

St Matthias sermon  
31 May 2026

### **Adopted as children of God**

#### **Romans 8:12-17 New International Version (NIV)**

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

*<sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba Father.” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

We know Christianity is not defined by attractive -looking churches but there are some very wonderful churches and cathedrals around. Similarly justice is not defined by court rooms. But there are some very attractive ones. One favourite is Cairns in northern Queensland where from the main court room one can look out in one direction on the tropical rainforest and in the other direction on the Great Barrier Reef out to sea. Another favourite are the courts in Japan and South Korea which are designed with tranquillity, peace and resolution in mind and a few years ago Annie and I had a wonderful half day being shown around the courts in Seoul by a family court judge. If I was going to be sent down, go to prison, my choice would be the Snaresbrook Crown Court, in lovely parkland with cows and sheep and ducks. My favourite must be the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand where I have spent so much of my career. A complete Gothic pile of interminable corridors, a huge number of courts and a venerable feel. Then there are the ghastly ones. Some may know this one. Fortunately it’s hidden away behind Sainsbury’s.

My worst is the Medway court. A grim 1960s exterior and interior. May be its only redeeming feature is the window in the men’s gents where one can just see the meeting of the River Medway and the River Thames. Only just. I’ve only been there once. Fortunately. A 1030 hearing and I met my client a little after 10 o’clock. We were sitting outside court waiting our turn when inside the court room we heard clapping, laughter, cheering and general merriment. It’s fair to say this is not the usual courtroom experience. I asked the Usher what was going on. Oh, she said, it’s one of these new adoption hearings. They had recently changed the procedure and all the wider family and friends can turn up with balloons, cake to celebrate the new adoption. And so it was. A change to make the final adoption a happier and family orientated occasion. I had never seen so many smiles as people came out of that courtroom. It was a wonderful occasion. All about the young child being adopted.

We are this morning celebrating an adoption. Our own and each other. Our reading: *The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.* Romans 8.15

I am covering 6 topics. Adoption and similar in the Bible. Why do I need to be adopted, I am a child of God. What must I do to be adopted as a child of God. What does it mean for me. What is my inheritance. And finally now what, living in our new family

## 1 Adoption and similar in the Bible

In fact it's only Paul which uses this word in the Bible. But something similar occurs in the Old Testament where Israel is described as a son of God, Exodus 4.22. In Romans 9.4 Paul refers to the Israelites as having been adopted and taking the unique identity and privilege as God's chosen people. Adoption was a Roman law practice more than Jewish culture, which is why Paul uses it.

But it is implicit elsewhere. John refers to us as becoming a son of God, John 1.12, to those who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. And then in chapter 3 Jesus refers to being born again, not of a mother, a human birth but of the spirit. Born into the family of God; adopted. Peter uses different wording in 1 Peter 2.9, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. Different language from very different authors because that's how the Bible was written, but the same thing. We are now in a new relationship with God through Christ

## 2 Why do I need to be adopted: I am a child of God

But you say, why do I need to be adopted, born again. We are all children of God. True. All humanity, each human, was created by the one God. We have the image of God in us by our birth as humans. Protestant Theologians have a concept of common or natural grace, which we all enjoy from being created by God. Catholic theologians refer to it as human grace with the need for supernatural grace for salvation. I wouldn't disagree with that. What is it? Sense of beauty, creativity, logic and reason, care for others and self-sacrifice, hard work, attempting to understand deep truths, capable of meaningful and fulfilling relationships, good moral codes. We have all these characteristics because we were created by God and still carry his image, his imprint, with us. So why do we need any more?

Because curiously a knowledge and freedom comes with that natural grace; call it the knowledge of good and evil if you like and the freedom to choose. We realise we are not the complete, good, perfect people that we could be, should be, and would want to be. We have failed to be who we should be. Everyone knows this from time to time in our lives even if we are not necessarily willing to admit. And perversely the higher we set our own standards, the more we realise we fail. And if we human creatures are aware of our failures and wrongdoings, how much more will a perfect creator God be aware. Whether we believe a factual or metaphorical garden of Eden, an origin story is how the media now describe it, we have choice between good and evil, using our free will for our own benefit, and too often not getting it right and sometimes getting it very badly wrong. By choosing our own way and self-sufficiency, we turned our back on God and a relationship with God. You see, that natural grace only goes so far. It does not restore us to being a perfect person nor having a loving relationship with God

A book has recently been published called, long title, Original sin: the genetics of wrongdoing, the problem of blame and the future of forgiveness. The author was raised as a Christian but no longer is one. Nevertheless she identifies in a detailed and forensic study the essence of wrongdoing despite our best intentions. She says explicitly: we have eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil and our eyes of self-consciousness are open. We are the object and the subject of the puzzle. The book reviewer in the Spectator rather depressingly concludes there are no easy answers or rather there are actually no answers. No. Wrong. The Bible gives us the answer. It's what we are looking at this morning. Being created by God is not enough. We know that. We need to return to a right relationship with God.

### 3 What must I do to be adopted as a child of God?

Paul writes that as created creatures, we are actually following in the footsteps of Adam. It's more accurate to refer to us as children of Adam rather than as children of God. Readers of the Narnia books will know this is how CS Lewis refers to humans. And Adam, whether a person or metaphorically, sinned and through Adam sin came into the world. We are a fallen, broken world out of natural harmony with God and with a natural disposition to sin and failure. However much good is happening around the world, and there is, whatever goodness we create of ourselves, cannot restore the relationship with our God. It was irredeemably and irretrievably broken through our family lineage, inheritance, from Adam. We need to be come out of that family, and come into the family with Christ. But how can we leave one family and join another?

