

Being Children of God

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[0 : 00] Okay, thanks so much, Sarah. So this is just truly a remarkable passage. And please, whoever you are here today, tune into what God says is true.

It's one of these passages that you think, I wouldn't believe this if it weren't for the fact that God tells me it's true in his word. And so whoever you are here today, whatever's going on in your life, whoever you come here today, this is something really worth tuning into.

So let me just try and get this to the heart of it. I lived one of my worst nightmares recently. So it was the middle of the night and I'm just hitting the greatly sought after deep sleep phase of the night. And I happen to look up and I see at the end of the bed, I see a silhouette of a person. And what I do is I inwardly give myself that pep talk.

I think, come on, you've done this so many times before. You're almost 40. Never has there really been a person at the end of your bed. It's just a light hitting the gap in the window and it appears like that.

[1 : 08] It's just time to go back to sleep. Everything's fine. But then the silhouette moved and I discovered it was a person. It was a little person.

And because I went on a sleepover when I was young and we watched horror films for that one evening and I cannot get the images out of my head, the fact that it was a little child added to the sense of fear and I could feel the adrenaline beginning to pump through my body and this whole fight or flight thing kicks into my system.

And I think to myself, who dares waltz into my bedroom uninvited in the middle of the night? And then the answer came to my head, actually there's three, technically there's four when she can learn to walk that can do that.

And the silhouette spoke and the silhouette said, not Mr. Shanks. Okay, that's how my bank relates to me. The silhouette said, not Graham. That's how you relate to me.

The silhouette said, Daddy. Because that's how my children relate to me. Dear friends, if you take one thing from this today, let it be this, that as earth shattering as this passage is, it really is simple.

[2 : 33] The one thing to take from this passage today is that this is exactly how a Christian believer can relate to the God of the universe. And if you take one word from this sermon today, and I hope you take a lot of words, but if you take one word from it today, maybe the one that appears at verse 15, it is the word Father.

Father. That is what the God of all creation has done to write that identity all over our lives. It's what the God of the Bible does.

His is the light that can transform the messiest and the darkest and the bleakest of situations. Let me just do a little bit of work on that word Father, because I don't know how it lands on many of us today.

It's a deeply relational claim. It's a deeply intimate word. And it's one that differentiates Christianity from every other religious faith system in the world.

In fact, if you're looking for a little example of that, here's Muslim scholar Shabir Akhtar, who died not so long ago, taught in Oxford for a while. And he's letting us see how our Muslim friends, and we love them, how they understand this.

[3 : 48] He says, Muslims do not see God as their father. Men are servants of a just master. They cannot, in Orthodox Islam, typically attain any greater degree of intimacy with their creator.

And so how different, then, the God of the Bible? This is a God who has made himself known. He's made himself known in creation, generally.

He's made himself known in his word, specifically. And he's made himself known in his son, perfectly. And those three things come together and tell you that this God longs to be known.

He is a God who has revealed himself. And he's a God, if you turn to the opening pages of the Bible, who has made human beings in his image. It means whoever you are here today, whatever is going on in your life, you are somebody who has been wonderfully made in the image of God. Dignity is not something you earn. Dignity is something that is pronounced on you from the outside. And because we have been made in his image, dear friends, it explains why, as human beings, we are hardwired for relationship.

[4 : 59] Because he is a father, son, spirit. He is the relational God. So to be made in his image helps us understand why we long for relationships. And that's why we found COVID so difficult, wasn't it?

Because for so long, those relationships, we can't have them with a screen. And that's what the word father is telling us. And I recognize it for many of us here today, that word doesn't conjure up happy thoughts.

Because I imagine it for many of us, we know what it is to be deeply hurt by an earthly father. And so maybe you hear that word and you're suspicious.

You're wondering what this father in heaven is like, whether he's trustworthy, whether he'll be any good. If you want to know what he is like, look at Jesus. Because there is no God in heaven who is unlike Jesus.

