

Galatians 4:4-7 “A Perfectly Messy Family Christmas”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Kids, I'd love for you to come join me on the stairs again this morning as we talk about Christmas. We've got a few more chances to do that up there. You all right?

We have been talking through December about lots of things to be excited about, about Christmas, haven't we? We talked about lights and songs and food, and I think we're running out of things for kids to be excited about.

Can you all think about anything else to be excited about for Christmas? Oh, presents. I forgot about it. Maybe we'll have to talk about those on Christmas Eve, okay? So we'll talk about presents on Christmas Eve, but we're going to talk about something else this morning, okay?

Who do you like to be with at Christmas? Can you think of it? Yeah? You sometimes have a lot of family that you might not get to see at other times that you get to see around Christmas, or special friends, right?

[1 : 11] That are part... Do you have somebody, Bennett? Yeah, some more people of your family are going to come. Some of mine are coming. Yeah, Millie?

My friends and my family. Yeah, you're going to have friends and family for Christmas, aren't you? And so we get to see lots of special people a lot of times, and I want you to know something.

When you think about the people that you like to celebrate with at Christmas, did you know that a big part of Christmas for God was having you be a part of His family?

Did you know that? That God wanted you to be in His family? Did you know that's what the Bible says? That's why the Bible says God sent Jesus to be born so that we could be in His family, that we could be His sons and His daughters.

Isn't that amazing? Now, I want you to think about something. If you're a son and daughter, that means God is your... Father. Father. Good thinking. It took a minute for some of you, didn't it?

[2 : 11] If God is your father... I want to tell you something that I used to do with my girls. I used to have three little girls. They're not as little as they used to be. But I used... One of the things I used to do with them was I used to sit them on my lap and say to them, Daddy loves you so much.

Okay? Maybe you've had a mom or dad say that to you. And we'd talk about why I love them so much. And they were just really little. Did I love them because they always made straight A's?

No. No. They hadn't even gone to school yet. Did I love them because they always obeyed every time, everything I asked them to do? Is that why I love them? No. No.

Sometimes they didn't obey. Maybe you sometimes have not obeyed. And you know what I would say? Why do I love them? And I would say, because you're my girl.

You're my girl. Daddy loves you so much. So listen, when God adopts you into His family, when He becomes your father, that means that He always loves you no matter what.

[3 : 20] Because no matter what happens, you're His, aren't you? You're His child. Even when you mess up, even when you're sad, no matter what you do, Jesus is born at Christmas so that you can be in God's family and have a father who loves you perfectly all the time.

Isn't that awesome? What a gift that is that we have God as a perfect father for us. Let me pray and then I'll let you go back. God, we are really thankful that You're our father.

We're thankful that You love us. We're thankful that You sent Your son to be born at Christmas, to live and to die for us so that we could be adopted into Your family.

I pray that these kids would especially know Your love for them, that they would know that You love them because they are Yours and that nothing can change that ever. And we pray that that would give them a great reason to celebrate this Christmas as they remember how much their father loves them.

In Jesus' name, amen. All right, now some of y'all are going back here to kids' worship, okay? You can go right back there and meet them. And the rest of you can go sit back down and come back up here at the Christmas Eve service because no matter what Mr. Jeremy says, you're all invited, okay?

[4 : 39] And we'll talk again then. When you start talking about family this time of year, you get some smiles and some uneasy chuckles too, right?

Ah, family. Maybe at this point my in-laws and or my parents should slip out the back while they have the chance. So glad y'all are here.

I promise not to talk about you too much. There are understandably a lot of emotions this time of year. Anxiety over expectations.

Grief over those who are not with us. Pressure of the big day and how could it all live up to what it's supposed to be?

We recognize this in our culture. Many of our favorite holiday movies reference complex family dynamics. Getting home for the holidays and can I make it?

[6 : 03] Will I be there? The difficult relationships that are being navigated. Or even leaving a child home alone while you fly across the Atlantic for the holidays.

I hope none of you have ever done that. But as many of you approach these times together, these difficult emotions, in the next couple days perhaps, maybe sometime this week, I want to encourage you, especially if that's a heavy thing on your heart, that it is right in the midst of those messy situations that God loves to show up.

That He loves to work in amazing ways. That is part of the wonder of Christmas that you can remember and that you can rejoice in right now.

