

Adoption: The Highest Blessing

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[0:00] You're going to start a new Sunday School series on adoption. Your first question, I can imagine, is what kind of adoption are you talking about?

! If there's probably anyone else other than me, you probably know what I was talking about. But are you talking about physical adoption? Or are you talking about spiritual adoption? Is this series you know about real adoption, or is it about the doctrine of adoption? And my answer is, yes. It's about both.

You can't talk about one without talking about the other. So we're going to talk about both. Our spiritual adoption should lead us to see the glory and the goodness of adopting orphan children into our families.

Because God's love, if we believe it, it teaches us to love others. When we experience God's love, it has a way of turning that inward bent of our heart, our self-infatuation, our narcissistic introspection, the way we're always thinking about ourselves, and it turns that outward.

[1:21] It gives us freedom to stop loving ourselves so much and start loving others. And one way that love expresses itself is by helping the poor and the weakest people in the world.

So spiritual adoption naturally leads us to extravagant love, including physical adoption. And so we're going to talk about both.

We're going to talk about both because spiritual adoption is a metaphor. And you can't understand a metaphor unless you understand the physical reality that it's drawn from.

So not only does spiritual adoption teach us about physical adoption, but physical adoption teaches us about spiritual adoption. So they go together.

And so what are we going to be talking about in this class? Well, we're going to be talking about both. Now, the second question you might be wondering is, why?

[2:23] Why are you going to be trying to talk us into adopting or something like that? Because, you know, I know it's not where I'm at right now.

It's not right for everyone. So why? Well, that's actually two questions, but here's the answer. I'm going to do this. I'm doing this series because Pastor John asked me to do this series.

He asked if I'd be willing to do it. And I honestly was going to do something like this. I was thinking later on. But, you know, sometimes now is as good as ever.

We're still processing everything. We're still learning what it means to have adopted, which is a past tense, but it's now done. And what that teaches us about God adopting us into his family.

So as we go further, Steph and I and our family go further along this line, we're learning more about God's teaching us. But, that being said, I'm not an expert.

[3:31] I'm maybe two steps further down the road than you are, but that's hardly a lot. So, will I be trying to talk you, especially you younger people, into adopting? I don't think so.

Well, maybe a little. But, you know, I don't think I have to control you into it. Because I think God will show you how they go together. How they fit together. How you should apply it to your life.

I might suggest some things. I might ask you to think about some things. But, it's not my job to control you, to twist your arm, to rub your face in it, or anything like that.

That being said, adoption, physical adoption, it isn't for everyone. I don't think that's true at all. But, it's for everyone to consider.

It's for everyone to consider and to think about. Not, first and foremost, because the orphan problem in our world is so great. And, it is. 147 million orphans in our world today.

[4:39] And, they are real. They're children, just like your children. They're children, just like my children. They're children, just like the ones that you see running around the church or in your neighborhood.

They're made in God's image. They have fears. They have needs. They have hunger. They know loneliness. And, the orphan problem is real.

And, it's serious. But, that isn't the first reason that you should think about it. The first reason is that God, in His love, has adopted you and in His family.

You have real needs. And, God met them by bringing you into His family. So, adoption is at the heart of the gospel.

And, so for the next several weeks, we're going to be looking at the gospel doctrine of adoption.

And, then we'll spend a few weeks talking about physical adoption and what we can learn about both.

[5:41] So, I have two big, big points today. And, the first is that adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel.

The greatest blessing that Jesus Christ brought to you when He saved you was adoption. Adoption is even a greater blessing than justification.

So, let me put it simply. Adoption is better than justification. That's not to diminish the wonder and the goodness and the beauty and the goodness of justification.

Justification is really pretty great. Adoption is greater. We're going to talk about why. So, justification. It's the first.

It's the primary. It's the fundamental blessing of the gospel. So, tell me. What is justification about?

[6:50] What do I mean when I say justification? That's going to be a review for some of you. But, I think we need to get that thought in the foremost of our minds. So, let me ask you. What happens in justification?

