

THE CALL TO BE GOD'S CHILDREN

Rom. 8:14-17 – The Call of God #3

Anna May Jarvis was a 42 year old employee of an insurance company in Philadelphia when her mother suddenly passed away. Her friends at the church where her father was the pastor noticed an almost immediate change in Anna May. She had always been quiet and studious, but now she became almost militant. She became obsessed to see that her mother and mothers everywhere were honored with a special day of their own. After a year of planning, she convinced her father to have the first mother's day service at the St. Andrews Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia, the church where her mother had taught Sunday School for many years. Because Anna May's mother had died on the 2nd Sunday of May, this was the day chosen for the first Mother's Day.

It was during that first official Mother's Day service that the idea for Father's Day was born. A visiting guest named Mrs. Bruce was listening to that 1st Mother's Day message when she thought it would be appropriate to have a day to honor fathers as well. She had lost her mother to an untimely disease when she was just a small girl and her father had raised her along with her 5 brothers and sisters by himself. So she went to her pastor 20 miles down the road in Fairmont, West Virginia and convinced him to have a special service honoring fathers. That first Father's Day service was held about a month after the first Mother's Day. It was targeted for June 5th because that was the birthday of Mrs. Bruce's father. But as the practice spread, the 3rd Sunday in June was chosen being more logistically acceptable. Since that time way back in 1908, Americans have set aside 2 weekends each year to honor their mothers and fathers. And both have become distinctive in their own ways. Mother's Day holds the record in the telephone industry for the most long distance calls. Father's Day holds a telephone industry record as well. It is the day when the most collect calls were made.

There is a reason why we have 2 Sundays every year to honor our parents. Our society recognizes the importance of families. Not all of us are fathers or mothers, but we all **are** children. It's interesting that Anna May Jarvis, the mother of Mother's Day, was never married herself. She never personally experienced motherhood. But she knew the importance of her mother as a child and as an adult. So she worked tirelessly, actually spending her entire retirement nest egg, so that her mother and mothers everywhere could have a special day of honor.

Just as our relationship with our earthly parents is critical to our physical well being, so our relationship with our heavenly parent is indispensable to a healthy spiritual well being. We have begun a series looking at

various calls of God to us that are given in the Bible. We have already looked at the call of God to salvation and the call of God to holiness. This morning we want to look together at the call to be God's children.

The first part of 1 John 3:1 reads:

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called to be children of God!"

That God should call us to be His children is one of the greatest manifestations of His love imaginable. We become children of God by heeding God's call to salvation, of course. John 1:12,13 says, "Yet to all who received him (Jesus Christ), to those who believe in his name, God gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." Now what are some of the blessings of this call to be a child of God. I would invite you see 4 wonderful blessings of being God's children from the 8th chapter of Romans with me this morning.

The 8th chapter of Romans is one of those choice passages of Scripture where various threads that have been introduced before are gathered together and tied up in a beautiful bow. The Apostle Paul presents here many blessings of the doctrine of justification that he has been developing. And right in the middle of this chapter, Paul speaks of 4 blessings that we have as God's children. Notice them with me in verses 14-17:

¹⁴ Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The 1st blessing that we have as a result of God's call to us to be his children is DIRECTION IN LIFE.

"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

One of the natural results of being a child is that a child is led by his parents. When Rockford Baptist called me to become the Senior Pastor, I prayed until I was confident of God's leading and accepted the call. That decision to move to the Rockford area didn't only affect me, it affected Sandy and our children as well. Sos was attending Schoolcraft college at the time – he ended up graduating from Grand Valley State University. Simeon and Hudson ended up going to and graduating from Rockford High School. A parent's decision has an effect on the entire family. And the younger the child, the more dramatic that effect. When Pastor Justin moved here to the Rockford area with their 3 young children, they were led by their parents and completely trusted their parent's judgment. This is one of the natural results of being a child. Now when a child grows up to become an adult, then the man or woman chooses to go and live anywhere in the world. And while Simeon also graduated from Grand Valley State, Hudson has escaped back to the University of Michigan for a couple of years. But as long as a person is a child, he is led by the parents.

