

Living as Children of God

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. My name is James. It's good to be with you this morning. During the COVID lockdowns, it made intimacy and close connection with family and friends and even church quite challenging. People were not able to see family and friends for long periods of time. And I know a number of people have only been able to go back overseas to see family just in the last couple of months. We had to endure lockdowns with no idea how long we would be locked down for. And I remember spending a lot of time with my family over Zoom. Do you remember these times? I don't know if you remember them fondly. It wasn't the same. For us, spending time with some of our family over Zoom was a bit of a chaotic mess. Instead of being able to do the big family meal that we would usually do with our family, what my family did on one particular Friday night is we each went to our local McDonald's and we picked up Macca's and we came home and we had a Zoom. And so we had a big family meal together over Zoom. And it was nice. It was fairly chaotic because you've got kids shouting, you know, where are my nuggets? Don't touch my chips. People are trying to talk over the top of each other. And the way Zoom works, it just doesn't understand voices if everybody's speaking at the same time. So we lasted about an hour. And then it was like, okay, this is nice. We all just need to go now. But even though it was hard and it was not ideal, we still did these types of things. We still did it. We continued to value important relationships and use these kinds of technologies even though it wasn't ideal. We didn't just say, oh, look, if I can't actually come and see you, I'm just not going to talk to you for the next three months, six months. I'm just going to put our relationship on pause because it's just too hard. We didn't do that. And yet, I wonder if we can do that with God. God, it's really hard to talk to you. It's hard to hear from you. It's hard to pray. I'd much rather you spoke to me directly. And so it's a bit hard to do that. And so maybe I just won't talk to you that much. Is it possible that the challenges we face, living in a sinful world and struggling with our own sinful hearts, tempts us to put a distance between us and God because it's not always easy to talk to him? We have been going through the book of Romans, as Ash has mentioned for us already, and we've seen this wonderful picture of God's love for us. Despite our sin, despite our shame, despite our rebellion, God would justify us. He would wipe away our sin and our pain so that we can stand before him, so that we can stand. And with Jesus at God's side, and Jesus can say, this one, I died for this one. And so we have a new legal standing before God. And today, we're going to see that we not only have a new legal standing, but we've actually been saved for a purpose. We've been saved for relationship. And the challenge for us today is to see that we can have wonderful intimacy with our God, despite the challenges around us. And so even though there's challenges and we groan as we wait, that is the challenge set before us. To understand what it means to be a child of God. So there's two points for us today, and you can see them in the St. Paul's app or on the

screen. The first point, let's see if I can get my clicker working. Let's see. Let's see, Wendy, if you can put it over there so I can get... There we go. The present hope of adoption and the future hope of adoption. Let me pray as we begin. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word to us. And we thank you for Paul's words to the church in Rome that we get to read and hear and understand today. Be with us, Lord, so that we would understand more of who you are, of who we are as your children, that we would get to know you and love you, Lord. Amen. Throughout Romans, Paul has looked at salvation from a legal perspective. We now have a new legal standing before God. But now he looks at salvation from a relational perspective. We have a new relationship with God. And so today we're going to start off with a beautiful picture of adoption, being brought into God's family. And so we're going to go through the first couple of verses of this passage fairly slowly before we speed up through the rest of the passage today. So have a look with me at verse 14 in your Bibles or on the screen. From verse 14, which says, for those who are led by the Spirit of God are the

children of God. What makes a person a child of God? Who decides the adoption? It seems like in the moment of salvation it is us. I remember when I became a Christian, the year was 1997, I heard the gospel preached and I went, that's what I want. I want to be a child of God. And in the moment, it seemed like it was me choosing God. But Paul is reminding us here that it is only at the initiation of God. God is the one who sends his Spirit so that we can be his children. My feelings in that moment of me choosing

God are just confirmation of what God was doing in my heart. And it's true of all people who follow Jesus. If you, by faith in Jesus, are trusting in him, that means that you have God's Spirit. And as we start to talk about what it means to be adopted as God's children, I can't help but think of scenes in movies like Annie. You know, you think of a scene in an orphanage and a couple of parents.

