

Awe Over Adoption

1 John 3:1-3

Introduction

- I know half of you are scared to death because you think, during the sermon we are lining up a bunch of kids in the lobby for everyone to take home after the service!
 - o Breathe easy...that's not happening until next week! I am kidding. This series is not about guilting anyone into adoption or foster care, instead it's about awakening us to God's grace and heart, and calling everyone to be involved somehow
 - o Adopting, or being a foster parent, isn't for everybody...More people than are doing it should, but everybody does have a part to play.
 - We are a gospel people and these are gospel issues....
- The church of Jesus Christ should be on the front line of building families through adoption and restoring families through foster care...
 - o Ephesians 1:5, "He predestined us for adoption as sons."
 - o Jesus said in Matthew 18:5, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."
 - o James 1:27, "true religion is to visit the orphan in their affliction."
- At any given time there are well over half a million kids in foster care, half them them don't come out the same year they go in, and half of that number, are waiting for adoption because parental rights have been terminated and there is no hope for reunification¹
 - o That's not out there somewhere, 2,000 kids enter the system every year in the Triad alone², with neglect and drug abuse making up 90% of the cause for placement³
 - o There 15 million "double orphans" worldwide⁴...
 - o There are over 800,000 abortions, down from 1 million in 2011, I know it breaks your heart...and we must continue to advocate for the unborn.
 - But our greatest opportunity to end abortion is to convince those at risk...there is a people who will foster while you get your life together, who will be for you and for reunification...and if tragically that fails, then we will adopt...
 - Psalm 27:10 "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in."

¹ US Health and Human Services Official Website

² Annie E Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center

³ Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and reporting System, 2015

⁴ UICEF

- We know God’s heart breaks for these kids, we know He stands ready to take them...that happens through the church.
- As people step forward and say, “Here I am Lord, send me”...and the rest of the church rallies around them, and says, “If you go down, we will hold the rope for you...”

Introduction

- Today I want to lay out the great reason that we adopt and foster...
 - o It’s not the only reason. There are good reasons such as compassion, but I am telling you for the believer there is something greater than a cute picture and a sad story...
 - o And trust me...the financial, emotional, and spiritual toll it will take is probably going to require a great reason, not just a good one...
- So here it is, before we ever think about adopting, we must realize we were adopted. Before we think about restoring, we were restored ourselves...
 - o Gratitude, wonder, amazement, awe over God having stepped in our life, when we were vulnerable, enables us to step into other people’s lives when they are vulnerable... The gospel inspires awe in the children of God.
 - o And that’s where we have to start...the Bible says that we were the orphan, we were estranged from God our Father because of sin. Be He came for us, He chose us, He rescued us, He restored us, He reconciled us, He adopted us...
 - o And we can’t lose the wonder of that.
- No matter the beauty of the thing, we have a unique ability to get used to it don’t we. We don’t even see it...
 - That’s where we need to start, if we aren’t in awe we won’t adopt, or foster. Let’s dive in.

Scripture

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

- There is fact, and emotion in the passage for today. We are going to see the emotion in a moment, this is the fact...
 - o Illustration: Think of a marriage, there is signing the marriage license, fact, you may kiss the bride and everyone cheers, emotion. Think of a graduation. There is the degree, fact. And then there is the throwing your cap, emotion.