And maybe for us, maybe you hear that word father and actually it's really painful because you've lost your father. All of those things that you most loved about him, the way that he just knew you, the way that he could make you laugh, the way that he could pick you up, the way that he was there for you in the hardest of times.

[6 : 12] This is the perfect father who you were created to know. And I always wonder whether God, that's the reason why he weaves these longings and experiences into the tapestry of human life so that we'll understand a little bit more what he is like.

Those famous words of Augustine that are a bit cliché, but one of the things about clichés is that they're truthful, right? So you made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

This is the father who we were made to know. Now last week we thought as we began this chapter, as we entered this chapter, all about Christian assurance, how the Christian is united to Jesus.

If you didn't listen to that last week, go back and listen to it. It's what it says. It is to be a Christian, that declaration that God makes over us, remember it? Those 10 words that will transform our lives. There, now for, no, there's, therefore, now, no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. And the word, so then, at verse 12, is Paul's way, if you see it in the text here, verse 12, it's his way of saying, this is what that now means for you in your life, dear Roman Christians.

[7 : 33] And here's the earth-shattering truth that this is telling us, that this God isn't simply after us being declared innocent rather than guilty, as wonderful as that is.

the intention of this God's heart is way bigger than that. It's way bigger than that. It's way more glorious than that. This God wants us to be declared family.

And so we move downstream from the declaration to the invitation. So in light of that no condemnation, how does God invite us, draw us in to live?

Two points for us this morning. Here's number one. As people who bear the family likeness. Now there's a famous story told of the late Queen Mum who turned up to a royal visit in her limo and in the back of the limo were her children.

Before getting out of the car, she turns to the back and she says this line. She says, remember children, royal children, royal manners. Now you could be forgiven for thinking that's exactly what God is saying to us here.

[8 : 49] Don't let the side down. Don't slip. Keep your chin up. Keep up appearances. And yet the problem is, see when I try and live a God-honoring, moral life on my own, I'm not very good at it.

I fall, I make mistakes, I hurt people, I get it wrong. And God here says, I know. Friends, without the Spirit, you and I are like a mobile phone that has run out of battery.

You can try all you like to rub the battery, try and get the thing started, speak life over it, but it doesn't work. And this is what the Bible says we were before Jesus got involved in our lives.

We were slaves like we were singing in the second song this morning, slaves to our sin. We were slaves to our flesh. Everything we were doing was out of this me first mentality.

But see the hope for failures like me at verse 13. How do we live a God-glorifying life? Just see it in verse 13. How do we please this God?

[10:02] What do we need? We need to be connected to a new power that will bring us inwardly to life. And feel those words by the Spirit.

And that's what the Spirit living in us does. He is the animating presence of the Christian life. He helps us and just follow the logic of the passage. He helps us to put to death the deeds of the body. Feel the strength of that phrase put to death. I'm always amazed when you watch those programs, those animal programs. And you get the animal hunter saying I kind of grew up with this lion. I kind of played with this lion. I stroked this lion. I put the bottle in this lion. and we're surprised when we learn that the lion grew up and tried to eat the person.

Right? And it's this idea of recognize what is going on. Put to death the deeds of the body. Don't stroke. Don't negotiate. Don't try and bargain with.

[11:09] Sever ties is what he's saying. Sever ties with the old us. The old us with the old way of thinking and live out the new us that God has created in Christ Jesus.

We've got to see that this is deeper than behavior modification. Right? This is not fake it till you make it with a religious veneer on top. Because let me tell you church is the easiest place to hide from God.

The spirit he transforms our inner tastes. The spirit puts new desires in us. And whereas before we reveled in our sin now we come to find a greater delight in the God who has saved us.

The sin that pleased us before now becomes odious. The God that we flinched from on the other hand becomes entrancing.

And what does that look like you see? A better question to ask is who does that look like? The spirit is working in us and forming us so that we would increasingly come to bear the image of Jesus.

