

Adopted By God - Part #8

“The Hope of Adoption”

Text: Romans 8:16-25

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 3, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Florence Chadwick had been swimming for fifteen straight hours. She strained her eyes forward, desperately searching for the land. But all she could see was fog, thick soupy fog.
 - Three years earlier in 1950, Chadwick had broken the world record by swimming the English Channel in 13 hours and 20 minutes.
 - On this day, July 4, 1952, she was determined to become the first woman to swim from Catalina Island to mainland California - a mind-blowing 34 km through rough ocean waves.
- The fog was so thick she could hardly see her support boats. Sharks cruised toward her but were driven away by rifle shots. Against the icy grip of the sea she struggled on hour after hour while millions watched on national television.
 - Fifteen hours into the swim she was past breaking point. Her mother yelled encouragement for her not to quit but staring into the fog she lost all hope that she could make it and asked to be pulled out of the water. It wasn't until she was on the boat that she discovered the land was less than eight hundred metres away.
 - Speaking to a reporter, she said, **(SHOW SLIDE 2) “Look, I’m not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the land I know I could have made it.”**¹ Just one glimpse of the land would have filled her with hope and that hope would have given her strength to finish.
- The Christian life is, in many ways, a long and difficult swim through thick fog. We have times of celebration and joy but we also experience many trials. We struggle to love a God we cannot see. The sharks of sin continually attack us. The waves of discouragement, health problems, financial worries, and bereavement never stop breaking over our heads. There are times when the trials and sufferings of life push us past breaking point and we feel like giving up.
 - What we need, above all, is a glimpse of the land. What is the land? The land is the future. It is the destination we are swimming toward. In this passage Paul describes it as an inheritance of incomparable value that the Father will give to all of the children whom he has adopted.
 - The aim of this passage is to give you a glimpse of that future inheritance in order that the great hope of what is to come might strengthen you to keep persevering through your present struggles.
- To that end this passage describes the Christian life in terms of three experiences that every son and daughter of God encounters.
 - Every son and daughter of God knows what it means to *celebrate joyfully*, to *groan inwardly*, and to *wait eagerly*.

WE CELEBRATE JOYFULLY

- In the first place **(SHOW SLIDE 3) the sons and daughters of God know what it means to celebrate joyfully.** We celebrate joyfully because we are heirs.
 - Look at the end of verse 16 and the beginning of verse 17. **READ 16b-17a - we are children of God, and if children, then heirs.**

¹ “Florence Chadwick,” Encyclopedia of World Biography, accessed November 8, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/people/sports-and-games/sports-biographies/florence-may-chadwick>.

- Oh what amazing grace! It would have been enough if God had just redeemed us from slavery and set us free. But he went further. He also adopted us into his family. And as if that were not enough we now discover, to our everlasting joy, that to be a child of God means we are also heirs.
 - This is so important that Paul constantly connects adoption to being an heir. Remember that Paul talks about adoption in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians.
 - We have seen this theme of being an heir here in Romans. In Galatians 4 Paul talks about adoption and writes, **“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir”** (Gal 4:7). In Ephesians 1 he talks about adoption and then writes, **“In him we have obtained an inheritance”** (Eph 1:11).
 - This is the logic of adoption: If you are God’s son or daughter by adoption then you are, by definition, an heir.
- In 2016 Heather and I went on a trip to Ecuador. Before we left Heather said, **“Have you updated our wills to include Josh because it would be terrible if something happened and he was not in it?”** I told her that we don’t need Josh’s actual name in our wills. Why not? Because our wills state that if we both die then various payments are to be made and the remainder of our estate is to be divided **“into as many equal shares as there are of our children.”**
 - So if we died a lawyer would ask, **“Who, by legal definition, are Barton and Heather’s children?”** Our three biological children could prove they are our children by producing the legal document of their birth certificates.
- But Josh cannot prove he is our child through his birth certificate. So what if a lawyer challenged Josh’s claim to his share of the inheritance?
 - Josh could simply pull out this legal document of adoption which declares, **(SHOW SLIDE 4) “This is to certify that Barton Dale Priebe and Heather Elise Sklaruk Spratt reached an adoption agreement for adopting Liao Yu . . . The adoptive relationship comes into effect from March 26, 2013. Barton Dale Priebe is Liao Yu’s adoptive father and Heather Elise Sklaruk Spratt is Liao Yu’s adoptive mother. Liao Yu is now renamed as Joshua Liao Yu Priebe.”**
 - Josh could put that document in his challenger’s face and say, **“Back off! I am the child of Barton and Heather Priebe. And since I am their child, I am an heir and am entitled to my share of the estate!”**
- You see it does not matter *how* Josh became our child; it only matters *that* he is our child.
 - If you have received Jesus then you are adopted into God’s family. And if you are God’s child then you are also an heir.
 - Celebrate this tremendous privilege!

