

What 3 Words: Adoption

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[0 : 00] It says God's word, please do keep that passage open in front of you if you're able and let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we come together. Let us pray. Father, we thank you so much for your word to us.

We thank you for the wonderful book of Romans. We thank you for the glorious truths in this chapter and we pray, Lord, that you would now speak to each and every one of us here through it by your Spirit, that you might make known the riches, the blessings that we have in your Son, Jesus Christ.

In whose name we pray. Amen. Well, you may have seen it.

You probably haven't seen it. But in 2014, ITV released a two-part short film called The Lost Honor of Christopher Jeffries.

The film won multiple awards as it traced the story of the former English teacher who found himself at the center of a murder investigation.

[1 : 10] Christopher was innocent. But the police suspected otherwise and detained him as a suspect. Some people made their own detections and he was quickly vilified in the media.

Christopher was ultimately released without charge. He was declared not guilty by the justice system. But nevertheless, had his life ruined.

He was unable to live a normal life. He feared for his safety. He was stigmatized by society. His name was dragged through the mud.

There are countless more examples or similar stories that we could choose from if we wanted to.

The point is this, though. We live in a world, don't we, where being sort of declared not guilty, being set free is good.

But in this world, in our justice systems, it does not carry with it, does it, any guaranteed benefits beyond walking out of the courtroom without your wrists handcuffed.

[2 : 24] The judge says, you are free to go. But no one, the judge, least of all, says, and I'm going to look after you or protect you or provide you.

You do not have to look far to find people who have been released by the justice system into the world, into a world that offers them no help, no hope, and no home.

If you were with us last week, you'll hopefully remember Joe took us really helpfully through the doctrine of justification. Let me just remind you very briefly what we saw there.

We were seeing, weren't we, that in Romans chapter 3, Paul makes very clear that we, in and of ourselves, are not righteous. Each and every one of us has done what is wrong.

The word the Bible uses for that is sin. The wonderful truth we were thinking about last week, wasn't it, was that the moment we put our trust in Jesus, God says we are righteous because with our faith in Christ, the judge of all the earth looks at us and sees not our sins, but Christ's righteousness covering us.

[3 : 45] And so that the gavel falls, the judge looks up from his bench and declares us not guilty.

Free to go. Free to go. But, and this is the question we're going to be thinking about this morning, where do we go?

Free to go, but to where? We can and should be thankful to God for what he has done, rejoicing at our new status. But are we then just sort of left to ourselves, sent out from the courtroom once more into the world to go it alone, to fend for ourselves, to do our best, to forge our own path?

Well, in a word, no. This morning we're going to spend a bit of time thinking about the wonderful doctrine of adoption.

We've called this series What Three Words? Because the Bible gives us, doesn't it, three specific words that tell us where we stand as Christians now.

[4 : 53] Three words that locate us here and now. Justification, adoption, and sanctification. And we come this morning to the second of those, adoption.

And in looking at each of these kind of glorious truths, we're thinking specifically about how we benefit from trusting in Christ right now. Not just in what we have to look forward to in heaven and the new creation to come, but how we benefit here and now in the present from having our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I've not conducted a survey, but I'm confidently assuming, right, adoption is a word we're generally more familiar with than justification.

Adoption. You ask someone random in the street to define each of those words. One of them they'll give an answer to. The other one, they'll probably look at you like you're speaking a foreign language, won't they?

Now, that is, I think that's probably both a good thing and a bad thing. It's a good thing in the sense that we have a platform to begin from, don't we? It's not necessarily that kind of thing in that not everything we have in our minds regarding adoption is kind of immediately transferable to the way it'll be used in its biblical context.

[6 : 15] Because adoption, adoption in the ancient Roman world, the one in which Paul, the Apostle Paul, is writing these words here in the book of Romans, was something probably quite different to what we most commonly have in our minds regarding adoption today.

So we're just going to spend sort of 10 minutes or so this morning thinking first about what the Bible does mean when it speaks of us being adopted into God's family, before then considering some of the wonderful present benefits which flow from this wonderful truth.

So let's turn our attention together to Romans 8. I'm focusing this morning, as we're saying, in verse 14 to 17. Let me just read verse 14 through to 16 again.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says here. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

[7 : 25] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. You know what Paul says quite clearly, doesn't he?

Well, he's not saying, well, one day in heaven you will become children of God. No, he says, you who have received God's Spirit, you are here and now God's children.

You who have received God's Spirit, you are now the children of God. He even calls the Spirit, doesn't he? The Spirit of adoption. That same Spirit we receive when we first put our faith and trust in Jesus also makes us the children of God.

And we put our trust in Jesus the moment we were justified. We were also adopted. And so you, if your trust is in Jesus alone this morning, then you have already been adopted by God.

