

Have you seen Pixar’s Toy Story movies? They are groundbreaking films in many ways. They really work because they are great stories with unforgettable characters like Buzz Lightyear and Woody the cowboy, Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head, and many others.

Early on in the first Toy Story we learn that Woody is a Very Important Toy. He is the favorite toy of a boy named Andy, as a matter of fact. And do you remember how Woody knew he was Andy’s favorite? I’ll give you a clue: it had something to do with his boot. Do you remember? Andy had written his name on the bottom on Woody’s boot. Woody was very proud that Andy had done that. It showed he was special. It showed that he was important. It showed that he belonged to Andy.

That’s what makes it so sad in Toy Story 2 when Woody agrees to become part of the collection that’s going to Japan—with a couple strokes of brown paint, Andy’s name is covered over. If someone looked at the bottom of Woody’s boot, they would never know he had once belonged to Andy. Later on in the story, when Woody decides he wants to stay, he wipes off the brown paint so that he can see Andy’s name again, because seeing that name means that he’s special, that he was important, that he belonged to Andy.

Why are we talking about this? It’s simple. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a Christian baptism, you have a name written on you. That name tells you everything you need to know about your past, your present, and your future. That name is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and with that name on you, there are certain things you can know are true, no matter what. You are special. You are important. You belong to God. Listen to what He says: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” Do you hear what God is saying? He paid a high price to obtain you because he knows you and treasures you. You need not fear. You need to know that, don’t you? I mean, really need to know that, because of everything else you’re going through.

What is truly amazing is that Jesus needed to know that, too. In his full humanity, he needed to know that he was loved and treasured by his Father. He was going to go through some things that make our troubles seem pretty manageable by comparison. His trust in his Father would be put to the ultimate test at the cross. So yes, he needed to know what his Father thought. And His Father told him. Do you remember what he said? “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” And when did His Father say this? At Jesus’ baptism. I have to think that there were days when Jesus clung to His Father’s words like a life raft. Whether facing satanic temptation, or the crush of human need, or the unbearable weight he felt in the garden of Gethsemane, there was always this baptismal proclamation: “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” And when on the cross that relationship was ruptured, that was the hell Jesus endured for you and me. As the prophet Isaiah says elsewhere, “the punishment that brought us peace was upon him.” And that’s it. God says, “I have redeemed you,” and it’s true. The Father made His beloved Son pay the bill for our sin debt. He treated His Son like the condemned sinner, so we could be treated as redeemed saints. And because of that, when you were baptized, the invoice of

your life was stamped “Paid in Full.” Not only that, but the things God said about His Son were said of you: You are my beloved child—with you I am well pleased. Your sin and shame is buried in Jesus’ tomb. That’s what I meant when I said that God’s Name, written on you in baptism, tells you everything you need to know about your past. Your sins are dead and buried in the grave of Christ, and your present and future are located in a living Lord. Jesus rose from the dead, just as he came up out of the Jordan River, Spirit-filled, perfectly obedient, perfectly pleasing to His Father. You are connected to Him in all his glory by baptism and the faith it produces.

I want to strongly encourage you today to try to think about your baptism a little more than you do now. And to be candid, that’s because I need to think about it a lot more than I do now. Baptism is a beautiful gift. It is nothing less than a spiritual adoption. It creates an adoptive relationship between God and me. I am in need; He pays the fee; He takes me in; gives me His family name and everything that goes with it. I can’t think of anything that could be better, can you? But how quickly I forget—how quickly I forget what’s been done for me—how willingly I forget who I really am. Holy Spirit, please, make me consider myself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Help me remember my baptismal adoption.

In an imaginary, cinematic world, Andy wrote his name on Woody the toy cowboy. If you have been baptized in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then somewhere in the real world, God wrote his name on you. From that moment on, you belonged to Him. You are far more than God’s favorite toy: you are his own child now. That doesn’t make you perfect; but it does make you perfectly loved. And in times of temptation; in times of crushing need; in times when the weight of the world has fallen on you; the words of your heavenly Father can break through with deeper truth: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

And if you’re not baptized, and you’re sitting there thinking about all this and it sounds like a gift you would like to have for yourself, well then, let’s talk.

Will you please pray with me: