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**Adopted,
Accepted,
Adored**

#1348-A

Series: God's Amazing Grace



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Creator of heaven and earth, designer of this body we live in, sustainer of all that is life itself, we worship You.

We pray for strength and grace, and that You would be our teacher; that You would teach us truth and that we would respond in such a way that we will literally, be changed.

To Jesus be all the praise, and all the glory. Amen.

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Come with me if you will into His journalistic workshop. There were no IBM PC's to work with, and not even a Macintosh was in sight. In fact, they were about 2,000 years away from the typewriter being invented so there were a few problems.

There were no halogen lamps to make writing easier, and I think that's just as well. From what we know, his eyesight might have been so bad, that even extra light wouldn't have helped. He had no literary assistants or even editors to proof his work, unless maybe you count a crew of rough-looking Roman soldiers who stood over him and watched his every move, and in some cases, they were chained to him, making his every move somewhat painful and difficult.

The mail delivery service was even a little more primitive than it is today. UPS wasn't on strike, but that didn't matter because there were no chariots painted brown designed to deliver packages overnight. So I think if you looked at the setting you would decide that it was not the kind of setting that you and I would consider right for a literary miracle to take place.

The author himself was a known terrorist. He had made a name for himself by hunting down men and women who were affiliated with this man, Jesus, seeing that they were imprisoned and punished for their faith in this itinerant carpenter who was

going through the hillside gathering followers as He went.

Now you know by now his name was Paul. At least that was his Greek name. The word literally means “small” or “diminutive” or “little.” It was generally thought he was small in stature and that other things made him less than pleasant to look at, but his Hebrew name, Saul, strangely enough, means “desired one,” an indication that perhaps when God took control of his life, his outward appearance would not be the deciding factor in his success.

Now he was in prison, innocent, but destined for long-term incarceration for a crime he hadn’t committed, standing for the very faith that he once sought to extinguish. But he couldn’t extinguish it, if you’ll remember; because one day on a Damascus road, this man Paul met someone he’d never met before. His name was Jesus. Jesus had been crucified, but He was very much alive; and Paul, who had been dead in trespasses and sins, was now very much alive, as well.

And you would think that God would remove now all the obstacles in Paul’s path so he could take the message of His Savior to the ends of the earth. That’s what you would think, but not if you understand the ways of God. They are so much higher than ours. God, you see, understood that often His choicest servants are best used when hidden from the limelight and left in the shadows where only the aroma of their faith is allowed to drift into the lives of others through the written word.

So it was with Paul. No longer able to travel from church to church, no longer able to preach and to teach, God had set him aside for a deeper work, a work which would be infused with the canon of Scripture and in fact become the Word of God itself. God took Paul out of the mainstream and sent him upstream into the quiet place, there to allow truth to flow throughout the world and ultimately to the annals of time itself.

And it’s been often so through the years. You consider the years Bunyan’s voice was silenced by the locked doors of a Bedford jail and from that came Pilgrim’s Progress. You consider Madam Guyon, trapped behind prison walls, but free to write words that could change the heart of the world. God knows what He’s doing, beloved, and if you are in some kind of prison experience right now, it is only to accomplish a higher purpose. Paul was in jail,

but he was free; He was free to do the will of God and so are you, and so am I.

It was from that Roman prison, about the year 60 A.D., that Paul wrote this letter we have come to know as the Ephesian epistle. Now, unlike most of his epistles, this one may not have been written just to the church of Ephesus, but it was likely to have been penned as an encyclical letter, one designed to be read in all the churches in Asia Minor, first perhaps at the church at Laodicea. If you'll read the book of Ephesians, you'll find there are no specific references to those in Ephesus. There are no personal greetings as there are in many of the letters, or instructions, and it makes no reference to neither doctrinal or philosophical issues that were dividing or causing that church a problem. It's in essence a general epistle, though in content and in purpose, it is much the same as the book written to the Colossian church.

AN APOSTLE'S EPISTLE

Now this morning, our concern with this epistle has to do with those first two chapters because the opening words of greeting and instruction form a baseline for understanding what appears to be, I believe, the most remarkable subject in Scripture, the subject of grace. And as we begin to pull away at the layers of this incredible subject, we will begin to hear what Paul had to say in this letter and I pray that as we do, God will open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of His Word. Let's read the beginning of it if we will. It starts as so many of his epistles do, that if we are not careful, we'll overlook the power that's in these words:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:1,2)

Paul, the little one, had become Paul, the apostle. An apostle was one sent out as an ambassador to accomplish a task. And Paul's calling was paramount to understanding grace. Can you see why? Because in all honesty, virtually no one who had ever lived had fewer credentials to be an apostle than Paul did. He was an enemy of the cross; he was a persecutor of the saints.

But you see those questionable credentials made him a perfect candidate to be an ambassador of grace because grace by its very definition shines most beautifully from the platform of those who are undeserved.

And so it is with you and with me. It is not our sterling character; it's not our potential to use our "God-given talents in the kingdom" that interests God. He's interested in taking seemingly useless clay, and bringing something out of nothing. He's the God of creation; He's the only one capable of bringing something out of nothing. And that's what He's done with us. We were dead in trespasses and sins; deserving of nothing but hell. And grace came on the scene.

Now I must remind you again this morning, that if you don't see yourself in that light, you do not yet grasp what grace is all about. You're still seeing grace as you're getting more than you deserve. Beloved, that's not true. We deserve nothing, that's true, and we never will. If you and I were to live to be a thousand years old, and some of us think we already have, and you were to do penance and good works and live righteously, all of that time you would be no less deserving of the grace of God then than if you were perilously falling from some great sin. Your qualifications for grace are found in Titus chapter 3,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He has saved us, (Titus 3:5a NKJV)

ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD

So Paul the ambassador, the apostle, now begins his epistle, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God." Now we're going to be looking, remember, for those four great evidences of grace in each of Paul's statements, and one of those evidences you remember is "grace is sovereign", God chooses, God does, God is glorified. You remember the pattern. He's omniscient; He knows what's best. He is omnipotent; He can do whatever He chooses, and He is sovereign; whatever He chooses, He does. And always, it is best for us. Always, it is perfect. It may not seem perfect to us when we look at it because we see through a glass darkly. That's what the Scripture says. Our perspective is we see heaven through the lens of earth, God sees earth through the lens of heaven. What a difference! But Scripture says that God's will is three things: good, acceptable, and perfect. Now that word

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“good” literally means to be in harmony with His Word. The word “acceptable” literally means that which brings joy to His heart. And the word “perfect” literally means that which is never, ever one ten-trillionth of a millimeter off course.

So you see, God’s will is perfect and it’s not just “good” as we use the word. It’s without any margin of error. So if God called Paul to be an apostle according to the will of God, it is all of grace; totally free, totally undeserved, totally sovereign. And once God has called you into any kind of ministry, it may be working with children, it may be ministering in some other very menial capacity, no matter how noble or menial it seems to be, it is perfect and He will equip you, He will sustain you, and He will use you; and the less qualified you are, the more grace you will need and the more grace you’ll need, the more humble you ought to become, and if you do, the grace will flow, the ministry will bless, and God will get the glory. It is called “grace”. Nothing as magnificent as this had ever been revealed before or since: God, doing supernaturally, what you and I cannot do naturally, without any merit or payment of any kind on our part. That’s grace.

Paul now gives his salutation, and I think it’s a key to the rest of the passage. Be sure you don’t just take it too lightly. What Paul is saying is:

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father, and
from the Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 1:3; Philippians 1:2;)
(Colossians 1:2; I Thessalonians 1:1)

Paul then says I am praying that God the Father will give you a kind of grace that will produce peace. Now, this is not saving grace. He is writing to the saints at Ephesus, and to all the faithful, those who have been saved in Jesus Christ. The letter was probably written to all the churches in Asia Minor, and Paul is probably invoking God’s grace on them. Now, what is he asking to do? And do you pray that way? I wonder sometimes if maybe we don’t miss it when we fail to pray: “Grace and peace be unto them.” You see, this was, as we will see, more than just a perfunctory greeting. This was a request for something totally, incredibly undeserved and free which would change their lives forever. Something done supernaturally they couldn’t do naturally: that is, live in the spirit realm laying up treasures in

heaven while blessing others and pleasing God all at the same time. What a gift! But only God can give it, and He gives it by his sovereign choice. But from this passage we learn that we can “invoke it or ask for it, according to the will of God for those we pray for.”

Learn to pray that prayer for those you love, for those you pray for. Ask God supernaturally to infuse their hearts with the enabling power of God that allows them to be internally changed by external pressures and blessings alike. He loves to do that. Give Him the opportunity.