You belong to him. But if you read it carefully, you'll notice there, doesn't it, that there are two ways in these verses that Paul refers to those whom God has adopted.

[8 : 45] In verse 14 and 15, we get sons of God, don't we? And then in verse 16 and 17, Paul switches, doesn't he, to children of God.

Now, what's going on there? What was someone kind of like looking over Paul's shoulder and he saw what he was writing, but daughters. And Paul's like, oh right, but children. That's not what's going on at all here.

This is where our understanding of adoption needs to probably shift a bit from its present meaning to get the full picture. So let's just think for a moment about why Paul says sons of God in verse 14 and 15.

When we think of adoption, well, most likely when we think of, I think of probably an orphan or a foster child being taken into a home at a young age by a loving family who wants to love and care for the child, right?

That's kind of adoption most commonly to us, I think. Give that definition to a first century Roman and they'll look at you pretty quizzically.

[9 : 57] Adoption wasn't really about child rearing at all. It was all about establishing an heir. So, for example, Julius Caesar, the great famous Roman general, he adopted Octavian, later Caesar Augustus, but Julius Caesar adopted Octavian in his will.

Okay, now in our context, that'd be a pretty strange thing to do, wouldn't it? When he died, that was the moment he adopted a son. It'd be a bit weird today for us, wouldn't it?

But not then, because the point was not that Caesar wanted to take Octavian to his family home and look after him and take him on family holidays and all the rest. No, it's that he wanted Octavian to have everything he had.

That was the primary terms in which adoption was understood. Becoming an heir, being blessed with the name, the wealth, the authority. And that establishing of an heir was, in that society at that time, it was a position for men.

The eldest male son, often adopted, he was the family heir. Now take that context, kind of back to verse 14 and 15 here. I mean, what would have happened if Paul wrote, now you have all been made sons and daughters?

[11 : 34] Well, I think in a kind of patriarchal society, the sons would have heard that and thought, great, that means we're getting an inheritance. The daughters would have heard that and thought, well, good, but we're not getting a slice of the pie, are we?

Instead, Paul writes to his whole audience, not just men and women, but Roman citizens, slaves, barbarians, Scythians, all of them, and he says to them, you are all sons.

Each and every one of you has equal standing and equal rights to all the inheritance of this kingdom.

That's actually, in this context, a spectacular thing for Paul to say. Not only to the women, but to the slaves, the barbarians, those cast outs from the Roman Empire at the time, for whom also the prospect of being adopted into any family in the Roman Empire was a virtual impossibility to them all.

Paul is saying, you who have put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, whatever your status in this world, whatever your prospects in this world, however hopeless it might seem, however limited the prospects might be, in this family, in this family, you are all sons of God.

[13 : 01] It is a position of honor that has just no comparison in earthly terms. It doesn't do what the guy called Hugh Binning, a 17th century theologian, says.

He says, it is a higher word. It is a higher title than if a man could deduce his genealogy from a line of a thousand kings and princes. Another says, if we did but know that this privilege were, then all the riches of all the kingdoms in the world would be as filthy done to us.

You, brothers and sisters, are sons of God. If you were descended from a millennial-long line of royalty, it would not compare to this.

It would not compare to being a son of God. Hopefully now we're seeing, aren't we, that, on the one hand, adoption means something slightly different here, but also the glory of the language Paul is using.

It's not exclusive. It's inclusive to all those who put their faith and trust in Jesus. They are all adopted sons and so all heirs to the imperishable inheritance that they are promised in Christ.

[14 : 15] The question this might leave us is that does this all mean that the relationship is purely a legal one between God and his people?

Caesar adopted Octavian as his son, but he certainly never acted as a father to him. Is that how God treats his sons?

As legal heirs, great as that is, to an eternal inheritance, but doesn't really have anything to do with them in the day-to-day? Well, that's perhaps what the original readers might have assumed on first reading.

And that in part, I think, is why it is significant that Paul moves on from sons in verses 14 and 15 to children in verse 16 and 17.

Because this is, it is a legal relationship, but it is also an intimate relationship. We are sons of God and we are children of God.

[15 : 23] Children of God means God isn't just here to hand things over to us and leave us be. He is here to love and care for us as his very own.

God's relationship to us is as a father who is loving and gracious and tender in all that he does. For some of this might be very close to home, but we have all, haven't we, known or at least heard of fathers who have been distant, who have not showed an interest in their children, perhaps haven't even provided for them in the most basic of ways.

That would have been normal and fairly acceptable for someone who adopted a son as a legal heir in Roman society and no more.

An inheritance was guaranteed, a personal relationship was not. But that is why Paul's subtle switch here is so significant. Because we are adopted as sons, but he says in verse 16 and 17, don't think for a moment.

