

“In Hope: We”

Scripture: Romans 8:12-25

Graphic: adoption, hope, future, new earth, new bodies

Key Verses: 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.

Theme: A spirit of adoption motivates us to live in hope today for the glory to be revealed when Jesus returns. That means being willing to suffer patiently in these bodies and in this life while we hope.

1) Introduction

- a) As we begin this morning, let me ask this question: Raise your hand (if you are comfortable doing so) if you were either adopted into your family or have adopted someone into your family as a child or youth... very cool!
- b) Stacy and I recently celebrated with two different couples in our life who have been waiting to adopt a child and just recently have become parents. One couple is in their 20s and the other in our age, in their 40s.
- c) I'll just be honest with you, I have never spent much time thinking about the process of adoption. I knew the basics of how it works, but never took much time to find out more.
- d) But our friends, simultaneously, were going through this adoption process, after having spent years going through the painful process of not being able to have children biologically.
- e) And what I realized is that this process of adoption takes a really long time. The process of adoption becomes your life...waiting...filling out paperwork...repeatedly having your hopes and dreams ignited and then doused...and then finally watching the process come to life in the form of a little tiny baby (at least for the two couples we know).
- f) And for these two couples, the adoptions happened in vastly different ways. I won't go into details, but one was formal, through an agency, and one was through a relationship the couple had with the birth mother.
- g) Adoption is a lot of waiting. Adoption is a lot of heart-wrenching and hope.
- h) And there are ups and downs on this emotional rollercoaster...
- i) But when the adoptions finally happened, there was an incredible sense of joy and relief.

- j) And I'm thinking, "Dude, this is where the real work starts!" As complicated and involved as the adoption process is, it's only the doorway to stuff that can be way more complicated. Six months or a year of waiting is just the introduction to a lifetime of worrying and praying for the person you now have to feed and love!
- k) Relief?!?! You should be scared to death, man! That was what I thought...
- l) But as we watched our friends with their new babies, I realized that all the suffering and all the guarded hope that occurs in the process of adoption is NOTHING, compared to the joy and purpose that comes to those who adopt because of the one who has been adopted.
- m) As the Apostle Paul begins to finish up this section of the book of Romans, it's crystal clear that, because of Jesus, we have entered into the adoption process of children of God. We have the opportunity to be chosen by God, to have a relationship with Him, and to learn and grow through Him...
- n) But just like the adoption process for parents and babies, even though the best part is the part AFTER the adoption is finalized, we have to live in the reality of the process that leads TO IT.
- o) For those who are in Christ Jesus, though, that process is secure...we know where it leads, and we can wait patiently for the adoption to be finalized when Christ returns.
- p) So that's where we're headed today...let's go to the Lord to ask Him to be our shepherd for the journey...
- q) Let's pray...
- r) Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 8, starting in verse 12...

2) Scripture

a) Read verse 12-13

- i) Whenever we read a "So then" or a "Therefore" in the text, we know that things are coming to a conclusion. Paul is saying, "Pay attention, now...I'm wrapping this up..."
- ii) So then, brothers and sisters...**WE ARE DEBTORS.**

- iii) Now, this is about the time my Mom, who was an English and grammar teacher for 30-some years goes berserk. Paul gets so caught up in what he's trying to say that he forgets to finish the sentence.
- iv) He writes, "...we are debtors, NOT to the flesh, to live according to the flesh..." and then here's where he gets derailed. He's so focused on this contrast between living according to the flesh, which leads to death, and living according to the spirit, which leads to life, that he forgets to tell us to what (or more appropriately we will find out) to WHOM we are indebted.
- v) So let's back up to the "So then..." You'll remember from last week that there is NOW, no CONDEMNATION (no katakrima) for those who are in Christ Jesus...because he came in flesh like ours...so that the justification that the law couldn't accomplish could be fulfilled...so that those who accept Jesus could walk with God through the Holy Spirit...and, ultimately, so we could have hope of bodily resurrection in when Jesus returns!
- vi) SO THEN (because of ALL THAT), WE are DEBTORS. Because of Jesus, we are in debt. To whom? TO GOD!
- vii) How much? One of the historical questions that gets asked to the candidates being ordained in the UM Church is: "Are you in debt to such a degree that you are an embarrassment to yourself, your family, and the church?" Right? And people laugh...and think it's funny...especially because so many of us have seminary debt and stuff...
- viii) BEING IN DEBT IS NOT FUNNY! And this question is dead serious. If we are in debt to someone else at such a level that we OWE more than we are worth, we're in trouble. The Church Council just recently approved a new ministry effort in the church to help people get out of debt...
- ix) The only person we should ever be fully satisfied being in debt to in our lives is Jesus Christ. He's the only one that we will never be able to repay. In fact, if we are not debtors to Christ then we are not truly alive. You know why? Because he's already paid the debt in full for our forgiveness and eternal life with his life. And Paul is reminding us here that because of it, we are in debt...not with the hope of ever repaying, but

