

Romans: Adopted as Sons...

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. My name is Chris. I oversee community groups here at Watermark, and if you're here for the first time, you're very, very welcome amongst us. Today is not just a day of celebration for Father's Day, it's also a day of mourning. And I would like you to bow your heads for a minute's silence for the victims of the tragedy of what took place earlier this morning. The England football team lost 2-1 in a tragic performance. Seriously, let me just pray before we start. Father, I pray that we would know you as our Father.

I pray today that we would understand something more of how amazing it is to be adopted as your children. I pray that you'd speak to each one of us and show us more of yourself. Amen.

Today we're looking in Romans 8, and we're continuing our series here. A writer called J.I. Packer once said this, what is a Christian? The answer can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is a Christian is one who has God for his Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and whole outlook on all of life, it means he does not understand Christianity very well. If that's not the thought that God is your Father and you being his child doesn't prompt and control your whole outlook on life, then you don't understand Christianity very well.

And today my heart is that each one of us would understand Christianity better. That on Father's Day, we would see that there is a father who is far beyond the father's, even the best father that you may have had.

If you were to look around this room now, look around, very attractive faces, but around you as you look are 200, 250 people who are deeply insecure, including me. Now you may be offended by that, you may think I'm pretty secure, but if I just spend a bit of time with you, I can guarantee that it wouldn't take me very long to prove the point.

[3 : 09] Just, I was at Essential the other day, and just looking at people, and people who walk, you know, if you walk past a window, or you walk past a glass door when you're out, it's fascinating to see how people respond.

You know, they've looked in the mirror probably just 10 minutes earlier, but suddenly they see the door, and they're just checking that their image is still up to standard for what they want to portray to everybody else.

Now I'm sure none of you do that. Or maybe you were really happy with your work package, with your exam marks, with your kids' performance, and then you hear about everybody else, and suddenly you feel like, oh, maybe I got second best in that.

And, you know, we could go on and on and on and on with example after example, which show us that deep down, we are actually people who are insecure in many ways.

And it's not hard to understand why we feel insecure. The world around us is insecure and makes us feel insecure. We have white papers from Beijing that make us feel insecure.

[4 : 20] We have stock markets that make us feel insecure. We have jobs which the security, we wonder about whether we're going to still be in the job. Our health is sometimes uncertain.

And if it wasn't just, if that wasn't enough, we also have other people who make us feel insecure. We can't always trust other people.

Even if you were born in the best family with the greatest parents, I'm sure that there were times where you craved your parents' approval.

You wanted them to be there. You wanted them to say maybe, well done. You wanted them to be there on that special occasion, and maybe they weren't. Maybe sometimes they were too busy.

Maybe they were there, but emotionally they were detached. Maybe they were too much. And deep inside, many of us still have that same longing for security and approval because we didn't receive it as a kid.

[5 : 24] You see, all of us are insecure in different ways. and it's not just that but also we know that if we're honest with ourselves we ourselves are not trustworthy sometimes we hurt the people that we love and we regret it sometimes we feel like there are things in our past which weigh us down there's things we know we should do but we don't do and there are things that we don't do which we know we should do and that's what the bible calls sin and whether it's externally or internally all of us have these insecurities and you can feel secure for a little while maybe you're feeling it's a good period at this moment i'm on top of my game but sooner or later the world kind of tips you up at some point and you can be back in flux feeling insecure again now as we as we look in this passage and there's so much in this passage we can't focus on all of it and i'm going to particularly focus on verses 15 to 17 this passage is talking to each one of us this morning it's talking to us in our insecurities and it's telling us that there are two different identities that we can live under we can live as orphans who are enslaved or we can live as adopted children who know we're loved by our father so we're going to look at those two different identities we're then going to have an interview with melanie case then afterwards we're going to finally examine how does the experience of knowing what being a child of god change the way we view life okay so that's that's where we're going we've looked through the book of rumors if you've been following along with us so far and paul has brought in all kinds of contrasts he's been telling us that you can live two different ways you can live trusting in yourself or trusting in christ you can live in adam or you can live in christ you can live in the flesh or you can live in the spirit and today it's you can live as an orphan or you can live as an adopted son and what he's done he's talking to some small groups of christians in churches from different backgrounds and he's telling them that the gospel message radically changes your view of everything your gospel message changes your view of everything so he's gone through the bible story the bible story is basically a garden to garden story it's a story about we were placed in a garden as a in an intimate dependent relationship on our loving heavenly father with security and in that relationship that relationship was the foundation of all the security in the world that there is but as children of god what we decided to say was actually we prefer to run away from our father we we didn't care about him we said okay i want to live my life my way and i'm gonna i'm gonna treat you as dead i don't you don't have any say in my life that's what we said and we thought we could be free in ourselves but the only freedom that we gained was the freedom of being an orphan and the world became like a giant orphanage with people running around trying to fend for themselves trying to find hope trying to find meaning trying to find significance in a insecure world