Nicodemus gets this point entirely. He says to Jesus: how can a man be born when he is already old. Is it not preposterous, he says, to suggest someone can enter a 2<sup>nd</sup> time into his mother's womb and be reborn? John 3.4. Too right says Jesus in reply. That which is born of flesh, created originally by God but now of the family tree of Adam, is flesh and will

remain flesh. Remain only human and out of sync with God. But, Jesus goes on, that which is born of the spirit is spirit, in the spiritual realm and within the spiritual family, and will enter the kingdom and family of God. So John 3.7 says you must be born again and that requires new birth, adoption, joining a new family. And then we will have a renewed relationship with God. And that is marvellous beyond words.

And when we come to Christ, as we can this morning, turning our back on the failures and messes we were and making a commitment to him, we become children of God. At that moment. We receive the Holy Spirit and have that new life. We are adopted. Everything changes. Now in a new family.

I mentioned one book and let me mention another, very different, which may have some publicity. It is called: How to become a Christian in 7 days. I will make 2 remarks. First, don't wait 7 days. The Lord is waiting for you now, holding out his arms in love and care and compassion for a new start. Talk to somebody today. The prayer team. Commit your life today. Don't wait 7 days. And secondly the author is Russell Brand about which it's probably better we say no more.

We heard last week about Pentecost, of thousands within one morning becoming Christians. The same experience of people committing their lives to Christ is happening around the world and in this country and in this Torbay. If you are not yet confident that you have been adopted into the family of God, join today. The opportunity is there. Take it

#### 4 What does it mean to be adopted as children of God

Adoption in law changes a person in lots of ways. A new surname, new parents, new siblings, perhaps new nationality, sometimes a completely new community. It really is all change which is why adoptions are such a careful process.

We have already seen about this new life, reconciliation, opportunity of a relationship with God, enjoying the Holy Spirit and benefits of being children of God when we are adopted. The Bible draws attention to several elements

- On becoming Christians when we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are able to speak directly to our God, in a colloquial, familiar way and call him Abba Father. Daddy. Dear father. Romans 8. 15. This is a term of close family endearment. And yet what an amazing miracle this is. The creator God of the entire universe

wants us to be close to him and have this wonderful minute by minute relationship with him. Adopted with a new father

- Secondly, adopted into a family life with others. We have new siblings, brothers and sisters as fellow Christians in the family of God. Here again is the deepest relationship. Sharing together in God's one great family, drawn from all nations and generations across history.
- Thirdly adoption means that we have the certainty of salvation. The Holy Spirit is with us as a guarantee, as evidence, of our salvation. Romans 8. 16. Amazingly, Jesus is the natural son of God but now we are adopted, we are by grace fellow children of God. This is incredible.

## 5 Adoption leads to inheritance

Under roman law, there was more emphasis than now in adoption on inheritance. Somebody might be adopted when a person had no natural heirs. Somebody may be adopted when the natural children would not be suitable heirs to inherit perhaps land and property or status. In the Roman world adoption anticipated full inheritance. Paul uses this concept to explain to us what it means to be Christians.

The concept of inheritance runs through both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It would be very familiar in first century Mediterranean. The Jews were proud and particular about their Israeli inheritance and heritage. In the New Testament, Christians have a common inheritance with Christ. We have the Holy Spirit as the evidence of our inheritance. We share all things with Christ which may mean suffering as he did. Romans 8.17 talks about sharing in his sufferings in order that we might share in his glory. The concept of cross bearing and self-sacrifice as Christians as part of our inheritance are not much now referred to in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Christian church but they are fundamental across the New Testament and the experience of the church in the past 2000 years. It's not that the sufferings redeem us but that through them we are made complete with Christ.

And the inheritance is ultimately revealed in Revelation chapter 21. We started in Genesis 1 and 2 with the wonder of new life and creation. We end with renewed life and renewed creation. A holy dwelling, described as the new Jerusalem. No more sorrow, no more death or mourning or crying or pain because old things have passed away. Peace, rest, satisfaction, fulfilment, harmony with all others and living in and with the love of God. What an inheritance to receive on adoption

## 6 Now what. Living life in all its fullness.

So how is this life we now enjoy as adopted children of God.

I went to Leicester University and it has a logo. An open book. It could be anything. The train timetable. A guide to the best pubs. Your guess. But when I was there and universities weren't ashamed, it had another logo. The book had a quotation from the Bible. Ut vitam Habeant. It's from John chapter 10.10. Jesus says I have come that you may have life and have it in fullness. For me, this has been a fundamentally important verse throughout my life. I even have it engraved on the inside of my wedding ring, Jn X:X. Along with the date just in case I forget!

For me it is everything that life is about. Living to potential. Living the best life. Living in harmony with the creator God, the Saviour Christ and the enabling Spirit. Failing often, far too often, but having the peace of forgiveness, of getting up and moving on and still being loved by God.

In the world of mindfulness and well-being, a lot of twaddle is said about potential. On shows like The X Factor, people are told that they can do whatever they set their mind to, that they will achieve anything, that they should expect no limitations and live their best life. And it just doesn't happen. That's not the way life is. There are inevitable restrictions and limitations. That's the realism of life. But within that, Christ gives us life in every fullness. And that's what's available to us this morning, and that's what is our life as adopted children of God.

Let's go back to the Medway court centre which incidentally has since fortunately been demolished and replaced with something better. Go back to that celebration of adoption. The joy and Happiness for that child, now in a family in which he or she is wanted and loved. The joy and happiness of the family having that child as fully part of their new family. That is the joy and happiness available to us today with our creator God through Jesus our Saviour. As we come to communion, may we give thanks and celebrate that we are adopted children of God. Amen

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