WHY DO WE STILL SUFFER?

- But even as we celebrate we are suddenly shocked back into reality when another icy wave of suffering crashes over our lives.
 - A great question then begins to plague our minds: If I have become the beloved child and heir of God, then why is my life still so difficult?
- I have sat weeping with Christian couples that have miscarried for a second and third time. I have groaned with Christian women who struggle with eating disorders and Christian men who hate pornography but keep losing battles against it. I have presided over gravesides where the coffins are only two feet long. I have watched cancer turn a 6’6” 280lb Christian man into a mere skeleton before leaving his wife a widow and his teenage son without a father.
 - Oh God, if we are your royal children and heirs, then why are we still suffering?
- To complicate this even more, there are many supposed Christian leaders who say that if you become a Christian and have faith then Jesus will heal all your sicknesses, solve your problems, and even make you financially wealthy.

- But people get disillusioned with God when this does not happen. They conclude that Christianity doesn't work. Many even give up swimming and get into the boat.
 - So how do we reconcile the fact that the Bible says Christians are the beloved children and heirs of God and yet we still suffer?
 - I want to show you that it is this doctrine of adoption that will enable you to make intellectual sense of suffering and will also grant you the emotional strength to face your suffering.

WE GROAN INWARDLY

- In the second place we see that, even though the sons and daughters of God know what it means to celebrate joyfully, **(SHOW SLIDE 5) the sons and daughters of God know what it means to groan inwardly.**
 - Look at verse 23. **READ 23** – *we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly.*
- So why do we still suffer and groan if we are the beloved children of God?
 - The key is to grasp that your adoption has both a *present* and a *future* element to it. **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Let's look at our chart one last time. We have seen that Paul uses adoption to describe the big story of history.
 - Today we are looking at chapters 4 and 5 in this big story. Chapter 4 has to do with our present adoption but chapter 5 says there is something about our adoption that is still in the future.
- You see, in one sense we are *already* adopted in the present for as Romans 8:15 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 7) “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.”** But there is another sense in which we are *not yet* adopted for the completion of our adoption lies in the future. Look at verse 23. **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** It says, **“we wait eagerly for adoption as sons.”**
 - So if we are already adopted in the present why are we waiting eagerly for our adoption in the future? The answer is found in this idea of being an heir. Being an heir has both present and future elements to it.
 - To be an heir is a present reality in that it points to the fact that you are already a child and that the estate is, in principle, already yours. However, being an heir is largely a future reality because you do not receive your inheritance until the future.
- So this explains why we still suffer even though we are sons and daughters of God. We suffer and groan inwardly because our adoption is not yet complete. We are heirs but we have not yet received our inheritance.
 - Even though we are the sons and daughters of God, **(SHOW SLIDE 9) we groan inwardly because we must suffer before receiving our inheritance.**
 - Paul then describes two reasons why we must suffer.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) First, we must suffer because the sons and daughters of God have to follow in the footsteps of the Son of God, who suffered and then was glorified.** Look again at verse 17. **READ 17** - *if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*
 - Do you see the present and the future tenses here? Jesus suffered and then was glorified; it was the cross *before* the crown.
 - Since we are united to Jesus we must follow in the footsteps of our elder brother: first suffering and then glory.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 11) Second, we must suffer because we live in “this present time,” which is marked by suffering for all creation.**
 - Look now at verse 18. **READ 18** - *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