What do we mean by justification? Jackie? God declares the guilty sinner righteous. God declares the guilty sinner righteous. That's perfect.

So, what's justification about? In justification, God takes the guilty, estranged, law-breaking, guilty, unacceptable sinner, and he forgives them.

He accepts them for Jesus Christ's sake. And so, in justification, God says, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

And though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool. But, more than that, it's not only that he forgives the sinner and wipes away their sin, he does that.

[7:53] He gives to them the very righteousness of Christ. So, we saw last week Romans 8.1. Therefore, there's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Condemnation is the opposite of justification. And so, in condemnation, we are found guilty. We are found lawbreakers. But in justification, we are found to be innocent and law-keepers.

Condemnation, the sentence of death is put upon us, but in justification, we receive life. We receive the righteousness of Christ. So, justification is the primary.

It's the fundamental. It's the first blessing of the gospel. Because it meets our primary spiritual need. We need to be made right with God. And through Christ's death and resurrection, our relationship with God is put right.

[8:55] We're declared righteous. So, everything else in the whole gospel rests on justification. Everything else in the gospel assumes them, including adoption.

But all that is not to say that justification is higher or better than adoption. Because to be justified is wonderful. And I want you guys to hear me clearly.

I'm not saying it's a bad thing or it's somehow a lesser thing. Justification is wonderful. But to be adopted is beyond wonderful.

It's amazing love. So, why do I say that? For the simple reason that because justification, it doesn't imply necessarily a close relationship with God.

It doesn't necessarily imply that. So, a judge can say to a man, you are innocent. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the judge and the man are close.

[9:59] Judges tell men all the time that they're innocent, that they're righteous. It doesn't mean that they have a close relationship with the man. But think about adoption.

Adoption. Adoption, in the very concept of it, is a family idea. Adoption is all about love.

It doesn't have God as a judge in view. It has rather God as a father. And so, in adoption, I didn't declare cavemen righteous.

Instead, in adoption, I put my arms of love around him. I said, I'm going to love him. I'm going to commit myself to be his father. And so, in adoption, God puts his arms around us and loves us like

a father because he is our father.

He calls us this very powerful. So, to be called righteous by the judge of all the earth is a very good thing. It's a great thing.

[11:02] But to be in love and care for God as a father is greater. Fathers don't count their love to their children. Fathers don't measure out how generous they're going to be.

They are going to be generous to their children. Fathers don't measure out how much affection they're going to give to their children. Because the default setting of a father's heart, the default setting of God's heart, is affection and love and closeness.

That's the given. And some of us struggle with that. Some of us think that God's sort of default heart position in our own unbelief is, we think it's sort of nitpicking or condemning.

He's always looking for a problem. He has a short fuse or something like that. And if that's you, if you can honestly say, you know what, I wrestle with that. I labor under that.

Let me encourage you to think long and hard about adoption. Think about 1 John 3.1.

[12:13] Listen to what he says. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God and that is what we are.

How great the love the Father has lavished on us. Adoption means great love, lavished love.

Some of you last week had an Easter feast. Maybe you didn't. And so think back about your Christmas feast or your Thanksgiving feast. You come to the table and you say, look at this fret.

Look at all this food. They just keep bringing it out. There's not even enough room on the table to fit all the food. You say, that's a lavish spread. And so it rains and it snows, food on our feast.

And so here John's words are good. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us. He's poured it out. He's rained and snowed love down upon us.

[13:17] And so it's like the blizzard of 78. You guys remember, it's that kind of love. Lavish love. Piled on kind of love. Not just a little, a lot.

How great it is that we should be called the children of God. And so in adoption, God fully opens his fatherly heart to us.

He opens it all up. As deep and as high and as wide and as great as his heart is, it's full of love for us. And this is a love that abides.

It stays. Everyone knows children that grow up in families that are unstable. Where there's this uncertain relationship with parents.

