along with all wisdom and understanding. Do you see this picture? We are not just declared right in God the Father's eyes; He pours out His infinite love on us. The floodgates of the love of God Himself poured out on us! This whole picture of adoption is the love of the Father.

He planned to love you.

Now, I want you to think about what that passage just showed us about love, and its relationship to adoption. First of all, I want you to see in that passage that He planned to love you. Heather and I have been on this journey for 17 months, and we sat there 15 or 16 months into it in Kazakhstan, realizing it had been awhile since we'd been planning. Did you see what Ephesians 1 said though? Before God even made the world, He planned, He purposed to love you. Let that soak in. Not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you; right where you're sitting, ladies and gentlemen, students, He planned to love you. He purposed to love you. Adoption never happens by accident. It is a purpose, a plan, which God has in our lives. In spite of our sinfulness, because of our sinfulness, God set in motion a plan to make it possible for you and I to become His children. He planned to love you, and nothing stopped Him from it.

There were times, even in Kazakhstan, when we were on this journey where Heather would look at me, or I'd look at her and say, "This is tough; this is not for the faint of heart." It's not that, at any point, we were going to quit; that was not an option. But it was not easy. The plan was there. Let me remind you of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane when He expresses an honesty before the Father. He says, "If it is possible, let this cup be taken from me." Praise be to His name, that He rises and says, "But not my will, but yours be done. I am here on a purpose to give my life for you." He planned to love you.

He paid a price to love you.

Second, He paid a price to love you. Adoption is costly. It says in here, "purchased with His own blood." Any adoption is costly. I wouldn't say to anybody that adoption is inexpensive; it's not inexpensive. It is costly financially, it is costly emotionally, and the cost is just beginning. We are going to get stock in diapers! The cost is just starting to swell! But there comes a point where any cost is worth it, isn't it? Aren't you glad that any cost is worth it for the God of the universe to adopt you and me? It was an infinite cost. It cost the life of His one and only Son. Him coming to the earth as God in the flesh and giving His life. He paid a price to love you.

He pursues you with His love.

Not only did He plan to do it, and pay a price, but number three...don't miss this: He pursues you with His love. He pursues you with His love! This is where adoption really gets good. You do realize that when we took Caleb out of that Baby House, and brought him home to Birmingham, we did not stop loving him at that point. It was at that point that our love for him began to really be poured out. Here we are, three weeks later, and it's being poured out more and more and more. It is a continual pouring out of love on this guy. In such a way, that he...in this whole attachment process of adoption, that he might see us as the ones that love him more than anyone else in this world. That he might respond in a way of reciprocal love to us in that way, attaching to us. What a picture!

You do realize that when you place your faith in Christ, and you receive His forgiveness of your sins, that is not where the love of God stops? It is where it starts! You now enter a journey, where, for all of eternity the God of the universe, in His infinite measure of love, is pouring it out on you day after day after day. He never stops loving you. He never stops pursuing His children with love. How does He receive love from His children? By pouring it out on us, and we reciprocate that. That's the picture in Scripture.

I remind you, especially if you are at a point where, either, you don't have a relationship with God this morning, or you have been running from that relationship with God, and there seems to be so much distance: The Adversary in this world would have you believe that there is a lot of distance between you and God, but I remind you, based on the authority of God's Word, He has not stopped pursuing you. He never stops pursuing you. He pursues us with His love.

It was common in the ancient world picture for people to adopt, but not necessarily to adopt infants or young children. It was actually more common to wait until someone had grown up more and shown themselves fit and worthy to carry on a family name. Then, you would adopt that person into your family. Not so with God. God does not look across this room at those who are the smartest, the most intellectual, the most successful, and say, "I want you on my team." Instead, He goes to the neediest places. The places where gravity and the weight of sin is felt the most. He meets us at our point of need. He says, "I pursue you, and I bring you in," in the darkest of situations; that's where His love shines most clearly.

So, what I'd like for us to do, is to reflect on some of the neediest situations in the world, especially when it comes to this topic of adoption. But not only to reflect on children's faces all over the world, but over the next few moments, I want to encourage you to see your face on the screen and see the love of the Father, who longs to take you into His family.

God changes our future.