- Notice again the sharp contrast between the present and the future. The children of God have a glorious future inheritance coming to them but it is not yet here. We live in what is called “this present time.” And note carefully that it is suffering that marks “this present time.”
 - And it is not just we who groan. Paul goes on in verses 19-23 to say that the entire cosmos also groans in this present time. Why? Because the destiny of the universe is tied to humanity. When humanity rebelled against God in Genesis 3 we brought down the entire cosmos with us.
 - God then placed the universe in a state of bondage so that it is unable to develop and blossom, unable to achieve its potential. And so all of creation is also groaning in this present time – groaning like a woman groans in pain when she is giving birth.
- So there is the intellectual answer to suffering: the reason we suffer and groan inwardly is because, even though we are heirs, we have not yet received our inheritance. So when people say, **“God promises that if you become a Christian then he will heal all your sicknesses, solve all your problems, and make you wealthy,”** then this passage says, **“You are absolutely right! But you are wrong on the timing!”**
 - You need to read God’s clock. You need to know what time it is. A time is coming when the swim will end and we will set foot on the land but that time is not yet here. A time is coming when the children of God will receive their inheritance and there will be no more groaning, but that time is not yet here.
 - Even though we are the children of God, we still live in this present time, which is marked by suffering.

WE WAIT EAGERLY

- So that is how this passage makes intellectual sense of why the sons and daughters of God still suffer. But now let us turn to the third experience, which gives us emotional strength in our suffering. In the final place, **(SHOW SLIDE 12) the sons and daughters of God know what it means to wait eagerly.** We wait eagerly because our inheritance will be worth it.
 - What is our inheritance? We will look at it in a moment but notice that this entire passage contrasts our present sufferings with the glory of our future inheritance.
- Look at verse 17 again. The children of God must suffer like Jesus did but **READ 17b - “we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”**
 - Look at verse 18. **READ 18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**
- Then look at verse 19. This future inheritance is so great that **READ 19 - the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.** J.B. Philips translates this as, **“Creation is on its tiptoes.”** The mountains and rivers, bears and eagles, planets and stars, are craning their necks forward, looking for that future day when God will publicly reveal who his children are and give them their inheritance.
 - Creation can hardly wait for that day because its destiny is tied to that of God’s children. When we fell, creation fell with us, but when God exalts his children, he will also exalt his creation. When the children are revealed, verse 21 says, **“creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”**
 - Oh yes, creation groans like a woman groans in childbirth. But the groaning of childbirth is not the groaning of *hopeless despair*. It is the groaning of *hopeful anticipation*. A baby is about to be born. Creation is groaning because it is in labour. A new heavens and a new earth is about to be born.
- So now the question is, **“what is this inheritance that the children of God will receive?”**
 - What is this inheritance that is so great that it cannot even be compared to our present sufferings?

- What is this inheritance that puts all of creation on its tiptoes, looking for the day when the children of God will receive it?
 - I see three things in this passage.