[6 : 34] I can't remember what's Annie's adopted father's name. Daddy Warbucks. I remember it was something. Daddy Warbucks. Daddy Warbucks comes in and chooses Annie and takes Annie home. It is at the initiation of the parents to adopt. I don't think I've ever heard of a child who's in an orphanage going out to a street going, adult, you there. I'll take you. You adopt me. Thank you. And I'm going to go home with you. That's not how it works. God is the one who has come and found us. He has given us his Spirit to adopt us to be his children. And what does this Holy Spirit do? Verse 15, it changes our relationship with God. The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. Adoption to sonship. This is one of the the key themes of the entire Bible. You go back to the very creation of the world. God makes the world and he puts Adam and Eve there to be his children. They rebel against him. And so after a while he takes the people, Israel, to be his children. And again, they rebel against him. And so finally he sends his own child Jesus to come so that we could be adopted as his children. Adoption to God's children is the point of redemption. Jesus doesn't just pay for our sins to just make us a little bit better, but for the purpose of being in relationship with God. God takes us who were slaves, those who were stuck in fear of God's wrath, and he brings us close. He adopts us into his family and he adopts us as sons. Now this book is called Romans. It was written to people in Rome. And in the

Greco-Roman world, adoption was a much more customary practice. What would happen is if there was a wealthy adult who didn't have any children, they would need an heir. And so what they would do is they would go and find a child, a teenager, or even another adult to be an heir, and they would adopt them. And this person who was wealthy would adopt them. And the moment the adoption occurred, for this child being brought in, all of their legal debt, all of their debts were paid. If there was any debts outstanding, that was paid by their new adoptive parent. Instantly, they were the heir of everything their father had. And third, the father is now responsible for all of their actions. And this child now has new responsibility to honor their parent. If you've seen the movie Ben-Hur, which came out about 400 years ago, there's a wonderful scene in this movie where the main character Ben-Hur, in this time, is given this legal standing by the adopted parent. And the adopted parent gives him his signet ring to show that he has all authority and power, just like his father. All of this cultural understanding sits behind verse 15.

God adopts people to be his sons. In our time, it's considered insensitive to refer to men and women as sons, but it's important to understand the point Paul is making here. In Rome, the status of sonship was the position of power and privilege. And it was only ever given to males. And so Paul is actually being radical here when he applies it to everyone, to males and females. All are God's heirs.

It was a culturally subversive thing for Paul to do then. It's culturally subversive for him to do it now, to take a masculine-only institution and show that in Jesus, adoption is for everyone. This place of power and privilege was for everyone without distinction. God uses different metaphors, masculine metaphors and feminine metaphors. So women, you shouldn't feel uncomfortable being called sons, just as men, you shouldn't feel uncomfortable being called the bride of Christ.

Even if it sounds strange to our ears, God is equal with his masculine and feminine metaphors. So we've seen that salvation and adoption are for relationship. And because God has brought us close to him as sons, we can have the greatest intimacy. The second half of verse 15 says, let me see, Wendy, can you click it over for me, dear sister? Thank you.

[11 : 37] By him we cry, Abba, Father. Kids, children, I need your attention for a moment. Kids, it's good to have you in church today. I've got a quick question for you. What do you call your parents?

Micah, what do you call your parents? Dada and mama. Okay, I don't know if I've actually ever heard him say that.

Dad, dad, mom. Hey, Sophie, question for you. What do you call dad when you really want something?

Dad, you just say dad. I wonder if our kids would ever lengthen that out a little bit. Daddy. Micah, is that what you would say? No, I'd say lollipop.

Lollipop. I'm pretty sure that's not my name. Our kids are the only ones who can call their parents these very intimate names. Dad, mom.

If any of you started calling me that, I'd be very confused. And what do they call them when they want something? Not just dad or mom, but the most intimate. It's daddy.

[13:00] It is a very intimate term. I kind of go in between calling my parents by dad and mom and by their first names these days.

When our children request things of their parents, they do so based on intimacy. You know, Micah, Tamara, and Isaac are the only one who can use those very intimate terms with me.

Paul tells us that we are brought into God's family as his sons, with all power, responsibility, and privilege. But we also get to call on him by the power of the Spirit with a very intimate term.

Abba. Dad. Some might even suggest it's daddy. Which sounds very strange to our ears to call the creator of the universe who made all things and has power over all things and is outside time and creation.

But we can call him dad with the most intimate term. God is no longer distant. He's no longer just a theological idea.

[14:09] He's no longer just something that we believe in intellectually. But we get to cry out to him as dad. A word which expresses our deep emotion and our real knowledge of our father.

And there's a wonderful benefit to being adopted and being able to cry out to him. Paul says in verse 16, The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

It's as if we're crying out to help from God for assurance, for comfort. And the Spirit comes alongside us as a witness to testify. We can look at our life and we can testify about our own life.

That since we became Christians there's been change. I've changed in these ways. My words are different. What I love is different. It is more like the things that God loves.

The way I treat people. I'm far more patient like my heavenly father. So we can testify to ourselves about how we have changed. But Paul is saying here that the Spirit also comes alongside us to testify.

[15:19] And it seems to be a direct testimony to our hearts. This is potentially a sense of God's presence in our hearts. Something that we're not going to get all the time or even very often.

