

Adoption: Identity and Inheritance

Romans 8:14-25

INTRO

Happy Father's Day. I'm a Dad. **These are my kids (Show Picture).**

Insert witty phrase about grilling, golfing, fishing, mowing the lawn, watching TV, and losing tempers. At least that's what all the *funny* hallmark cards say.

- (you know, you have the serious ones, you always know the serious ones because they are written in cursive and the funny ones are always written in comic sans font. I wish someone would make a funny card that was written in beautiful calligraphy. I mean, go all the way with this thing, put a picture of the sunset in the over the ocean in the background, a couple of seagulls overhead. On the front it could say "To the greatest Dad in the world..." Then on the inside in the same beautiful font "...when you find him, will you give him this card.""
- For the record, I would never give that card to my Dad. I love him and am very thankful for him.

But it does seem as though fatherhood is defined by our experience. Did I have a good dad, then I think fatherhood is a great thing...and I love father's day. Maybe you had a father who wasn't there, and you hate when this day rolls around every year. Maybe your understanding of what a father should be is defined by hallmark cards and Homer Simpson.

Whatever the case, it is question I had to ask myself 7 years ago. What is a good Dad and can I be one? My wife and I were thinking seriously about adopting a child. Rather, she was and I was kind of humoring her, thinking "there have to be so many steps in an adoption process we'll never actually go through with this!" I'm not sure why I was hesitant about adoption at the time. I knew it was a good thing, I thought "Somebody should do it." But I think, deep down, I really thought that the first step to being a good dad...a real dad...was being a biological dad. I couldn't seem to shake the idea that to adopt a child was to "admit defeat" in the realm of fertility or that in some

way I was going to have some secondary, deficient relationship with my son because he didn't share my genetic makeup.

But I was missing something. See, I was only thinking about adoption in the terms of my limited experience with it.

- Specials I had seen on TV.
- Things I had overheard my parents or grandparents say about some family I didn't know who had adopted a child and they were having all kinds of behavior problems.

My entire understanding of adoption was formed by human experiences (mostly negative). They were broken pictures of something that is much more than what they portrayed, much like the broken pictures we sometimes get of fatherhood. But bad experience with a father shouldn't mean I think negatively of God every time the Bible refers to him as father. NO, we rearrange what we understand a father should be based on what we know about God as father. In the same way, I needed to rearrange what I understood about adoption based on what the gospel says it is.

That is what we are doing today.

TEXT- Romans 8:14-25 (Read it & SCREEN)

CONTEXT-

Jumping into the middle of this chapter is a little like being blindfolded, spun around 10 times, and then pushed into a swimming pool full of spaghetti sauce.

- You know you're in the middle of something rich and meaty, but your just not exactly sure what is going on.

So let me try to give some context. Paul, the apostle, has just written in the first 6.5 chapters about the gospel. The gospel is that though we had rejected God, God loved us and came after us and rescued us. He summarizes it in **Romans 5:8- God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (SCREEN)**

When we get to chapter 8, what we see is that this reality is to redefine how we see EVERYTHING.

That is where adoption comes onto the scene. When you understand the doctrine of adoption, you get a clearer picture of who God says you are, and what he has in store for his children.

Adoption is a reminder of 2 things

1- Identity (Who God says you are)

2- Inheritance (What God has in store for his children)

1) IDENTITY (Who God Says you are) (SCREEN)

Romans 8:14-16

- What Paul does in these verses is to reassure the Romans of their belonging to God's family by telling them they are adopted!
- He is saying that adoption is the highest and most glorious privilege in all the universe. Being adopted is the greatest of all spiritual realities.
- **GOSPEL on CULTURE:** Now this may seem backwards to you if all you know of adoption is what you saw in an 80's sitcom. Many times we think of adoption as something to hide. In fact you might think that revealing to a child that he is adopted would have the adverse effect, confirming his fears that he doesn't belong. But that is not how the gospel informs us.
- Paul says "if you are doubting who you are, let me remind you that you have been adopted!"
- **ILLUS:** I do this with my two boys all the time. We talk about adoption with them, answer questions, and celebrate their adoption days. They not only know they are adopted, they are proud of it. Micah recently had a day at school when he had to bring in his baby book. Had pictures of the orphanage, he proudly told his friends, "Yeah, this is my Russian orphanage, these were my caretakers, but my Mom and Dad came and got me."