- That's how this passage works. The last couple verses of chapter 2 are all about our position before God and our behavior according to that position...
 - o And our position as Christians is that we are abiders. Christians abide in the vine. This isn't the only book of the Bible written by John, who had a very close personal relationship with Jesus...
 - o In John 15, he gives a striking analogy of what it's like to follow Christ, and he says it's like abiding in the vine...that it is only in being connected to the vine that we will have a life and relationship with God and bear fruit in our lives... ^{John 15:4} Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
- And isn't it interesting that he brings that language back here. He says, children, abide in Christ, be in the vine. If you want to grow, and you want to bear fruit, you have to be in the vine...
 - o Illustration: it's like, there are really only two ways to try and exhibit the characteristics of a growing Christian life, practicing righteousness as he said here in verse 29, organic, or mechanical
 - o So take gardening for example, if I want tomatoes I can tend the vine, make sure it's healthy, and if the branches are in the vine they will grow fruit inevitably. Or on the other hand, if the vine dies...I will have to staple them on. Look kids, tomatoes!
 - I think at its core, when Jesus comes back, abiders and staplers will have very different reactions to His coming...
 - Sure, the people that have rejected Him will shrink away, but really anyone who is not an abider will shrink away
- And that's the idea here, v. 28... "so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming."
 - o Church, if Jesus Christ appears today, before this message ends, do you have confidence, or would you shrink in shame?
 - o The answer to that question is all about abiding in the vine...so the question is, how do you become an abider?

²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

- We have to be careful here, because the natural impulse of the human heart is to read this and say, practice righteousness...I asked how do we become an abider? We want to answer, practice righteousness...
 - o We can't do a big thing here, but working for salvation negates our need for grace. We would rather be a people who earn God's love, we'd rather put him in our debt rather than realize our sin created a debt we could never repay...

- o Illustration: Veggie Tales is undoubtedly the most successful faith based children's franchise of all time...at the height of success in 1999 and 2000, the videos outsold every other kids production in the world including Pokemon, and Barney...which, you know...
 - Despite the success, the company went under early in the 2000s and creator Phil Vischer said, "Did I just spend the last 10 years teaching kids to behave like Christians without teaching them Christianity?"
 - There it is...it is so possible to act like without being.
- And that's why we have to get this right, the passage says everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. Gospel: This is the point. We aren't born into Christianity, we are reborn into to.
 - o We aren't to the emotion yet, we aren't to throwing the cap, or kissing the bride. This is about the truth, the declaration of being reborn...
 - o Illustration: Religious leader comes to Jesus in John 3, totally intrigued, and Jesus says, "You must be born again, you must become new." That's what every Christian has to eventually realize, I don't need to get better, I need to get new. I need to be reborn...
 - And that is what Jesus came to do, found a new humanity, and offer people the opportunity to get in on it through faith...
 - We sinned, and we were put out of the family, Jesus paid for that sin on the cross and starts a new family through his resurrection...
 - No more sweeping analogy than new birth⁵
 - Adoption and reconciliation through foster care, these are pictures. But actually what Christ has done is more
 - What Christ does in the gospel goes beyond adoption...He makes us new, reborn into His family...
 - Hey, for someone in here that's good news...you are tired of trying to work for your salvation, or tired of the fear that comes from knowing you can't work for salvation
 - Good news, Jesus says whosoever will may come...this new life awaits you
 - Now the outburst, the emotion, the ovation...

3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

- See, stop and look...some translations say "behold." Don't just know it's there, but look at it...
- What kind of love is this, it's a figure of speech? It literally means, what country is this from?⁶

⁵ ZECNT, Jobes

⁶ TNTC, Stott

- o It's gotta be from somewhere else because I have never seen anything like this...
- o A God would give to us a love like this...that's not a great translation, some say that He lavishes upon us, the KJV says that he bestows upon us...that we should not just be called His children but be His children...
- This is an outburst...the fact of the new birth producing feelings for about our Heavenly Father
 - o Illustration: Accidental presidents, Eight men in a moment became president because of the death, Tyler, Johnson, Roosevelt
 - It's like, you are the president, act this way, stand here, go to this dinner, say this at the speech...there is a moment where you are like, "I am the president! How could it be? This is unbelievable!"
 - It's a moment that way where John is just caught up in the emotion of the new birth...that we won't be cast to hell because of our sin, that we have a relationship with God, that we now have a church family, that we are going to heaven when we die, that we have a purpose in life, that the spirit of God interacts with our spirit...all of it is just enough to overwhelm him.
- John is in the final third of his life, but he is acting like a child who has just been swept up in the arms of his Father...
 - There are times when God sweeps us up, and the relationship trumps the rationale of it all...
 - There are times we understand, and church there are times we stand under and gaze...
 - There are times when we know the truth, and there are times when it bursts alive...
- What's this passage about? Awe, wonder, amazement. The truth always warms, but sometimes it breaks us...in a good way
 - o What do we deserve because of sin, what have we been given because of the cross? Are we taking for granted the fact that our life and legacy doesn't have to be defined by our greatest failures? We are heading for an eternity where everything sad comes untrue, and no sin will taint our relationship with God...
 - o Have we gotten used to the view?
 - Stop, breathe, slow down, assess the situation...that's what I am calling us to do today.
 - Stop...if we are going to stand in awe, we have to stop first. Dallas Willard said, "Hurry is the greatest enemy of the Christian life." It steals our gaze...stop, stand, and behold...