Being a child of God brings with it the blessing of the possibility of being led by God. And whereas being led by earthly parents might or might not be of benefit to the child depending on the circumstances, being led by God always brings blessings because God being omniscient always knows the best path to take through life. God has given His own Spirit to each of His children. When Jesus promised that coming Spirit to His disciples, He emphasized that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit would be a directional one. "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13)

Now it is important for us as God's children to utilize this blessing to the fullest degree. For we only hurt ourselves when we ignore the Spirit's leading in our lives. Just as a young child can put himself in harm's way by ignoring the leading of his parents, wandering off into the street or not staying close to mom in a crowded mall, so we often put ourselves in harm's way when we fail to listen to the internal leading of God's Spirit.

A 2nd blessing of being a child of God is the possibility of having Freedom from Fear. Notice the 1st part of verse 15 again with me:

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.

In an old Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis is crawling into his parent's bed, snuggling between his father and mother. The reader can see the lightening flashing outside the window and the rain pelting down so he is led to assume that Dennis is afraid of a violent thunderstorm and has come into his parent's room for some comfort. As Dennis snuggles in between his mom and dad, the caption has him whispering, *I wouldn't be afraid of thunder if I could keep my mind off my thoughts.*

Who of us hasn't experienced times as a young child ourselves when we needed to be comforted by our parents? We just found a security being with our parents that we didn't feel when we were all alone, didn't we? Somehow being with our parents gave us a courage that we didn't have alone.

So it is that a close, intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father can bring freedom from fear into our lives. Fear can be enslaving. That is why the enemy loves to bring it into our lives. God's enemy desires to enslave us, to rob us of our spiritual freedom. He knows that fear is one of his most useful tools in accomplishing this. But one of the blessings of our living in light of our position as a child of God is freedom from fear.

Bishop Quayle tells of a time when he was especially anxious. He had personal health issues and problems in the church. He just couldn't seem to get to sleep one night as he tossed and turned, his mind filled with all kinds of anxieties. Finally he got up and went to his study. He opened his Bible and began reading Psalm 121. *I lift up my eyes to the hills- where does my help come from? My help comes from the*

Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Then he came to those 3rd and 4th verses. He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Suddenly he had the thought in his mind as if the Lord were speaking directly to him. *Quayle, why don't you go back to bed? I'll stay up the rest of the night. I'm going to be up anyway. There's no use both of us staying up all night.*

It was as if there was a huge load taken off of Quayle's shoulders. He had known these truths theologically, but now he experienced the peace that comes from being one of God's children. If our Heavenly Father is in control, then we need not be consumed with anxiety and fear. God never slumbers or sleeps. God is always on duty – 24/7. And God has promised to watch over and care for his children. Quayle went back to bed and slept soundly throughout the rest of the night. So we can have confidence and freedom from fear because we are God's children.

A 3rd blessing of being a child of God is the intimate relationship that we can have with Him.

Notice this brought out in the last part of verse 15 and verse 16:

*“And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”*¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

Every language has a special word that a child first calls his parents made up of the simplest speech sounds. Speech therapists sometimes speak of guttural, dental and labial sounds of speech. The guttural sounds are made between the back of the tongue and soft palate of the mouth. These are the hard sounds that come from the back of the throat that develop later in the child's speech process. The dental sounds are made between the blade of the tongue and just behind the upper teeth and the labial sounds are made with the lips. Both the dental and labial sounds develop much earlier in the speech process. This is the reason for a child saying papa or daddy or mommy before saying grandfather or grandmother. Every language has its dental and labial sounds for parents. These are the words that parents eagerly await as their baby develops for they are usually the first words uttered. Abba is the Aramaic word for daddy or papa. Abba was the word that a very young child would call his father. It was a tender term that reflected the intimate relationship between a daddy and his young child.

This is the kind of relationship that God invites us to because of His call to us to be His children. It is a relationship of complete trust. It is a relationship of complete confidence. It is a relationship of complete commitment.