But there will be times when we cry out to God as Father. As Dad. When we find ourselves deeply assured that He is there and that He is listening.

When we were in COVID lockdown, meeting together over Zoom was good. But made us look forward to the future. Which wasn't over screens.

Friends. For the Christian we are promised a better future. Verse 17. Now if we are. Now verse 17. Thank you Wendy.

Now if we are children then we are heirs. Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.

[16:20] This is again radical for the time. In the ancient world there was only ever one heir. Usually the firstborn son they would be the heir.

And they would receive the vast majority of the wealth. They would continue on the family name and the family business. But now in another radical turn Paul is saying that we are all heirs.

We all get the majority of God's wealth. It's as if what God has in store for us is so grand and so glorious. That it will seem as if we've each received far more than we deserve from God.

This is a truly wonderful picture of what it means to be God's child. There's a quote here from Thomas Watson who was an English Puritan preacher.

He said since God has a son of His own and such a son. How wonderful God's love in adopting us. We needed a father but He did not need sons.

[17:26] He did not need sons and yet He chose adoption. To be His children. With full standing before Him. With an inheritance that will not fade.

With assurance and intimacy. Have you ever heard of a lifeguard pulling someone out of the water saving them and saying hey do you want to be best friends?

Or a firefighter pulling someone out of a fire and getting them out and saying hey I'm going to a barbecue later. Do you want to come to a barbecue? This just doesn't happen.

Lifeguards, firefighters, it's their job to save people. But they don't have relationships with them. God doesn't just save people and say there you go.

I've made your life a bit better. Keep going how you were. I'm not sure what your relationship with your parents is like. Whether they are good, caring, loving parents.

[18 : 33] I'm not sure if they were physically present but emotionally distant or even abusive. All of this influences our view of God as a father.

But there is a beautiful picture here from Paul in Romans that we have a God who delights in us. Who wants us to draw close to Him. Who has saved us so that He can have a relationship with us. We have been saved for a purpose. Called to know Him. To be close with Him. To be able to cry out to Him as Father.

Is this something that we're doing? Is this something that we're doing? Or is this just something that is a bit hard? The relationship with God has become a bit distant because it's a bit hard to do.

And there are challenges around us. This is a beautiful picture of adoption. To be intimate children with God. But Paul's very aware of the challenges around us.

[19 : 37] It's our second point today. The future hope of adoption. Much like the challenge of having a deep relationship over COVID. Paul moves to speak about challenges that we face while we are awaiting adoption.

And so on the one hand Paul says we are adopted. But he also says we are awaiting adoption. It's described as the now but not yet tension.

We have these wonderful blessings. But we're also waiting on other blessings from God. We get to call Him Abba Father. But we don't yet have full intimacy with Him.

We're still waiting for Him. And as we wait there are challenges. There are challenges outside us. And there are challenges inside of us. Verse 20 tells us that because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Creation was subjected to frustration. There are problems in the world around us. Nature is not what it should be. It's not as beautiful as it should be.

[20 : 47] It's not as it was created to be. Humans were made to care for the world around us. We were meant to be the stewards. But because of our sin it's not just damaged us.

It's also damaged the world. I was at the dentist the other day. And one of my favorite things about this dentist is they've got TV screens on the ceilings.

It's a really wonderful thing because it means that while I'm lying back and having people in my mouth. They were very happy with me by the way. Just in case you were worried. Thank you for your care and worry.

It means while they're doing whatever they need to do I can be distracted and watch what's happening on the screen above me. And on the screen the other day was a documentary about penguins. And it was very cute fluffy things.

But what it continued to show every shot was of ice falling off cliffs. Of the water you know it was of the ice melting.

[21 : 45] Really heartbreaking shots of penguins on being on the same piece of ice. But then it cracks and then they're on two different pieces of ice. And you're like oh the penguins they're being separated. But of course they can swim so it's not that bad.

But I couldn't help but think about the impact of mankind and our sin on the world. And whether or not you completely subscribe to the idea of climate change or think it's overblown.

We don't need to look much further than the fires and the floods that have been happening in the last year and last day. To realize that there are things wrong in our world.

And Paul describes this as the creation is groaning in verse 22. If you can go to verse 22 for me Wendy. The creation itself is groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

There is pain. There is misery. No experience in this creation goes without being tainted by pain and by sin. But just like childbirth there is an end.

[22 : 55] There is a joyful end. None of this is the last word. Verse 21. Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay. And brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

This is a strange thing Paul is doing here. Paul is making the creation, the entire creation like a person. And it's as if this person is waiting for us to see God fully.

To have the glory of God that we're waiting for. Creation itself is looking forward to us being redeemed. Because it's going to be redeemed too.

