

The Rev. Ben Jones:

So I was never good at sports.

My mother made me try out for everything, and I played almost every sport imaginable. I played baseball for a number of years. And when I was allowed to play, I was the last at bat, and I was stuck in right field, which in Little League is the equivalent of exile.

And I played what was called Bantam League football. I don't know if they have that anymore. It was fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. This is elementary. I look back on that and I think, you know, the sixth graders, there's a big difference between fourth grade and sixth grade. And again, I didn't have the killer instinct. I was always making mistakes. I was always running laps because that's the way you were punished when you didn't do it right. And to this day, I think running is punishment. And I can't deal with it. And when I was allowed to play, I was stuck on the kickoff return team, which in Bantam League was the equivalent of exile.

And here's the thing. I played my fourth grade and the fifth grade. And then in sixth grade, I can remember standing on the playground of the school, the elementary school that I went to. And one by one, names were being called and they were being given the brand new Jersey for the upcoming season. And then I was left standing alone. And the coach came and said, Ben, I'm sorry, I'm going to cut you.

I think about this later. I'm like, don't I have like legacy status or something by the third year? But no, that's the story of my sporting life. Now, fast forward a long time. So the early 2000s, I was invited by the Bishop of Northern Indiana to give a talk on leadership and to a diocesan event. And I was standing around milling around with some other people and a woman I who had been a person of mine from years earlier and I didn't know had moved to Indiana was there. She walks up to me. I don't know that she intended it to come out this way, but she said, Ben, what are you doing here? I had the presence of mind to just smile and say, well, I belong here.

And then I got up and I talked about leadership and I suppose that she recognized that, yeah, I belong there because the Bishop had invited me to be there.

Now, the parable of the rich man in Lazarus is asking this question of who belongs to the family of God?

How do we know that we are children of God? And this is where I think the parable ties in very nicely to the spirit-filled life, this program, this study that you're all going through. We're all going through it. This week, the theme is the spirit of adoption.

By the way, if you're not familiar with the spirit-filled life, it's a book written by Charlie Holt sitting behind me. And there are books in the back of the church as you leave this morning. You feel free to take one. The thing is, is that the spirit is the one who answers the question who belongs to the family of God. The spirit is the one who tells us who we are, where we belong, and what our inheritance will be.

So let's think for a moment about first, the rich man, and then we'll think about Lazarus.

The rich man, I think, is a warning about false security.

He thought his blessing and his heritage guaranteed him a place. He calls Abraham, for that matter, so does Lazarus, calls Abraham father. But in the rich man's case, that was enough as far as he was concerned. I'm a child of Abraham. I have the name of God's chosen people.

But Jesus shows us that heritage and possessions and status don't guarantee sonship.

Now, since I've moved to Jacksonville, I've come to discover that names can be a big deal in Jacksonville. And I was at a party not too long ago, or some people were talking. I wasn't part of the conversation, but I overheard them talking and I heard someone say somebody's name. And then the other person said, "Oh, that's a big name in Jacksonville."

And I thought to myself, "Well, I take your word for it." But here's the thing. Okay, so listen up.

You might have a name that means something in this earthly life, that might mean something in Jacksonville.

But when it comes to salvation, the only name that matters is Jesus.

That's it. I mean, that's the parable. The rich man cannot rely on his name.

God doesn't care if you are a child of Abraham. You know, Jesus said God can raise children of Abraham from the stones if he wants to.

The only name that matters is Jesus. And this is part of the point of adoption, right? When you are adopted, you take on the new name.

You now have the name that is above all names.

You think you have a name? I have the name above all names. That comes from Philippians 2. It's my, I think I've mentioned this in every single sermon that I've given so far.

Philippians 2, 5 to 11. Have this mind among yourselves that yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God something to cling to, but emptied himself and followed as he empties himself, taking the form of a servant and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend in heaven and earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

When you receive the spirit, you are now in the name of all names, the name above all names. The only name that matters is the name of Jesus Christ.

Once you're adopted, you're related.

You're an heir. Paul put it this way in Romans. You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry, "Abba, daddy." That's what that word means. Abba, father.

You're part of the family now.

The spirit-filled life is not about automatic membership.

It's not about being born into the right family. It's not about how much money you have or your status or your possessions or any of that. It's about the spirit living in us, testifying that we belong to God.

So now think with me about Lazarus.

Right? Lazarus is the picture of rejection. He had no advocate, no provision, no dignity.

He's the one, and he also claims Abraham as a father, but he is treated like an orphan.

In death, there's another translation of this parable where it says that he was taken to Abraham's bosom.

And that's a Jewish way of saying, "He's family now."

He's family now.

Paul put it this way in Galatians 4, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son that we might receive adoption as children."

In Christ, the spirit takes those the world calls outsiders, the poor, the broken, the overlooked, and makes them beloved sons and daughters of the father.

That's what it means to live the spirit-filled life. That even when the world counts you out, the spirit says, "You belong.

You are part of the family now."

