

“This is My Son”

Galatians 4:4-7

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The old adage, “He’s like a son to me,” is one that has been used often by people to describe the affection they have for someone who is not actually their child. Whether speaking about the friend of one of your children, a distant family member that is dear to you, or just a young man in your congregation that has created a bond with you, there are many instances of a close relationship developing that is very “son-like.” Caring for someone like a son, though, is not the same as declaring them to actually be your son. That young man who is like a son to you doesn’t get all the benefits that a true son is given. He doesn’t get the inheritance that a real son would get from his father. Now, that is not meant to minimize fatherly figures in the lives of young men, because it’s imperative that they continue to have those examples and leaders in their lives, but it simply points out the truth that being “like a son” is not the same as the declaration, “This is my son.”

But, in contrast, adoption is another story. Our text this morning says that Jesus came into the world “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (v. 5).” Being adopted as a son is not “like” being a son. It is the same thing as being a natural born son. That child receives not only the affection of their father, but they are grafted into the line of succession, given their inheritance as one who is claimed as their father’s own dear child. And that is what Paul highlights for us this morning. You are not “like a son” to your Father in heaven, but He is truly your Father as one to whom He has proclaimed, “This is my son.” You are indeed true sons of God who have been given the inheritance that has been promised to all who believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation. It is the same inheritance that Jesus has as the only-begotten Son of God, and it has been given to you according to His grace and mercy.

In terms of the sonship that Paul addresses for us this morning, there are an ever-abounding number of false sons out in the world. So many try to claim their sonship of their own free will, but think about the absurdity of that idea. If you are going to be someone’s son, you cannot just claim to be their son and it forces them into agreeing. To be declared a son and receive all the benefits of such status, it must be given to you. Decision theology is the way of the majority of modern Christianity, but when we think about it in the context of our Epistle, it really just falls apart. “I’ve decided to be a child of God,” is never uttered anywhere in the Scripture. However, according to the Word of the Lord in Ephesians 1:4, God did choose you in Christ before the foundation of the

world. Anyone who believes that their choice makes them an heir to the kingdom of God is fooling themselves, and placing their faith in unnecessary jeopardy.

Then there are those who hide in the shadows and claim to be sons but without taking on any of the responsibility. To be a son is to care for the estate, and guard the inheritance that is promised to you, so to neglect that duty is to be a false son. The antinomians and all those who believe that the Law does not apply to them or has no more purpose have abandoned their duties as a son. The Law of God is not a scourge upon humanity, but a curb, mirror, and guide, as Luther tells us. As those who are in the faith, you should desire to please God by keeping His Law. It is given to keep you on the path of faith, and keep you in the sonship into which you are claimed. You must not squander the possession you have been given by failing to properly care for it. Do not abandon something that is good, holy, and perfect simply because somehow you think that only the Gospel matters. Both Law and Gospel must be preached together.

There are also those who are on the other side of that coin. Those false sons believe somehow that they actually have the ability to keep the Law. You would think that a simple reading of our text would put that to bed, but they worm around those Scripture passages and find ones that in their minds (falsely) support their ideas. “God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law (v. 4).” Jesus was born under the Law so that He could save all those who are born under the Law. To be born under the Law is to be subject to that Law, and thus also be subject to the punishment of failing to keep it. If it were possible for you to do that yourselves, then why did Jesus bother coming down from heaven at all?

The people of God have been losing this battle for millennia. No matter how many times the Lord gives forgiveness and fulfills His promise of redemption, His people still fail Him. Isaiah says in verse 10 of our Old Testament Lesson, “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.” You cannot allow yourself to become so comfortable in the grace of God that you forget that you still inhabit the sinful flesh, as one who is a son of Adam. You must mortify your sinful flesh and keep it in check as the Apostle Paul teaches in his letter to the Romans. And the only way to keep it in check and guard the great inheritance that has been given to you is through the work of Jesus. It is only through the work of the holy Son of God that you are able to kill the deeds of your body and keep the sin power at bay. And because you have been given faith in the one true God, and have been redeemed by His only-begotten Son, you too are claimed as His own son—a true son of God.

But to be a true son of God is not to be perfect, innocent, and holy like Jesus Christ (which many will teach). To be a true son of God is to acknowledge your inability to do anything of your own power. It is to submit to the will of your Heavenly Father the same way our Lord Jesus submitted to His will in Gethsemane as He went to the cross for your salvation. Being a true son is acknowledging that you are indeed a poor, miserable sinner in need of the forgiveness which only God can bring you. You must humble yourself before the Lord, knowing that you are utterly incapable of keeping His holy Law, and pleading with Him to have mercy upon you for the sake of Christ. And because of the blood of Jesus we have reconciliation with our Father who would otherwise be estranged from us. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

So, are you a true son, or a false son? How are you supposed to know? By the blood of Jesus which cleanses you from your sin, you know. By the work of the one who mediates before God in heaven, you know that you have been reconciled to Him. You are now receiving the grace of your merciful Father, the same way the prodigal son received it in Jesus’ parable in Luke 15. You walk in the light by faith, and it is that faith which brings you the forgiveness that He has promised you. To be a true son is not to do enough or earn the right to be called a son. It is to be present in order to receive the mercies of your loving Father. It is to come to the divine service of your God and receive His gifts of grace by His preordained means.

And so, we gather today around His Holy Word, which announces the grace of God unto all of you and forgives you all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We gather around the baptismal waters that unite us as a family in Christ, having been baptized into His death and resurrection, being claimed as His own dear children in those precious waters. We come to His table to receive His very body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. There is the assurance of your inheritance. There is the certainty that you have been given the gift of being the adopted son of God. And that adoption into sonship makes you Jesus’ brother. He is our brother and the Great Redeemer who protects you and keeps you in the faith. By His blood you stand as those who are in the line of succession, co-equals with the Lord according to His humanity.

Jesus came into the world, born under the Law, to make you His equals. To give you the gift of salvation which can only be for those who are sons of God is the purpose for which He went to the cross. The reason He was raised up on the third day was so that you too would receive that blessed inheritance—to live eternally in body and soul when they are reunited in that glorious day. Do not look to yourself for the assurance that you

are God's own son. You will not find it within or without you. That truth lies only in His blood. It lies in the blood of His vicarious atonement which has made your inability to please your God irrelevant in His salvific plan. You stand redeemed, perfected, and adopted before the Father, who has claimed you as His own and made you righteous by His just declaration. On the last day when you are judged, you will not hear, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you (Matt. 25:12)," but only, "This is My beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased (Matt 3:17)." For that reason, and only that reason, you will receive what is promised to those who are sons of God—eternal life in His heavenly dwelling, forever in the light of His great glory, ruling alongside your Brother, your Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.