and we kind of pilfer for survival and the thing is if you're trying to survive what happens is often people become slaves to somebody else like Julie was talking about earlier and we cling to anything and anyone who can give us that sense of that security that we're craving because it was meant to be found in God but now we've become like orphans and you know sometimes maybe we join gangs you know we join um office gangs who are kind of um chasing after success on the stock market or we join singles gangs who are chasing after the one who's going to fulfill your greatest desires or we join parents gangs who who are pushing their kids to success all to make ourselves feel good secure worth something in our lives but actually in those gangs what often is the gang leader what often drives us is fear fear of missing out fear of being rejected by others fear that maybe other people are going to think badly of you fears of all kinds but the Bible story is this that God takes us out of slavery to gangs to fear when we're at our worst as orphans who are running around trying to find meaning he adopted us into his family which was the beginning of that restoration of the way we were always meant to be and that's the beginning of full restoration of the whole world okay so to understand just a little bit more of this background of um of verse uh 15 let me just read it to you one more time for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry

Abba Father to understand what it means to be adopted we've got to understand the um the context in the Roman world adoption was something in the Roman world where um the Roman world was a man's world the father of the household was the undisputed authority and even a son even when he was grown up he was still under his father's authority and it was critical for a father to have for his sense of esteem in society to have a son who could inherit all of his wealth all of his property everything that he had now sometimes powerful landowners aristocrats for one reason or another didn't have a son and so what they would do they would go and look around society and find someone from a lower status maybe even their slave to make them their son so that they would become the person who inherited all of their wealth and what would happen is their old father would have to legally renounce his authority over their son all the debts that the son had were cleared and the son became no longer a slave or a lower class citizen he became the son of a nobleman he had new responsibilities but he was now seated in a place of honor the most significant example of this is

Julius Caesar adopted the emperor who became the emperor Augustus Caesar and the thing is Augustus Caesar he wasn't Augustus to start with he changed his name and when Julius Caesar adopted him into his family you know what happened?

he became the emperor the owner of the whole Roman Empire from nothing from a nobody to a somebody that's what happened and that is what God and Paul is saying here happens for each one of us you were orphans you were slaves you were people who were nobodies but actually I have removed all your debts I've brought you into my family I've made you now sons of the royal family you are seated in a place of honor and the kingdom that is mine is yours that's what he's saying now let's just think about this for a minute one more minute Russell Moore who's the head of a seminary in the States who's adopted two kids himself he once said this imagine for a moment that you're adopting a child as you meet with the social worker in the last stage of the process you're told that this 12 year old has been in and out of psychotherapy since he was three he persists in burning things and attempting repeatedly to skin kittens alive he acts out sexually the social worker says although she doesn't really fill you in on what that means she continues with a little bit of family history this boy's father grandfather great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather all had histories of violence ranging from spousal abuse to serial murder each of them ended their life the same way death by suicide each found hanging from a rope of blankets in his respective prison cell now think for a moment would you want to adopt a child like that?