[12:23] Now there's a myth that's often peddled in our culture that God is a kind of life stealer.

And I imagine that's how many of our dear non-Christian friends who we love might look at us and think why would you sign up for something like that?

Do you remember there was this famous slogan that was on the side of buses in London a number of years ago promoted by Richard Dawkins. There probably is no God so stop worrying and enjoy your life.

Is God some kind of killjoy in the sky? Is he the referee in the sky who always gets it wrong? The person who we love to hate who's just out to spoil the fun?

Friends, if holiness is being transformed into the image of Jesus then you look at Jesus in the scriptures and you have to say here is a man who is truly alive.

The first time I read about him thinking that here is a man who does not seem to be missing out on life. So to be transformed into his image is to become more human not less.

[13:25] Jesus as it were he shows us what life was always meant to look like. And so with that framework in mind if that is where the spirit is pulling us friends I wonder here's some hot questions for you.

What new step of obedience is God the Holy Spirit calling you to make today? You know is there a sin that you are making peace with in your heart?

That you're allowing a foot in the door? What is it that God is calling you out of his grace, out of his mercy to see and to kill?

Have you ever prayed and this is a scary prayer Lord show me the hidden bits of my heart and expose them even the bits that I'm not even aware exist.

And if that battle rages in your heart be encouraged that the presence of the spirit creates the conflict. You know I used to think of it like this, I used to play a lot of football when I was younger.

[14:39] I'm growing up in the west of Scotland. we didn't play on grass pitches, we didn't play on 4G pitches, we didn't play on 3G pitches, we didn't play in concrete, but we played on something much worse.

If you remember this, if you're certain vintage, we played on this thing called ash. Ash is just gravel, red gravel. And the thing about ash is it completely wrecked my knees.

Right? Every time you'd fall on this ash, it would just cut your knees open. And so what I would do is I would go home after every game and mum would get out the scrubbing brush and she would just scrub away until getting most of the dirt out.

And then finally when she called it quit, she whacked on top of this cut pseudocreame. And boy did it sting. Every time it stung. But what I soon found out was true that the sting was a sign in my head that the good stuff was trying to attack the bad stuff.

Yeah? So the sting was a sign that the good stuff was trying to go at the bad stuff. And so here's what that means. Friends, if you feel yourself in a fight, if you feel like the Christian life is tough, if you feel like there's a tug of war going on, that is not a sign of failure.

[16:04] that is a sign of faith. Or if you want to quote verse 14 there, that you feel the battle is proof that you are a son and daughter of God.

Because if you weren't, if the spirit wasn't present, you wouldn't care. Let me try and put this another way, friends. What is going to transform Rome? There's a big question.

What's going to transform Rome? this letter written to Roman believers living in the heart, the motherland of the empire. What is going to transform Rome?

Where you are encouraged to let your passions run wild? Where might is right? Where people are disposable according to human wants? Where society is based on where you were born and exist in the ranking system?

What is going to transform society? I take it it is individual people coming to know Jesus and putting to death the deeds of the body.

[17:08] In other words, it is only dead fish who go with the flow. How do you spot a living fish? It is going against the current. Students, if you are here today, you want to be revolutionary amongst your peers.

You want to stand out. I take it that is a wonderful thing. Can I encourage you from this passage not to think protests and marches primarily? Think putting to death the deeds of the body.

Think the fruit of the Spirit. How much are you going to stand out if people look at your life and they see growing inside of you, and this is what the Spirit produces in our lives, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Nine words. I cannot think of nine words that are more different from the social media age in which we live. You want to stand out at uni, you want those around you to sit up and take notice, live lives where people can see that you are putting to death the deeds of the body.

Can I just say as well, this is what I found in five years when I was at Aberdeen University. There is never a better week to do it to nail your colours to the mast than in the first week. Yeah, we'll be praying for you the first chance that you get to be different from the world around about you, take it.