See, when Jesus was about to be born, there was family tension with Joseph and Mary, right?

There's some awkwardness. And that's actually been the norm through His whole family tree.

Matthew lays out Jesus' family history for us all the way back to the beginning. And the people He highlights include Judah and his brothers.

[7 : 17] Remember the name of any of his brothers? One of them was named Joseph. And Judah and his brothers were selling their brother into slavery, his sibling rivalry on steroids.

Tamar. Tamar's story is probably one of the most painfully abusive in the entire Bible. Rahab. And Ruth. Rahab. And Ruth.

Those are Gentile outsiders without the best reputations in the world. Jesse, whose family tree was cut down to a stump at this point.

And what could come of them? Until his youngest son, David. David and the wife of Uriah.

Talk about awkward family dinner discussion that would always include adultery and murder. All the way down, person after person, to Joseph and Mary and their tension.

[8 : 25] And so here's this family tree. Here's the history they bring in their family. And God looks down and says, right there. That is where I'm going to show up in the world.

All of these people, they're going to play key roles in my cosmic story of glory and grace. As I come to redeem, that's exactly where I'm going to start.

It's with them. So listen, if you feel tension in your family right now, maybe that's a great place to ask God, to expect God to show up and to work.

He'll probably do it in ways that you don't expect, right? He doesn't usually do it the way I think he might. But God is so gracious that his family is beautifully broken and perfectly messy.

He picks this broken bunch for his family. And he writes a history-shaping, world-changing story right in the midst of their mess.

[9 : 37] He'll do it in yours. Merry Christmas. Whether it feels merry or not. See, in case you've forgotten while you've been working on Christmas cards and presents and schedules and relationships, Christmas is not about your messy family being perfect.

It's not. It's about you and your messy family being included in God's perfectly messy family. It's what he wants for you.

This is God's heart. If you don't believe that this is what he thinks of Christmas, look at Galatians chapter 4. In fact, please look at Galatians 4 even if you already believe me that this is God's heart. See, part of the wonder here is how God works in this family. In Galatians, Paul's been talking about our relationship with God.

How it comes not by successfully keeping God's law, but by surrendering to God's grace by faith. God's law has been showing us how perfect he is, how desperately we need to be rescued.

[10:56] And then Christmas. Verse 4 of chapter 4. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father.

So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God. Why Christmas? Because God wanted orphans like you and me trapped under the weight of the law, stuck in our sin, left out in our loneliness.

He wanted us adopted into His family. God, in fact, sent His Son. Can you believe this?

What a painful decision this must have been? And He sent Him into an uncomfortable and distant situation to go buy us wandering children back into the family.

[12:16] Boy, He must really love us. He must really love you if He was going to take the one son that He had and send Him out so that He could have you back in His family.

See, adoption means that our relationship with God is based not upon us, but upon God. Not upon our performance, but upon God's promises.

That is the first thing that's highlighted in our passage this morning. Christmas adoption is about our having a permanent seat at the table.

I am talking family dinner in God's family. You are in. You have a seat at that table because of the mission Jesus was sent on at Christmas.

Pastor Sinclair Ferguson says it this way in his book on adoption. Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status.

[13:18] If we fail to see this truth, we will reject the power of our adoption. Adoption is a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon His gracious choice in which He says, You are my son.

Today I have brought you into my family. It's beautiful. We can't reverse the legal transaction that God has made take place by being too messy.

We are His, period. Jesus came to earth to bring us into the family, into a relationship with God, where the way it works is that our best days don't commend us.

And at the same time, our worst days don't condemn us. Did you catch that? Your best day of moral performance when you're patting yourself on the back, it doesn't make you an appealing signing in the transfer portal for God.

That's not how it works. And at the same time, your worst day of failing and blowing it doesn't get you cut from the team. It's not like that. This is a family. You've been adopted by God's grace.

[14:32] You receive, Paul says, adoption as a son. No more distance from God. No more fear of being neglected.

No more doubt of His fatherly care. You may know that it's often difficult for children who weren't well cared for in their early years to feel secure in a new reality where they are well provided for to trust that that will continue.

Their parents will often find them stashing food under their bed or somewhere else because they're not sure even though they've had a good meal, they're used to not being able to trust that there will be food there when they're hungry again.