Where it's an on and off relationship with the parents. It takes its toll on the child. Children need a steady father, mother, love, and their family.

[14:32] So a broken home. Just think about it. You know it from experience. You know it from just looking around you. A broken home easily leads to depression.

It leads to immaturity. It leads to erratic, harmful behaviors. Children growing up in the foster care system.

Where they're shuttled from one family to another. Have an absolute terrible time transitioning to a normal adult life. Children growing up without parents.

Have a terrible time going out on their own. And learning to live a normal human life. In the Ukraine, 50%.

50%. One out of every two children that graduate from the system, so to speak. Commit suicide within two years.

[15:34] So listen to just some of these statistics from our own foster care system. Up to 50% of former foster probation youth become homeless.

Within the first 18 months of emancipation. 27% of the homeless population spent time in foster care. Less than half of former youth are employed two and a half to four years after leaving foster care.

And only 38% have maintained employment for at least one year. So they don't keep jobs. They can't get jobs. Youth in foster care are 44% less likely to graduate from high school.

Girls in foster care are six times more likely to give birth before the age of 21 than the general population. 60% of women who emancipate from foster care become parents within two and a half to four years after exiting care.

Parents with a history of foster care are almost twice as likely to see their own children placed in foster care and become homeless.

[16:47] So if you've had foster care in your past, you're twice as likely to raise a child that will grow up in this system.

It's a vicious cycle. And that's one reason for all of us to think about adopting or participating in the foster care system in the United States.

You don't have to adopt from Ethiopia in order to love and care for an orphan. But all that was to show you what happens when there's instability within a family.

When the children experience instability, family instability leads to personal immaturity. That's not how things are like in God's family.

That's not how things are like in God's house. We aren't temporary residents in God's house. We're family members. We come and we stay. We're not going anywhere else.

[17:51] So we have absolute stability. We have absolute security. Only a bad father throws his children out of the house. And that's even under provocation.

When it's really bad. Only a bad father would probably do that. God is not a bad father. He's a good one. And so, when I see depression, immaturity in the Christian life, erratic, sinful behaviors in the Christian life, I can't help but wonder if that person has learned to live as a child of God.

If they've really learned to think of themselves as God's children. What I mean is simply this.

Immature Christians are usually Christians who haven't learned to think of themselves as God's child.

So they still think of themselves as orphans in some ways. They still think of themselves as separated. It's not really permanent. It's coming and going. The orphan life, the orphan heart, it doesn't produce anything good.

So God goes to great lengths to show us and tell us again and again, I'm your father. You can trust me. I love you.

[19:14] I love you. I love you. I still love you. So adoption is a privilege that abides. It abides.

It stays there. It's there. We'll never stop being a children of God. And that makes it the highest of Christian blessings. It's where we see God's fullest expression of love for us as Jesus' sacrifice in order to bring us into his family.

God cuts the red tape of all the legal problems in order to bring us into his family. And it stays. Now, that's my first main point.

My second main point is this. And it goes off to what we were talking about. Adoption is meant to be the basis of the whole Christian life.

Adoption is meant to be the basis for your whole Christian life. Adoption has to be the filter that you think about everything through. J.F. Packer, in *Knowing God*, says this.

[20:17] This isn't just me saying this. It's J.F. Packer saying this. Sonship must be the controlling thought. The normative category, if you like.

At every point. At every point. So, I'm not exaggerating. Sonship must be the controlling thought at every point. So, adoption isn't this relatively minor doctrine.

It's not a doctrine that's just meant to give us warm and fuzzy feelings. It's meant to be the controlling thought that reaches out into our whole life.

So, I'm going to ask you to turn to Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5. And we are just going to grab some of the highlights of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

And you're going to see that Jesus assumes the Fatherhood of God. Assumes adoption. He brings it in all over the place. And I hope you're going to see from the Sermon on the Mount that this doctrine of adoption, it's not like the side dish.