Stand in awe of God adopting you into his family

- In your estimation, is what God did in your life, chasing you down, changing your heart, extending you the kingdom invitation...is it great? How's the view?
 - o Because if that isn't right, adoption and foster care will be an afterthought rather than a heartbeat for us...Illustration: In his book "Adopted For Life," Russell Moore sets up an illustration like this...
 - o You're just about to sign the papers on an adoption, this kid is legally going to become part of a new family...then the social worker says, couple things you should know. The child is a fire starter, he acts out sexually, his lineage is filled with alcoholism and violence, he has been in need of counseling forever, he's hurt other people and on and on the list goes...and then they say, "Sign right here."
 - Should they sign? Here is the point, as I told that story every single one of us assumed the role of the adoptive parent, when from God's perspective, that child was us!
- It was you and I...in our sin we were rebellious, running away, treasonous against God...fighting our way out of the family...
 - o This how Paul describes us in Ephesians 2:12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
 - Saw a bumper sticker that says, "But God..."
 - "Christianity itself seals our heart for adoption, Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption."⁷
- Does that humble you?
 - You can't be humbled unless you need to be. You can't be brought low unless you are too high...
- And for some of us here today, that is the problem. We don't see ourselves as being on the other side of the table, that we were the vulnerable that God had to choose...
 - o We think God got a pretty good deal with us...I know that's true in my life if I don't watch myself
 - o We've forgotten it, we've not taken in the view...would you open yourself to being humbled?
 - o This is how crazy your life was, and mine. God didn't have to simply sign His name, and hand over money. He signed in blood, handing over His son...
 - If you need to be humbled, consider this, the only way you come into the kingdom is the Son of God beaten to a pulp, shamed before the world as He hangs naked on a cross, pierced for our transgressions...

⁷ Knowing God, Packer

- That's what it took...We aren't the rescuers, we are the rescued on a mission...the awe, the amazement, the wonder of it all...

Conclusion

- John stands in awe of God, and that produces the practice of righteousness...
- John stands in awe of God ^{3:3} And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
 - o The evidence of hope in God, faith, rebirth...it's practicing righteousness, it's a life filled with purity...
 - o Illustration: We need your birth certificate, why? Check my pulse...
 - o So as we close, bringing it back to our series...if we aren't in awe, we won't adopt. If we are not standing in reverence, we won't reconcile...
 - But if we take in the view, if we realize, it was us...suddenly our hearts break and our hands open wide.
- I am not pushing the church in this direction because I am passionate about adoption, I am passionate about adoption because God lights a fire in people for this ministry .
 - o But here is what I have learned, cute picture and sad story may get you in the door...Motivation comes fast, leaves faster...Tim McGraw
 - o Is it enough with the financial cost, the emotional cost, even the physical cost is high...
 - It's not an easy road, it's not an easy road to walk beside the families that step forward over the next couple years...God rescued us, we were adopted, that's a deep well...
- Is God moving in you?

*Sermon by Andrew Hopper, lead pastor of Mercy Hill Church in Greensboro, N.C.
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