GOD'S CHILDREN WILL INHERIT RESURRECTION BODIES

- (SHOW SLIDE 13) **First, the sons and daughters of God will inherit resurrection bodies.**
 - Look again at verse 23. **READ 23** – ***“we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”*** Adoption is here defined as the redemption, or deliverance, of our bodies.
 - The great hope of Christianity is not that we will escape our bodies and live as disembodied souls in a spirit world. You are not just a soul. You are an embodied soul. God is not just going to save a part of you. He is going to save all of you – body and soul.
 - God will not allow sin and death to have even one little victory. Rather, he will resurrect your body from the dead and transform it to be like the resurrection body of Jesus.
 - I used to go visit an older woman in my church whom we affectionately called “Cousin Elizabeth.” She had set every single Psalm to music, even Psalm 119. But she suffered. She was blind. She was overweight and had diabetes. She had to have a leg removed. She was confined to a bed in a care home for the last five or six years of her life.
 - You think, ***“Father, this is one of your daughters. She has to live with a permanent catheter and have others bathe her. Why don’t you do something?”***
 - God the Father answers back, ***“Oh, I will do something. Her body will not lay in the grave forever. I have an inheritance for her. Her body will be changed, ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of any eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and dead will be raised imperishable’”*** (1 Cor 15:52).
 - A day is coming when your adoption will be complete – when you will be delivered from this body that is frail, weak, sinful, and mortal.
 - You will inherit a resurrection body; a body of strength and vigor that will throw walkers and wheelchairs aside, a body that laughs in the face of cancer and Alzheimer’s, a body that has no desire for sin, and a body that mocks death to its face saying, ***“Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?”***
 - The sons and daughters of God will inherit resurrection bodies.

GOD'S CHILDREN WILL INHERIT THE WORLD

- (SHOW SLIDE 14) **Second, the sons and daughters of God will inherit the world.**
 - The idea of being an heir in Romans 8 must be understood in light of what Paul has already said about being an heir in Romans 4. In Romans 4:13 we read of (SHOW SLIDE 15) ***“the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world.”*** So God made Abraham his heir and promised to give him and his offspring the entire world.
 - Who then are Abraham’s offspring? They are all those who trust in Jesus for as Paul says in Galatians 3:29, (SHOW SLIDE 16) ***“If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”***
 - So God’s children will not just inherit resurrection bodies. We will also inherit the entire world. Revelation 21 talks about how God is going to renew the universe into a new heavens and a new earth.
 - God’s plan is not to evacuate his children from this world to live in some spirit world as disembodied souls. Contrary to the old hymn, this world *is* our home. But this world is like an old home that has fallen into disrepair. God’s plan is not to demolish our home but to renovate it into something new.

- A day is coming when, like on all those home reno shows, God will reveal our newly renovated home to us. And just as the people on those shows cry tears of joy and can hardly believe it is the same house, we will look upon the renewed earth and say, **“I can’t believe it. It’s the earth but it’s so much better.”** Just one hour standing upon the shore of that new world and breathing the sweetness of its air will heal all the wounds of this life.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD WILL INHERIT GOD HIMSELF

- So the sons and daughters of God will inherit a resurrection body and they will inherit a renewed world. But there is something missing here.
 - Without this third part, the children of God would spend eternity groaning in their immortal bodies.
 - Without this third part, the children of God would soak the new earth with their tears.
- In the third place, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) the sons and daughters of God will inherit God himself.**
 - Our Father will not give us new bodies and a new world and then walk out of the universe, close the door, and leave us all alone. No! Look again at verse 17. **READ 17a - and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.**
 - To be “heirs of God” means that we inherit God. The supreme inheritance that God promised Abraham was not the world but himself for he said in Gen 17:7 that he would be his God.
- Revelation 21 describes how a future day is coming when heaven (which is God’s home) will come down and merge with the new earth (which is our home).
 - Then verse 3 says, **“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.**
 - Oh what else can you possibly ask for? There is nothing more that God can give you. To have God is to have everything.
- This is also expressed in that wonderful phrase “fellow heirs with Christ.” This means we get to share in what Jesus inherits. Jesus is our elder brother. The Father has promised him an inheritance. Since we are united to Jesus we get to share in what Jesus inherits. And what does Jesus inherit? Everything! For Hebrews 1:2 says God appointed him to be **“the heir of all things.”**
 - What more can you possibly ask for? Your inheritance includes everything that can possibly be given.
 - A resurrection body will be yours. The universe will be yours. But greatest of all, God himself will be yours. Adoption, then, refers to the completion of all that we are and all we are meant to be, which is a resurrected and glorified human being dwelling forever in the presence of God in a newly remade world.
- Reflecting on this, Martin Luther said, **(SHOW SLIDE 18) “This far passes man’s capacity, that He calls us heirs; not of some rich or mighty prince, not of the emperor, not of the world, but of God, the Almighty Creator of all things. Our inheritance . . . is incalculable. And if a man could comprehend the great excellency of this matter, that he is the son of and heir of God, and with a constant faith believe it, this man would esteem all the power and riches of all the kingdoms of the world but as dung, in comparison with his eternal inheritance. . . . A man that could perfectly believe this, should not long remain alive, but should be swallowed up with excessive joy.”**²

