Remember the Titans is one of my favorite movies of all-time. Based on a true story, it depicts the tension running through T.C. Williams High School and the entire town of Alexandria, Virginia when court-ordered integration begins. To help in the transition the school board names a black man, Herman Boone (played by Denzel Washington) to coach the once all white football team. Coach Boone decides his integrated team needs to get away from the distractions of a fragmented community as they begin the season. So he takes them by bus to Gettysburg, Pa. for several days of two-a-day practices.

Before they get on the bus, Gary Bertier the designated leader of the white players approaches Coach Boone to lay down some ground rules. He says, “I’m Gary Bertier, the only All-American you got on this team. If you want any of us to play on this team, you reserve half the spots on offense and special teams for us. We don’t need any of your people to play defense. We’re already set.”

Boone looks at Gary and says: “Are your parents here?”

Gary says, “Yes.”

Boone: Good. (nods his head to Gary’s mom)
You take a look at her. Cause once you step on that bus you aint got your mama no more. You got your brothers on the team and you got your daddy. You know who your daddy is, doncha? Gary, if you want to play on this football team, you answer me when I ask you who is your daddy? Who’s your daddy, Gary? Who’s your daddy?

Gary: You.

Coach Boone: And whose team is this, Gary? Is this your team? Or is this your daddy’s team?

Gary: Yours.

Coach Boone: Now get on the bus. Put on your jacket first and then get on the bus.

Coach Boone understood if his team was going to be successful they were going to have to understand they had a new family, a new identity, a new understanding of team. It couldn’t be black and white, us versus them. Success for the team would come from recognizing Coach Boone was their moma, daddy, and leader. They were coming from such a segregated community in bondage to racial hatred and mistrust, they would have to make a radical break from the past. They would have to view one another as brothers and the coach as the builder of a new family.

In Galatians 4 Paul is making a similar argument. There were some people in the Galatian churches who were challenging Paul’s leadership and his gospel. In the pivotal chapter 3 that we dealt with last week, Paul revealed the new identity for the Galatians. They were neither Jew nor Gentile, slave or free, male or female for they were all one in Christ. They were a family not divided by the boundaries that had been in place for hundreds, thousands of years. A new family was being built. They had a new daddy. And they were sons, not only of Abraham, but sons of God. They were heirs to the promises of Abraham and set free to live in grace. They were being lured back into a religion of ritualism and legalism. Paul reminds them they are not slaves to the law, they are sons of God. He reminds them they have been redeemed by the
blood of Christ and no longer are in bondage to old rules. He pleads with them to return to the original joy they had experienced in Christ when they were free, Spirit-filled, and loving their new identity.

That’s what Paul wants to remind every Christian in every generation. Today I want us to understand who our daddy is, because if we can answer that question well, we too can live a grace-filled, joyful life in Christ.

So who’s your daddy?

I. Your daddy is the one who has made you a son, not a slave (vv 6-7)

Paul says this plainly and emphatically in v 6, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son.” The Jews had been slaves to the Law, but now, through Christ they were freed. The law had been like a guardian for them while they were children. The law served as their supervisor and their disciplinarian. It told them what to do and what not to do. But now that Christ had come, it was as if they had grown up enough to receive the full inheritance of God’s blessings. They were adults ready to be treated as free, responsible people.

The Gentiles were also slaves, slaves to a life of idolatry, worshipping idols and ignorant of the knowledge of the true God. They were the children who never knew who their real daddy was. Now they were also sons. Both Jews and Gentiles were sons of God through faith in Christ. And because of this they both could call God “Abba, Father.”

This is an amazing little phrase. “Abba” is the Aramaic word that is best translated “daddy.” Paul is letting Jews and Gentiles know they can call God “Daddy.” It was a term of endearment, a tender word that a child would use in speaking to his father. It indicated an intimate and full trust in the father, and a ready obedience to do the Father’s will.

I love the word “Daddy.” I have now become a “Dad.” I used to be a “Daddy.” I don’t know exactly when I changed from being a Daddy to a Dad. When my daughters were very young they would run to me and jump on me and say, “Play with me Daddy. Let me put make up on you Daddy. Let’s play tea party. Let’s play dress up.” And daddy would sit there and receive lipstick, hair ribbons, and powder. I would pour tea and eat cookies and make sure our guest dolls and teddy bears received generous portions. At some point I became “Dad.” When did that happen? It may have happened when there were other older girls around and it just was too childish, to youngish to call your Father “daddy.” It could have been when the boys started coming over. It could have been when there was a need to assert autonomy and let me know that child-like obedience was set aside. We were in a new stage, when authority could be challenged if the rules didn’t make sense or seemed too juvenile. I don’t know when it happened, but it happened. I became a Dad. And I’ll admit to you, I like the term “daddy” better.

