

OUR ADOPTION

Scripture Lesson: Ezekiel 16:1-14

Text: Ephesians 1:5

Songs: R536; PH237; PH269; "Oh, the Mercy of God"

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

It is Mother's Day. The Bible is always up-to-date on every issue, including mothers and fathers who adopt children. Our culture often questions adoption and frequently seeks to tweek it. The Bible is bold about adoption and makes it a kingpin consideration in our salvation. On Mother's Day let's think like God.

Wanda and I have a long involvement with Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, IFAPA. We had that for the 11 years were foster parents in this state following another 11 years when we were foster parents in Massachusetts and Washington. We were foster parents for 22 years and had 44 children. We have seen and experienced first hand the joy and pain, the hurts and hopes, and the predicaments and peace of people struggling with concerns, care, and consequences of adoption. We have been privileged in God's providence to have an inside look at a very Biblical, but also abused, system. If we had to look only at the human intrigue and hurt we would wonder whether or not this is the best for children. We wondered about caseworkers, caseworkers' caseloads, state laws that seemed to have nothing to do with a child's care, and a broken court system that seems to have little sympathy, and sometimes even less common sense, when it concerns a child. If we looked only at fallen human beings trying hard to help other members of the fallen human race, we would say that our observation is that sometimes the whole foster care, adoptive system is like Humpty Dumpty that cannot be perfectly put together again. We saw people in Iowa and else where struggling with almost impossible situations. As long as we look horizontally at our fellow human beings, we will have questions and concerns along with some super successes and accomplishments at rebuilding lives.

When we look at the Bible we get a totally different picture of care and adoption. Take Ezekiel 16 for example. Perhaps this chapter was startling to you. It may be a chapter you have read only a few times in your life, maybe only when we read through the entire Bible together a few years ago. The translators help us by identifying this chapter as "An Allegory." What is that? The simple definition of an allegory is, "A symbolic representation of something." A more complete definition is "The symbolic expression of a deeper meaning through a story." The full definition of an allegory is, "A work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual and moral meaning." That means this chapter has deep and delightful things to teach us about God.

John Calvin writes of this chapter, "Here the Prophet metaphorically describes that most miserable state in which God found the Jews. For we know that scarcely any nation was ever so cruelly and disgracefully oppressed." (Calvin, Commentary, Vol. 2., page 97) Let's break this chapter into fragments that will help us understand what a marvelous Mother's Day message is here for all of us. Let's think like God tonight.

The nation of Israel was unwanted in Egypt. The baby boys were killed, except for Moses. There was no one to look out for them as a people. They were slaves to the Pharaohs' who had forgotten Joseph. God pictures that this way. "Ezekiel 16:4,5." It was common to let unwanted babies die, but the Jews considered that awful.

Children here this evening all remember the plagues God sent in Egypt so the cruel Pharaoh would finally let the people go. They would have died as a people with no boys to father families, but God said, "Live!" "Ezekiel 16:6." Notice the exclamation mark. God was ready to save His people beginning with plagues, then

parting the Red Sea and having the water return drowning Pharaoh and his army, and sustaining them in the desert with manna and quail for forty years. Then Israel blossomed as a nation. God says, “Ezekiel 16:7.”

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God considers Israel reaching puberty when they were led under Joshua to conquer the land God described as “flowing with milk and honey.” It was a slow process. It took them a long time to possess their capital city. We first read about Jerusalem when it was simply called Salem in Genesis 14. “Genesis 14:18-20.” It resisted Israelite conquest under Joshua. “Joshua 15:63.” David finally conquered Jerusalem. It is recorded this way in II Samuel 5. “II Samuel 5:6,7.” It was a long struggle from slavery in Egypt to having a land of their own. It was an impossible achievement for the people, but with God all things are possible when He is fulfilling a promise He made. God summarizes that drama in a single verse, Ezekiel 16:8. “Ezekiel 16:8”

In the final paragraph we read that God dresses His people as a bride. She is no ordinary bride. She is dressed like a queen. This is a royal bride, a royal wedding. God has fussed over His people so that they could be the bride of a King, the queen of all the nations in the world. God took a people from the gutter of humanity and boosted them to the pride of the nations, the apple of His eye, His bride and queen forever. Catch the cadence as you listen to this Scripture Lesson from The Message. “Ezekiel 16:1-14 The Message.”

This is an allegory of how God adopts His people. He finds them totally depraved, totally incapable of helping themselves, and He provides them with everything they need to become part of His family, even His bride. While the word “Adopt” is not used in this chapter, the chapter describes exactly what foster and adoptive parents do: They rescue children who cannot help themselves. In spite of many obstacles and setbacks, these children grow into good and great adults. Ezekiel 16:1-14 is an allegory of adoption, “A symbolic representation of something.” God pictures His salvation of you and me as adoption.

How do we know that? The Bible is a book of progressive revelation. God keeps making Himself more and more clear and understandable. We know much more about God at the end of the New Testament than we do at the end of the Old Testament. So what does the New Testament say? “Ephesians 1:5.” The Message says, “Long, long ago He decided to adopt us into His family through Jesus Christ.”

Adoption was common among the Greeks and Romans. Their adopted children had all the rights and privileges of naturally born sons and daughters, including full inheritance rights. God adopts Christians through grace in Jesus Christ. Christ is God’s natural Son. That is why we call Jesus “the only-begotten son.” All of us are sons and daughters of God through adoption. That is why we read in Romans 8:23, “Romans 8:23.” Every time we witness an adoption, every time we see adoptive parents and adopted children, we rejoice because that is what every one of Christians is—an adopted child of God. Our salvation is God’s adoption process into His family.

That is what makes adoption with all its imperfections and struggles such a wonderful thing. Like the Greek and Romans before us, we cherish adopted children as if they were born to us because we know the blessings from God of womb and breast as we saw this morning. We nurture children not because of the womb from which they came, but because they are children God lovingly placed in this world. In God’s pattern of adoption, we adopt. We walk in our heavenly Father’s footsteps any time we take in a child who cannot care for him or herself. Mothers and fathers who adopt follow the footsteps of God for all His children.

This is Mother’s Day 2009. We celebrate children providentially born to us and providentially brought to us. In both we see the significant providential hand of God who Himself has a begotten son and millions of adopted sons and daughters. Families who have adopted children and biological children and treat them all alike are following the pattern of God who uses an allegory of Ezekiel 16 and a text like Ephesians 1:5 to remind us that the greatest privilege each one of us has is that we are adopted children of God. Rejoice in your divine adoption tonight! Let’s close with the prayer John Calvin prayed with his students after he had lectured on Ezekiel 16. “Grant, Almighty God, since from our first origin we have been entirely accursed, so that we were entirely foul

and polluted in Your sight, that we may be mindful of our condition, and acknowledge Your inestimable pity towards us, since You choose to draw us from the lowest estate, and to adopt us as Your children: and we may so desire to spend our whole life in obedience to You, that we may at length enjoy that blessed glory to which You have called us, and which You have prepared for us in Your only-begotten Son. Amen.”