

Saved by Adoption

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[0 : 00] Loving God, we come this morning, each of us with our own cares. We come each of us as ransom slaves and heirs to your promise. We just pray, Lord God, that only the truth would be spoken and only truth heard.

In Jesus' name, amen. We're going to be focused on adoption, which is an important theological and biblical theme that I seldom hear, other than here, George has preached and spoken about it, but we really don't see this idea developed all that often, as much as perhaps it should.

It's just a wonderful metaphor for us to stop and to think on when we think about ourselves all as saints in God, through Jesus.

My sister was adopted, and we don't think of Melissa as our adopted sister. We think of Melissa as our sister. And one of the things we learned, she learned later on in life, is that being adopted had actually saved her from something.

She was actually spared a life of growing up, being raised by someone who was abusive and someone who was an addict and had some very serious issues.

[1 : 17] And when she speaks to her biological siblings, she says she's given a wonderful new perspective on the fact that my parents adopted her, and a wonderful appreciation for the life that she was given, rather than the life that she was destined for, had she not been adopted.

And this is one of the reasons it comes home for me that I believe this is a wonderful metaphor, because not only is she happy, this is my sister. This is our sister, my mom and my dad's daughter. We are so happy that she didn't have to go through what some of her biological siblings, unfortunately, had to go through. And it's a wonderful image because God wants to spare us from slavery to a sin-addicted and abusive world.

God wants to spare you and release you from bondage, or has spared you and released you from bondage to a sin-addicted, lost and abusive world.

Let's turn to Galatians 4. Paul is writing to Galatia. So this is Mediterranean Sea. You can kind of see Galatia is to the east and a little bit to the north.

[2 : 33] It's not a town, it's an area. And this is one of the areas that Paul went to during one of his missionary journeys. And as happened in all the other areas, like Ephesus and a number of the other cities or areas that he went to, when Paul moved out from his missionary journey, the false teachers came in.

And they started to say, well, Paul's message is great, but let's just add a little bit to that. And what we have in Paul's letter to the Galatians, as is in a number of Paul's other letters, he's addressing the false teaching that has come in after him, pretty much immediately after he left.

And he's addressing a false teaching that says, what people were saying is, you know, we still need to keep the law as an obligation to be accepted by God. Not as cultural Jews, just as someone from Africa would keep their, at that time in ancient Africa, would keep their cultural values.

But not just cultural values, that these are things we need to do. Rituals, keeping the law in order to be accepted by God. These are our obligations in order to stay within his house.

That was the teaching that Paul was saying, no, hold on here. Wait a tick. That's not the gospel of Christ that I was preaching to you. And in this section of the letter that we have, up until this point, he's been kind of, you know, kind of circling around, kind of getting to what he's talking about.

[3 : 58] But in this section, we get to chapter three, we get to chapter four. He is just directly, head on, attacking that teaching. And in dealing with it directly.

And he's appealing to the Galatians to resist and to keep the faith. Let's look at verse one. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave.

Though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In Roman times, legally, you didn't come to age automatically at 12 or 13.

You came to age when the father decided you were going to come to age. And then they had a special thing that happened. I think it was March 16th or March 17th about that it happened. And they recognized you as the heir. But that did not happen until the father recognized him. So obviously, if we look at that, it starts with, I mean that. Paul is talking about something. He's developing an idea that he's already stated in chapter three.

[4 : 59] And so we have to read everything in chapter four of our section in light of what he has just said in chapter three. And what he said in chapter three is simple. People of faith in Christ are adopted by God.

Full stop. We are adopted by God. And this adoption comes in accordance with a promise that was made long before the law ever came along.

A promise of faith that was given to Abraham, which he develops and talks about fully in chapter three, which came along long before Moses came along with the law.

Being adopted by God for us as Christians has to do with the promise to Abraham. And because that promise comes from then, before the law, it supersedes anything the law can do for us.

Anybody who went to the Ryle Open House, wonderful talk by Pierre on this very thing. That when we understand the scriptures and we understand theologically the scriptures, we need to understand where we are and what we're talking about in light of all that history.

[6 : 11] So the chronological order of the way God and salvation history has happened matters. And that's what Paul is saying here. What he's saying is the promise is based on Abraham's faith for his descendants.

And I just commit to you chapter three for that. So we have a promise given to Abraham based on faith. And what Paul is saying here is that the law was given as a guardian between the promise given to Abraham and the promise fulfilled in Christ.