They don't know that they'll be seated at a table full of food like this again. And new parents have to reiterate over and over, you're our child. We love you.

We won't quit providing for you and leave you on your own again. We're here. We're going to keep taking care of you. Brothers and sisters, how often does our Heavenly Father have to remind us of that incredible reality?

[15:49] The good news of Jesus is not, as so many describe it today, as a second chance. A second chance to get it right. So don't mess it up again.

Don't blow it. That's not it. It's not that, oh, that bad sin you did, it's forgiven, but don't do another big one because you don't know what will happen then. That's not the good news of Jesus.

It is a new status. Child of God. Because Jesus left His seat at the table and took our spot on the cross where He paid for all of our sins and He seated us in His seat, if you will, at the family dinner

table forever.

We have a place. Someone here this morning needs to hear God say to you, you are my child. I love you.

I adopted you. And I will keep loving you because you are mine. Don't worry. Your Heavenly Father knows what you need.

[16:59] Christmas shows it. Jesus was born for this. Jesus was born for you. We will be born for you. We will be born for you. We will be born for you. We will be born for you. We will be born for you. We will be born for you. If we will receive them.

A second part of being in God's family by His amazing grace is in the next verse. Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father.

Father. God so wants you to know that Christmas is about your coming into His family that He sends not only His Son to rescue you, but also His Spirit to remind you that He is here for you right now.

He wants you to experience what I call fall-out-of-bed access to your Father. What in the world does that mean? Here's what I mean. It's been a while for me, but I still remember very vividly things going bump in the middle of the night.

You've probably, if you're a parent, heard before the thud waking you from sleep. Usually, in our house, it would mean that one of my girls had fallen out of bed.

[18:16] Very little would jolt me out of bed so quickly. If I was quick enough, I could run across the hall and get there to them before they even realized what was going on. But that wasn't very often because I was usually pretty asleep and pretty slow.

And so if I wasn't fast enough to get there, inevitably, what would happen is you hear thud, pause, pause, Daddy, Daddy! One night I had one of those middle-of-the-night realizations.

I don't know if you've ever had some of the best realizations you'll ever have when you wake up in the middle of the night. I realized that when my girls fall out of bed, when they go bump, not one of my daughters ever stops to think if this is a particularly convenient time for me for them to cry out.

Asleep as I was, I don't think it crossed their minds. None of my daughters either stopped to think in that moment whether she obeyed well before going to sleep.

She didn't hit the ground and think, hmm, did I eat my vegetables at dinner? I wonder if I obeyed Dad the last thing that he asked me to do.

[19:31] Is that what happens in the middle of the night when you fall and hit your head? No. Instinctively, she cried out for Daddy. And she knew I'd be there.

She knew I'd comfort her. I just want to ask you, have you cried out like that lately? Abba, Father, in the midst of your life when things go bump in your life because they still do when you're big.

How do you respond? What do you cry out? To whom do you cry out? You know, a servant can come during business hours if he gets his report all organized and bring it and talk to his boss, right?

But a son can come 24-7, disheveled, disheveled, half asleep to his father and know that he will be loved. You don't have to wait until you've had a good day or a good night of husbanding or parenting or childing or whatever else.

You've disobeyed. I know you have. You've failed. God's aware of that. But you are still his child and you don't have to count that before you cry out to him.

[20:43] If you've never experienced a relationship with God, that's what it's like. That's what I'm trying to describe for you. That's fall out of bed access to personal, intimate relationship with God who desires for you to be with him.

In fact, it's why he says he sent his son. It's why he sends his spirit into our hearts so that we can know that we're free to come anytime and be received with open arms.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones described this as instinctive crying out to Abba Father. Anytime, for anything, he says, it can become natural for us.

Many of us feel like, I don't know, that's awkward. I don't know if I can come to God like that. It can become natural for you as you listen to him and his word and you talk to him and you tell him what's on your heart and you spend time like that.

It becomes normal. I can talk to my Father. He wants to hear from me. Just think about this. Jesus, who taught us to call his Father our Father, cried out, Abba Father, in his darkest hour in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was facing the cross and he knew that he needed the one who

would care for him perfectly.

[22 : 03] He said, Abba Father. And the same Father who heard Jesus that night still hears you today when you cry to him.

Most fathers are willing to listen to their children. In fact, they love to hear what's on their hearts, don't we dads? This is the perfect Father.

