

Adopted for Life

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[0 : 0 0] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

I'd like to go ahead and invite you to turn your Bible to Galatians 4. We're going to be in verses 4-7 this morning. And as you're turning there, I'd like to tell you a story that's very dear to my family.

I'd like to tell you about the first time we met a girl named Judy. I just graduated high school, and my family went down to Honduras on a short-term mission trip.

Some of us are getting ready to go to Mexico. Very similar trip. And we partnered with a friend who had started a home for high school girls who basically aged out of an orphanage. So Judy was a vibrant, spunky girl, about the same age as me.

And though she was barely even five feet tall, she had a reputation in the neighborhood for being this fiery, feisty soccer player. And she even put the soccer, like the high school boys, to shame.

[1 : 0 3] Unbelievable soccer player. And our family had a wonderful time that week that we got to go down serving alongside Judy. During our short time there, we laughed. We told stories. We got to serve and reach out to the community.

It was a great week. But as the week went on, that warm and lively Judy seemed to be withdrawing. And by the end of the week, we couldn't even find her to say goodbye.

It was really bizarre. And when we finally did find her, she was acting kind of cold toward us. And we couldn't understand what had happened. I mean, my mom, who is absolutely terrible at Spanish, she reached to give Judy a big hug.

And she tried to say, hasta luego, Judy, which for you Spanish speakers out there basically means see you later, right? Well, when my mom would do this, Judy pulled away and simply said, hasta never.

So my mom was shocked by that comment. And I think all of us were really kind of on our heels. We're thinking, didn't we have a great time together this week? Weren't we going to part ways as friends after such a great time?

[2 : 1 4] Well, what we didn't understand was that for Judy, this goodbye was preceded by a lifetime of goodbyes. She had been abandoned by her mother and separated from her twin sister.

And she grew up in an orphanage with corrupt leadership who lined their own pockets with money from Americans in the name of Jesus. And then they leveraged their authority to take advantage of young girls.

So the alternative to the orphanage was to drop out and to work the streets in a country with one of the highest murder rates in the world. So vulnerable to corrupt orphanage leaders within and vulnerable to street life without.

Judy's whole life was just characterized by trying to survive both physically and emotionally. So Austin never was this kind of self-protecting response to yet another family that would pass her by.

We were just another case of Judy longing, but not belonging. Well, my parents, they refused to let Austin never be the case with Judy.

[3 : 28] They insisted that we will be back again next summer. And that's exactly what happened. So Judy was excited to see us again the next summer. This time, my parents actually began having conversations, talking through logistics of how Judy might be able to come and stay with our family in order to pursue an education and play college soccer.

So two years and many prayers later, that conversation became a reality. Fast forward 13 years. After playing college soccer and graduating with honors, Judy is now working full-time in Atlanta for a youth soccer ministry and is an ambassador for Operation Christmas Child.

Some of you are familiar with the shoeboxes. She was a recipient of those, and now she's an advocate for it. She recently got her green card, and now my parents will be able to help her get a name change so that she can officially become a Hollingsworth.

So now she never has to say Austin never. Now it's always Austin luego. Judy belongs. Judy is loved, and she has a family.

It's a wonderful story of dramatic transformation. It's a powerful story for me, personally. It's my own sister.

[4 : 50] But it's also a story that points to something that every Christian in here should be able to relate to. Are you aware of the dramatic transformation that's happened in your life?

Perhaps you feel like God is an abstraction that has little to do with your daily life. Or maybe you fear that he's silently just watching you and waiting for you to mess up so that he can punish you.

Maybe you think God is too great. Maybe he's too high, too holy to give attention to your little life, your little issues. Or maybe you've suffered and you feel like God is malicious, cold.

Wherever you may be this morning, I'm certain that all of us could benefit from the truths revealed in this text, who God is and who we are in relation to him. These verses display the dramatic story of your transformation.

Let's read this text. Galatians 4, 4-7, it says this. 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 were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[6 : 12] And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you're no longer a slave, but a son.

And if a son, then an heir through God. So I believe the main point God has for us this morning is simple yet substantive.

The gospel transforms us from slaves to sin to sons of God. So this text announces the glorious transformation that is ours in Christ.

Understanding the divine adoption, this divine adoption changes everything. It transforms how we think about our status before God when we sin.