It was a great thing to have a guardian at that time. But we now live in the time of Jesus. The law was just a guardian.

So when he uses the term child, when in our passage we hear the term child, what Paul is indicating is that time when the law was kind of our guardian as children.

He's calling the Galatians to that mature faith in Christ, not to stay as children. And when you're a child, you're as good as a slave, he's saying, because you have these, it doesn't matter who you are. You've got these overlords over you.

[7 : 21] And that's who it is that's looking after you in the life that you live. So he's talking actually to two groups here. And he's saying to these two groups, neither one of you is better than the other.

Everybody's in this same situation. He's trying to show that everybody's in the same boat. He's talking to the Jewish Christians and he's talking to the Gentile Christians. There was both in Galatia at the time.

For the Jewish Christians, being a child was continuing under the law of Moses. Would just be to live as a spiritual child under a master, a slave master.

In Joseph's time, Egypt started as a savior. Had a role, a wonderful role in salvation history. But then at the time of Moses, what was Egypt then?

Egypt changed from a savior to a slave driver. And God called them out. And so he is saying the law did the same thing.

[8 : 18] It had that purpose of holding and bringing people and making them God's people. But with Jesus now, if we still allow the Egypt, the law to function like that, we remain slaves.

It's made that same shift that Egypt made in the life of Israel at that time. So if they aren't careful, he's saying, they could easily become stuck under that taskmaster again.

It would be the same as the Israelites going back to Egypt after they had been saved by God from that. And we know that they were always saying, well, Egypt was so great. It's the same with the law.

It's almost, it's like history repeating itself. They're saying, oh, the law is so great. Let's just go back to that. And Paul just doesn't understand this, which I'll get to in just a second. The second group he's talking to is the Gentile Christians.

They have been enslaved, verse 3, by the elements of the world. Verse 3, in the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

[9 : 17] Among other things, that's a way of indicating the gods of paganism, which were based on the elements of the world. And the religiosity and the rules and the things that they would have you do in order to pacify them and receive their blessing.

So what he's saying are parallel states. We have parallel states of being enslaved. And he's saying to the Jewish Christians, you're no better than the Gentiles.

And he's saying to the Gentiles, you're no better than the Jewish Christians. We are all in the same boat. We are all orphans. We are all falling under a slave driver if we don't believe in Jesus, if we go back to this.

Both Jew and Gentile, they're distant from God. And they need Jesus where God comes close. The promise of Jesus, I will not leave you orphan. I am coming to you in John 14, 18.

It's as true for one group as it is for other. Which is an important point because there was obviously butting heads that was going on. So when he says, we have experienced adoption, he's speaking to both groups.

[10 : 22] And for Paul, he can't get his mind around why would they ever want to go back. It appears as though they were buying into this false teaching and were going back from being sons to being slaves under the law.

And Paul just doesn't get it. He doesn't understand why they would want to go back to that kind of spiritual life where they're living as though living the law makes them right in God's eyes.

And I was trying myself why they would move from freedom in Christ in a dynamic relationship with God to simply being slaves to a law.

Paul doesn't get it. And I was myself trying to understand, you know, how could I say this? How could I understand this in an image that has more to do with my life? And it kind of, it dawned on me. To me, the Christians going back to the law is kind of like a military chaplain deciding to stay on basic training forever.

That's a bad decision. It is horrible. I did it twice, basic training. And I have to explain. It was asked this morning. I did it for the reserves, but it wasn't good enough, apparently. They made me do it for the regular force.

[11 : 32] Having to do basic training a second time almost made me not join the regular force. It was that awful. And I would not, you know, I didn't join the military to be stuck in an infant state under slave masters.

Yes, I used the term. That's what it's like to be on basic training. And not actually doing this dynamic, living this dynamic life, this dynamic ministry that I had been called to.

And Paul's saying the same thing. He said, why would you ever go back to the law, to basic training? You have a dynamic relationship with God. Why would you ever go back there?

He couldn't wrap his mind around it. Why they would go back to being a slave stuck under the law. They were spiritually adopted. In a sense, when they did this, as they were doing this as Christians, they were thumbing their nose at what God had done for them in Christ.

Verses 4 and 5. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[12 : 47] And that's what I love, folks. Right here, in the center of the passage, is realizing the love shown in Jesus. Nothing else matters. Realizing the love and the sacrifice that was made.