HEAVENLY PLACES

The next aspect of grace surfaces as Paul goes on, and this may well be the most important verse in the entire chapter. It says this:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings [underline that, all spiritual blessings] in the heavenly places [underline that if you will] in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

So God’s grace is not only undeserved and sovereign, it is eternal. Paul now explains where you get that awesome power: in the heavenlies. Then he describes its blessings. They are spiritual blessings. And then he describes the source, the singular source: in Christ. You memorized that verse last week. In it lays the hidden secret of grace. Grace is the divine enabling of the human heart to be spiritually blessed both in times of victory and in times of physical grief; in times of great pressure and times of great joy; in times of serious disappointment; in times of great elation and answered prayer.

The circumstances are not the key to being blessed. Your response to the circumstances is the key, and only grace can allow you to be blessed. You may be praying, “Bless Aunt Susie,” and what we mean is, please remove Aunt Susie’s problems, right? We pray, “Bless Bobby at school,” and what we really mean is help Bobby get all A’s. But let’s go deeper. Grace allows Aunt Susie to have a heart that sees the heart of God and rejoices at whatever He sends and enables her to see life from his perspective. And as she does her life is flooded with joy and with peace and she receives grace.

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God gives Bobby grace in his perspective of his grades. It allows him to see his education from God's perspective. He becomes a man of integrity, supernatural ability to focus on diligence, faithfulness, and truth. God enables him to do his best, and once He does, he's able to rest. He has peace, not instability. He focuses hard on knowing God even in the midst of his studies and God gives him grace.

Now, both are being challenged on earth and blessed in the heavenlies. They are being tested in their faith while they're gaining spiritual blessings. The people praying for them may be praying for the kind of grace that changes their circumstances, but God's kind of grace uses their circumstances to change their lives, even as it did Paul when he prayed for the removal of his thorn. "Okay, Paul, I hear you," God said, "But I won't *remove* the problem, I will *use* the problem to change your heart. My grace is sufficient for you."

Spiritual blessings, heavenly places, in Christ Jesus—oh, to learn the difference. It will change your prayer life. It will change your perspective of people. It will change your perspective of life!

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Now, having described both the plan and the purpose, Paul gets down to the portrait. And herein lies the photograph of the heart of God as He redeems the children of God and it ought to drive us to our knees and give us some principles to chew on as well. Bear with me now, this is a tough passage, but let's go through the next three verses:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

To the praise of the glory of His grace, He has adopted us, accepted us, adores us, and it's all of grace. Paul now goes from the theology of who God is to the reality of how He feels about you and how He feels about me. Paul catapults us from the lecture

hall and the seminary of life to the nursery where a loving parent brings home an incredibly precious gift: a newborn child—and not just any child—this child was in desperate need of love and had none, and this parent chose that particular child and said, “I want him; I want her. I will pay whatever it costs to adopt that child into my family. That’s how much I love them.” Now when did He make that choice? Before the foundation of the world. That’s what the verse says.

Remember, God is omniscient. He knew before He chose you, before He adopted you, all the dirty diapers of sin that would have to be changed. He knew all the times that you would have to be bottle fed, when you should have been taking solid food. Even the incredible cost of that heart transplant for which He would have to pay the bill in full, He knew. And yet, He chose you. He walked through the nursery of eternity, looking at beds full of babies-to-be and He said, “Whatever the cost, I’ll pay it. I want her, I want him, to be mine.” That’s grace.

Was it because you were so beautiful? We could pass a mirror around, I guess. No, you were covered with a rash of sin, screaming and kicking your legs in rebellion, shoving aside the bottle of His Word, demanding to make your own decisions, run your own life, and do your own thing, even before you were born. Pretty? I don’t think so. Was it what he saw on your computer print out? That you had such a high IQ or that you had such great parents or that your potential was to be a football star? I don’t think so. The Scripture says,

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble [have been called]; (I Corinthians 1:26)

No, He saw your need.

God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise [that’s us]; the weak things to confound the strong [that’s us], that no flesh should glory in His presence.

(I Corinthians 1:27, 29)

He chose you because He saw you in need of grace. He saw in you a child who would have enough needs and enough weaknesses to know you needed grace. And so, He chose you. And He chose you, and you, and you.

He paid the price; He adopted you, because He loved you. Now,

adoption has never been cheap or easy, but always beautiful. It has always involved risks; hence, it has always had the potential to produce miracles. Adoption takes away the egocentric aura of expectancy and replaces it with the spectrum of faith. So the adopted child has the potential to receive the greatest kind of love of all, unselfish love.