[18:40] It means saying no to drink, it means saying no to sex, it means saying no to drugs. Take the opportunity to be different from Jesus. We always say here at the church we want to be walking question marks in this world in which we live.

What is it that makes those people tick? Paul wants these Christians to be people who bear the family likeness. And secondly, he wants them to be people who know the Father's nearness.

And this will be a lot quicker, but it is incredible. Do you see verse 15? What does Paul not want the believer to fall back into?

The word beginning with death? It's fear. Now, I've been asking myself all week, why would you fear? The word fall back there, I think, is the clue.

I think it's falling back into an old way of thinking about God. Because sometimes, and I know this is true in my life, we're tempted to think when we get it wrong, when we stumble, when we doubt, when we're weary, that God somehow changed his mind on us.

[19:50] Like he saved us, and like you would in your work, any job you can go into, he saved us and he's put us on probationary period. We'll give it six months and we'll see how this salvation thing turns out.

For the Spirit leads us to relate to God as a Father who we can trust, rather than a God that we are fearful of. And this is so important why we don't base our faith on our feelings.

Because our feelings go up and down all the time. And this is true on your best day, this is true on your worst day. That this is how God wants to relate to us.

Formally, before we came to know this God, because of our sin, we were in fear of judgment. And we want to be clear that there is coming a day of judgment for every single human being who's lived.

We'll have to give an account for our lives before the holy God who made us. But if you're a Christian here today, what this is telling you is that your judgment day happened 2,000 years ago

on an old wooden cross outside Jerusalem.

[20 : 58] And Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when he died for your sin on the cross. Jesus doesn't offer us there a matching grant. You know those things? People say, I'll put up the first 50% of the funds and I kind of leave it to you to find the rest.

It's not how salvation works. The number is not 50. The number is 100. He took all of our sin on the cross. And what that means is that God the Father loves Jesus with fatherly love because Jesus is his son by nature.

It means that God the Father loves you and I with the same fatherly love because we are his sons and daughters by adoption. God loves us exactly how he loves his son because our lives are united to his son.

Right? And I know that's stretching us a little bit but it's so profound. It transformed my Christian life when I understood that. I'm not right before this God because of how I act and how I am.

I'm loved by this God way more than I could possibly imagine because Jesus has died and brought me to himself. And he'll never change his mind on us.

[22 : 09] You know there's a woman called Faith Chang. She wrote a book called Peace Over Perfection and I hope you can see that with the contrast.

If not, come and I'll let, I can give you the book and you can read it yourself. But she says this, okay. If drawing near to God is the goal, maybe we can aim to return to him a little quicker when we fall instead of staying away because we're not yet perfect.

Do you feel that? I often assume that God is just as impatient with me as I am with myself. But he is not like me and I greatly need his lengthening perspective.

It's incredible. I loved that quote when I read it. God is not like me. His patience is so much greater. His knowledge is so much greater. His love is so much deeper.

Let me just really quick and the time we have left pick out two words that Paul uses here. Verse 15. What does that mean?

[23 : 16] How can we come before this God? Do you see the word Paul uses there is not say or declare? It is the word cry. Now that is a really painful word when you look at the original.

And when Paul quotes there Abba Father, he's picked that phrase deliberately because that is the phrase that Jesus cried on his darkest hour.

On the eve of his death on the cross as the sheer terror of what is ahead of him overwhelms his soul. He says Abba Father in that cry of pain.

And so this means as it were that we can pray through the lips of Jesus when we find ourselves particularly in those dark times. When we are in the depths of despair.

When the only words that we can possibly muster up are the cry of a child screaming for help with nowhere else to go but to dad. Even then and maybe especially then we can pray through the lips of Jesus and say Father.

[24 : 25] And so next time you pray we pray let's remember that through Jesus we have the Father's undivided attention. Remember when I was grappling with this when I was young I used to picture God with a massive ear bending down.

