

# TOGETHERFORADOPTION

## “Abba! Father!” and Hearing the Orphan’s Cry

*“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son . . . so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Galatians 4:4-6*

Over the last couple weeks I have found great encouragement from what I am learning about the significance of the cry, “Abba! Father!” Though I do believe it is a cry of familial intimacy (“God, you are *my* Father!”), I do not believe that its primary significance lies in its familial intimacy. Rather, it is primarily a hopeful cry for deliverance—a cry grounded in the hope of the gospel. Ultimately, we should understand it as the intense outward expression of our deep inward groaning for the redemption of our decaying bodies. Understanding the significance of the “Abba! Father!” cry in this way should make us more attune to the orphan’s cry. Let me explain.

Jesus, our Elder Brother, is the only one on record in Scripture who ever cried, “Abba! Father!”; and he cried it in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his wrath-bearing work on the cross. When “Abba! Father!” came from Jesus’ sinless lips, it was a humble yet impassioned cry for deliverance: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. *Remove this cup from me.* Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36, emphasis mine). Although Jesus prayed for the removal of the cup of his Father’s wrath against our sin, he humbly submitted to his Father’s will and drank every last drop that he might deliver us from what we justly deserved.

### The Good News

The good news of the gospel is that the Father’s all-wise and all-gracious decision *not* to grant Jesus’ “Abba! Father!” cry coupled with Jesus’ humble submission to his Father’s will resulted in an indescribably good gift to us—the gift of sonship through adoption. Paul writes:

*“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5, emphasis mine).*

For the joy set before him (see Hebrews 12:2) Jesus submitted to the will of his Father and, as a result, eternally secured our adoption as sons; and, as Paul goes on to say, because of what Jesus accomplished in

his life and death and because of our subsequent status as sons, God “has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6).

Here is what we must keep in mind: “Abba! Father!” was first cried by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was a cry for deliverance. The Spirit now places that



same cry within our hearts because we have become God’s sons through adoption. This means that “Abba! Father!” has become *our* cry for deliverance. But we cry not for the removal of the cup of wrath against our sin—no, our Elder Brother already drank that cup in our place—but for the consummation of our adoption, that is, for the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23).

Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus has *transformed* the “Abba! Father!” cry into a cry for deliverance that is grounded in the hope of the gospel, and it is the work of the Spirit to place it in our hearts. Therefore, to cry “Abba! Father!” is to cry for the glorification of our decaying bodies and for our deliverance from this present “time of affliction and suffering” (see Romans 8:18 & 23). After all, it is in Christ Jesus that God justifies and glorifies all whom He has predestined to adoption as sons (Romans 8:30 and Ephesians 1:5) in order that the *resurrected* Christ might be “the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 9:29). The Spirit of Adoption’s ministry, then, is to bring this yet future but objective gospel hope to bear upon our present internal experience so that we might increasingly long for the day when we are revealed to be the true sons of God (Romans 8:19). Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15 teach

us that the “Abba! Father!” cry comes from a heart that is eagerly anticipating the great day when we will live on the New Earth as glorified sons of God.

### **How Shall We Then Live Now?**

The Spirit of Adoption, who is the down payment of our future completed salvation, places this deep groaning within our hearts for our final deliverance so that we may increasingly live as “children of that consummated kingdom” now. Because of this, let me suggest that this “Abba! Father!” cry should serve as the lens through which we read, interpret, and apply James 1:27.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to *visit orphans* and widows in *their affliction*, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” [emphasis mine].

If any group of people should be inclined to visit orphans in their affliction in order that they might be removed from it, it should be those in whose hearts

the Spirit has placed the cry, “Abba! Father!” It should be those who, through their adoption as sons in Christ, have the sure hope of final and full deliverance from “the sufferings of this present time” (Romans 8:18). If there is anyone who should deeply empathize with the orphan’s cry, it should be one who has the firstfruits of the Spirit and who, as a result, groans inwardly as he “waits eagerly for adoption as sons, that is, the redemption of [his] body” (Romans 8:23). No community of people should be more attuned to the cries and groans of orphans in this world than the children of God. Therefore, we, of all people on earth, should lead the way in caring for orphans in their affliction.

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