A 4th and final blessing that we can anticipate because of our call to be children of God is an inheritance in glory. Notice this with me in closing as we read verse 17:

¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

One of the blessings that children normally have in a family is being included in the will. After the parents pass away, the children normally receive a good portion if not all of the inheritance. This is such an established pattern that we sometimes hear of children going to court to contest a will if there is some drastic deviation from this pattern.

Now children not only share in the inheritance, but they also share in the sufferings of the family, don't they? If parents face financial reversals, children are forced to cut back on expenses as well. For children are totally dependent on the stability of the family until they are old enough to start a family of their own. But in the end, children usually have some kind of an inheritance to anticipate – a house that has been purchased by parents, financial savings and annuities, pictures and other precious mementos.

Being a child of God puts the Christian in a position to anticipate a great inheritance one day. Now there will also be some suffering in this life, for the Lord Jesus Christ suffered as He walked this earth during His public ministry. He suffered rejection, misunderstanding, fatigue, criticism, and even physical suffering. So we should not feel that we should be exempt from all suffering for children suffer along with their parents in the household. But as the Apostle Paul will admit in verse 18 the sufferings that we endure during this lifetime are not even worth comparing with the glory of the inheritance that we will one day receive. Just imagine what the inheritance must be for children of the Creator of all things! After all, God owns everything that exists because He made it all. And He has willed His riches to the members of His family as it were. As God's children, we are destined to share in the glory of His inheritance. What an amazing and wonderful prospect this is.

Jamie Buckingham tells a story in his book, Power for Living. It was a story first told by Fred Craddock while lecturing at Yale University. He told of going back one summer to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, to take a short vacation with his wife. One night they found a quiet little restaurant where they looked forward to a private meal—just the two of them.

While they were waiting for their meal they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting guests. Craddock whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." He didn't want the man to intrude on their privacy. But the man did finally work his way over to their table.

"Where you folks from?" he asked in a friendly manner.

"Oklahoma." Fred replied.

"Splendid state, I hear, although I've never been there. What do you do for a living?" the stranger continued.

"I teach homiletics at the graduate seminary of Phillips University" Craddock answered.

"Oh, so you teach preachers, do you? Well, I've got a story I want to tell you." And with that he pulled up a

chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife.

Dr. Craddock said he groaned inwardly: "Oh no, here comes another preacher story. It seems everyone has one."

The man stuck out his hand. "I'm Ben Hooper. I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn't married when I was born so I had a hard time. When I started school my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn't a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and during lunch-time because the taunts of my playmates cut so deeply.

What was worse was going downtown on Saturday afternoon and feeling every eye burning a hole through me. They were all wondering just who my real father was.

When I was about 12 years old a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking right at me."

'Who are you, son? Whose boy are you anyway?'

I felt the old weight come on me. It was like a big black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down.

But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. "Wait a minute," he said, "I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a child of God."

With that he slapped me across the rump and said, "Boy you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it."

The old man looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, 'That was the most important single sentence ever said to me in my life.' With that he smiled, shook the hands of Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table to greet old friends.

Suddenly, Fred Craddock remembered. Ben Hooper. That name sounded familiar. He was the governor of the state of Tennessee. They had just been talking with the governor of the state of Tennessee."

Just as Ben Hooper's young life was completely turned around by his realization that he had great worth as a child of God, so this single truth has great power to change our lives as well. We all come from different family backgrounds. Some of us have very fond memories of our parents and our childhood. Others of us might have painful memories even of neglect and abuse. But what is far more important to us than any earthly heritage that we might have is whether or not we are one of God's children. We can know that we are one of God's children by accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12).

If you are one of God's children this morning, you can have direction in life. If you are one of God's children this morning, you can have freedom from fear in life. If you are one of God's children this morning,

you can have an intimate relationship with your Creator in life. If you are one of God's children this morning, you can anticipate an inheritance beyond your wildest imagination in glory.

Are you confident that you are one of God's children this morning?