Paul went on. Not only did God adopt us, He accepted us just as we were. That, too, is grace. And He plans to change us into His likeness, to whatever degree we will let Him. But whether we do or we don't, He will never love us any less. He can't. We are accepted in the beloved.¹ Our adoption is so complete that God now sees us in Himself according to this passage. We are as much a part of Him as Jesus is. Therefore, His love will never let us go. We can rebel, we can run away, we can break His heart, and we will still be accepted in the beloved. Do you believe that?

He'll be grieved over our rebellion, but He will not love us any less! He cannot love us any less and still be God. We who have been adopted have been accepted! That's a spiritual adoption, but there are some physical images on the screen of life that we need to look at, and I only mention them in passing this morning. Number one is:

The world today is flooded with homeless, starving children. From Korea to China to India to Russia to Rwanda through virtually all of Africa, not to mention the unwanted children in the United States. Thousands upon thousands of babies are dying weekly because they have no one to care for them. A few, however, who are looking to adopt, even as believers, look into the nurseries of the world because these children may not be as normal, or as culturally acceptable, or as potentially successful as a baby that came from our own womb or at least from our own strata of society.

But God did not initiate His divine adoption proceedings that way at all, did He? He went and He looked for the ones who just might not be as wanted, might not be as desired; He went after us. Sinners, rebels, average mentalities, regular folks, along with many who would be considered the dregs of society until He adopted us, paid the price to bring us into His family, nurtured us, loved us, fed us from His glorious Word, and waited patiently

¹ Ephesians 1:6

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for the scales to fall from our eyes. You say, well, He got a bargain. It was worth waiting for. I don't think so.

Isaiah chapter 1 says:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me [were stinkers loose translation].

(Isaiah 1:2)

Is He going to give up on us? No! Then why did He choose the likes of us? It was our great need. And even Christians who are not thinking of adopting need to be willing to pray fervently for the homeless and needy children of the world, that God would provide as many believing homes as possible where godly men and women are willing to do what God did. What did God do? He adopted into His family babies whose only hope was in Him; not in their culture, not in their family, not in their heritage; only in God. What a trophy they will be when God exalts His name through them. Will it be easy? Absolutely not! Was it easy for God? Absolutely not. Then why did He do it? To demonstrate His incredible agape love, a love which gives itself away to those who do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and probably won't appreciate it.

The third major issue to consider is that God not only has adopted us and accepted us, He adores us. Think about it, He will never leave us or forsake us. He is not gritting His teeth, regretting that He chose us because we are in rebellion or unteachable. He still loves us. And like the father of the prodigal, the fatted calf will always be there, waiting for our hearts to repent.

Oh, the difficulties of parenting in this age. I've read the books, didn't understand most of them. I've had children. I have grandchildren. I know. But God's example is perfect. You don't have to approve of everything they do or even their attitudes, but you never stop loving them, because they're yours. You may deplore what they do, but you must love them because they are your children.

And you cannot disown your children any more than God can. He adopted us permanently into His family and He vowed that nothing could ever separate us from His love. Nothing. Then He spelled out nothing. I don't know why, He didn't have to; nothing means nothing, doesn't it? More or less. But He did. He said:

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...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor anything else can ever separate you from the love of your Father.

(Romans 8:38, 39 paraphrase)

Parenting is a lifelong profession. I can testify to that. They grow up, they move away, they go away, they come back, they grow away, whatever. But the burden to pray and love them never goes away, and it never should. They are ours forever just as we are God's forever. You say, "Now, wait a minute, you have not met my children. They don't deserve my love. You'll never believe what they have done to me, or what they haven't done for me."

Yes, and God says, "That isn't what grace is all about. They never deserved your love in the first place. You gave it to them freely because God loves you freely, and grace is meant to be passed on." And that's why the parent-child relationship is so critical where faith is concerned. Discipline is so important. Balance is so important. But love must never die. It is a part of the formula: He adopted us; He approved of us, He adores us and He always will. Though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, He will love us and He will love us into heaven, no matter what. And incidentally, in case you have forgotten, the word is: Grace.