[15 : 46] would you want that child? if you did adopt them wouldn't you want to keep an eye on them as they played with your other children? would you watch nervously as he looked at the kitchen knife the knife on the kitchen table?

would you leave the room as he watched a movie with your daughter with the lights out? well he's me and he's you that's what the gospel is telling us your birth father has fangs and left to ourselves we'll show ourselves to be as serpentine as he is wow we don't want to think of ourselves like that I want to think that actually I deserve to be in God's family I want to think that actually there was something about me that made God just think man Chris I've got to have him man can't let him go to another team but actually the gospel is saying God wanted you God took the initiative knowing everything about you he took the initiative it wasn't your initiative he took the initiative and out of his infinite love he came down to the squalor of the orphanage that was at earth with all these people running around and he became an orphan for each one of us he was abandoned by his father so that you and I would never have to be abandoned ever again we are secure in his family that is the gospel and the beautiful thing about it is this you could earn more money in the world you could have the greatest spouse in the world you could earn all the respect that you ever wanted all the achievements that you ever desired and the thing is you could never be more secure than you are now in God's family if you're a Christian isn't that amazing isn't that amazing

Melanie case if I can find her is going to come up and just share with us a little bit about her story a few extras this morning that's great thank you Melanie so Melanie and Jason would you like to just tell us a little bit about your family my name is Jason and this is Melanie and this is Helen and this is George we have three others Esri is our oldest Javi is our oldest son who's adopted from Guatemala and Helen and Ethan are in the process of being adopted from Uganda thank you it's an amazing family you've got and you've probably seen them running around causing joy to everybody but could you tell me as we've kind of talked about the process of adoption there are some people here who've adopted many of us maybe have not had experience of this maybe could you kind of run us through what some of that process of adoption has been like and how you've seen orphans when they're in that situation how does being an orphan affect children

I think the process can be quite long and lengthy and always has hiccups but as far as I think something you just mentioned in the sermon a few minutes ago about how God pursues us how God initiates and I think that's a really poignant point about physical adoption is that the parents are the one who initiate that relationship the parents are the one who pursue that and who do the work of getting that child home and bringing that child into their family and there's no merit on the part of the child the child did not do anything to become an orphan and the child cannot do anything to earn favor to be adopted but the parents are the ones who are assessed and scrutinized so that they so they put in the work I'm not saying that for us I'm just saying that that really relates to how God is the one who puts in the work to bring us into his family but I think as far as children who are orphans and some of the things that we've noted in two different orphanages so our kids when we met them for the first time those of you who are moms you'll know that overjoy when you when you birth a child or when you adopt a child and just that that first meeting and that wow and that I don't have words for this and that happened with each of our children we adopted as well it was different but it did happen and I was really grateful to God for that but what we noticed when we meet them in that moment they are timid they are scared they don't know us they've never been known really by anyone they don't have any favorites and that to me was really strange

I asked the caseworker well what are their favorites you know what what color do they like what animal and she said they don't have any because they've never been noted or noticed in that way so they don't know to have favorites does that make any and to me that was really hard to contemplate and so my eldest daughter said to me this morning I asked her what should I add to this talk and she said well they don't like anything there's nothing that they can you know they don't like anything I mean and then when you ask okay what do you like well they like exactly what I like she's like have a favorite color you know you don't have to like pink so yeah that's a new thing for us just understanding that they're learning what it means to own anything and to own family so those are some yeah timid I think fear and not being known great and how have you seen just in the process of children moving from being an orphan to being part of your family what are some of the struggles that happen there what are some of the joys that you've seen just in that process as far as as far as bringing them into our family

[22 : 23] I remember we went before the judge in Uganda and she said well how are you how are you going to treat these children and I said well once they're in our family I'm going to treat them just like the other children and it kind of it kind of I mean we try to have more patience and more sensitivity that they're dealing with more things from their past especially the ones that have more traumatic experiences but adoption is just the way that they enter into our family and once they're in our family it's just a more it's more an idea of assimilating them into our family and making sure that they know that there are cases and there's nothing they can ever do to break that bond and I mean they're just like all the other kids in that they test boundaries they have fits you know and you just like I said it really becomes more of an issue of parenting and making sure that they're strong and they're foundation in their identity as cases do you find the kids naturally just accepting to you as parents and naturally or are there any struggles that you find well I think the transition early on

Helen had grown up in orphanages she was very happy there and she was very hesitant about coming with us Ethan had more trauma in his background and he loved the iPhone so I won him over pretty quickly by taking this picture but Helen the three weeks I was there she never did she never did really welcome me so that was kind of an issue for me you know so I remember the first time she gave me a hug I thought it was you know a real step forward but you know as they come over and as they get used to us and as they're here and bond with other kids you know it's become easier and easier great great thank you anything else you want to add on that well let me just pray pray for these guys even as you we know you're still going through some of the the issues with the Ugandan authorities so let me just pray pray for them Father thank you for this this family thank you for