He listens, he cares, he knows, he loves. As we see next week he's working all things together for the good. And that means that we can pray with rock solid confidence when we come before this God and we can do it every time.

Second word real quick see that word air right at the end of verse 17. If we're thinking more about this next week we just want to try and set us up. Do the spike before the dig.

Can't remember what it is. Anyway. Everything that Jesus stands to inherit will be ours by right. A child inherits not based on their performance.

A child inherits because of their family name. God's life. And the shape of the life of Jesus. Trust in God and the hardships and the roller coaster of life now leading to glory with God then.

[25 : 38] That is to be the shape of our lives too. Everything that the son stands to inherit will be ours. We'll think more about that next week. But this is the identity that this God has so graciously and kindly written all over our lives.

It's what he does. He brings newness of life. He brings forgiveness. He transforms people who were spiritual orphans and makes them spiritual sons.

Now just as we close and I thought of this dear friend of mine recently. I think this is a wonderful application of this. I've got a good friend who's got a tattoo on the top of his left arm.

And this is his story. They say every tattoo's got a story, right? This is his story. He grows up in a Christian family. He goes to university when he leaves home.

And in his own words he drifts from the things of Jesus. And part of this phase of his life he goes on this rugby tour to a place called Loret de Mar near Barcelona if you've ever been there.

[26 : 46] It's a nice place. He gets caught up in the spirit of the tour to the extent that he goes to a tattoo parlor and he gets a tattoo of the rugby club on his arm. And one of those things that's good in the moment and then when you wake up the next day you think I'm living with that for the rest of my life.

And years later with this tattoo still on his arm, years later he comes back to Jesus. And in response he goes to another tattoo artist and he says I want another tattoo but I don't want a tattoo on a different place on my body.

What I want you to do is I want you to, the tattoo that I've got, I want you to transform it into a collage of Psalm 23. So they plan it together and they come up with this image and so on top of these initials of the rugby club is transformed into a collage of Psalm 23.

That verse, even through the darkest valley you will be with me. The Lord is my shepherd. And it was his way of saying that what God has done for me has covered all my shame and regrets, all my foolishness, all my mistakes.

This God has transformed my story. This God has written his story of grace over all of my life. And instead of thinking I was the head honcho of my life, I now see that he is my loving shepherd and I want to follow him.

[28 : 07] And that's what this God does. It's what he does. He takes the messy lives of sinful people living in a broken world like us. And because of the death and the resurrection of his son, he forgives us.

He accepts us. He welcomes us into his family. He makes us sons and daughters. And he promises us to bring us into his heavenly home and shower that fatherly kindness upon us for all eternity.

Friends, if you do not know this God for yourself, may today be the day when you put your trust in his son and come to have life in him. Why don't we just be quiet for a minute and then I'll pray.

Just use this opportunity before everything gets noisy and busy again. Bring your cries and your mistakes and everything that's going on in your life to this God.

And know the forgiveness and the newness of life that's found in Jesus. And so Father, as your word has gone forth today, I pray that your spirit would take these truths and apply them deep into our hearts.

[29 : 22] Like the master farmer, just doing the work that's needed in the soil. Lord, I pray that you would be in our own individual circumstances.

Lord, if there is stuff that we need to realize today, would you bring a fresh realization of who we are? Lord, if there's stuff that we need to sever today to put to death, Lord, I pray that you would be bringing a convicting knowledge of that.

But Father, most of all, I pray that you would help us to grasp something more today. In all of our different generations, in all of our different life circumstances, that together we have been declared sons and daughters of you, the living God.

Father, thank you that you are the God who is bigger than our mistakes. Thank you that Christ on the cross, he absorbed the judgment that was deserved for us.

And thank you now that we are the beneficiaries of fatherly love and perfect care. So Lord, be with us now as we close our time as we sing. May these truths just resonate in our hearts and in our minds.

[30 : 34] Father, be with us as we close. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.