- The point is that it is adoption that tells him how he came to be my son, so he's proud of it and he likes to hear and tell the story.
- In the same way Adoption is how we came to be God's children, and we should relish the opportunity to be reminded of it.

So how does adoption inform the believer about our identity?

1) Adoption changes our legal status (Screen)

- **Romans 8:15a**- No longer slaves to fall back into fear
 - Slavery to sin that results in a fear of God's judgment
 - A legal standing has changed about you in God's court
- **ILLUS:**
- When we adopted both of my sons, we didn't just fly to Russia and Ethiopia, find an orphanage, pick them up and fly home. We had to go through grueling paperwork. We had sit in front of a judge (and an angry, cynical one at that). We had to have our credentials checked by both the US gov't and a foreign gov't. To make my boys our sons, we had to meet the demands of the law.
- The same is true is our adoption in the gospel. God's law sets a holy standard that we fall short of. Because we have broken that law, it demands that we pay for our sin with our lives. But in Christ, to adopt us, God met the demands of the law. Christ fulfilled the law in 2 ways-
 - 1) He never broke it. He was totally and completely righteous.
 - 2) He took our penalty for breaking it.
- **Romans 8:3-4 (Screen)**
 - *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*
- In our legal standing with God, we have a guilty verdict rightly attached to us because we have committed treason against God.

We rightly deserve eternal punishment for our sin against a God who is infinitely just, holy, and good.

- But Christ changed our legal status with God. First, he made us Not guilty, then he adopted us, gave us a spirit of Adoption.
- **ILLUS:** When I adopted my kids I didn't have to get em out of criminal court, before I went to civil court to change their name.
- But that is what God did in Christ, he had you declared not guilty, then he walked you next door in the courthouse and had your name changed to his. He met the legal demands to make us his kids.

TRANSITION- But he didn't stop there.

2) Adoption changes our spirit. (SCREEN)

- **Romans 8:15b-16**

- What does he mean here when he says we have the "Spirit of Adoption as sons by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"
- Well, the Spirit he refers to here is "the Holy Spirit". The third person of the trinity.
- What Paul says is that we not only have an exterior, objective legal adoption, we also have an interior, subjective, emotional adoption.
- Simply put, if you understand the gospel, you love your heavenly father.
- **ILLUS:** Here's what I mean. When my boys think about being my sons, they don't run to my bottom drawer, get the key to the lock box, get out their adoption papers and say "Whew, yes, OK, I am your son" NO. they have a spirit of sonship. Something inside of them, because of our close relationship of daddy and sons, they know that I am their Dad. It doesn't come just because I say, "You know what I did for you?" It comes because of the way that I continue to love them day in and day out. It is not conditioned on what they do, but who they are. In fact, **we have a thing I do with the boys where I tell them "I Love You"** then I ask them "Why does daddy love you?"...Because your good at baseball? NO. Because you can swim, ride a bike, or read? NO. Then they say "It's because we're your sons." See, it is the identity that I gave them as my sons that I reinforce with my unconditional love that

tells them I am their Dad. They may not have gotten it completely the first time I held them, but ask them now who their Dad is.

- **V. 15-** God replaces the fear of a slave toward a master with the love of a son toward a father. The Holy Spirit is given to us to change our own understanding of God from a fear of judgment to a confident, joyful, peaceful affection toward a father. (FLOW TO NEXT VERSE)
- **V. 16-** God the Spirit now testifies with our spirit, or emotional center, that “Yes, indeed. God loves me and has made me his son or daughter.” Because of that we can call on him in prayer. Because of that we can address him as Daddy, Papa. It is the confirmation of an intimate relationship that we have because God has legally declared us to be his children.

Individ application: In order to know your identity, to know if you are a child of God, you don't look at an inscription in the front cover of your Bible. You look at two things

- 1-Christ's work on the cross to change your legal status- do you believe it?
- 2- Do you have the kind of relationship currently with God where you confidently and often call him Dad in prayer?

Church Application: (CULTURE OF ORPHAN CARE)

- So what should these changes in identity do to the people of God, the church?
 - It should affect our attitudes and actions toward those in the family of God and towards those outside.

1) For our church, we find ways to love each other, take care of one another, serve one another, as a family should. This happens primarily in our small groups.

