

Adopted As Sons and Heirs

Gal. 3:23-4:7

Let's turn together to Gal. 3. If you're visiting us this morning we are in a study of Galatians and just to give a quick recap of where we've been – Galatians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the churches that he planted in the region of Galatia. The Galatians were Gentiles who lived in the spiritual darkness of following pagan gods but when Paul and Barnabas came to their cities and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to them, many turned to Christ in faith and were powerfully saved. However some time after Paul left Galatia, a group of Jewish teachers claiming to be Christian infiltrated the Galatian churches with a message that said it isn't enough to believe in Jesus – that's a good start but you need to add to your faith obedience to the Mosaic law. It is vintage legalism – we can earn God's acceptance by our own efforts, in this case, by keeping the law.

Galatians is an emotionally charged letter because Paul knows the very gospel is at stake. The Galatians are on the verge of abandoning the saving gospel of Jesus Christ for a legalistic gospel that can save no one. So for much of chapter 3 Paul contrasts keeping the law with faith in God's promises and through the OT and in particular the story of Abraham the father of the Jews, he demonstrates that the path to God's blessing has never been by keeping the law – that from Abraham forward, the path to God's blessing has always been by believing God's promise. The OT isn't the story of God giving a law and expecting His people to keep it. It's the story of God giving a promise and expecting His people to believe it. As Christians, our relationship with God is based on His promises, not our performance.

Paul brings his argument to a climax in the last verses of chapter 3 and the first 7 verses of chapter 4 by telling the Galatians that trusting in God's promises delivers us to a destiny that keeping the law never could. Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ are not only justified or made righteous in God's sight by faith –something the law could never do - but even more amazing those who trust in God's promises rather than their own performance find that those promises climax with us being welcomed into the very family of God through the beautiful act of adoption. Even as we saw pictures of the two precious boys that Clint and Marisa are adopting, and they don't have any idea the home that's being prepared for them and the love that is waiting to be showered upon them, so too there is a home being prepared for all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and a love that is waiting to be fully lavished on all those who are adopted into the family of God. It's staggering beyond our ability to imagine, but my prayer this morning is that we get a glimpse. Even a glimpse can melt our hearts. So let's read **Gal. 3:23-29** and then let's pray.

Who are you?

The 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher is credited with having had a significant impact on modern thought and religion and many have even called him the “Father of Modern Liberal Theology” (not a compliment in my opinion). One day when Schleiermacher was an old man, he was sitting alone on a park bench and a police officer approached him, and, thinking he was a vagrant, asked, “who are you?” Schleiermacher shook his head and with sadness in his voice said, “I wish I knew.”

The policeman was just looking for identification, but the disillusioned philosopher was talking about identity. *Who are you?* Very few questions are more important for us to be able to answer than that one: *who are you?* Not talking about pulling out your ID. Not what do you do for a living. Not what your ethnic

background is. Not what season of life you're in right now. Not even what you believe. These all play a part in making you who you are, but they aren't who you are.

Who are you? It's a question of identity. To use a big word, it's an ontological question – a question of *being*. Who you are is more than your ethnicity. It's more than what family you are from or what culture you were raised in. It's more than what you do for a living. It's more than whether you're single or married, have children or don't, are young or are old. It's a question that goes deeper than whether you are well educated, athletic, good looking, wealthy or none of those things. It's a question that bores to the center of our being – when no one else is around and when we let down all the facades and pretenses and images that we erect and all the busyness and noise that we surround ourselves with – and when all that is stripped away quietly asks our souls: *who are you?*

Everyone in this room is different. We come from different backgrounds, have had different upbringings, have different skills and abilities. But for those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, there is one overarching answer to that question that is true of all of us. Who are you? The answer is in verse 25 and 26: *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* (vv. 25-26)

Who are you? If you're a Christian, you are a son of God! At your core, at the center of your being, you are a son of God. The promise of God doesn't just make us righteous, it makes us sons. If we really get what that means it will absolutely blow us away. We have been brought into the very household of God, not as servants, not as acquaintances, not even simply as friends, but as *sons*. Loved and cherished and welcomed as beloved sons. I'm looking right now at a room full of sons of God. Who are you? If you're trusting in Christ, you are a son of God.