We have a God who changes our status. He changes our family. This is where, as if it's not already good enough, our picture of adoption is even greater: He changes our future. Obviously, I cannot stand before you and tell you what Caleb's future would have been like if we had not adopted him. I can say, though, based on all probability, that his future was bleak. In one country, Ukraine, near Kazakhstan, sixty percent of girls who are not adopted will end up in prostitution. Sixty percent. Seventy percent of the boys who are not adopted will end up living a life of crime. I can't tell you what Caleb's future would have looked like, but I can tell you with all certainty: His future has changed as a result of adoption.

So, what changes in God's story of adoption? Check this out in Romans 8:15: "*So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you have received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.'* For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children." Now, listen to this. "*And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ, we are heirs of God's glory*" (Rom. 8:15-17).

He promises a full inheritance.

Let me read that one more time, "*And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ, we are heirs to God's glory*" (Rom. 8:17). Did you catch that? The glory that God the Father has poured out on His infinitely dear Son Jesus Christ is not just for Him, but is for Him to share with all of us. God the Father, when it comes to our future, promises a full inheritance. That's a good thing coming from God. He is infinitely and immeasurably wealthy, and He says to us, as His children, "You will inherit the entire estate; all that is mine is yours." That's what it says over and over again. Jesus came to give us that picture. You know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more does your Father in heaven want to pour out His love and His gifts on you? He wants you to experience Him fully. He promises us a full inheritance.

Ladies and gentlemen, with great joy I stand before you today to tell you that Caleb Thomas Platt, legally, is ours and no one can take him away from us. However, in a much greater way, when we are adopted into the family of God, there is no chance that anyone will be able, anything will ever be able to take us away from Him. We have the full inheritance of Christ. "Guaranteed," Ephesians 1 says later on.

But it doesn't stop there. A few verses later, in Romans 8, listen to this. The Bible says that we as believers groan. The children of God groaning, why? "*And we believers groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We too wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us*" (Rom. 8:23).

I wish we had time to dive into Romans 8 as a whole, but the whole chapter is about sin and suffering, and victory in the middle of the sin and suffering. The Bible never, anywhere, pretends that this life is easy, or that everything will go well for us in this life. That's never a pretense in Scripture. This book is filled with the picture of sin and suffering. It's very familiar to all of our lives in this room. Whether it's emotional suffering, pain, hurt, depression, anxiety, worry, fear, things that so many of us wrestle with; or physical suffering, disease, illness, sickness, cancer, tumors, with things that can't be explained by doctors; relational suffering. Divorce, separation, death. This picture of suffering is all through Scripture. Romans 8, though, comes on the scene and says, "In the middle of all

that suffering, we are waiting." What are we waiting for? We are waiting for the day when we will have new bodies, when we will have our full rights, the Bible says, as His adopted children!

He prepares us an eternal home.

Not only do we have a full inheritance, but He has prepared us...our Father has prepared us, the Bible says, an eternal home, where there will be no more cancer, and no more sickness, and no more death, and no more separation, and no more divorce, and no more crying, and no more pain, and no more hurt, because it will all be gone, because the Father will enjoy His time with His children for all of eternity! That is what we wait for. That's what we long for. Isn't it good that God desires to adopt us? He changes our future; He turns it upside down. All of eternity hinges on whether or not we are adopted into His family.

I'll never forget standing and giving that speech. Every line planned to offer that last plea for Caleb to be given to us. I sat down, and after the other officials had made their case, the judge began his ruling. I was sitting there in the tension of the moment and hearing him say, through the interpreter, that by the authority of the government of Kazakhstan, this child's status was now going to be changed. He was no longer an orphan. To hear him say that, "By the authority of the government of Kazakhstan", his family is changed. He no longer belongs to the government; he belongs to this family. Then to say, "By the authority of the government of Kazakhstan", his future is different. He will now leave today what is past, and he will go into a new future, not as an outcast, abandoned by the people around him, but embraced by the people around him.

I want to give you a picture this morning, in God's Word, of a Father who stands, and he says to you, "By the authority of the blood of Jesus Christ, and His resurrection from the grave, you are no longer an orphan. By the authority of Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the grave, you are no longer an outcast living without a family. I am your Father. By the authority of the blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the grave, you are no longer abandoned as a stranger, separated from me for all of eternity. You are no longer a stranger to me; you are a child." What an incredible picture of a God who longs, across all of our lives in this room, by the death and resurrection of Christ, to change our status forever, to change our family forever, and to change our future forever! You are no longer an orphan, you are no longer an outcast, you are no longer a stranger. There is no such thing in the family of God! So, as we reflect on that truth, as we see the lives of adopted children who have been impacted by families across this room, I remind you to see yourself in this picture as well, and know that there are no orphans in the family of God.