² Martin Luther, *Galatians*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 1998), 258. An old writer named Octavius Winslow put it this way: “It is in the heart of our God to give us the chiefest and the best. Had there been a greater, and a better, and a sweeter, and a more satisfying portion than himself, then that portion had been ours. But since there is not, nor can be, a greater than he, the love . . . that he bears to us, constrains him to give himself as our God, our Portion, our All.” Octavius Winslow, *No Condemnation in Christ Jesus: As Unfolded in the Eight Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 187.

HOPE STRENGTHENS US TO PERSEVERE

- Now let's bring this all together. Why has Paul told us all of this? Answer: to fill us with hope. It is the hope of the future that will strengthen you to persevere through the sufferings of this present time.
 - Florence Chadwick said, **“if I could have seen the land I know I could have made it.”** Paul is giving you a glimpse of the land in order that you might be strengthened to keep swimming.
 - And what will strengthen you to face all the suffering of this life is keeping that future inheritance always before your eyes.³

A MISSIONARY AND A PRESIDENT

- The story is told of an old missionary named Samuel Morrison who, after twenty-five years in Africa was returning home to the United States to die. As it so happened, he traveled on the same ocean liner that brought President Teddy Roosevelt back from a hunting expedition.
 - When the great ship pulled into New York harbor, the dock where it was to tie up was jammed with what looked like the entire population of New York City. Bands were playing, banners were waving, choirs of children were singing, multicolored balloons were floating in the air, flashbulbs were popping, and newsreel cameras were poised to record the return of the president.
 - President Roosevelt stepped down the footbridge to thunderous cheers and applause and banners that said, **“Welcome home.”**
- At the same time, Samuel Morrison quietly walked off the boat. No one was there to greet him. He slipped alone through the crowd. Because of the crush of people there to welcome the president he couldn't even find a cab.
 - Inside his heart he began to complain, **“Lord, the president has been in Africa for three weeks, killing animals, and the whole world turns out to welcome him home. I've given 25 years of my life in Africa serving you, and no one has greeted me or even knows I am here.”**
 - In the quietness of his heart he felt like he heard God saying to him, **“But my son, you are not yet home.”**

CONCLUSION

- Sons and daughters of God, you are heirs. In this this present time you must suffer as you follow in the footsteps of your elder brother, Jesus. But a day is coming when you will receive your inheritance.
 - A day is coming when you will walk down the footbridge into a new world. As you approach the city of God, the host of heaven will rise in thunderous applause. The ticker tape will fall. Music will fill the air. Banners will be stretched across the city gates saying, **“Welcome home.”**
 - And then you will see him. Then you will see your elder brother. He will reach out with his nail scarred hands and say, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”** (Mt 25:34). And Jesus, your elder brother, will bring you into your Father's house to dwell with him forever.
- Just one day with your Father in that new world will heal all your old wounds. All the groaning and pain you experienced in this world will fade from your memory like the terror of a bad dream is forgotten when morning arrives.
 - The swim is long and hard. Strengthen yourself with hope. There is land ahead. It is closer than you think. You're almost home and a vast inheritance awaits you.

³ C.S. Lewis captures this so well at the end of his seven-book series called *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Children from our world go into the world of Narnia where they encounter many struggles and trials. Eventually they die and Lewis ends the entire series with these words: “The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, vol. 7, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984), 228.