[21:27] It's not the occasional dessert. Third, it's meant to be the bread, staple of the meal. It's the basis for Christian life.

So, how so? We're going to look at three ways. First, it's meant to control our conduct. Adoption is meant to filter down into our heads, into our hearts, and control how we behave, our conduct.

So, look at Matthew chapter 5, verse 44 and 45. We're meant to imitate our Father. 544. But I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

And are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that.

[22:37] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. So, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father.

And then he says, therefore, be perfect, your Father. So, let me ask you, it's not a hard question, but how are we to act?

In the broadest, generalist terms, how are we to act? Like God. What's that? Like God. Like God. We're to, we're to act like our Father.

We're to see what our Father does. How right now, he's raining, get out of rain, and it's not just falling on my house, or your house, it's falling on everyone's houses. We're supposed to look at that.

And we're supposed to see how he loves, and cares for even the wicked. And we're to imitate him. We're to see what our Father does, and we're to imitate him.

[23:41] And act like our Father. So, right now, we're teaching Kate then, to be a weapon. Just learning what it means. And what we do, what you do with any baby, is they learn by imitating.

You don't give a baby a set of rules and say, okay, this is how, you don't give them a book of grammar and say, this is how you learn English, junior. You speak, and then you have them imitate, and then when they do a good job, you imitate it back, and you talk baby talk, and you praise them, and it's all about imitation.

And so, right now, we're talking, we're teaching him the sign for please, which is this. Okay? So, we're trying to get him to not just cry when he wants something, but to say please.

Well, actually, last week, he was thinking in the kitchen, and he seriously was doing this. He was doing it. He was, whatever.

He's gonna take it. He's learning please. Not getting what he wants all the time, but he's learning.

Well, how did he learn to say that?

[24:58] He didn't come from the orphanage saying that, doing this. Now, when he finishes the bottle, he says, all done, and he throws it on the ground. And yesterday, we changed his formula, and he said, it was half gone, he said, all done, yuck.

How did he learn that? Well, he learned it, because we taught him. We said, yuck. Please. All done. Yuck. Please. Please. So, he learns by imitation.

Jesus says, how does holiness work in God's family? You see what your father's doing? You imitate him. You do what he does. Well, we're to imitate our father.

We're to glorify the father. Look at Matthew 5.16. In the same way, let your light shine before men. Matthew 5.16. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and praise your father in heaven.

We are meant to do what we do for the praise of our father. I think this would have meant a lot more in that culture than it does in our culture, and I think it would probably mean a lot more in some cultures today than it does in ours, because one of the foundation blocks of behavior in the ancient world and in a lot of cultures today, it is about family honor.

[26:28] whatever you did, you didn't bring dishonor in your family. You didn't dishonor your father. And actually, that's why the story of the prodigal son is actually so amazing, because that youngest son does everything to dishonor his father.

And then the older son, when he has his shot, he does everything he can to dishonor the father. So, we are to think about our family's honor, our father's glory, whenever we do things.

And so, Jesus says, you're in God's family now. Live like it. Live like it. Whatever you do, do it for his glory. Do your good, your glory, and praise your father.

So, we're going to glorify the father. We're supposed to live to please the father. Look at 6.1.

6.1. Contradictory to what Jesus said in 5.16, but the heart is the same. Look at what he says in 6.1.

[27:37] Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men. To be seen by them. That's the key. You don't do it to be seen by them so that the praise goes to you instead you can do it for the father.

If you do, you'll have no reward from your father in heaven. So, the point here is we're meant to live to please our father. So, we do our good works not to please men, not to be rewarded by men, but to be rewarded and to please our father in heaven.

So, we want his reward, his smile. young children want to impress their parents. Yeah, they want to impress their parents.

They want to please their father and that's good and that's normal. And Jesus says, you're God's children. Live like it. Find your place in the family.

So, how does adoption shape your Christian life? It's to be the controlling aspect of our conduct.

Secondly, it's meant to teach us to pray. It's supposed to teach us to pray.