with hope of living our lives with Him at the center, loving God and our neighbors until he comes back to finalize the accounts.

x) We are children of God...verse 14

b) Read verse 14-15

- i) One of the stories we heard during VBS this week was the story of the Passover and the Exodus...when God's people were led out of slavery in Egypt...out into the desert wilderness...led by pillars of cloud and fire.
- ii) God didn't drive the people out into the desert. He didn't drive them to the Promised Land. That may work for cows, but the bible never refers to humans as cows. God is a shepherd...He leads people where He wants us to go.
- iii) And if we allow God to LEAD US, then we are his sheep...his children.
- iv) And when we follow God where He is leading, there's never any reason to follow anything or anyone anywhere else.
- v) In verse 15, Paul tells the Romans that they didn't receive a spirit of slavery, so that they could fall into fear. The pillars of cloud and fire didn't lead the people of Israel back to Egypt! Don't keep going back from where you came...back to the same slavery – the same sin - away from which God has led you, by His Spirit!
- vi) Instead, be led by the spirit of adoption. I reflected a lot on that phrase this week. It's as if Paul's trying to say that the adoption is not final. It's like my friends who were waiting, hoping, living, dreaming, wrestling...all that, because what they hoped for was not yet complete. They were living in the spirit of adoption...they wanted to adopt...they were confident they would be...they could even envision themselves as parents. They had done a lot of work and praying. They had paid money and built a nursery, ready for the baby. But it was not yet final! We are currently not living in the post-adoption world! We are not yet fully adopted...
- vii) We are living in the time before the adoption is final, but we have been promised to someone...and that someone is God.

- viii) There were a couple days after my friends found out that a baby was matched with them and things looked good. And their feelings were excited, yet not final. They couldn't totally relax and prepare in their hearts because the process isn't perfect and sometimes these things fail.
- ix) We are living in that time...we have been chosen and are building our relationship with God, but NONE OF THIS is where we will spend the rest of eternity, if we are in Christ.
- x) This spirit of adoption is not the final adoption itself, but merely the promise and hope of the adoption effecting everything about our lives now...in hope for the day it happens. The day when we know God more fully than we currently know our parents here on earth...verse 16

c) Read verses 16-17

- i) I don't care if you are an adopted child, biological child, step-child, or a child that gets taken into a family because of something that's gone wrong with your family...the key element in the life of a child is a loving relationship with the parent.
- ii) It's a unique thing...when either one of my own children calls me Daddy, or calls Stacy, Mommy, it's the most intimate name that a parent can have. And it's shared only through the parent-child relationship, however it comes about.
- iii) Paul is saying to the Romans that when we are in the process of adoption, we know that we are God's children because our spirits connect with God's spirit. In those moments with our children, when no words need to be spoken, and we are fully connected to each other, THOSE are the times when we begin to understand how God loves us...why it was painful but necessary for him to sacrifice his OWN son for us.
- iv) And how our spirits can connect with his. Spend time this week focusing on God as intimately as you can...you won't need words...just sit with your Abba Father...
- v) Because when we do, then we begin to understand what that means...that because we are God's children...then we are in the process of becoming adopted siblings with Christ (because of Him, he is our brother). And because all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus, then we, as heirs with Christ will have access to everything that Jesus has...

vi) But there's a catch...(always seems like there's a catch).and here's where we get tripped up. You know, we like to think about inheriting the UNIVERSE with JESUS...but we don't like to think about suffering with Him so that he can get the glory...

vii) Let's see what Paul says about it...verse 18...

