Sermon Series: What Does It Mean to Be Saved?
Sermon Title: Welcome to the Family

Text: **Romans 8:12-17 -- So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him**.

Introduction: When I was growing up, one of the best-known pop groups was the Swedish band "**Abba**." They topped the charts worldwide, producing eight albums and twenty-six #1 singles, including "***Knowing Me, Knowing You***" and "***Dancing Queen***." They won the 1974 ***Eurovision Song Contest*** (*kind of a European Battle of the Bands*) with their hit "***Waterloo***". To date, they have sold over 375 million records worldwide, making ABBA the second-best-selling band in the history of recorded music. So, you can imagine that for most of my teenage years, whenever I heard the word "***Abba,***" I immediately thought of their songs. **However, after I became a Christian, the word took on an entirely different meaning for me**. It was one of the men that discipled me as a young believer who taught me that the word "***Abba***" as it's used in the Bible means "***Papa***." Our Lord used it that way (**Mark 14:36 -- And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will"**) as did the Apostle Paul in **Romans 8:15**. ***It is the name by which a child refers to his father that suggests*** UNREASONING TRUST. Before I became a Christian, like many others, I thought that God was remote, distant, and untouchable. But when I came into a saving relationship with Him and later learned of this word, I knew that it was accurately describing my Heavenly Father as loving, caring, protective, and generous—**a true Abba (Papa) who was and still is interested in all of His children**. By the way, did you know that the Scriptures teach that we are God's children? **John 1:12** says, "**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**…" This and other texts indicate that not everyone is a child of God, but only a select group. The process by which we become His children is referred to as ADOPTION, and here's how it is defined:

Adoption is an act of God whereby He makes us members of His family (*Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 736*). The Bible teaches that when a person becomes a believer, he joins the family of God. ***This implies two things***: **First, that any previous family ties are severed. What am I talking about? Listen to these words from Ephesians 2:3 -- Among the sons of disobedience we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind; and again in 1 John 3:10 -- By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. So, the good news is that when we are adopted into God's family, we are no longer children of wrath (i.e., children of the devil). Second, that as God's children, we now have been granted all the rights and privileges of being in God's family**. This morning, we're going to study what the Bible has to say about adoption and several of the implications that it has for us with regard to our relationship with God and others. Let's begin by looking at the Biblical support (or evidence) for this doctrine.

The Evidence for Adoption (**Ephesians 1:4-6 – He (God the Father) chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved**). The Apostle Paul writes that Christians are predestined to be adopted by God through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. **In His model prayer, Jesus encouraged His followers to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven"** (**Matthew 6:9**), **in recognition that we are His children**.

Think about this for a moment -- believers have a relationship with God that is similar to that which Christ had with Him, though not entirely the same (**For an example, see John 5:20-23a**).

You may be wondering about saints in the Old Testament. Are they also adopted by God? In the Old Testament, the Jews were sometimes referred to as children of God (**Isaiah 43:6-7 -- I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth; Malachi 2:10 -- Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?**) **However, even though there was an awareness of God as Father to the people of Israel, the Apostle Paul explains that the full benefits and privileges of being in God's family are experienced not by children of the flesh (those who are born into the nation of Israel) but by children of the promise (i.e., those who put their faith in God as Abraham did). This is what the Bible says in Romans 9:6-8 -- For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. Now that Christ has come, the Spirit of God has been poured into the hearts of all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike** (**Romans 8:16 -- The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God**). As children of God, we can rightfully call each other brothers and sisters. After all, through faith in the Lord, we share the same family tree. IMAGINE THAT! ALL TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST ARE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY OF GOD. CAN IT REALLY BE ANY BETTER THAN THAT?

I read this week about a kid who was bullied at school back in the early 2000s because he **pretended** that the talk show host and comedian, **Jay Leno**, was his uncle. Somehow, Leno found out about this and decided to help the young man**. Here's what the comedian said in his own words**: I got a letter one day from a kid saying he was in trouble because he had told his friends that I was his uncle and that we would go driving around (together). And his friends all called him a big liar. He wanted to know if I could give him a ride to school one day in my **Lamborghini Countach**. It so intrigued me that I called the kid, of course speaking to his mother first, and said, "**Why don't we do this next week**?" So, I drove out to where the kid lived and picked him up. Then we waited until the opportune time, when most of the buses are in front of the school and all the kids are hanging out, and we pull up in front, the doors go up into the sky, the kid goes, **''Bye Uncle Jay**!'' And I go, **''OK, Billy, take care, I'll pick you up next week and we'll go drivin**g.' **And of course, all his friends' mouths are hanging open. It was hysterical**. Pretty nice of Jay Leno to pretend he was this young man's uncle, wouldn't you say? **Listen: As cool as it might be for a kid to say that his uncle is a famous TV personality (even if it wasn't true), it pales in comparison to the absolute truth and the sheer delight that we experience when we are adopted into God's family and start calling Him Abba, Father**.

The Means of Adoption. How does it happen?