But it's not just the world around us that's longing for that. We groan as we wait for Jesus to return to. Verse 23. We ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit.

Groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship. The redemption of our bodies. We now have the first fruits.

[24 : 00] The first part of the harvest. A taste of the goodness of God that is to come. But we're also waiting adoption. We're waiting for the redemption of our bodies.

Creation is eagerly awaiting redemption. And we are eagerly awaiting redemption. Paul can say earlier that we are adopted.

But we're also waiting adoption. It's as if the legal papers have been signed. And we're there at the door of the orphanage waiting with our bags packed. Waiting for God to come.

I know of families who have adopted children. And they celebrate two different days. They celebrate the child's birthday. But they also celebrate the day that child came home.

And so we wait. We celebrate our birthdays. But we also eagerly await the day we get to go home to be with our Lord.

[25 : 01] Now I don't know the day that I became a Christian. But I know it was in 1997. So I remember that. It was 25 years ago. But I'm really waiting for that day I get to go home.

Hoping for the redemption of our bodies. Not just from the physical pain of bodies that are falling apart. Not just the longing for an end to flu and COVID and sickness and death.

Not just that. But in chapter 7 of Romans, Paul talks about the battle in our hearts. And at the battle with our bodies to obey him.

And so I'm longing for when I'm not going to desire sin. My every desire will be to glory in God and to enjoy him. And so we groan now.

Because this is not our home. We are in a fallen creation. With bodies that are against our desire to follow our Father. And God's Spirit helps us to groan to him in need.

[26 : 05] This is not our home. But we are adopted and awaiting adoption. And so the Christian is to live with their bags packed. Waiting with the expectation of the hope that is to come.

And so what do we do now? We enjoy relationship with God. We grow closer in intimacy with him. And we see the suffering around and inside as the challenges of labor pains.

Labor pains that have an end because our hope is yet to come. I had COVID back in January. And I promise I'll stop talking about COVID soon. I had COVID back in January.

And I kicked one of my kids out of their bedroom. And I took over their bedroom so I could isolate from the family. Which was good because nobody else in my family got it. But one of the few things I was able to do for my family was read books to them.

And so at the start of isolation they slid some books over to me. And they were like, that's my book now. This isn't leaving this room. And so at night I would read to them.

[27 : 12] As much as I was able with an incredibly sore throat. And so what would happen is they'd be sitting on one side of the bedroom. Of one side of the doorway. And I'd be on the other doorway. And I'd read.

And it was fine. And it was good. It was something I was able to do. When I couldn't do much else. But I remember Micah saying, Dad, I just want to hug.

And it was really hard to say, No, you can't actually cross this line here. I don't want to make you sick. And whilst I longed to hug them, I didn't cut off relationship.

I didn't cut off connection because it wasn't perfect. Despite the challenges of the season, there was still relationship and longing made a couple of days. Longing for what was to come.

And brothers and sisters, that is where we sit right now. Longing for what is to come. It's as if we are relating to God through a Zoom screen. It is not ideal. It is not a preference.

[28 : 13] We talk in prayer. We hear and read His word. Waiting for the full adoption where we will see Him face to face. But that doesn't mean we ignore Him now because it is not as we want it to be.

Brothers and sisters, if you're not following this God, maybe you're not sure what it would look like to talk to Him. Maybe you're thinking, I want this relationship. I'm groaning. I tell you what, I'm

groaning.

There are challenges. I've never felt loved or valued by my parents. Let me tell you, there is a Heavenly Father who not only forgives you and loves you, but wants to know you, to talk to you, and values you.

If you want to know that God, if you want to come and talk to me after and get to know this God, I'm going to be down the front straight after church. But I know some are sitting here today wondering if God is even hearing their prayers.

Some of us are crying out to God for help. God, I've got challenges at home. I've got challenges at work. I turn the TV on and I see the challenges around the world.

[29 : 22] I'm groaning, Lord, because I've got challenges with my body. I'm groaning because I've got challenges of the flesh. I'm tempted to sin and I don't want to do that.

The wonderful promise of the Bible is that our God adopts us. He calls us into his family and we get to call out to him with intimacy. God, come and help me.

He knows our struggles, the challenges we face from creation, from the creation groaning and the challenges of our lives. And so we get to call out to the God who knows us, who loves us and is with us as we are waiting to be with him fully.

Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, for your word to us today. God, we ask that you would call us to know you and to love you, that we would get to talk to you daily.

Lord, even though it is not ideal, we want to talk to you face to face. Lord, remind us that you are with us, that you hear us.

[30 : 35] We thank you for your spirit by which we get to call you Dad, a very intimate name. Remind us today of your love for us in this relationship, Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.