d) Read verses 18-23

- i) I consider, Paul says, I reckon (I calculate...I have thought about and come to the conclusion that) the $\rho\alpha, \varrho\eta\mu\alpha$ pathema {path'-ay-mah} (the sufferings) of this present time are not even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed...(WHEN?)...when Jesus Christ returns and our adoptions are final.
- ii) The trials endured during the adoption process seem like NOTHING after the baby comes home. The sufferings Paul talks about, which, incidentally, are not physical pains, really, and aren't always really even negative here, as Paul uses them...he does mean evil, or calamity in a spiritual sense, but also can mean passions, desires, pursuits...things that burden your soul.
- iii) The sufferings we have as Christians are not persecution (at least not in this country, most of the time), but are the things we do because God has called us to DO THEM through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Whatever it is, when we use our spiritual gifts to serve God, these things, while burdens to us - sufferings in our lives - are used for the building of the kingdom and the pursuit of holiness...
- iv) And we know that without pain, there is no gain...without sacrificing our time and money and skills obediently to God, we can not grow as Christians and cannot build up the body of Christ.
- v) And so it is these $\rho\alpha, \varrho\eta\mu\alpha$ pathema {path'-ay-mah} that are present in the world...present in creation and in humans as God's stewards of creation.
- vi) And Paul says that creation has been groaning, like in child birth – in labor pains – until now. Now, I have no idea what labor pains are like...frankly, I don't want to know. It can't be good, that's all I know, because when we had our kids, I looked at her while she was giving birth...I almost dropped the sandwich I was eating, seriously...

- vii) But again, Paul is not focusing on the labor pains, but on the fact that the labor pains are what lead to the birth. The spirit of adoption is what leads to the baby coming home.
- viii) And not only has creation, even though it's been decaying and declining because of sin...so, too, we are decaying and dying because of sin. I firmly believe that because of sin, the human race is continuing in this decline...more immorality, more brokenness, more disease, more fighting and war...and it won't stop until Jesus reveals the final plan for transformation of the world.
- ix) Until then, Paul says in verse 23, we are called to wait for the adoption to be finalized...which is the redemption of our bodies. And you'll remember from last week that this is all about the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise that we, too, THESE BODIES, will be raised from the dead by that same power.
- x) That is the hope! That is the promise! Verse 24...

e) Read verses 24-25

- i) Did you know that no one in heaven has any hope? There's no hope in heaven! You know why? Because when we are with God, everything has been revealed and we are filled with knowledge!
- ii) Those waiting for adoptions to be finalized are FILLED with hope that a baby would be found and matched. There is hope. But when the baby comes home (the baby is SEEN), then hope doesn't exist...it's reality in front of them. Then the hope switches to: wow, I hope I can be a good parent...I hope my child grows up healthy...I hope God guides us...
- iii) Right now, we can only HOPE for Jesus' return and our inheritance coming. We can't SEE it...yet we have to suffer...be motivated BY it and BECAUSE of it. And we're called to do it with patience...something we rarely do well, at least in my house...
- iv) The difference between waiting for an adoption to go through and waiting for the Savior of the world to come back is true faith in the promises of God. When we rely on human systems, no matter how pure and holy they are, there is always room for failure. When we rely on the divine systems and plans of God, especially the final one when Jesus

comes back, then there is never room for failure. God is perfect and His plans are perfect.

3) Conclusion

- a) This morning, we've heard about some great things that are going on in Spain...on the mission fields we support. We've heard about some great fun and learning at VBS... We've come to worship the King and get ready for even more ministry to our community this summer...
- b) All of those things are merely burdens and sufferings that God has called us into, equipped us for, and commissioned us to do (the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit). They are not the end of the story...they are not the sole purpose or the motivating factor for the church.
- c) They are merely the negative balance that we have with God because of Christ.
- d) In hope, we lay aside down things which burden us in order to freely run this race toward the finish line...and I've said this before, I want to be **SPRINTING** across the line – break the tape accelerating!
- e) There is no room for gossip or pride or any other pursuit that tries to draw attention to ourselves...only that which points other people to Christ...only that which beats a path to the cross.
- f) God did not lead us out of slavery to sin so that we could revert to doing the things of the flesh while we wait for the adoption to be finalized. He leads us out into His space so that we can give up everything we have to follow Him.
- g) And when the adoption is finalized...O glorious day!
- h) Wait patiently, brothers and sisters, as you live your life in debt to Jesus Christ...brother, Savior, King...
- i) Let's pray...