It transforms how we view God's disposition towards us. It transforms how we think about our suffering. If we begin to grasp this precious truth, I believe we will experience an unshakable joy and humble gratitude that's based on what God has done for us in Christ.

[7 : 22] And it's my prayer that you will walk away today more convinced of his abounding love for those that he claims as his own. So we're going to walk through this in two stages of this divine adoption.

I trust come from this text. The first stage is this. Through the son, our adoption is secured. And the second stage is through the spirit, our adoption is assured.

So let's look at stage one. Through the son, our adoption is secured. As you've seen, we're in chapter four out of six. And so come into chapter four, you feel like kind of watching a one hour movie and we're at the 40 minute mark and we're trying to make sense of everything that's already gone on.

So let's rewind. I'll play it back fast and I'll try to catch you up to what's going on up until this point. So the apostle Paul is writing to the Christians in the Galatian church to combat false teachers who are saying that faith in Jesus is not enough to be made right with God.

They're saying it's necessary to keep certain parts of the law in order to be acceptable. And this teaching is what we call legalism. Legalism believes that we can gain or we can maintain God's favor by what we do or don't do.

[8 : 35] But Paul just hammers back. He hammers back against his position saying in chapter two, verse 16, maybe the fulcrum of the whole message, we know that a person is not justified or made right by works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus.

Because by works of the law, no one will be justified. So if people are made right with God by faith in Christ, not by keeping the law, then what's the deal with the law?

Why is it there? Well, this is exactly the question that Paul is dealing with in chapter three. The law does not give life. If it did, then why would Jesus need to come and die in the first place?

No, keeping the law cannot save anyone. The law was added to highlight the breadth and the depth of sin. Paul says that the law is a guardian that leads us to recognize our need for a savior.

And now the savior Jesus has come. So placing their faith in Jesus is what makes people right before God, not going back and trying to keep a law that they could never keep in the first place.

[9 : 47] So to put themselves back under the law would be like putting themselves back into slavery in Christ after freedom in Christ has already been purchased.

So coming into chapter four, what is Paul trying to say to us? He's saying the law was never meant to save us. He's told us what the law is for. It's not the way we relate to God. It's not the way we're justified by God.

So we come to our text here in the flow of Paul's argument. There's this mounting tension. We're confronted with this pivotal question, who can do something about sin?

Look down with me at verse four. But when the fullness of time had come, who? Whose name comes after that comma?

Well, just try this on for size. But when the fullness of time had come, I checked the boxes off my Bible reading plan.

[10 : 47] When the fullness of time had come, I prayed at church today. But when the fullness of time had come, I did not cuss at the driver that cut me off in traffic.

It sounds kind of ridiculous, right? Sounds funny, but isn't that kind of the game that we start to play? Just like these Galatians, we start to believe that we can gain and maintain God's favor based on what we do or what we don't do.

That's like saying we need to cross over the Grand Canyon in order to get to God by using a secure, ready-made bridge that would allow a safe passage. What if after walking to the other side across the bridge, we did a little dance, and then we said, you know, that bridge was really helpful, but let's go back and try jumping across this time.

This is the insanity of legalism. Paul is going to redirect our attention to that pivotal moment in history that answers the question, who can do something about sin?

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son. Our God is an initiating God.

[12 : 01] He acted definitively at the appropriate moment. And the point is that God is intentional and he's strategic at all times. This is a great comfort to us when we consider our own lives because even when it appears that God is silent or inactive, he's sovereignly orchestrating all things.

And this verse turns our attention to the focal point of all of history. God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those who are under the law.

So why did God send his son according to this? Because redemption was necessary. When comparing human adoption to divine adoption, this analogy begins to break down right here.

Because these are not orphans to be pitied. This story begins with lawbreakers, slaves to sin. Redeem means to release a slave from his or her owner by paying that slave's full price.

As you remember, Paul is making an argument here that the purpose of the law is to lead people to see their need for a redeemer. Remember, the law accentuates what is true of all people, born of woman.

[13 : 18] All are slaves to sin. And this isn't just for the Galatians. This is our story too. There's a claim on our lives from the creator of the universe.

He is utterly perfect and totally just. And that presents a problem to us, doesn't it? Because we are not perfect. We've rejected his authority and we've attempted to live based on what we think is good and right.

The result is that we tend to compare ourselves by ourselves and we think that we're okay because we can always find someone more jacked up than we are, right? Don't we all play that game? I'm not that bad.