THE GRACE OF ROYALTY

Which brings us to the next passage, which gets even more exciting. We go back and read again from verse 5:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, where he made us accepted in the beloved.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Wherein he abounded toward us in all wisdom, in all prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself:

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That in the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, those in heaven, those on earth; *even* in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will:

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (Ephesians 1:5-12)

Oh, the marvelous grace of our loving God. It ought to cause us to be humbled, to realize our unworthiness to be adopted into this glorious family. But listen, once we have been humbled by that fact, it's time to face the fact that not only have we been adopted into a family, folks, we have been adopted into the royal family.

It is, according to verse 6, for the purpose of bringing praise to the glory of His grace, so our unworthiness becomes even more apparent. But having said that, Paul says the riches of the kingdom of the King are yours now. And He has blessed you with all the blessings of the heavenlies because the King of heaven is now your Father. He has *adopted* you, He has *approved* of you, and He *adores* you. Now think about the benefits of being His child:

1- We have redemption through His blood (verse 7). God has delivered us from the penalty of sin. You may still suffer in this life in the prison house of sin for a season and you may suffer the entire time you live by sowing and reaping. But I want to remind you this morning, that come the harvest, the King of glory is going to come and lift us up, draw us to His bosom, and take us home to the palace for all of eternity. It is totally undeserved and it is totally free, but it is part of the adoption process. It is final, it is eternal on God's part and we take it so lightly, don't we? How many of you—oh, I hate to ask this—how many of you complained this week? I've got to hold up both hands. We complain about the jobs God gives us, the treatment God gives us, the "hardships we have to bear." We even complain about having to pay for our own mistakes, don't we? And what we forget is, here is only temporary. God is building a new castle for His family. It's perfectly designed. And if you have been born again, there is a room with your name on it, custom made, even furnished by the King, Himself. That's why we ought to hop out

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of bed every morning singing, “Redeemed and I love to proclaim it; Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.”

2- He has offered us wisdom and understanding that only a loving Father can give His children (verses 8,9). The Scripture says He has called us to His side and He has whispered to us the secrets of the Kingdom. He’s made us to understand even the mystery of the plan. He has imparted to us even the capacity to understand it and to share it. Why do we spend so little time sitting at the feet of the throne, drinking it in, not only the wisdom of it, but the majesty of it.

3- He wrote a will, and guess what? We inherit everything (verse 11). Not only are we heirs of God, we’re joint-heirs with Christ. All of the spiritual riches of heaven have been given to us. Deserve it? No! Can we pay for it? Of course not; not in a million times a million years. Then what can we do?

4- We should be to the “praise of His glory” (verse 12). That means our lives should reflect the sheer joy along with the uncommon humility that comes from being picked out of an orphanage of losers and adopted into the family of the King. Our countenance ought to reflect His likeness because we have spent so much time at His feet. Our behavior ought to never demean the Crown. A child of the King! An undeserving child of the King. He came, He looked, He saw my need. He chose me, He redeemed me, He paid a price for me. I can’t even imagine it. And now He has given to me everything He has. Now how could my life not reflect His values? How could my heart not beat with joy at the mention of my Father’s name? How could I not live every waking moment in the ecstasy of knowing that though I do not deserve it and I never will deserve it, I am a child of the King. I’ve been adopted, I’ve been accepted, I’m adored!

Drink it in! Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! The King of kings came down from His throne, He called His Son to His side, and he began a long, slow walk through the annals of time looking for children to add to His family.

You think about it. He could have gone into the homes of mighty men; and He did touch a few. He could have gone into the residences of royalty and fame, but most of them had so little need. So He began His journey. He walked into the ghettos and recesses of life’s darker places where those who seemed so

undeserving lived.

He came to my house. He came to your house. We can't fathom, in retrospect, what He was looking for. We had nothing to offer royalty and we certainly had nothing to offer prospective parents. We were soiled with sin, whimpering in self-delusion, whining over every trial and every blessing alike. We saw no need of adoption. We thought we could make it fine on our own. We couldn't even walk.

No matter. He came anyway and He rang the doorbell of our hearts the Scripture says, and He looked inside. Dear God, He looked inside. He not only knew how despicable was our behavior, He looked inside. He saw the greed, the anger, the selfishness, the pride that dominates our thoughts. We can't even see those things in our children. But He saw it. You say, "Oh dear God, that's enough. That will finish it." But no, beloved, having seen all of that, He looked at you, He looked at me, and He said, "I choose him. I choose her. I will adopt them into my family. They will become royalty. I will give them everything I gave My Only Begotten Son."

"But," the overseer of the orphanage replied, "You don't understand. This child needs a new heart. Without it, they'll die. And there's only one heart in the universe that will transplant into theirs and it belongs to your Only Son."