That means he isn't taking a personal interest in you, where you are today. Don't think for a moment he is not going to care for you each and every day of your life.

[16:55] Because you are not only a son, you are a child of God, someone he considers not only as an heir, but as his very own offspring. That is how God sees you and knows you and loves you.

As his son and as his child. And that comes, praise the Lord, with a great many benefits.

We are going to focus this morning only really on the ones that this passage here points us to. But there are so, so many we could add if we started branching out.

But let's begin with the great benefit that this whole chapter of Romans is really all about. In the context that Paul is writing here, I think the big takeaway from all of this is the assurance.

The absolute assurance, the certain guarantee we can have of God's love for us. Just cast your minds back to the beginning of this sermon when we were in that courtroom.

[18:11] If the judge was someone who only declared you innocent and set you on your way, what would you expect from them going forward?

You're not expecting much, are you? You might well be thankful for their declaration. You might well rejoice at the verdict pronounced in your favor. But you're not exactly about to wait outside the court, are you?

Looking for an invitation to the family barbecue on Friday. But what if that same judge who has declared you righteous says, before you go, before you move a muscle, I'm going to adopt you. I'm going to make you my child. How is that going to change, transform your relationship to them? It's going to completely change it, isn't it? That is what God does for us. And so not only are we no longer condemned, but we now have confidence and assurance that nothing, nothing is ever going to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus because we are his.

[19:37] Brothers and sisters, God has not only made you righteous in his sight, he has brought you in as his child.

And for all the failings of earthly fathers some people here might have experienced, there is never any failure of this father to love and care for his children. That is why Paul says in verse 31, if God is for us, who can be against us?

Again in verse 38, for I am sure, he writes, that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, nothing, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Because he has adopted you, you cannot get away from his love. No matter how far you run from him on a bad day, you cannot escape his fatherly care.

You can falter and fail, but he no longer looks at you as a judge, he looks at you as a father. That is the only way he will ever look at any of us in Christ Jesus.

[21:11] Adopted as God's children, we can forever be assured of his love for us. Secondly, because we have been adopted as children of God, we have freedom from fear.

Just look again with me there at verse 15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons.

Again, adoption as sons, doesn't it, clearly means to Paul no more fear, no more slavery. And that is because I think of where Paul begins this chapter.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We have not been declared righteous only to be kind of released back out into the world and go alone ourselves and brought back before the heavenly courtroom every time we fail.

That would be a fearful thing, wouldn't it? We find ourselves under condemnation of a judge every time we messed up, but no. No, instead we live under the loving care of Father.

[22:22] Sometimes he does discipline us as a loving Father disciplines his children, but never again will we who are in Christ be condemned. We live no longer as slaves to the law, instead as children of the promise, and so we are free.

Not free to sin more, but free to live free, free from fear of judgment, free from fear of man. Free because we have not been set completely free, but taken into the one safe, secure household that exists.

The one who declares us righteous in his sight welcomes us into his family with open arms. And because he has welcomed us into his family with open arms, we have, thirdly, access to the Father. Father. End of verse 15, you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, by whom we cry, Haba, Father.

What's striking about this is how absent this kind of language is from the Old Testament. Faithful saints, like Abraham, Moses, and David, for all their knowledge and love of God and their communion with him, the thought of coming to him as Father was foreign to them.

[23 : 51] God was God and they were creatures. God was holy and they were sinners. God was king of kings and they were lowly rulers. God was the judge of all the earth and they were to be judged.

That is who God was and so that is how they came to him with reverence and awe. And we should still come to God as all those things.

But to now, to us, he also says, in Christ, I am your father and you are my children. That transforms, doesn't it, the relationship between us because while God is still king, we as his children can run into his throne room and speak to him at any moment.

He's not going to say, is he, to his own children, you need an appointment with me. You need to come at the right time. You need to come in the right place. No, he says, of course, much of helps. I will hear you in all that you say.

In Christ, we cry out in prayer to the one we now call father. And the father looks down as his own children and so we can expect him and look forward to him to answering every one of those prayers in light of that relationship.

[25 : 13] He will care for our every need. He will be for us in every situation. He will be with us when we feel alone. He will do what is best for us even when we don't understand his ways.

The job of the most loving father isn't to completely smooth everything out and remove all suffering and pain, is it? To give the child everything they ever want.

It is to look after them according to what they know best. Give them healthy meals when they need healthy meals. Take them to the dentist when they don't want to go to the dentist.

Give them injections that hurt them. A loving father knows what is best for his children and that is how he will care for us in all circumstances. We might still not understand it or see the wisdom in it, but because we are his children and he is our father we can trust him always to be doing what is best for us.

Because he is our father, the most loving father and we, you, this morning, are his most beloved child. fourthly, we have an inheritance to look forward to.