Now, I realize that probably about half the room is just a little bit uncomfortable and thinking, "I get what he's saying, but I wish he'd say "children of God" because I'm not a son, I'm a daughter of God." The reason you feel uncomfortable is because our gender is a big part of who we are.

The other morning I was at the YMCA in the weight lifting section and there's like 3 other guys in there who all seem to know each other, and this really big guy (looks like a biker) comes in and says to them, "good morning, ladies." It was pretty funny, and he meant it in a good natured way, but the reality is that it's insulting for guys pumping iron to be called "ladies". Not because the term "ladies" is inherently insulting but it's inherently insulting when it's applied to a guy (especially a guy pumping iron).

Isn't it the same thing with Gal. 3:26. Paul says, "you are all sons of God" but what he really meant to say was "you are all children of God", right? If you have the New International Version of the Bible, you'll see that they did change it to read "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith". After all, that's really what Paul meant, isn't it?

Well, maybe not. Before we change it from "sons of God" to "children of God", let's consider this: In most ancient cultures, daughters could not inherit property. The status of being an heir was forbidden to women and reserved only for "sons". So when Paul says we are all "sons" and then goes on to say in verse 29 that we are all heirs according to the promise, he's deliberately saying that in Christ we all have the status that only sons had – we are all heirs. In fact all distinctions have been done away with in regards to our adoption status – race (Jew and Gentile), economic status (slave and free), and gender (male or female) have all been done away with in Christ in terms of our status before God as heirs. It is actually one of the staggering blessings of God that females are sons when it comes to inheriting all that the Father has to give us in Christ. And so, ladies, don't be offended that you are called a son of God in

this passage. And if you are still bothered, remember this: we guys are just as much a part of the “bride of Christ” as you are. Granted we’re the uglier part, but we men are brides and that’s hard for us to take. So it’s fair.

In chapter 4 Paul goes on to unpack what it means to be heirs in terms of our being adopted. **Read 4:1-7**

Adopted as sons

In Roman days an heir was considered a minor until they reached the age of 14, and then they still were under trustees until the age of 25 when they would have full access to their inheritance. Paul applies that concept not only to Israel, but to the entire world. Before Christ, all were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. Any system of belief by which men try to save themselves, whether it be law-keeping, or worshipping pagan gods, or being a good person, or giving to the poor, or being very religious and intolerant of people who don’t live up to our standards – all these are a type of legalism – trying to reach God by our own efforts. Once everyone was enslaved to that in one form or another. Until at just the right time God sent His Son, and then sent His Spirit. The Son accomplished one part of our adoption, the Spirit accomplishes another part of our adoption.

1. The Son secured our legal status of sonship (vv. 4-5)

But at just the right time God sent His Son, “born of woman and born under the law.” Jesus was born under the obligation to keep the law, and he lived his life in perfect obedience to the law so that he would be qualified to die as a law-breaker in our place. By doing that, vs 5 says he made it possible for us to “receive adoption as sons.” This is a legal term that actually means we have received the legal status of “sonship”.

In those days, a wealthy man who was childless could adopt one of his servants as his son. At the moment of adoption, the servant was no longer a slave but was a son and an heir. His status was legally and irreversibly changed. That’s what Jesus did for us. Who are we? We have been adopted as sons and all that is Christ’s is ours. That is legally settled whether we feel like it or not. But God wants us to feel the reality of our identity in Christ, and so He sent His Spirit.

2. The Spirit secures our actual experience of sonship (vv. 6-7)

God sent the Spirit of His Son to enter our hearts to enable us to experience and feel our sonship. We are beloved children of God but the Spirit makes that come alive in our hearts so that we cry “Abba! Father!”

Russell Moore writes about when he and his wife Maria went to Russia to pick up their two adopted boys. He says that as they entered the orphanage the thing that disturbed them most was that it was the eerie silence, even though the orphanage was full of cribs with babies in them. These babies had learned that no one responded to their cries, so they had stopped crying when they had a need.