Melanie and Jason and for all of their kids and for the way that they're just such a great picture of how you you adopt us and you bring us into your family Lord I pray that you would bless them as parents bless them in their as they're seeking to bring the kids up to know you as their heavenly father Lord we pray for all the the details of all the legalities at the moment with the Ugandan authorities we pray that you would just really open those doors that that might happen and that each one of these kids would know that you are their father and that they are so secure in you please bless them as a family now in your name Amen Thanks guys Do you want to just take that down?

Thank you Thank you You see what is it like to live as an orphan what is it like to live as a child of God orphans are often fearful they hide their food in their high chairs because they're not sure when the next meal may be coming they may be fearful but others will reject them so maybe they chase after approval from everybody else or they'll do anything to be liked they can't say no to anyone or the other the other extreme can be because they've been hurt before they feel they can't trust anyone so they can't open up they can't be vulnerable with other people because they're they're suspicious if someone does show them love sometimes orphans can be controlling because they want to be in control because they've had to sort out the world themselves they're the only ones who can fix the problems because there's no one else around to do it so they've got to take responsibility for everything themselves and sometimes that may mean orphans get angry they lash out because if people are getting in their way they can't control the situation it makes them feel insecure and the problem is often orphans are enslaved to fear and I wonder how many of us including me are like that we stockpile our money our stuff our time in our high chair bank accounts in our in our ways of trying to make ourselves secure we don't want to be generous because we're not sure what will happen in the future if we give away time now if we give away money now we're fearful about our kids we're fearful about our jobs will God actually provide for us or do I have to actually take it all on myself because no one else is going to sort out the situation maybe we're fearful and we don't say no to anyone because we've got to get other people's approval we want people to like us or we're trying so hard to fix everybody because we want to feel like we're needed and we're valuable and we're worth something and yet often and this is so true of myself we're living like orphans locked up by fear in an orphanage and we're shaking the bars of our cot angry complaining hurting stressed not knowing that we don't have to live there you see at the root of all of your anger issues all of your stress issues all of your worry about the future issues if you peel back the layers far enough you would find it all comes down to this one truth you and I have forgotten who our father is and we've forgotten that we're a child of God and we're living like an orphan someone once said man made orphanages for children but God made the family for children as followers of Jesus we cannot be satisfied with children living in orphanages as a long term solution

I would like to say we as Christians cannot be satisfied with ourselves living as orphans in the long term it doesn't matter how long we've been a Christian every one of us in one part of our lives or another lives in an orphan and God wants to bring us in every part of our lives to knowing what it is to be a child of God so let's very quickly look at just some of the experience of what it is to be adopted as children verse 15 says by the spirit we cry Abba father now Abba is the intimate cry of a child to a father she knows cares and is fond of her you know when you're in a crowded room or you're in a pressure situation the presence of someone who loves you intimately brings a sense of security and safety well here in the passage it says we cry

[29 : 55] Abba father notice it doesn't say we kind of gently murmur it doesn't say we whisper in dulcet tones it says we cry Abba father now that word Abba occurs only three times in the bible and one of those times is with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane before he's going to go to the cross and at that moment he is sweating drops of blood and he cries out in distress to his father Abba father take this cup away from me you see the cry of Abba is the cry of a child who maybe is in distress it's the cry of a child who has wandered off somewhere in the crowd and is lost and doesn't know where their father is at that moment and they say daddy and the thing is if you're an orphan at that stage you can cry all you like but the only person who's going to hear you may be a stranger but if you're a child your father hears you and he comes running to you with open arms just like the father in the prodigal son story he's right there with you you see the world is full of precious situations and moments of stress moments where we fear moments of intimidation moments of all kinds of insecurity and it's just at those moments that God wants you to cry to him