There is this juxtaposition in this parable between the possessions and promise, the promise of God in the Holy Spirit. Abraham tells the rich man, "You received your good things in this lifetime, but now Lazarus is comforted." There is a great reversal going on here. This is actually a theme that's been going on in Luke that we've been reading for the last few weeks. It's the same kind of reversal. We might just sum all of it like this. The first will be last and the last will be first.

That's what these parables have been about.

The man who has everything ends up with nothing.

The one who's treated like an orphan is brought into Abraham's bosom. He's part of the family now. And Paul puts it in this language in Romans 8, "If we are children, then we are heirs,

heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ."

In other words, by the spirit of adoption, you have the only name that matters.

The spirit guarantees an inheritance, and it's not based on wealth, it's not based on possessions, it's not based on your name, it's based on God's promise.

Earthly wealth can disappear overnight, but the spirit's promise is eternal.

Now think with me for a moment about adoption in general.

Charlie, in his book, talks about adoption. He and his family apparently have firsthand experience with adoption, and he describes briefly in the book

about the adoption process, which is, needless to say, it's arduous. Okay, so let's think about the adoption process that God went through for you.

The adoption process that God went through for you is called Good Friday.

That's what God did.

Now, let's think about what this means.

It's very fashionable right now to imagine that, you know, like all spiritual paths go to God, all religions are equally true. We live in this age of relativism where, you know, whatever you think is true is true for you. And so in that framework, all religions are true. All right, let's go with that. Let's go with that and see where it takes us. All religions are equally true. That means that Christianity is true. Now, usually when people talk about this, they want to exclude Christianity. They want to say, Christianity is false because they think they're the only one, so those bad Christians are over here, but everyone else is true.

But no, you don't get to have your cake and eat it too. Well, all religions are equally true. So Christianity is true, and Christianity says some very unique things about God. And I've already quoted to you Philippians 2.

About how God becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, suffers and dies on the cross.

So let's just take that thought and put it right here for a moment.

And let's stipulate something.

Would you agree with me that if there's a God, that God is really smart?

All right, would you agree that if there's a God, you know, the theological word for this is omniscient. If there's a God, by definition, God is really smart.

So let's go back.

Here's my question. Why, if any religion would do, if any spirituality works, would God go through all that he went through in Jesus Christ if it wasn't necessary?

If it wasn't necessary, why?

I thought you were really smart, God.

Well, he went through it because it is necessary. And here's the thing. In the Bible, sin is way more complicated than the things that we do that are wrong.

You think about it. Lazarus isn't forgiven. Lazarus is rescued.

Right? Lazarus needs to be rescued. Sin in the scripture is a power that has us in its grip.

Jesus said, "Anyone who sins is a slave to sin. You are shackled."

I like to use the image of sin as, and its power as a tsunami.

We are caught up in a tsunami that is hurling us to our death, and we are helpless to get out of it. And while you're in the tsunami, you're probably not thinking too much about being forgiven. You need to get pulled out.

And on Good Friday, Jesus on the cross crushes, as death crushes him, he defeats sin and death.

Because on the third day, he rose again.

Now here's how this ties into adoption.

Paul says in Romans that slavery and sin leads to death.

We are rescued, and Paul puts it this way.

You are no longer a slave but a son.

And if a son, then an heir.

That's Galatians 4.7. You are no longer a slave. You are shackled and helpless and powerless as a slave, but you are now no longer a slave. You've been rescued.

And now you are given the name above all names.

That's the adoption process that God went through for you. And we think further about that.

You can only get to the Father through Jesus, right? Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." But you can't get to the Son except through the Spirit.

And at your baptism, you receive your official adoption papers. In Colossians 3.3, Paul wrote, "For you have died," and he's talking about baptism, "for you have died in baptism, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." That's just a different way of saying you have died in baptism and now you have a new name.

Your life is hidden in the name of Jesus. Or in Philippians 3.20, he says, "We are now citizens of heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven." He doesn't mean that you were sent to the wrong address and one day you get to go home.

No, he's saying that now your passport is the kingdom of God. It's just another way of saying we have a new name.

We now belong to the only one that matters, Jesus Christ. And he is the king and ruler of all in the kingdom of God.

So this parable is a dramatic reversal, right?

The presumed Son is estranged, the rejected beggar is welcomed, and Paul puts the theological explanation point on it that I already quoted. "You are no longer a slave, but a child of God. And if a child of God, then an heir."

That's the Spirit-filled life, to be taken from slavery to sonship, from orphan to heir.

And if a son, then you have it all, the name that is above all names. So if you're feeling today like Lazarus, you know, you can relate to not belonging on the team.

You feel like an outsider, overlooked, unworthy, and forgotten. The Spirit says, "You are a beloved child of God. You are family now."

And if you're tempted, like the rich man, to rest on possessions or heritage or success,

the Spirit says, "Trust not in what you have, but in the one to whom you belong." And for all of us, the Spirit-filled life is about not fear, it's not about fear, it's about freedom.

We've been rescued. We are no longer slaves, but we are sons and daughters who cry out, "Abba, Father!"

We've been given the only name that matters.

That's the good news.

By the Spirit, we are made children of God, and if children, then heirs of everything that God has. We are heirs of eternal life. Amen.