- Have you ever considered that what goes on in a small group is living out the identity of your adoption in Christ?

- How can you say that you want to take care of orphans if you are not even in a small group loving on the family of God that you have now in your gospel adoption?

2) For those who are outside of the church, we love them even when they are not like us. In our gospel adoption, God loved us and gave his son up for us “While we were sinners”. We should love those who are on the outside. Those that don’t look like us. We should welcome them in our homes and church. That will mean laying aside personal preferences and perceived “rights” in order to reach them with the gospel. It means serving them in places like the Durham Rescue Mission, or living in a culture overseas that is totally foreign to you or adopting a child of a different race or with a special need. It may mean your life gets very uncomfortable or downright painful in order to clearly display the love you have experienced in Christ.

These are the marks of a church whose people understand their identity through adoption!

TRANSITION

- So Paul reminds the Romans of their Identity (Who God says they already are).
- But he also introduces the “Not yet”. Paul gives a look to the future to encourage them. He speaks of their Inheritance

2) INHERITANCE- What God has in Store for his Children (SCREEN)

Romans 8:17-25

- In the middle of all this adoption talk, Paul says something that tends to freak us out a little. Look in v. 17
- **V. 17-** He says that because God has changed our identity (the already) we now should expect an inheritance (the not yet).
 - This is great! I am an heir of God. God owns everything. I get everything!

- But that is not the freak-out part. Where we freak out is with the phrase “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
- WAIT A SECOND! I thought Jesus did the suffering so I wouldn’t have to.
- True. Because Christ suffered for sin on our behalf, we don’t have to endure that penalty. But we are **still subject to the temporary suffering that happens as a result of sin.**
 - Now, sin no longer has power. The sting of the permanence of suffering and death has been removed by Christ, but creation, including his children, has not yet been completely restored or glorified
- Paul says here that...
- **We must endure the temporary pain of sin before we fully experience the eternal joy of glory. (SCREEN)**
 - No pain, no gain. No cross, no crown. No suffering, no inheritance.
- Before I really dug deeply into this passage, I thought the “Abba Cry” (v 15) was more of a warm fuzzy feeling. It was me sitting in my Dad’s lap and saying “I’m so glad you’re my Dad.” But that is not the way Paul frames it up here. It is a desperate cry. It is a groaning. It is a cry that comes from a realization that though we have been adopted, our adoption is not complete (look **at v. 23**). It says we eagerly await our adoption. **This is the not yet.** The full glory of being God’s children is not yet known until he comes back. And when he comes back he is not just whisking us away to heaven. He will renew all creation.
- For now, though, we live in a world of pain, heartbreak, death of loved ones, persecution, earthquakes, oil spills, Tsunamis, School shootings.
- But Creation looks at us, the children of God, and cries to the father “What you have started in them, we want you to come and finish, because when your children whom you adopted are fully renewed, we will be to.”

- Creation cries “Daddy! Come back!” Make it right!”. And we are joining in that cry.
- The abba cry is less like sitting in our dad’s lap and more like the scream of a child whose being attacked by a rabid dog. “Daddy! HELP ME!” It comes from a heart of child who knows that Daddy will come and do whatever it takes to heal the hurt, mend the wound, and make things right again.

I want to tell you how the adoption of my two boys greatly illuminated this truth for me, in hopes that it will do the same for you.

- Today, I can’t tell you the details of my kids lives prior to their adoption. Keva and I now are the only one’s who know some of those painful truths and will reveal them first to our kids when the time is right. But what I can tell you is that neither of them came from a place or situation that offered much hope at all. The hope that v. 24-25 speak of is slim in an orphanage. But, I experienced 2 great truths about the hope that comes through the Gospel through 2 very different experiences in each adoption.
- MICAH- **The Hope of Promised Return (SCREEN)**
 - When we first saw Micah, he was covered in sores from the bed bugs that had eaten at his body. We thought it odd, but pleasant, that he never cried. In fact, we did not hear Micah cry for the first time until several weeks after we got home. The reason? He had learned that nothing comes from crying. The caretakers were too busy taking care of all of the children’s basic needs, that being picked up and rocked was just not something they could do. I don’t know how many nights it took my son laying there crying to come to the point of hopelessness that his cry would not be answered, but I can imagine that night after night he hoped that someone would pick him up when he was afraid. He hoped that someone would rock him, sing to him, hold him close.