When the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, He gives us back our cry and we cry “Abba, Father!” Think about this: why does Paul use the word Abba, which is an Aramaic term for Father, when the Galatians he is writing to probably don’t even speak Aramaic and that word by itself wouldn’t have meant anything to them? The reason he uses that Aramaic word here is because it’s the word that Jesus used in the garden of Gethsemane when he prayed his heart out to his Father. He cried “Abba, Father” and we have that same spirit in us – it is the Spirit of His Son that cries out from our hearts.

When we have needs, we cry out, not to an impersonal or institutional God, but to a Father who loves us and hears our cry. He willingly chose us and adopted us as His very own sons (and daughters). When we struggle, we have a listening Father. When we're lonely, we have a loving Father. When we're standing on the edge of a major decision, we have a committed Father who doesn't so much tell us what to choose as He grows us in wisdom. When we blow it and sin, we have a compassionate and forgiving Father who wants to forgive us completely and *can* forgive us completely because of what His Son did on the cross.

My prayer is that we not only cry out to our Father, but that we hear the loving voice of our Father. Last week I touched on the voice that some of us might hear – maybe even from a parent – telling us that our “performance” doesn't measure up to their standards. Several people shared with me that they related to that. That's something I remember from my father – I know he loved me and he was a good father, but at times it felt like it was hard to please him. Others here have heard much harsher terms like you're a failure, or you'll never amount to anything. Or maybe what you heard was silence – I've talked to many people who share with me that they never heard their father say “I love you.”

Those words (or lack of words) can go deep, but that is NOT your identity. That is NOT who you are. You are a son of God. Clint and Marisa will go a great distance and pay a great expense to adopt their two boys because they love them and want them to experience their love and bring them to their home and share all that they have with them. God went to the greatest lengths and the greatest distance and the greatest expense to choose you as His son or as His daughter. His love is the love of a perfect Father and here's the mind boggling thing: He loves us with the same love that He loves Jesus with. It sound ridiculous but it's true. Listen to Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23

*“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, **21** that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that **you sent me and loved them even as you loved me**”*

Let that sink in. Let it wash over you. Let the love of your Father fill your heart with security and peace and joy cause that's the reality of our identity. You are adopted as His child and He loves you with the same love that He loves His Son Jesus with. I couldn't believe that if it weren't Jesus himself who tells us that.

Reaching ahead or reaching back? (Call Steve and Rick up)

The climax of all this is in verse 7 – we are no longer slaves. We once were. We once were in bondage to our sin and the world and the kingdom of darkness. But God set us free. And He set us free to be heirs of His kingdom. All that is Christ's, is ours. Romans 8:17 says, *If we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...* All the riches of Christ is ours – we can look ahead with great anticipation at all that lies ahead of us. At what God's prepared for us.

When Russell Moore and his wife first took their two adopted boys out of the Russian orphanage, the boys were terrified. They had never seen the sun, never felt the wind blowing on their cheeks and as they walked away from the orphanage, even though it was a dark and filthy place, empty of love, empty of care, it was all these boys had known and they cried in terror and reached back for the orphanage in their desire to return to the only home they had known. What they couldn't know was how much lay

ahead. How much love and care, security and provision. Their needs would be met and their cries would be heard. But at that moment they had no idea.

For the Christian, what lies ahead is a kingdom and a home and a love that we cannot even begin to imagine. It will blow everything in this squalid world away! Sometimes in our ignorance we reach back for the world – we yearn for the empty glory of pride, the glitter of materialism that promises so much but never delivers, the lust of the eyes that substitutes for sincere love of the heart. But God has put a cry in our hearts – a cry that says this is not my home. I want to go home. And on my way home I want to help as many people find Jesus as possible so that they also can be adopted into God's family.

If you're a Christian, if you're trusting with all your heart in the finished work of Christ on the cross, then you are – you *are* – a son of God and a co-heir not only with Abraham, but with Christ. Let that reality be the identity you walk in, the core from which you live out your life.

And if you're not a Christian, I invite you to come with simple faith to God this morning and ask Jesus to be your Savior, to come into your life and save you. He promises that those who come to him he will never cast away. You can be a son, a daughter of God, not by your performance, not because you can earn it, because you never could, but by putting all your faith in Jesus Christ. Will you pray with me as we close?