

There are a couple reasons we don't have a rescue dog. For those of you who remember, it's not because we have white carpet and furniture. My wife will tell you partly it's because she could never pick one out at the shelter. It'd be impossible to walk past all the kennels and cages, look at each dog, and pick only one to take home. How could she leave all the rest? There'd always be another sad faced dog needing a home. But just because we can't doesn't mean pet adoption isn't good. It's a great thing. So many pets have great homes today because of adoption.

Now this isn't an animal shelter. We aren't dogs begging to be rescued and taken home by everyone who walks by while all the rest get left behind. Yet our rescue wasn't an automatic. We were not naturally in God's family. We aren't naturally part of this family we call Gethsemane either. Yet this morning we look at the first verses of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We're reminded of the special way in which we can be confident we're part of God's family and also enjoy a shared relationship among ourselves. We've been...

**Adopted as Sons and Daughters in Christ
Chosen by God
Ransomed by Christ**

How much worse would pet adoptions be if animal shelters and agencies would take all the dogs outside and line them up every so often? Then walk the lineup shouting out which ones were adoptable. No, yes, no, no, yes, no. Without any trace of caring or compassion they'd make snap decisions about whether or not a dog could be adopted. It sounds terrible. How sad for the dogs not selected? What happens to them? Doesn't every dog need a chance to be adopted? Can't some exception be made? To callously say no to one over another demonstrates a lack of love we figure. Yet that kind of picture is exactly how some people figure God did it with us.

Go back to the beginning, the creation of the world. Even before that, in the eternity before time began, when it was just God in existence and nothing else he chose us. This is not the picture of God lining up all human beings who would ever live and himself walking down the line shouting no, yes, no, no, yes, no. Do not picture God as some heartless caretaker with no compassion or any trace of love. To picture God this way is irresponsible. To ask any questions that would lead to those conclusions about God's choosing degrades what God did. To think of it as anything other than loving is to miss what Paul says. **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."** God's choosing was all about love, caring, and compassion. He chose us in Christ.

God did not look into the future and see you here on Sunday August 23, 2015 and say to himself, "Well if they're in church they must be good, worthy of being saved." He didn't choose anyone because they were already holy or blameless. God only had one thing he concentrated on. Something he was already planning. Sending Jesus Christ as the Savior. It was only in view of Christ Jesus, his cross, his empty tomb, what he did for human beings, only in view of Christ did God choose. People who weren't holy and blameless were chosen anyway in Christ. You are holy and blameless in Christ. You are chosen by God in Christ.

Adopted pets get chosen and go home with their new families. And in so many cases they become so important they're treated as part of the family. Human beings didn't start out as part of God's family. We were on the outside of any kind of relationship with God when we were born. In our sins we wanted nothing to do with God. We were anything but holy and blameless as our lives progressed. Even becoming members of this church didn't take away our sins or make us less selfish. We are just as much able to watch out for ourselves and not care about others. We could push and shove to make ourselves feel better, look better to others. Our sinful nature would cause me and you to do anything but act as part of a family.

Lost having no relationship with God, there was a specific point when that relationship with God started. **"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."** When God chose you he marked you off as his. God said, "Hands off, he's mine. Don't touch, she belongs to me. I'm adopting these." Then to complete the adoption he set in motion a plan. Before the world was created he established that nothing would stop him from adopting his chosen. To achieve a rightful legal status as adopted sons and daughters sin in you and me needed to be dealt with. Confronting it firsthand was Christ Jesus. The moment Jesus said **"It is finished"** your sin was completely paid for. Guilt held no power anymore. Death became something different. In love God chose you. Love led him to adopt you. God's free love given through the One he loves, Christ. God's love in Christ chose you to be his son or his daughter.

God deserves your praise for rescuing you and adopting you. But the blessings don't stop there. Think of what your adoption means. A legal adoption conveys rights and privileges to the one adopted. When God adopted you it came with all sorts of rights and privileges. You get to call God your Father. You can say you belong to God. The future causes you no worries. Death can't harm you. In Christ God has taken care of everything. You have an inheritance that nothing can diminish and won't be taken away. Put away for you, in Christ, is a bodily resurrection just like Jesus received. Protected from everything is a heavenly promise that you'll live forever there someday just like Jesus. Being adopted, you are in every way like the true Son. You are adopted by God into his family in Christ.

Even adopted pets come home and make messes on the carpeting or chew up shoes. Just because they're adopted doesn't mean they don't do bad things. God created Adam and Eve perfect and without sin. They were automatically part of God's family. It's what God wanted for everyone else who would follow, including the ones he chose before creation. But then Adam and Eve sinned. They separated themselves from God and infected all people who followed them with sin too. So even though God chose and adopted some, all were sinful. The sin of humanity totaled too much for anyone to pay. The price was too high. People liked their sins too. They got comfortable and made life as easy as possible without God.

The price of our sins is too high. But God promises a price has already been paid sufficient for all people. It covered everyone, including you and me. The ransom price paid to free you from your sins was Jesus' own blood. **"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."** There could be no choosing and no adoption without the redemption and ransom paid by Christ. Jesus came for humanity, to do what he did for you and for me. Saving people from their sins, forgiving people in Christ, giving away inheritance, and adopting people into his family. God's grace takes action. God lavishes his grace over and above what you would expect.

Christ Jesus paid the ransom for you. He paid with his own blood, a sacrifice necessary to overcome your sins. By his blood Christ binds us together in a unique and special bond. Look around this morning. These are blood brothers and sisters. Sons and daughters of God because of the Savior Jesus. God doesn't leave this a mystery. **"And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ."** This was fun for God, his good pleasure. To reveal Christ to you. To make sure in all history that you heard about it. He joined you with each other and with me, putting us right where he wants us in Christ. We get to see fellow believers and rejoice and praise God. Other believers get to see us and rejoice and praise God.

If you have a pet, adopted from a shelter or born and raised by you, you don't look at them as strange. They're yours. You love them and care for them. They're family. We are not strangers or burdens to God. We belong to him. You belong to him. He loves you and cares for you. You're family to him in Christ. And we aren't strangers or burdens to each other either. Praise God we share the same inheritance and blessings. We've been chosen by God. We've been ransomed by Christ. We're related. We're family. We're adopted as sons and daughters in Christ.