Paul is telling us we are sons and daughters (remember there is neither male or female in Christ, 3:28) who can call God “daddy.” We never grow out of it. God isn’t the reclusive old man with the white beard sitting on this throne of judgment waiting to zap you with a lightning bolt if you mess up. God is more like the daddy that you climb onto when you’re afraid. He will hold you and take care of you. He is like the daddy who will
play with you when you want a companion. You don’t think God plays?!! Why would
God make rolling hills if he didn’t want to run around with us? Why would God create
music if he didn’t want to listen to us play a tune for him? God wants to spend time with
us, in a personal relationship, in a manner that helps us drop our guard and become
intimate. Play, in the sense of embracing the utter delight of the moment, is a means
through which God communes with us.

We are sons and daughters of a “daddy God” who loves us, wants to be with us,
wants to play with us, wants to delight in our presence. If you want to live a free, joyful
life filled with the trusting intimacy you hopefully experienced with your father as a child,
then God, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the daddy for you. And if you somehow missed
the experience of a loving father, if your father was in bondage to his own demons of
alcoholism, or he was too stressed out with life to offer you love, or he was so scarred
from his own childhood wounds, then I want you to know, ……this God is the “daddy”
you missed. He loves you. He wants to help you not be afraid. He wants to protect
you from harm. He wants you to experience the blessed life. All you have to do is
come to him like a little child, climb into his arms, and say, “Daddy, can I stay with you?”
And he will say, “I was hoping you would say that. Of course you can.”

Your daddy is the one who made you a son, not a slave.

Your daddy is also the one who redeemed you, not rejected you.

II. Your daddy is the one who redeemed you, not rejected you. (4:4-5)

Abba, Father, daddy father is the God and Father of all history. Paul makes the
point clearly in verses 4 and 5, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his
Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, that we
might receive the full rights of sons.”

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under
law. The Christian faith is based on history, actual events that happened on definite
days. The Christian faith isn’t some set of ideas or principles. It’s not a philosophy that
you carry around in your pocket like a cell phone. It’s not a set truth, disconnected from
time, culture, and the smells of a birthing room. It goes back a long way, including the
time when God made promises to Abraham. 430 years later God gave the law to
Moses. This law acted as “the guardian” for the people of Israel when they were
children. But just as it would be inappropriate to treat an adult heir like a slave or a
dependent child, so it was appropriate, at the right time, in the fullness of time, for God
to send his Son.

Jesus came into the world through the birth canal of a teenage girl from
Nazareth. He was born under law, that is, he was born under the same guidelines as all
the sons of Abraham. Through Jesus, redemption was made for the sins of the world.
What is redemption? Redemption is reclaiming something or someone that is trapped,
in bondage, held in prison by someone else. It was a term, used in Paul’s day to refer
to the reclaiming of slaves. A slave could be purchased by someone and set free. That
is one difference between slavery in the land of 1st Palestine and 19th century America.
Someone in Mississippi couldn’t buy a slave and simply set him free in the 1850s. But
in Palestine it could happen. Someone could pay the price and set you free.

We don’t have an economic system based on slavery today, but we still redeem
things. The rule at Jordan High School is that if you have a cell phone out and visible
the teacher is to confiscate the phone and keep it. The teacher takes the phone to the office and the student can’t pick it up at the end of the day. Only a parent can redeem the phone. The parent has to come to school and reclaim or redeem the phone. The cost of redeeming the phone is the aggravation of the parent. I know it doesn’t happen like that frequently. Most teachers just tell the students, “Put the phone away.” But if a parent does have to come there, they are not happy about it. They are either angry at the student for using the phone inappropriately or they’re mad at the school for creating a policy that inconveniences them.

Jesus came willingly, freely, and with great love to redeem us from our sins. The price of redemption was his life. He gave up his life on the cross at Calvary so that we might be redeemed, won back, freed from our bondage to the law and our constant breaking of the law. He did this so we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters. This was no quick fix, no cheap transaction, no easy exchange. You show up and get your cell phone back! No! God sent his Son, and don’t you know that was hard? Don’t you know it broke his heart to see his son, his only son, mistreated, beaten with a whip, nailed to cross, and treated like a common criminal rather than the royal divine ruler that he was.

That’s the kind of daddy you have. He is a daddy who paid an extraordinary price so that you could be redeemed, freed from all the junk that clogs the arteries of your life. Your pride, selfishness, lust, ego, and greed nailed to his flesh on a real day in history. He loved you that much. That’s what daddies do.

And finally, one more thing about your daddy.

Your daddy wants you to be filled with joy, not weighted down by burdens.

III. Your daddy wants you to be filled with joy, not weighted down by burdens (4:8-20).

In the next few verses of his letter Paul directs his words to the Gentile converts. He reminds them of their former lives. In verse 8 he says, ‘Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.” They were slaves to idols they worshipped and gods who were no gods. Then they were freed from that by putting their faith in Christ. Tragically, they are reverting to another form of slavery. They aren’t returning to their former gods but they are falling into the trap of ritualistic religion. Look at verse 10: “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

It’s not that observing Passover was a sin. Jesus observed Passover. Just like it’s not a sin for us to observe Lent. What the Gentile converts were dealing with was more insidious. They were being fed dogmatic propaganda that observance of these seasons and days was essential to being a Christian. Observing these Jewish holidays was essential to living a Christian life. It was another way to force every Gentile Christian to become a Jewish Christian. Jesus Christ wasn’t enough. You had to have faith in Jesus and observe the Feast of Tabernacles. You had to have faith in Christ and observe Pentecost.

