071920 Romans 8:12-17

Anchor Series “Greatly Loved”

I remember a day, long ago, when I felt great shame as my father’s son; but I also, on the same day, felt greatly loved as his child. I was eight or nine years old. My brothers and I were playing out in the backyard. My dad was working in his garden, in the early evening. We were playing a crazy homemade baseball game. We had drilled a hole through an old baseball, then tied a clothesline to the ball. One of us would stand and spin that ball around on about ten feet of rope. And then one of us would take a baseball bat and try to hit the ball as it came around on the rope. Can you picture this in your mind? I don’t recommend that you try this at home. But it was great fun.

This one night it was my turn to bat. We had a few beat-up old wooden bats, and one really old one. My father and his brother had whittled a bat out of a farm fencepost when they were kids, and it was a rough, skinny little bat. I was the only one of my brothers who could ever hit with that antique bat, and that’s the bat I was using that night.

I hit a few pitches, and then the bat suddenly slipped out of my hand. I watched it flying across the yard, spinning around, right toward my father. “Watch out, Dad!” I yelled. He looked up, and, wham, that bat hit him right in the jaw, and knocked him on his back.

I was horrified. My brothers and I ran over to our dad. And I was thinking, “If he’s not dead, he’s going to kill me.” I felt so bad, so scared, so ashamed. But my dad quickly sat up, wiping off the blood, and checking to make sure his teeth were all still there. What he didn’t do was holler at me, punish me, or show any anger to me. He knew it was an accident, and he let me know that we were OK.

On that day, I felt great shame for not being more careful, and for injuring my dad. But I also felt greatly loved by my father. He put up with a lot of nonsense from me back then, and I’m thankful to have had the patient, faithful father I did.

I know we don’t all come from loving families. I know that not all earthly fathers are great, or know how to show love to their kids. But we all have a heavenly Father who is really something. He puts up with a lot from us. He sees us hurt others and hurt ourselves. He watches us come to church and then ignore him in other parts of our lives. Our Father in heaven is hurt and injured, by the way we treat him, by the sin that separates us from him. We all should be ashamed. We all should know we’re guilty in his sight. We all should fear his punishment, and suffer his anger.

And, yet, we are greatly loved! You have a Father in heaven who loves you dearly, sincerely. A perfect Father who loves you with a perfect, personal, powerful love. He knows you inside and out, the good, the bad, the ugly, all of it. You may not feel you deserve it, but you are greatly loved by your Maker, by your Lord, by your God, by your Father in heaven.

Romans 8 says your loving God not only wants you in his family. He has already done everything needed to bring you into his family, to adopt you, to make you his own child. On our own, living according to the flesh, caught up in our own sinful ways, we can’t get close to God. But Romans 8 reminds us that God has given us his Holy Spirit. Verse 14: “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” And not just sons. Daughters, too. The Spirit calls us all to faith via the Gospel. The Spirit enables us all to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. The Spirit helps us all to hang in there, to keep the faith, to trust in Christ alone for forgiveness and salvation, no matter what.

Despite the shameful things we’ve done, the Holy Spirit keeps us connected to Christ. And that’s what makes us part of God’s wonderful family. Today, you need to know in your heart that you are greatly loved by your God. Verse 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!’”

We may deserve God’s punishment. But we don’t live day by day in fear of our Father’s wrath. Our punishment was taken by Christ on Good Friday. Our sins are forgiven. Christ takes our guilt, and gives us his righteousness in exchange. And, so, by God’s grace alone, we’ve been adopted, welcomed, accepted, embraced in the family of God, as his greatly-loved daughters and sons.

That doesn’t mean we just go on sinning freely. We cannot. That doesn’t mean that we can just live whoever we choose, or ignore God’s commands and laws. We cannot. Our Father in heaven loves us too much to see us fail like that. He calls us to remember today, we are his children.

Verse 16: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God…” What an important promise to live by! You are a child of God, greatly loved. You are a sister, or a brother, of Christ Jesus himself, and greatly loved. You are a sister, or a brother, of every Christian in this room, of every Christian in this world, and greatly loved.

That’s a message that we all need once in a while. Because life in this world can drag you down, and wear you out. We all face trials, we all suffer, we all experience pain. We bring much of it on ourselves, but some of it just comes out of nowhere. Like a baseball bat flying through the air. Some of our suffering may even come because we follow Christ, because we’re Christians.

Never, though, should we feel we’re alone. Never should we wonder if anyone cares. Never should we imagine that we are not precious and important, not greatly loved by our God. You are. You are, and you always will be. Because of Son of God’s sacrifice, and because of the Spirit’s work in you, you have a special place in God’s family, in God’s heart.

One of the great promises of this anchor chapter, Romans 8, is that you are a child of God, greatly loved by your Father in heaven. Live in that promise, and live forever in his love. Amen.