It costs money to adopt. It costs money in many places around the world to adopt. My friend is an American pastor, and he was taking the program with me over the last few years.

And as we went through our program, he was actually adopting a little girl. And it was very interesting to see and to walk with him and pray with him through the ebbs and flows, the amount of money they had to spend on lawyers' fees, the amount of bureaucracy they had to go through, the highs and lows of dealing with social workers and everything they had to go through.

It was a price they paid to adopt this wonderful little girl. You see the family now, and it was well worth it. And when she grows up, when they are able to communicate to her what it took to adopt her and what they were willing to go through, she's going to experience and know her value in her parents' eyes.

She's going to know, even more so, the love that her parents have for her because the more they got to know her, the more they were willing to go through.

[14 : 14] We have been bought spiritually by Christ. Ransom from slavery at a cost. Center banner right there. You have been bought with a cost.

Death on a cross that shows our value to the one who chose us. Do you see yourself with that value?

Not what the world says. Do you see yourself with that value there? Considering the price that was paid. Because that is the root of a growing relationship with God through Jesus.

Is recognizing what was done for us. And the value that God has for you. Ephesians 1.14 He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, through the purpose of his will. We are or were all orphans. Legally paid for now and adopted. And while our adoption starts with that legal act that's just the beginning, it continues with membership in God's house.

[15 : 21] And the imperative to live in line with this new identity. But it's not, we live, therefore we're accepted. It's, we're accepted, therefore we live. Extremely important distinction that Paul is making here for us.

Verses 6 and 7. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, friends, then an heir through God.

Theologically, we say that adoption has both a forensic aspect, and it has a transformative aspect. John Calvin called this double grace. We're doubly blessed. First of all, we're given a, that forensic thing is that we are legally accepted by God.

Our legal status in the eyes of God has changed. Purchased, we are moved to a spiritual condition where transformation happens. And we are, second, we are given grace to grow into this new identity.

It has a forensic legal aspect, and then it has a transformational aspect, where we receive God's spirit, and then we learn, and then we grow. We are saved, so then we grow.

[16 : 33] We are adopted to live a life as heirs with Jesus. Not a life of slavery, but a life of transformation. Now, this really hits home in our time, because adoption deals with a similar false teaching that is rampant in our culture, in North America, in Canada, in Ottawa, 2019.

Today's has a new attempt, way to attempt religion without being a son or a daughter of Christ. It's nothing novel. You've probably heard the term moral therapeutic deism before.

But it's important to keep this in mind, folks, because this is the water that we sleep in. I want to give you the National Religious Creed of Canada. Okay, you want to put it up there, please? We said our creed. Here's the National Religious Creed of Canada.

First, the world would say, God created everything, looks after humanity. Okay, fair enough.

Second, God wants us to be generally nice and good. And by the way, this is what all religions teach.

Third, the goal of life is to find happiness and simply to feel good. Fourth, God can be a second thought, unless, of course, you need him for something. And fifth, most importantly, good people go to heaven.

[17 : 47] Now, leave alone the fact that places I've been in the world and places where I think a number of us have been in the world, this just, I mean, it's just tripe. It doesn't last first contact with the reality of the world.

There are a number of things that are simply wrong with this. But by and large, this is the religion of Canada. And if you're not a Christian, you may be looking at this saying, well, actually, Sean, that sounds good enough for me.

Thank you very much. But I want to point a few things out. Most importantly, I want to point out that in a world where we have no moral absolutes, we can't say anything is actually good or decide, have any basis to decide on anything being good, how can we ever say God wants us to be good? It's like this self-licking ice cream cone, right? God wants me to be good, but I can't decide what's good. But God wants, it's this slavery to this vicious cycle.

And that's just one irrational cycle that's going on in that, in this creed that we have. And there's studies that show, actually, and I'm going to commit to you this book after I'm done here, there are studies that show that this, especially the present generation that's coming up, know that that's an issue and are incredibly uncomfortable with the lack of moral compass, yet have no idea what to do about it.

[19 : 13] So simply just go by living life like this, but are really slaves to the idea that they don't know what's good, they're just trying their best to get by. And this is really nothing new, it's what historically we would call deism.

And I want us to see how distant this makes God. We're often told in Christianity, oh, well, you make God up there in the clouds judging us, but when I look at this, this actually sends God to the clouds.