It would be like saying in order to be a Christian today you must have faith in Christ and attend the Ash Wednesday service. You must have faith in Christ and come to the Christmas Eve service. Don’t get me wrong. Those services are fine. I hope you
attend. They provide an opportunity to worship in community, confess our sins among the congregation, and sing praises to our God in a choral symphony of celebration. They are helpful but not essential. They nurture our faith, but they don’t create our faith. They allow us to express our new birth, they don’t generate our new birth.

We don’t have many people here today who are in danger of reverting to Judaistic legalism. Anyone here worried about missing out on the Feast of Tabernacles this year? But I suspect a number of you are in danger of losing your joy. You’ve lost your joy in worshipping God, and worship is more of a duty than joyful experience. You’ve lost your joy in serving God because you’re on too many committees, you attend too many meetings, and church has become just another calendar challenge. You’ve lost your joy because you’ve experienced conflict with others in the church and perhaps still experiencing conflict right now. The residue of former conflict falls on your life like black soot covers the inside of a chimney. It’s caked on and burned in.

Paul wrote in verse 15, “What has happened to your joy?”

Perhaps it’s time for you to start all over, to remember the first day you sat in your daddy’s lap, to rejoice in having a daddy who will teach you how to hunt or how to ride a bike, to race again into daddy’s arms to worship him because he’s the biggest, strongest, sturdiest person you know. Perhaps it’s time to stop coming to worship out of duty and only come for joy. Perhaps it’s time to say no to a meeting so you can say yes to Sabbath rest. Perhaps it’s time to cut out the religion of don’t, shouldn’t, shall not, and do not and fill it with “Daddy let’s play. Daddy let’s talk. Daddy let’s run. Daddy, will you read me a book? Daddy will you stay with me until I fall asleep?” In short, maybe it’s time to throw out guilt-ridden, duty-driven, burden-inducing religion for the free, joyful, ecstatic, charismatic, dramatic relationship with a daddy who misses you and wants you to come home.

Conclusion

In the 1998 Disney movie Parent Trap, identical twins who were separated at birth by their parents' divorce accidentally meet 11 years later at summer camp. Together the twins plan to switch identities, so each can meet the respective parent she’s never known and try to bring their parents together again.

As Annie (Lindsay Lohan), who is pretending to be Hallie, disembarks from her plane, her father (Dennis Quaid) is waiting for her. Annie is tentative but exuberant as she sees him and says, "Oh, gosh, it's him."

"Get into these arms, you little punk!" her Dad says.

She runs to embrace him with a big smile, saying, "Dad! Finally!" The father tells her he missed her and a lot had been happening. Annie responds, "A lot's been happening to me too, Dad. I mean, I feel I'm practically a new woman!"

As they're walking to the car, the father notices that she can't stop looking at him and asks, "What? Did I cut myself shaving?"

Annie answers, "No. It's just seeing you for the first time. I mean, you know, in so long."

As they drive toward his home, Annie discusses the camp, ending almost all her sentences with the word "Dad". He asks her, "Why do you keep saying 'Dad' at the end of every sentence?"
Annie answers, "I'm sorry, I didn't realize I was doing it, Dad. Sorry, Dad." They both laugh. "Do you want to know why I keep saying 'Dad'? The truth?"

The father says, "Because you missed your old man so much, right?"

"Exactly. It's because in my whole life—I mean, you know, for the past eight weeks—I was never able to say the word 'Dad'. Never. Not once. And if you ask me, a dad is an irreplaceable person in a girl's life. Think about it. There's a whole day devoted to celebrating fathers. Just imagine someone's life without a father. Never buying a Father's Day card. Never sitting on their father's lap. Or being able to say 'Hi, Dad,' or, 'What's up, Dad?' or, 'Catch you later, Dad.' I mean, a baby's first words are always 'Dada,' aren't they?"

The father asks, "Let me see if I get this. You missed being able to call me 'Dad'?"

Annie answers, "Yeah, I really have, Dad."

Have you missed calling out for your Daddy? Has your religion got you into a rut? Has it become more of a burden than a blessing? Are you driven by guilt more than you've been freed by grace?

Then, my friend, my brother and sister, I want to tell you about your "Abba, Father." I want to remind you "who's your daddy." He's the one who has redeemed you at great cost of the life of his only son. He has adopted you and made you heir of everything in his kingdom. He is eager to fill your life with joy so that whenever you say, "Daddy, play with me," He always has time, always has the energy, and he's there to play until it's time to go to bed and rest for another joy-filled day.

Who's your daddy?

Abba, Father is your daddy!