



## ***The Gospel of Adoption***

**Sermon – Trevor Ackman**

**Galatians 3:25 - 4:7**

**12&19 June 2022**

**Other Readings:** Psalm 100, (8am only) John 17:20-26

Have you ever wondered why the media puts a personal spin on news? Interest rates are not just rising but Mr and Mrs Smith from Wollongong with their 3 pre-school children are going to lose their home! Facts are a bit too abstract to hold our attention. But a 40 year old father and his 7 year old daughter dying in a car accident makes us think – that could have been my family, or someone I know.

Some people here may have heard me say this before, but I don't understand conversion... how someone goes from not believing to believing. I used to think it was all a matter of knowledge. If people understood the logic of the gospel – Jesus coming to earth, dying in our place, his resurrection etc, they would believe. Sadly, that's rarely true. Conversion is God's business. It happens when God convicts someone's heart and mind. Knowledge plus experience makes the difference.

Preaching can be a bit theoretical sometimes. Next term we are looking at apologetics – attempting to answer some of the hard questions in life. Sadly, this can become theoretical. Why does God allow suffering? Because this is a fallen world, but it won't be like that forever. Strictly true... but hollow. It doesn't provide much comfort to someone going through a particularly awful situation.

I have a confession. When I first looked at this passage I thought Aiden had made a mistake. Greg told us about Chapter 3 last week so I almost rang Aiden to tell him to delete 3:25-29 from the Bible reading.

Then I noticed how well these verses fit with chapter 4. **Now that faith has come we are no longer under a guardian/tutor.**

The coming of Jesus changed everything. Christianity has its roots in Judaism. Jesus was Jewish (born to a Jewish mother); he witnessed primarily to Jews with notable exceptions. So it was natural that when Jews became Christian they wanted to bring all their heritage with them – especially circumcision and other Jewish rituals.

But Jesus changed everything!

The old distinctions between Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free no longer apply!

Rather we read WE ARE ALL children of God (26) and ALL heirs of the promise first given to Abraham (29).

If we jump to Ch4 v5 we discover how all this came about.

God sent Jesus (v4) 'to redeem those under the law **so we might receive the adoption of sons**'. The Greek word for adoption combines two words 'placing... as a son.'

In our culture, adoption is an amazing act of love; you reach out to a child who has no parents and bring them into your family circle, not just as a short-term visitor but as a permanent family member.

But what does it mean to be adopted by God? I suspect this could become one of those theoretical issues where you have some ideas in your head but it doesn't impact your heart. To fully appreciate this amazing gift of grace, we have to step back into the world of the first century.

When a father died his oldest son would take over running the family business. So a wealthy dad would train up his son to take on what could be quite a huge responsibility. If there was no son, or dad thought he couldn't handle it, dad would find a relative or even someone outside the family.

Even a Roman emperor could gain their status by adoption; some you may have heard of are Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Nero and Marcus Aurelius.

When you read that in light of what Paul has just said about breaking down distinctions, placing...as a son can also include as a daughter. Before I do that, let me remind you how Jesus has broken down the old distinctions between Jew / Gentile, male / female. So when we read about adoption as sons we can now read that as sons and daughters. When the Bible speaks about sons it now includes daughters.

The training up stage - where a father gets his son ready to take over - might explain what Paul means at the start of ch.4 **“as long as the heir is a child, he is no different than a slave...although he owns the whole estate”**. So you could argue our adoption is kind of symbolic until we grow up – which I assume means heaven.

However, there’s a couple of problems with watering it down like that. Under Roman law adoption usually happened to adults, not children. Furthermore, in v.7 Paul makes it clear the slavery bit ended with our adoption **‘you are no longer a slave, but a son’**.

Remember what I said earlier about adding experience to the theory? Adoption is not some theoretical nicety but has practical implications. Let me give you just a couple from this passage. Before I do that let me remind you what Paul said earlier about removing the distinction between Jew and Gentile, male and female. So whatever we now read about adoption as sons can also be read adopted as daughters. The coming of Jesus changed everything. Adoption is not just a nice theoretical concept but has profound practical implications.

You’re probably familiar with the idea that God gives his Holy Spirit to believers. Jesus promised it, the book of Acts reported it and Paul assumed it happens to all believers.

### **3:3 Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard?**

Do you realise that the Spirit coming into our lives is due to adoption?

### **v.6 Because you are sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts...**

What does it mean to be adopted by God? It means God is willing to share his very essence, his Holy Spirit with us.

If you followed the Queen's Platinum jubilee, you would know the warm reception Prince Charles received when he referred to Her Majesty as 'mummy'. Family can do that. When Jesus was in great anguish on the cross he referred to his heavenly father as 'abba father' – colloquially translated as daddy. Family can do that. And so can we. We're family - brothers and sisters with Jesus.

When I hear some people's conversion story I sometimes find myself wishing I had a more dramatic conversion – like in the movies. In reality, my conversion was a miracle – so was yours. Even more amazing, I have remained a Christian. Unconditional love tends to make it easier to remain faithful. That's what adoption does. If first-century adoption could put a man on the emperor's throne, what could God have planned for his heirs?