Not you or me. Not the one who sometimes gets weary, who loses his temper, who gets impatient. No. The perfect Father.

He longs to hear. He loves to love. He lives to listen to your cries. Child of God, by faith in Jesus, you have come into this family where he is your Father.

You have a permanent seat at the table. You have fall-out-of-bed access to the perfect Father forever. And, one more thing that you get from your adoption here in this passage.

[23 : 12] Verse 7. So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God.

An heir. An inheritance. Now, what will that mean? What is an inheritance? Well, it's certainly not less than eternal security.

Wow. The Bible speaks of an inheritance that is kept in heaven for us so that we are children provided for even beyond this life. No matter what you get for Christmas, you've got an inheritance kept in heaven for you.

It's not less than that. It's certainly not less than present provision. The Bible speaks of our Father as a God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and provides generously for His children as He feeds all of His creation.

He won't forget you. It's not less than that. But it's actually, it's even better. See, when the Bible speaks of us as God's heirs, it highlights the reality that we are co-heirs with Jesus Himself.

[24 : 23] Now, that's something to stop and think about for a minute. It's significant for a number of reasons we could ponder later. But in this context, it's especially significant because in the Roman world in which this passage was written, the most common purpose of adoption, of adopting someone as a son, was to have an heir when you didn't have one.

You didn't have anybody to carry on the family name, your legacy, to give your property to. But that's not something our Heavenly Father needs, is it?

Jesus is already there as heir. And by the way, God's not going anywhere. He doesn't need somebody to carry on after Him. Hmm.

What do we get? Instead of that, if that's not the primary thing, we get what would come along with all of those things. The Roman father, without an heir, would adopt a son that he could fully bring into the family, right?

That he could share his heart and life with. He wanted to pass on his very person, if you will, in relationship so that the things that mattered to him and who he was would live on.

[25 : 43] And then he would leave a material inheritance on top of that. So what do we get? We get the relationship. The best part of our inheritance is God giving us Himself.

As we've just been learning from Jesus in John 17 recently, that God loves us even as He loves Jesus Himself, His perfect Son.

That's amazing, isn't it? See, it's not merely that He wants to give us stuff. That's great. He loves us so much that He wants us to be with Him to see His glory.

With Him, in His glory, in relationship. Unbelievable. He wants that relationship with you. The more we ponder that reality, the more we realize having God Himself, that relationship with access and intimacy is what we most need.

That's the thing that meets our needs. He is. Most of you will have seen some version of the story of a red-headed orphan named Annie who is eventually adopted by Daddy Warbucks, a rich, older man who comes to adore Annie in the midst of looking for other parents for her.

[27 : 11] Annie has lived her life in a squalid, dirty orphanage. She's gotten used to dreaming of rich parents who will notice her charm and her wit and they'll pick her to adopt.

And so when she goes into the Warbucks home, she is blown away by the lavish digs of this awesome mansion. But what Annie really feels is exhausted.

She has been exhausting herself her whole life trying to convince someone, pick me, pick me, right? She sneaks in the door and shows her red hair. She tries to charm people.

She is worn out from not being picked. And as the story develops, she realizes that she longs for more than just wealth and abundant provision and lots of cool stuff.

she longs to be loved, to be able to rest finally because she's been picked for keeps.

[28 : 16] She's loved. And when she gets that love from Daddy Warbucks, they start to sing, don't they? They famously sing about tomorrow and it's something they look forward to because she's got this amazing inheritance that has got her future covered.

But they also sing another slightly less famous song called I Don't Need Anything But You which gives us a beautiful peek into their relationship together.

Annie sings, I'm poor as a mouse. And Warbucks responds, I'm richer than Midas. And together they then sing, But nothing on earth could ever divide us.

And if tomorrow I'm an apple seller too, I don't need anything but you. Can you sing that with me? I don't need anything but you.

I sing that not because any of you enjoy my singing, but because I want you to hear that tune in your head and I have been singing it all week and so help me, you will be singing it on Christmas because you'll never be able to get it out of your head.

[29 : 28] It's really catchy. You may have been overwhelmed by God's incredible riches, but have you realized or remembered lately that you don't need anything but Him?