- We had to take 2 trips to Russia. The first we spent about 3 days with Micah. It was glorious. We rocked him, sang to him, played with him. I told him stories of what his new life would be like. I told him about his house, his room, his new family members. I told him about things I loved to do, how we would play football together, how I would teach him how to ride a bike, and eat a meatball sub with everything on it. I told him about all our holidays, what Christmas would be like, and who would be at the airport to greet us when we got home. In the night, Keva and I would take turns watching him, helping him not to scratch at the bug bites that covered him from head to toe. We took him on walks, played peek-a-boo, and made him laugh.
- Then the day came for us to leave. It would be a month before we would return to take Micah home with us. There was a knot in our stomach as we woke up that morning. We had been dreading this moment for the last 24 hours. The social workers showed up, and the tears began to flow.
- Just before they took Micah out of my arms, I whispered **John 14:18** *"I will not leave you as an orphan. I will come to you."*
- Then I watched them carry him out of the door. As Keva and I sat there sobbing, our hearts breaking for our little boy, we wanted so badly to grab him and take him with us right then. I wondered at that moment, "Will he remember us?" "Will this break his trust in me?" Finally, he has the hope of someone that will love him and now we are leaving him too!
- We left Micah with a little photo album with our pictures in it and a little stuffed elephant that we had rubbed some of our shampoo into so that he could see and smell us while we were gone in hopes this would remind him of us and our intentions to love him.
- **TRANSITION TO THEOLOGY**
- During the month in between leaving him and coming back my attention was drawn to the similarities between what we were doing and what God has done for his children.

- As I quoted that verse to Micah, I thought about Jesus reassuring his disciples, and through scripture, all of his followers, that though he was leaving...he is returning.
- And just like I promised Micah I was coming back to bring him to a new home, a new family, a place where I could always pick him up and rock him when he was afraid. A place where he would no longer have to sit scared in the dark in despair scratching at his disease, but would be loved unlike anything he experienced, so Christ has promised that to us.
- And just like we left a picture of ourselves and a scent on a stuffed elephant when we left Micah, so God has given to his children his Word and his Holy Spirit as a reminder and guarantee of who he is, who we are, his intentions to return, and the glorious inheritance that is to come.
- That day I understood more deeply how badly God desires to complete my adoption. **Romans 8:22-23** says that we await our adoption as sons in groaning. This is not because we have not already been declared adopted by God, it is not because we have not already experienced his love, it is because while we continue in the imperfections, the hurt, the brokenness, the sin of this world, we hang on a promise from a Father who says that he will make all things new and wipe away every tear from our eye (**Rev 21:4-5**).
- And I know, through his promise, and through my experience as human Father who so desperately wants to come back and get his son and wipe the tears away and give him a new life, that the heavenly Father desires that infinitely more for his children whom he adopted.

TRANSITION

Isaac's story is different but has taught me something very deep about God, the gospel, and myself.

ISAAC- **The Hope of Persistent Love (SCREEN)**

- When we first saw Isaac, he was eating (which is still one of his favorite activities). As Keva approached him, and tried to

hold him and feed him he began to scream and cry. We picked him up, changed his clothes, tried to get him to calm down, but all he wanted was to go back to sitting in the lap of a hired caretaker and eat mashed up beans.

- As we pulled away from the orphanage he continued to cry wanting desperately to go back. Despite our efforts to calm him and assure him he was going to be better off, he had decided that that orphanage, with that food, and those clothes were best for him.

- He eventually calmed down and sat quietly in Keva's lap, even developing an attachment to Keva. But he would scream every time I picked him up. This went on for 2 weeks in Ethiopia. I grew more and more frustrated and discouraged. I wanted to tell him in a way that he would understand. "Don't you see what I want to give you? I want to give you life where you have none. I want to give you a home where you have none. I want to be your father where you have none. This orphanage is not your home. What is here is not what is best for you. I know what you need. If you could only understand how much I love you and what I want to do for you!"
- Then it hit me. I am just like this with God. **Ezekiel 16** came to mind. It speaks of God's adoption of Israel a child that was cast aside in an open field, helpless, squirming in her own blood. BUT GOD, picked her up, cleaned her off, and gave her all of his rich food and clothing and made her beautiful.
- But still, the child did not honor her Father or trust him. She gave herself away as a prostitute, seeking to gain pleasure and joy by worshipping other Gods.
- **Though we are obstinate and unfaithful, God still pursues us.**

- Here is an excerpt from an email I sent while we were there.