Completely distant, completely impersonal, and really doesn't care all that much. And we're left seeking a mystery standard that we could never meet.

But this, when we contrast it with adoption, that is when God is close. When we contrast it with adoption. And it brings us close to Him.

When God adopts us, He has come to us in Christ. We enter a joyful world as God's children, powered by the Holy Spirit, not this mushy place where we really don't know what's good and what's bad.

[20 : 18] And this is where our passage says, God becomes Abba. He's not in the clouds, folks. He's come to you, He's come to me. And it's a term that, this term Abba, it denotes familiar or close.

It's over-sentimental. Some people say we should just translate Abba, Daddy. That's kind of over-sentimental, but you get the sense there. There's a closeness to this term Abba. Moral therapeutic deism, the creed of Canada, contrasts starkly with the kind of spiritual adoption and dynamic faith that Paul is calling people to.

We are adopted to a life lived as heirs with Christ, raised to a new life of grace and holiness, friends. And so we have something to consider.

I want you to consider something. That creed, just like for the Gentiles, the elemental spirits was the water they swam in.

Just like for the cultural Jewish Christian, the law was the water that they swam in. And moral therapeutic deism, that creed is the water that we swim in.

[21 : 28] Paul is asking them to say, check yourself here. Where are you buying into the water you're swimming in? I think the Lord is looking at us and saying, check yourself here. Paul is saying, have you made God too distant?

In what way am I buying into that creed and the destruction of values in life that comes along with it? Something to consider. Contrast this morning.

Am I living in a law mentality where it's kind of the outside, I do good things and in? Or am I living an adoption mentality where I have a new identity and I'm living from the inside out?

Are you experiencing a relationship with God based on your adoption as his child, not staying out in the spiritualist streets where confusion reigns? We're adopted to live a life as heirs with Jesus.

I usually have a graphic, it's a big finish, I missed that. But just to finish here, it's important to continue to experience our foretaste of what our spirits groan for.

[22 : 37] At the end of the day, our spirits don't groan for this mushy God in the clouds type of faith. That is not what fulfills us. And the next generation coming up is telling us and they know that that's not what fulfills us.

What fulfills us is what our spirits groan for. We know, we're just saying, do we know the world is broken? Folks, we know the world's broken. And we all, in our own way, groan inwardly.

I went to a wedding, my cousin's wedding recently, and for some reason, dinner lasted from, I think it was 6.30 to 11 o'clock at night.

And they'd bring out a little bit of food, and then all of a sudden, there was the speeches. A little more food, and then they danced. And I was in uniform, so I didn't dance, and I wouldn't do it anyways.

But it was just kind of back and forth like this. My family, I'm the smallest of my brothers, okay? I'm the little one. And we're meat and potatoes people from the hills in Halliburton.

[23 : 39] We were inwardly groaning by the time 9.30 came along. And if it wasn't for the little hamburgers, they call them sliders that they served, and we downed those suckers, I gotta tell you.

During the reception, I don't know if we would have made it. We just would have gotten an Uber and went and found a steakhouse somewhere. But it was that little foretaste is what got us through, even though we were inwardly groaning.

And that's, we are given a foretaste now, folks. If you think worship's good, if you think the church is good, if you think the new life that you have now, that groan is never gonna go away.

God knows it. It's there for a reason. It's to keep us coming back to him for that foretaste. But let me tell you, the main is coming in God's time. And just hold on to that foretaste.

And don't allow yourself to get pulled off into the streets. Stay in the party. Amen? I want to commit to you a book, Union with Christ. It was funny, George and I were talking about, you know, writing books, writing articles and stuff.

[24 : 41] I'd love to write a book that wasn't ever written. Every time I come up with an idea, someone comes along and they already wrote the book better than I could. It's called Union with Christ on Todd Billings. I gotta tell you, I've been listening to George's sermons and he's just, if you like George's sermons on Ephesians, I think you'd like this book as well.

He's right along with what you're talking about, brother. So I commit that to you and just full disclosure, some of what you heard this morning from me is actually from that book. Let's pray together. Lord God, what a party it is to be with you.

Even though the world is broken, Lord God, you and your grace give us a foretaste. Help us to continue to come back, Lord God. Help us to continue on in the faith, not to buy in to what the world is trying to sell, but instead to get the world to buy in to what you're selling and what you offer in Jesus' name.

Amen.