That your heavenly Father Himself is the one that your soul longs for? Have you remembered that? There's so many other things to want. that even if tomorrow you're an apple seller, I don't know what that is, but it doesn't make a lot of money, you won't need anything but Him and you'll have Him.

His is the love that you need, the purpose you desire, the family that you long for and so Jesus comes at Christmas so that you can be adopted into that family to have brothers and sisters and a perfect Father forever.

And I want you to know something. You don't have to quit grieving the pain of the family that you long for here or that you lack here.

You don't have to quit grieving that to have Him because He comes to comfort you with the grace of His adopting you right in the midst of where you are, of His living with you every moment of every day even in your grief that you are in His family at His table and that He's rushing to your side that He's the one who will be your sufficiency forever.

[31 : 09] So that's the part of the wonder of God's family. It is perfect perfect because the Father is perfect but remember His family is perfectly messy too.

You remember where we started? Don't think to celebrate Christmas with His family you have to get yours all sorted out and cleaned up first. Get your Christmas card picture looking just the way you dreamed it would be and then I'll take that with me and I'll show up at a manger where these newlywed couple with assorted family history and lots of tension.

What? No way! That's not how you have relationship with Him. Christmas with God's family means you show up with the donkeys and the black sheep and the crazy uncles and you marvel you bow at the manger in wonder that God is showing up right there in the midst of you and your messy family delighting in you and singing over you as His very own family the one He picked to be a part of your family.

Just think of what all that means. If the good news of adoption by God's grace is true at Christmas in fact if it's the reason for Christmas then you can become a part of His family right now even if you don't feel like you were born into it even if you don't feel like you've lived up to it the good news is this you don't need a resume to come to Him you need a Redeemer and Jesus is that Redeemer it's why He came to buy you back to welcome you in as you trust in Him welcome to the family gracious adoption means you can invite other people who are very imperfect themselves into this perfectly messy family because we are full of imperfect people around here in case you didn't notice some of them stand up here and talk for a long time we started this year with me declaring 2024 two for one orphan year at Southwood if God has adopted you who else is coming with you into His family you can invite anyone right someone invited you and you certainly didn't look the part when you were invited you didn't have to clean up first nobody sent you to get your act together who do you know that is longing for a father like this if God brought us into this perfectly messy family with these other crazy people we read about who found their way into the divine story of glory and grace then we can know that nothing can separate us from His love none of that stuff separated them we know for sure that the reason

He loves us must be because we're His that He sings over us because we are His children not for any other reason and finally celebrating Christmas with God's perfectly messy family with a father

this good take a deep breath it means you don't have to make Christmas perfect and I for one need to hear that you don't have to make Christmas perfect your heavenly father already has He's got it He takes messy people like you like me He takes messy families like your family and my family and He gives us Himself He welcomes us home He sets a place at the table for us He listens whenever we cry He washes us clean and He never stops loving us ever this table is here this morning because He wants us never to forget it's here as a reminder of that gracious and glorious reality because friends there is no question that Southwood is a messy part of his family anybody want to say amen to that there is equally no question that our

[35 : 27] Father is delighted to have us in His family He sets this table so you'll taste and know that that's true and that everyone who hopes in Jesus is welcome here on the very night He was betrayed by someone very close to Him Jesus took bread and He broke it and He gave it to His disciples as I ministering in His name give this bread to you He said take and eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me the same way after supper He took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes if you're a member of another church that preaches the good news of Jesus a savior for messy sinners like us then come and eat and celebrate with our

Southwood family around the family dinner table we're going to remember and rejoice and rest in our savior together if that's not you if you're aware you're you're not a part of God's family and you're not sure you even want to be we want to introduce you not to this table but to our father to our elder brother they're they're the ones we'd love for you to meet we'd love to talk with you about one who will love you one you can trust we'd love to share more about that with you grab any of us we'd love to talk with you about how you can be part of a perfectly messy family with a perfect father let's pray and we'll celebrate together our father that we could eat with you today is far beyond what any of us deserves that to make it happen you would send your own son out away from you to be born on this earth to suffer and to die in our place it's a grace bigger than we can comprehend your love indeed is beyond our wildest imagination we can't fully explain it but we come to taste and see that you're good to have your spirit help our hearts believe that love afresh and so use very common elements for a really significant and sacred purpose in our hearts that we will know your love know the welcome of a family sit at your table and talk with you work that in our hearts even now we ask in

Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org