It was our last evening in Caleb's city, and we packed our bags and went to the airport. There we were going to say goodbye to the people that had been with us during our time there. One of those people was our interpreter, who on our first day in that city, we had met. This is a city full of cold orthodoxy and Muslim mosques, and the remnants of atheistic Russian communism. We got into the car driving away from the airport, and the interpreter was sitting there with us found out that I was a pastor and made it clear that she was an atheist, and that there was no God. She said, "God is for the weak." Thus began a second journey, where over the next few weeks, we had conversations at the lunch table, conversations in our apartment late at night, sitting there with Heather and me, and asking, "How do you know God exists? How do you know Jesus is true? How do you know Jesus can save us from our sins? How do you know I need that? Why do I even need that?"

I remember one night, after she had left, Heather and I had just fallen on our faces, and called out to God on her behalf. We called out that God would, with the love of the Father, break through the intellectual and emotional and spiritual barriers that were so clearly there.

So, we came to this last night in the airport, and we're preparing to leave, and I'm over on the side with our interpreter. She looked at me, and she said, "I just want you to know that two nights ago I decided to place my faith in Jesus Christ." She said, "I know that there is a God because He loves me. I know His love and I feel His love and I want to love Him."

Get the picture with me. Walking away from that airport, out to our plane, holding our adopted son in my arms, and turning back and waving goodbye to an adopted child in His arms. Ladies and gentlemen, are you ready to be adopted? Do you want to be His son, His daughter? Are you ready? He is ready. He has brought you to this point in your life, everything culminating even in this moment, in His plans that have been there since before He created the world to pour out His love on you, to pursue you with His love and to pay the price to love you. He longs to adopt you into His family.

Will you bow your heads with me? As we pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, I can't help but to remember the time in my own life when the love of God the Father became real to me for the first time. When I acknowledged my need for Him, confessed my need for His forgiveness, and He changed my status. He brought me into His family with His grace, and He gave me the hope of eternal life. So, the question I want to put before every single person who can hear my voice, regardless of how old or young you are, what place you are in life, my question is, "Are you a son? Are you a daughter? Are you a child of God? Have you been adopted?"

Now, I'm not asking if you go to church, if you take your family to church, if you go with your family to church; church cannot answer this question for you. Now, I'm not asking if you believe in God; I'm not asking if you believe that Jesus was on this earth. I'm not asking if you read your Bible; I'm not asking if you signed a card or walked an aisle. You can do all of those things and still never be a child of God. Are you His child? Do you call Him Father? Do you walk with Him as Father? Have you trusted in Him to change your status, change your family, and change your future forever? I pray that this would be that poignant moment for you, that all across this room, you let Him adopt you with His love.

I'm going to pray out loud in just a second, expressing a desire to be a child of God, much like I did at that point in my life. I want to invite you across this room, as I pray out loud, if you want to experience the joy of His adoption for the first time this morning, to say, "I'm going to lift my arms up to my heavenly Father, and trust in Him." I want to invite you to express this in your heart. I'll pray out loud, and you express this in your heart, just say to Him in your heart,

Dear God, I know that I need your forgiveness. I know that I am a sinner, and I believe that Jesus died on the cross, and He rose from the grave, so that I could be forgiven. So right here, right now, I trust in you. I trust in you to change my status, to make me right before you. I trust in you to pour out your love on me, as I become a part of your family. I trust in you to change my life for all of eternity. Thank you for being my Father.

If you have prayed that, and you have expressed that in your heart to God, I want to say to you, based on the authority of God's Word, that even though you have not done anything to earn His love, you have not done any works to get there, but simply by expressing your trust in Him, He says in His Word that He changes your status immediately. You are right before God. He changes your family immediately; you are a son or a daughter. He changes your future. There is no more need to worry about anything to come in this life because you have a full inheritance and an eternal home!

God be praised for the love and the grace and the mercy that drives you to adopt us. God, I praise you for men and women, children, students, across this room, who for the first time this morning, have trusted in you as their Father. God, I pray that in the days to come they would experience the joy of knowing your infinite love poured out more and more every day. God, I pray for every Christ-follower in this room, every son, daughter, Lord that you would help us to realize, as we celebrate Easter, the mammoth realities of what it means to be in your family; and that it would drive our Christianity. That we would live in such a way that the family name is honored and glorified in us. Help us to realize what it means to be your sons and your daughters. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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