- *I am learning a lot about how i treat God. with Isaac crying, screaming, pushing me away, not understanding my love...it is hard. I told him today the joy he is missing in playing with me while he screams and tries to get rid of me because he thinks something else will satisfy him, take care of him, calm him. Then this afternoon...BREAKTHROUGH. He began to play with me, laugh with me, enjoy me. I was overwhelmed with joy. WHY? Because my son was enjoying me. I began to tear up thinking about how pleasing it is to God when I enjoy him. Yet i resist so many times looking for my joy in someone or something else. I asked God today to remind me of these moments with Isaac when I chase after idols.*
- Through all that God does in his adoption of us, we would often still rather play in the cess pool of our own sin, than enjoy the amazing things he has in store for us in his will as he reveals it in his word.
- Why? Because we become so comfortable with the "orphanage of our life." We think the pleasure that we have experienced in idolatry and sin is enough to sustain us and we keep running back to it. We become comfortable with the idea living in a big house, having a few kids, and taking them to church on Sunday. And we lose the sense of groaning
- **But this is not joining in the "Abba Cry"**
- I wanted Isaac to scream, "Daddy, Take me home. Make it right." But he just reached out for the orphanage, the caretakers, the comfortable. He thought he wanted to remain fatherless.
- We get so wrapped up in our little, comfortable, pitiful world, we forget there are places and people who don't have a home, shoes, a Bible.
- When we embrace comfort and safety, we put a pillow over the face of those calling out the Abba Cry. We want to muffle it. We want to act as if creation is not broken, as if we

already have our inheritance. As if nothing is broken with the world.

With Isaac I was reminded that even in my obstinate pursuit of this world and the pleasures that it offers, even as I continually say no to God who offers me eternal pleasures and joy in Him (**Psalm 16:9**), that he still doesn't leave me in the orphanage. He keeps demonstrating his love for me and is persistent in his pursuit of my affections by constantly reminding me through his word, through the church, and through my family that He loves me and has a glorious inheritance in store.

God wants us to enjoy Him forever, not the orphanage of the world.

CONCLUSION

So what is a perfect Dad? According to the gospel, it is the God of the universe who gave his only son to adopt you. The most important relationship you will ever have with a father is not your earthly Dad, it is your heavenly father who loves you unconditionally and pursues you relentlessly. If you have never known that love, we want you to. Allow us to help you realize the love of your heavenly father. Just tear off that card in the worship guide and put it in the offering bucket when it comes around. There would be no better way to celebrate Father's Day than trust in the one who has made a way for you to be eternally adopted out of sin and into his grace.

Summit Church- When we truly believe the gospel, that we have been adopted by God into his family when we were completely helpless, and that we have a **new identity** as his children, we will love God, our Father, more passionately and each other more deeply.

- If the Summit has been a place where you just show up on the weekend, you are not fully enjoying the benefits of your new identity as a family member and a **small group** is a great place to start.

If we truly believe the gospel, All of our lives will demonstrate a love that is not self-focused...but a love, like God's, that sacrifices to bring others to the realization that they have a Father that loves them. We will realize that everyone outside of Christ is "fatherless," and we will want to introduce them to Jesus so they can cry "Abba, Father!"

We will reach out to those in need, those experiencing the brokenness of our world, to show them that there is a heavenly Father who will make all things new. Race, Disease, Special Needs, Finances, will not keep God's church from adopting orphans because sin has not kept God from adopting us.

If the gospel story of our adoption is true, then from Durham to Raleigh to Chapel Hill, to Mebane, to Garner, to Wake Forest, to Cary, to Apex, to NYC, to Denver, to N. Africa, to Central Asia, and back again, The stories should be flowing like legend of the way God's church has taken care of the orphan, the widow, the marginalized, the alien, and the outsider because that is what we all were without Christ!

And when we live as if we actually believe that there is an inheritance waiting in Christ that is so much greater than what we experience now, we will join with creation in the "Abba Cry".

Let's Pray.