[28 : 46] Well, how should we pray? What did Jesus say? The Sermon on the Mount. He said, this is how you should pray. What did he say? First line. That's where you can answer.

Our Father in Heaven. Our Father in Heaven. That was radical.

I'm not just saying that because I'm trying to use it hyperbole. That was radical. That is radical. A Jew would never say that.

A Muslim would never say that. Elijah would have never prayed like that. Moses would have never prayed like that.

You look through the Psalms. Not there. It took the Son of God to teach us to pray like that. When he came, it changed everything.

[29 : 48] And so, now when we pray with a lot of words, do we pray with a lot of babbling and just carrying on, thinking that we're going to be heard by our new words?

No. No. What did Jesus say? Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Think about that. You know what?

I know what my children need before they ask me. They think they need a lot. But I know what they need. And I know what they need better than they do.

And I'm working all the time to make sure that they have what they need. I plan it out. I put the budget together to give them what they need.

And so, when they ask for what they need, I'm ready to give it. Why do I act like that? Because I'm your Father. They're my children.

[30 : 48] And Jesus says, pray like that. God's your Father. He knows what you need. He's putting it together. He's preparing it for you.

So our adoptions teach us how to pray. Finally, our adoption is the basis for our life of faith. So, it controls our conduct.

Adoption's supposed to teach us how to pray. And adoption is supposed to teach us how to trust.

And what I mean is that Jesus calls us to trust God for everything we need because we're His children.

We shouldn't worry. So look at chapter 6, verse 31. 6-31. So do not worry, saying, what shall we eat?

Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things. Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them.

[31 : 59] Heavenly Father knows that you need them. Like I said, you know who budgets and plans and buys my children's clothes and my children's food and provides a shelter for them?

I do. I'm the dad. That's my job. my children's food. My children don't have to worry about it for one second because I worry about it.

I'm concerned about it. And as God's children, you don't have to worry about those things either because the Father is the one that ultimately provides everything.

Every good gift comes from Him. So He knows what you need. So Jesus says, don't worry. So do you see that? Over and over again. There's more there.

Over and over again. Jesus says, you're God's child. You've been brought in. You've been loved. So live like it. Believe it. Trust it.

[32 : 59] And if you aren't trusting God, if you're worried and you're threatening and you're living for worldly things because you think if you don't live for them, you won't have them, you're showing that you are still living like an orphan.

You're still thinking of yourself as not having a Father who can take care of me. Well, a couple of Christmases ago, we went to my parents' house for Christmas Day and it rained the night before. And the roads were really terrible. I'm not wise like my father and Evan. So we went out as a family. We're going down to my parents' house.

We really didn't know the roads were that bad. But they were icy. And they weren't just like spots of ice. It was like an ice rink two inches thick everywhere covering the road.

Well, on the way, there, on the way to my parents' house, we come to a tee. And this is the kind of tee that you kind of have to give up to. So not only do you have to stop in order to make sure that no

traffic's coming, somehow we have to have enough momentum because of the ice to get up the hill. [34:21] Well, one thing led to another. And we ended up sideways on the bottom of the hill with our nose hanging over a little country ditch.

It's not deep. It wasn't like a farmer's thing or anything like that. But there was a ditch full of snow and a fence six, eight feet away. I don't know. Well, I worked at it.

You know, I'm going back and forth and I'm trying to work on it. And in the back, pretty soon, I hear a little girl crying. She's afraid. And my wife, bless her heart, turned around and said, honey, don't worry.

Dad's a good driver. Well, thank you. No, come on. So, we prayed.

And, after that, she relaxed. She stopped crying. Because she knew that God was going to take care of her. She had the faith of a child.

[35:30] She knew that daddy was going to take care of her. The daddy was a good driver. Now, do you trust your heavenly father like that? Do you just believe him or what he says?

If not, why not? Has he ever let you down? Will he ever lay down? No, never. He's your father. And so, trust him.

That's all the time we have. We're just away.