Look at that guy over there. You can always find someone like that. Well, that's like trying to give out medals for the best landing to skydivers with no parachutes.

Thank you, buddy. The point is that all have sinned and they fall short, not of each other, but of the glory of God. That's the standard.

[14 : 28] The standard is not other sinners, but a perfect God. And so we've fallen infinitely short of perfection. We've stolen, lied, lusted, hated, coveted.

If you're like, well, that's not me. Well, then what about failing to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength? We're slaves to sin.

So how can God be just and let rebels walk free after committing treason against the highest authority in all of the universe? Well, Scripture makes it clear that God is just, but He's also gracious.

And in order to spare us of the death that our rebellion deserved in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. Jesus, like all other men before, was born of woman and under the law.

But unlike all other men before, Jesus perfectly obeyed the law, but He did not stop there, for He came to redeem slaves from the penalty of their sin. So Galatians 3.13 makes explicit what the Son did for slaves.

[15 : 39] It says this, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, curse is everyone who is hanged on a tree. And there, He willingly hung on the cross, taking on God's just punishment against the sins that we committed, so that all, all who put their hope in Him could be saved from the just wrath of God against your sin.

For those who place their hope in Jesus, God no longer sees their sin but Christ's righteousness. And the qualifications for such a redeemer are very unique. John Stott summarized it this way, if He had not been man, He could not have redeemed men.

If He had not been a righteous man, He could not have redeemed unrighteous men. And if He had not been God's Son, He could not have redeemed men for God or made them sons of God.

Isn't that great? So as wonderful as redemption is, the verse does not stop there. Verse 5 says, He redeems those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

What an incredible expression of love. The word used for adoption literally means to receive the placement as sons. This is a legal term here. In the Greco-Roman world, a childless, wealthy man could take one of his servants and he could adopt him.

[17 : 11] And as soon as adoption was final, he stopped being a slave and he received all the financial and legal privileges as the son and heir. Though by birth he was a slave without a relationship to the father, he now receives the legal status of a son.

So it's incredible to think of this reality in terms of divine adoption. We weren't just some nice servants obediently working in the house of a benefactor that needed an heir.

We were active rebels in direct defiance against the God of the universe who does not need anything from us. And if we could have been present at the crucifixion, our voices would have risen up with the crowd that cried out, crucify him.

I think about all the times that I lived in secret or I told lies or I cheated or I burst out in anger or I harbored jealousy or I lived self-righteously.

I think about all those times and if you're anything like me, our sinful hearts would have been glad to see that hammer fall on his hands. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son so that the hammer fall of slaves to sin might give way to another hammer fall.

[18 : 36] God, the righteous judge, wields a hammer in the form of a gavel. And for all the slaves to sin who place their hope in Christ, God looks down from the judgment seat and he brings down that gavel with a single blow to make two declarations at the same time.

Based on the work of Christ, I declare you innocent and I declare you my son. Then he lays the gavel down, comes down from the stand and he brings you into his family.

How could he be so kind to forgive us, let alone adopt us as his children? J.I. Packer said it this way, To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved by God the Father is greater.

When confronted with this picture of God's generosity toward former slaves to sin, it's common for Christians to think of their salvation only in terms of being forgiven by God the judge, but not adopted by God the Father.

But when we live like that, it's like we're only half saved. We claim the pardon, but soon, we try to start gaining and maintaining God's favor.

[20 : 05] Paul wants to show the Galatians and he wants to show us that not only did the son remove the judgment that we deserved, but he also gives us the blessed status of sonship.

So we are both forgiven and adopted. Does that make you uncomfortable? Do you? Do you feel like you need to do something to stay in God's favor?

Do you feel like he'll kick you out if you mess up again? Underneath all of those questions is really this core question. Why does God love me?

Pastor David Platt described a conversation he had with his own adopted son on this very question. He says this, the other day I was playing with my son whom we adopted from Kazakhstan and his favorite question now is why?

When I told him I loved him he asked why? I said because you're my son and of course he asked why? How do you answer that?