- **It is made possible by the death of Christ** (**Galatians 4:4-6 -- But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**). In redeeming us, Jesus bestowed on every Christian the privilege of being adopted into God's family. And now we have nothing short of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to bear witness with our spirit that we are God's children (**Romans 8:16**).
- **It happened when we believed** (**John 1:12 -- But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**). To receive Christ is to believe in Christ. It is to place our trust in Him for our salvation.
- **It will be completed when we receive resurrection bodies** (**Romans 8:23 -- And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**). **The idea here is that our adoption by God will not be fully realized until we are finally made like Christ himself**. At His return, we will possess a body that will no longer undergo death or decay. Then we will know in the fullest sense what it means to be a child of God.

When the Chinese dictator **Mao Zedong** died in 1976, ***his physician, Dr. Li Zhisui***, was given an impossible task. The Politburo demanded, "***The chairman's body is to be permanently preserved***." The staff objected. The doctor objected. He knew a body with no life was doomed to rot. But he had his commands. Twenty-two liters of formaldehyde were pumped into the body. The result was horrifying. Mao's face swelled up like a ball, and his neck was as thick as his head. His ears stuck out at right angles, and the chemical oozed from his pores. A team of embalmers worked for five hours with towels and cotton balls to force the liquids down into his body. Finally, the face looked normal, but the chest was so swollen that his jacket had to be slit in the back and his body covered with the red Communist Party flag. **That sufficed for the funeral, but the powers above wanted the body permanently preserved to lie in state at Tiananmen Square**. For a year, Dr. Zhisui supervised a team working in an underground hospital as they tried to preserve the remains. **Because of the futility of the task, a government official ordered that an identical wax dummy be made. Both the body and the replica were taken to the mausoleum in Tiananmen Square**. Tens of thousands came to file past a crystal casket and pay their respects to the man who'd ruled China for twenty-seven years. But even the doctor didn't know if they were seeing Mao or a waxwork dummy.

The Apostle Paul wants us to know that God has no interest in preserving these earthly bodies for eternity, but fully intends to give us new ones that are imperishable, raised in power and spiritual in nature. This is the final act that completes our adoption as His Sons. **We will possess a new body similar to the resurrected body of Christ**.

The Privileges of Adoption. Here are some of the benefits of adoption.

- **Adoption impacts how we relate to each member of the Trinity**.
  - **It impacts our relationship with the Father** (**Matthew 6:9 -Our Father in heaven**). As our Heavenly Father, we can expect FROM God what we would like to receive FROM our earthly fathers and even more. **He loves us** (**1 John 3:1 -- See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are**), **provides for us** (**Matthew 7:9-11 -- Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him**); **supplies peace when we need it** (**1 Corinthians 1:3 --- Grace to you and peace from God our Father**); **disciplines us** (**Hebrews 12:5-6 -- My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives**) and **understands us** (**Psalm 103:13-14 -- As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust**). *God* is everything we want a father to be.
  - **It impacts our relationship with the Son** (**Romans 8:17 -- and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him**). As children of God, we are given the privilege of walking the same path that Christ walked that we too might receive glory in the life to come.
  - **It impacts our relationship with the Holy Spirit** (**Romans 8:14, 16 – (Verse 14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Verse 16) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God**). The Holy Spirit leads us and, in doing so, confirms to us that we are God's children. It is not our responsibility to give someone assurance of salvation. That comes from God the Holy Spirit. If a person doubts his or her salvation, it may well be that they are not currently being led by the Holy Spirit.
- **Adoption impacts how we relate to people**.

- **It impacts the unity of believers** (**Ephesians 2:18-19 -- For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God**). Gentile believers admitted to a church filled with Jewish Christians must have made them uncomfortable at times. Paul wanted them to feel completely at home so he reminded them that they were not second-rate citizens in the kingdom of God. They were full members in God's household (**See Romans 9:25-26**) because they, too, share the rights of sonship with believers from every generation and every nation. We are all part of the family of God.
- **It impacts the conduct of believers** (**1 Peter 1:14-16 -- As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy**). It is natural for children to imitate their fathers. Peter appealed to the notion that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree to exhort his readers to be holy just as God is holy.
- **It impacts the witness of believers** (**Matthew 5:16 -- let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven**). When God's children do good deeds in full view of those living around them, they become the light of the world and bring glory to their Father as a result.

Conclusion: **Oh, how becoming a child of God changes us and our outlook on life**. Those of us who have been adopted into His family never have to face life again all alone. **Fred Craddock and his wife** were in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, on a short vacation. 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, white- haired man moving from table to table, visiting guests. Craddock secretly hoped that the man wouldn't make it around to their table, but he did. After a short introduction, the white-haired man sat down at the Craddock's table and said, "**I've got a story I want to tell you… 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 to attend 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 lunchtime 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 you. 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?' the preacher asked. 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 son of God!**" **Ben Hooper**, former Governor of Tennessee, looked across the table at **Fred Craddock** and said, "**That was the most important single sentence ever said to me**." With that, he smiled, shook the hands of Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table to greet old friends. **The wonderful news of the Gospel is that God wants YOU and ME to be His children**. He has gone to great lengths to make it possible, sacrificing His Son on the cross for our sins in order that we might have forgiveness and become a part of His eternal family. **Have you become a child of God? If not, you can right now.**