[26 : 31] An inheritance to look forward to. We are focusing on in this series the present benefits of each of these truths. But knowing that inheritance awaits us is a benefit, a great benefit to us now.

I wonder, students, teens, what motivates you to get through your course, your exams? What helps you to put the work in?

It's not, is it, the momentary pleasure of the exam? It's not the thrill of pulling an all-nighter to get a bit of coursework done. No, you willingly go through those things, don't you?

Because you trust, you trust that what is waiting for you at the end of the process, at the end of school, at the end of the degree, will be well worth enduring a couple of exams for.

It's worth giving up a few free evenings to put in the hours of study so you can qualify as a doctor or a nurse or engineer at the end of it. There is a cost, isn't there? There is a momentary cost, but because of what is coming, you know it is a price worth paying.

[27 : 43] That is what it is like knowing that we are heirs to all things in Christ Jesus. Look at what he says there at the end of verse 17. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him.

There will be a cost to following Jesus in this life. but knowing we are adopted as heirs with an inheritance to look forward to, that shapes our attitude to the present, doesn't it?

Because no longer are we unnecessarily sort of giving up the riches of this world to live for Christ. Instead, we are living for Christ knowing that as heirs with him, suffering with him and for him, we have an inheritance waiting for us that even were we to be getting this whole world and everything in it would not begin to compare.

If that is true, that is going to transform, isn't it, how you live this life here and now? Knowing that what is waiting for you, an inheritance that can never spoil, perish, or fade, puts everything in this

life into perspective.

As we go through these years being cared for and loved by the Father, enduring life in a broken and sinful world, we do so knowing that what waits for us at the end of it is of infinitely surpassing worth to everything we could possibly gain in the present.

[29 : 19] And then, fifthly and finally, we have a family to love. In these verses, there are no individual pronouns, right?

Every single one of the U's is plural. There is no individual isolated child of God.

We are adopted as God's children into God's family. adoption is not only being brought under the care and love of the Father, it also means being brought into a family full of brothers and sisters. And that is a family we get to love and be loved by. Many people, many people in here this morning come from broken families.

Some do not have families, but in Christ, you do. If your trust is in Jesus this morning, look to your left and look to your right and look in front of you and look behind you and see a brother and a sister.

[30 : 37] Sometimes it can take a little while to feel at home in new surroundings, can't it?

Sometimes it can take a few weeks or months or even years for an adopted child to be able to call new parents, mum and dad and new siblings, brothers and sisters.

But while it can maybe take a while to feel like family, it does not change, does it, the fact, the fact that the moment you were brought in, this became your family.

brothers and sisters, this is your home. This is your family. This is where you belong, even if it's taking some getting used to.

And so in Christ, these, we, together, are the people that God has called us to love as our own brothers and sisters.

it is an amazing privilege to be given this family. But it is also, isn't it, an exhortation to love this family for that, as the Apostle John says, is how we will be known by our love for one another, our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[31 : 58] Assurance of God's love, freedom from fear, access to the Father, inheritance to look forward to, a family to love.

These are very real benefits that we really can enjoy here and now. But there is, I think, one thing we need to make clear. These benefits are for those who are in Christ.

If that is not you this morning, these benefits are not yet yours. But they can be.

Outside of Christ, you cannot rest assured that God is for you in all things. Outside of Christ, you are living in fear. Outside of Christ, you cannot come to God as your Father.

you do not have an eternal inheritance to look forward to. And you do not have this family to love and be loved by.

[33 : 13] But Jesus says to you, repent and believe in me. and all this, all of this, and so much more will be yours.

Do not delay in coming to him if you have not already. We want these benefits to be enjoyed by everyone. we want you to become part of this family.

And God does too. Let's close with a word of prayer before we sing together. Amen. We come to you as the God who made the heavens and the earth.

God of gods, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. The one who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. the one who knows all things, the one who is all powerful.

And yet, our Lord and God, we come to you now as our Father. We thank you and praise you for this most wonderful privilege that in Christ Jesus we come to you as the children of God.

[34 : 45] And we thank you so much for these benefits which we have been considering that flow from this wonderful truth that we are adopted as sons of God, heirs to all things in him, assured of your great love for us.

Given a family forever to love and care for and be loved by and cared for by. You are so, so good and gracious to us.

And we praise you for that. Lord, we pray that any here who do not yet know those benefits because they do not yet know Jesus. Lord, that you would soften their hearts, that you would open their eyes to the wonderful truth of the gospel.

That they might repent and believe in Jesus Christ and so find life and hope and justification and adoption and sanctification in him. And that we would delight to welcome them in as brothers and

sisters to our family.
We pray this all in the name of Jesus. Amen.