[21 : 24] Out of all the children in all the world why is he my son? I started thinking about all the factors that had to come together from the timing to the qualifications to the ups and downs and the days my wife and I wondered if we could do this and I felt the tears well up though my son didn't even know what was going on and I looked at this precious little boy and I said because we wanted you buddy and we came to get you that's why you're my son in a much greater way you and I have a God who says I love you and when we ask why God he answers because you're my son but why because I wanted you he says and I came to get you where you look for certainty of God's love for you makes all the difference if you look within yourself you will be crippled by striving and legalism for as long as you live you will always be wondering have I done enough have I done enough but if you look out to the cross you will see that God's love for you is not based on what you can do but on what he has done for you in Christ

Romans 5 8 says God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us for all the fathers in here today who are Christians I believe this text calls us to see ourselves as sons who are infinitely loved in spite of our failures and sins our heavenly father displays undeserved mercy and he lavishes us with grace so dad seeing ourselves as recipients of this kind of love as sons should challenge us as dads it's usually obvious that mom loves the kids isn't it but it's often the case that dad is harder to please and harder to read let the reality of God's love for you dad be a springboard to show and tell your kids that you love them without them having to earn it through the son our adoption is secured let's take a look at the second stage through the spirit our adoption is assured take a look at verse 6 and because you are sons

God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba father God initiates the adoption by sending his son then applies it to our lives by sending his spirit the work of the son brings us this objective legal condition that's ours whether we feel it or not that's great news whether we feel it or not the gospel is not good vibes it's good news of an objective historical event through which the son accomplished redemption but the spirit is different the spirit brings us a radically subjective experience as redemption is applied to our lives so how does the spirit assure us of our adoption as children of God human adoptions are special don't get me wrong on this but they don't change a child's nature the changes is only legal and relational but when

God adopts us into his family he changes who we are from the inside out look at verse six God sent the spirit of his son where into our hearts so this is a fulfillment of what Ezekiel looked forward to hundreds of years before God sent forth his son listen to this and I will give you a new heart and a spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules so in Christ we become new new creatures God changes our nature by sending the spirit of his son into our hearts and he never departs and he transforms us over time have you given thought to how he's changed you maybe it's easy to dwell on all your rough edges in the unchanged parts of your life if you're anything like me that's my default but condemnation has no place in the

Christian life the spirit brings conviction that transforms you and brings life that's different do you remember your thought patterns and your actions before you became a Christian I want to invite you to think about this maybe this afternoon this would be a good exercise maybe ponder the wonderful renewal of your mind that the spirit has brought since he came into your heart maybe this would be fun to do with some people that know you well have seen you over a long period of time that know what a jerk you were before right my wife and I do this all the time like pointing out evidence of grace in your life over the course of years wow God's at work it doesn't feel like it all the times but sometimes when you look back it's so encouraging and we need that he is at work celebrate the evidence of grace that have emerged in you since becoming a Christian he gives us a new nature by his spirit but what are we to make of this crying

[27 : 39] Abba father so Abba as many of you know is this intimate and informal word children use for their dads like daddy and the first time I read this it really didn't strike me as very helpful I know I'm not supposed to say that about the Bible but I was reading this and I'm trying to figure out when did crying fix anything that was my default reaction to this well allow me to show you what I found as I dug on this particular thing while reading Russell Moore's book adopted for life I came across this description of one of his many visits to a Russian orphanage to work through the logistics of adopting two boys listen to what he says of all the others in its horror it was quiet the place was filled with an eerie silence quieter than the library of congress despite the fact that there were cribs full of babies in every room if you listened intently enough you could hear the sound of gentle rocking as babies rocked themselves back and forth in their beds they didn't cry because no one responded to their cry eyes so they stopped that's dehumanizing in its horror the first moment

I knew the boys received us in some strange and preliminary way was the moment we walked out of the room for the last time on that first trip when little Maxim now Benjamin fell back in his crib and cried the first time I ever heard him do it it was because for whatever reason he seemed to think he'd be heard and for whatever reason he no longer liked the prospect of being alone in the dark crying out is not meaningless emotionalism crying out here is the expression of hope for the hopeless crying out is the vocal demonstration of dependence Jesus what's more crying out Abba father is an echo of Jesus praying in the garden on the night that he was betrayed you remember this Abba father all things are possible for you remove this cup from me yet not what

I will but what you will Jesus cried Abba father as he depended on God to walk to the cross for sinners so that we can cry Abba father as we depend on God to walk through this life as sons have you listened to yourself cry lately what do you sound like when you're faced with difficulties or hardships or suffering or setbacks are you silent and hopeless or do you cry out who do you cry out to the ability to cry out to God is an invitation to see everyday life through the lens of his fatherly care we need to learn to ask moment by moment am I acting more like a slave who is afraid of God or like a child who is assured of my father's love for me one of the ways we can be assured of our sonship is by how we respond to our suffering the suffering