With that, the King looked down at us again and said, "I'll pay the price. I'll give my Son's heart for this child whatever the cost."

The keeper of the orphanage said, "Whoa, wait a minute. Why? This kid's a loser. What does this baby have to offer you?" The King quietly answered, "It isn't what this baby can offer me, beloved, it's what I can give this child. It's settled. The price will be paid. Draw up the papers. Yes, it'll cost me everything, but everything is nothing when you love someone."

And so, the merciful, loving King reached down and picked us up, and He drew us to Himself, and He made the transaction and He adopted us. Now we are His, and He is ours. We have full access to His throne. Day and night the door is open. We have full access to His wisdom. Whenever we have a need, we can sit at His feet and listen. We have full access to his riches. The treasures of

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the Spirit are all ours to appropriate, and the scripture says He'll never scold us for asking.

We have full access to His heart, as well. He promised to share with us, not only the principles of the Kingdom, but also the thoughts of His heart. He wants us to spend so much time with Him that we'll become like Him, thus being able to minister in the Kingdom, as He did.

He wants to train us, not in palace traditions, but in kingdom principles. Daily, He wants us to go out into the highways and the back streets of the kingdom and find people as needy as we were, and give our lives away to serving them, even as He gives His to serving us. He wants us not to form the palace social club, that's not why He came, He wants us to join the royal service club, washing dirty feet, touching hurting hearts, not as princes, but as slaves. He wants us to understand that what He has done for us is all of grace, and grace never stops giving.

Oh, beloved, burn it into your memory this morning. He has adopted us. He has accepted us, and He adores us. I know, to the natural mind it makes no sense. It's inconceivable. God knew it would be, so He invented something called grace.

And in the marvel of His plan, for some unknown but wonderful reason, He included us.

INCLUDED!

Included! Oh, what a precious word,
As it falls from the lips of our loving Lord.
Chosen from the nursery of hell,
He looked and said, "I choose you, as well."

No matter how sinful or how defiled,
I want YOU to become my child.
I'll die for you on a Roman cross;
No matter the price, I will pay the cost.

God looked down and saw your need,
And He saw a heart that had to be freed.
Blessing of blessings, grace free and true,
God in His mercy adopted you.

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Let's pray.

Our great God,

Our hearts burn within us with gratitude, and yet we cannot fully grasp the miracle of grace; that You would walk through the nursery of eternity and choose the likes of us. Not by works of righteousness that we had done, and not by anything we could ever do, not even based on our gratitude and acceptance of what You have done.

All we can do is humble ourselves and be amazed. It is amazing grace. But it's ours, and humbly we accept it this morning. We have been adopted. We are part of the royal family. We have been accepted now and forevermore. And miracle of miracles, we are adored by our Father.

To Him be praise and glory. Amen.

A Challenge for Further Study

1- Compare Paul's greetings in Ephesians 1 with those of I Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, I Thessalonians 1:1, II Thessalonians 1:2, I Timothy 1:2, II Timothy 1:2, and Titus 1:4. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

2- What do you think is the relationship between grace and peace?

3- To what would you liken an encyclical letter today?

4- Compare Paul's signature "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" with "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ." What common quality of God is expressed by both titles? What common quality in Paul is expressed by both titles?

5- What kind of blessings was Paul praying for in Ephesians 1:3? Using Matthew 5:1-12 as your baseline, *what do you think a blessing is?* Do you pray and ask God to "bless" people? What do you mean when you do?

A Challenge to Application

1- What practical steps can Christians today take to be a part of the solution to the world's growing population of unwanted children? Are you willing to pray?

2- When did God decide to adopt you?

3- Why do you think He did?

4- Write out your credentials for inclusion in the Royal Family.

5- Review in your mind the imaginary trip God made to the nursery of eternity when He chose you. Look at the love in his eyes as He looks at you. Hear Him offer to take His Son's pure heart and transplant it into your sinful body. Hear Him offer to pay the total price. (No co-payment)

6- Promise to spend at least fifteen minutes a day this week alone with God reviewing that transaction and thanking Him for His amazing grace. Ask Him personally and honestly to reveal more of what that grace is all about in the days to come. Worship Him.

A Challenge to Memorize

Memorize Ephesians 1:4-6 this week. Meditate on the words: "chosen," "adoption," "good pleasure," "accepted in the beloved".

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