

Blessed Adoption

January 8, 2023

Ephesians 1:3-14

Every week, after we've taken up our offering, we sing this short little song that most, if not all, of us learned from a very early age; what we call "The Doxology." We all know the words to it, much like we know the "Lord's Prayer." However, just like the "Lord's Prayer," many of us don't often take the time to stop and really think about the words we're saying, to consciously consider what each word and phrase is saying. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." Every sentence tells us to "praise God," and each one has its own theological significance. The first sentence tells us why we are praising God, the second clarifies to whom this command goes out, the third clarifies what position of authority and power God has, and the final sentence defines the triune nature of God. So, we have a command to all of Creation to praise a God that is above all things in heaven and on earth, and from whom all blessings are so graciously bestowed. What are these "blessings," though?

This introduction to the letter to the Ephesians, while it says "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," specifies two really big blessings. The first is that of "adoption." Whether we are talking about adoption of a child or that of a pet, we have an increase in family size, an increase in the love shown forth by the one adopting. However, consider the conditions that need to happen before that adoption happens. If a child is adopted out of the foster care system, this means that not only have they been forcibly removed from their parents' home and the parental rights of said parents have been permanently stripped from them, but any and all fictive kin (grandparents, aunts, uncles, older cousins, etc.) have said they cannot or won't take that child in. As for domestic and international adoptions of babies, the mother has to conclude she either doesn't want or can't keep the baby, whether because she financially can't support it, the child is a result of her being attacked, or any of a number of other reasons. As for pets, the owner has to either give the pet up because it cannot be supported or it has to be forcibly removed in some cases. Regardless of what we think of when we hear the word "adoption," certain aspects remain constant and true. Namely, before the child or pet can be adopted and welcomed in, it first must be rejected, deemed "undesirable" for whatever reason. Then, after that child or pet has been rejected, there must be someone else who steps in and says, "I have love enough to bring in this child/pet, care for him/her/them/it as if he/she/they/it were my own, and never know the difference." So, God has adopted each and every one of us. This means that, despite our sinfulness and our "undesirability" because of it, God still loves us enough to call us "sons" and "daughters" without a second thought. The blessings don't stop there, though.

Like any adopted child, we are welcomed into the family and given full benefits, even made heirs to an inheritance. Like grafted branches on a tree, every one of us has been grafted onto the same Tree of Life, coming from various places and times, being grafted on at different points, but we're all fed by the same root system. What makes this blessing all the sweeter, though, is that, as the author of this letter writes, we are "*destined* for an inheritance." It's not that it's offered to us and we must accept it; it's ours, plain and simple. It's not that this is conditionally given; it's irrevocable. We will all receive this inheritance at the designated time, full stop. Additionally, though, to say we are *destined* for this inheritance is to say that it is

God's plan, God's intent, to give it to us. This inheritance is as much divinely-given as it is divinely-inspired. For such gifts, there is no denying that our God is worthy of far more than a lifetime of praises, which raises an interesting question: Why? Why would God so graciously adopt us and destine us for so great an inheritance as salvation and life eternal in the City of God?

The simple answer is "the same reason we have all been given the various gifts of the Spirit." None of us has all gifts, and therefore none of us can be "all things to all people." This necessitates then our being in community, our coming together to meet all needs. We have been given the gifts of the Spirit that we might use those gifts for furthering God's Kingdom. We have been adopted into the fold that we might welcome others into the fold, reconciling not only humanity's relationship with God, but also healing the divides between the various groups within humanity. We have all been destined for the same inheritance that we might all come together as one, all of us equal in the eyes of God, both here and in the hereafter. This, as it turns out, is the point of the letter to the Ephesians as a whole. The church in Ephesus was feeling disillusioned, wondering where God was, how they were going to survive, what purpose God had for them. This letter, then, served as a reassurance that God has a purpose for all of us, both collectively and individually. As we go forward and start off this new year, we, like the Ephesians, must not only be praising God for giving us a purpose, but fulfilling that purpose. So, let us start this year out right: What is God's purpose for us, individually and collectively, for this year?