God brings into our lives whether large or small provides occasion to confirm our adoption as sons of God Hebrews 12 6-7 says the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastises every son whom he receives!

it is for discipline that you have to endure God is treating you as sons so whether it's getting that unexpected call about an accident or maybe it's struggling for patience with small children our cry for dependence on God is a supernatural declaration of trust that only can be brought by the spirit of God in us it's encouraging maybe at this moment you're thinking and you're wishing my default I wish my default was to cry out to God independence but maybe you find yourself hesitant to trust God and you tend to lean on yourself well let me assure you every single one of us in this room can grow in our trust of God children are constantly learning to depend on their parents right that's the same with us so by way of application

[32 : 34] I want to commend a way forward to cultivate a deeper trust in God's kindness towards his children the work of the son and the work of the spirit should never be divorced the fullness of the spirit is experienced as we meditate on the love of the son and the gifts of the son are enjoyed as we look to the spirit to guide us I want to encourage you to give yourselves to meditating on what God has done through the son for you identify a few scriptures that make this clear one example I found particularly helpful just for me is Galatians 2 20 very familiar verse I've been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me in the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and he gave himself for me saturate your day with prompts about the love of God towards you in Christ you could write scriptures on your mirror we've done that a number of times listen to verses on repeat while you drive so encouraging!

God sent the son to redeem us from slavery to sin by his death and made us sons of God God sent the spirit to assure us of our adoption by changing our nature and giving us the cry of dependence and because of Christ we receive all the benefits of being God's sons verse seven sums it up this way so you are no longer a slave but a son and if a son than an heir through God some of this inheritance is yet to come there's a future hope for the sons and at the return of Christ we will be raised from the dead to receive new bodies and new eyes to see God and the world without sin blurring the picture anymore won't that be great we are sons and heirs right now and the best part of!

inheritance is yet to come Russell Moore described the moment the adoption of their boys was final and he walked out of that orphanage carrying his new son and as they walked out of the building toward the taxi Moore's new son began reaching out for the orphanage tragically it was the only life these boys had ever known up to that point little did they know that this reference point for their total life experience was really no life at all I couldn't help but think of all that still had to happen on these little guys journey so much they wouldn't understand they still had to cram into a taxi drive through the city get into an airplane wouldn't that be weird if you never been out of the orphanage fly through the night to the other side of the world that process

I can guarantee you would be very uncomfortable but they were already loved as sons and a forever home with a family was on the other side we're not much different than these boys are we so often we reach back for that which did not satisfy like the Galatians we turn to the very things that kept us in slavery but we have been freed we can turn our eyes and we can cling to our good father who is with us and loves us he sent his son to redeem us while we were at our darkest so we can trust him in this world we will have trouble but he will not leave you as orphans through the spirit we can call to him now and all the while he will carry us his beloved children to the fullness of our inheritance a home that is unobscured by sin with a family in the presence of our father forever at thanksgiving a couple years ago i found myself sitting with my sister judy watching a documentary called the drop box you've never seen it it's a wonderful film so the film follows a korean pastor who created a small portal on the external wall of their church so that moms could who would normally abandon their babies could drop them anonymously at the church most of these babies left in the box had extreme disabilities that would require constant and complete care this pastor became the father to many such children he and his wife and a few church members spent their days and nights feeding bathing and loving these children these children would never be able to be independent ever they were utterly dependent on this gracious pastor who had brought them in as his own beloved children and as

I watched that film I looked over at Judy and I just marveled at the fact that this former orphan was sitting with her new family at Thanksgiving and I look back at the TV as the pastor was helping sponge!

[38 : 30] baby and I couldn't help but think of my own adoption I was just like them all God came for me not because of anything I could give but simply because he loved me I had nothing to give and everything to gain!

children of God and in fact are his children will over time prove to be the solvent in which our fears mistrust and suspicion of God as well as our sense of distance from him will eventually dissolve let's pray father such a joy to be able to address you as father we're grateful for your kindness to us though we deserve wrath justly you came to rescue us because of your abounding mercy we thank you for the gospel we thank you for the son that secures our adoption we thank you for the spirit who assures us of our adoption I pray that today will be a springboard to see you more clearly as a good powerful loving father in

Jesus name we pray amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com!