Abba father now an orphan often doesn't cry Abba father because they think they've got to fix the situation all themselves so they don't cry because they don't think anyone will hear them but if you're a child of God God hears you second children of God are reminded who they are you see it's the spirit who reminds you of who you are it's not your initiative you didn't think oh I'd like to cry to God now because the Bible says that none of us wanted actually to run to God we treated him as if he was dead naturally we wrapped up in ourselves but what God does he puts his spirit in you so that you will cry to him in those moments it's his initiative to do that you know whenever you read a song lyric and it kind of gets your heart and you just want to say father when you're in those situations and you just want to cry out to God

God help me those situations are God putting that cry in your heart because God is wanting to draw you to himself because that's a sign that God loves you because he is drawing you at that moment because he wants you and he wants to know you and there's another thing the spirit does the spirit also continually bears witness that's what verse 16 says the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God now what that means is this his job is to remind you that you're a child of God if he doesn't do it he'll get fired okay so it's his job to do it now think about this when was the last time that you heard the spirit saying to you you're my child when did it last thrill you that God was your father

I mean really excite you that God was your father because it doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian it's possible to grow deaf to what the spirit is saying because in this world there are so many voices that are competing to us voices telling you you're not good enough voices telling you you've got to just try a bit harder yourself voices which are condemning you voices which are telling you look at what everybody else has got voices which are telling you life's not fair and you know so many of those just drown out the spirit's voice the thing is what each of you and I need we need spiritual headphones we need these things because God's just convicted me of this really just as I've been just thinking about this because you see headphones are great you know what headphones do they do two things one is you put them in and it blocks out all the noise that you don't want to hear yeah all the other voices that you don't want to hear if you want to ignore somebody the best way to do it is just put your headphones in and then they'll stop talking to you okay you notice that now so it does that but the other thing it does is it enables you to focus on and concentrate on the noise that you do want to hear the voices that you do want to hear and so I think we need to use the Bible and God's word as spiritual headphones we need to take this passage and meditate on it daily speak it to yourself daily

I would recommend that you learn and memorize verses 15 to 17 as your spiritual headphones learn them speak them to yourself when you're having a shower tell yourself I'm a child of God I'm accepted I do not have a spirit of slavery to fear when you're going into the office when you're going to that interview when you're going to meet your boss and you don't want to meet your boss at that moment you can tell yourself I do not have a spirit of slavery to fear I have the spirit of adoption as a son of the king of the universe I am secure in him I have nothing to lose I have nothing to prove he will provide for me entirely I wonder how many times we actually tell ourselves those things every day because if you're like me I kind of know that but every day I forget it when I'm in the moment and we need in our community groups to be people who are enabling each other to put on those spiritual headphones of reminding each other who we are because otherwise we won't know

[36 : 25] Christianity very well because we won't know our father very well and the spirit's voice will be drowned out next and we're nearly there Christians also if you're a child of God you display the family likeness you know the phrase like father like son I find that phrase very scary because the older I get the more I realize you know when I was a kid my dad I always used to cringe at the embarrassing things my dad used to say as I get older I hear myself saying the same things and it's frightening but you know that's the same thing that should be true of Christians children of God become like their father now here's the thing here's the key thing to remember if you remember nothing else I want you to remember this in all of our lives there are areas where we live as orphans where we know that we should be living as children of God but if you want to change in your life as a Christian to live more as a child of God you've got to remember this if you are more aware of your sin in your life than of God's adopting grace of you you will only ever be motivated to change out of fear guilt or desire to prove yourself let me repeat that if you are more aware of your own sin and guilt and shame in your life than God's adopting fatherly grace on you then you will only be motivated out of guilt or fear or a sense of desire to prove yourself because God's adopting grace if you want to change anything in your life and walk with God that is the foundation of it all let's let's take an example everyone's gossiping at work about one of your colleagues you know she's she's oversensitive she's just she's a slacker she doesn't do the work she should do and you know what you kind of begin to join in with what everybody else is saying why do we join in well we don't want to be left out we want to belong and you know what there's nothing better than helping you to feel okay about yourself than by putting somebody else down so I mean it works like that doesn't it you know she's bad that must mean we're okay yeah well at that moment the spirit wants to remind you of who you are you're a child of God children of God don't have to gossip because you already belong you don't need to have some people around you to feel secure because

I'm already secure in Christ I don't need in this situation to get involved because children of God don't gossip they're like their father and so that enables us and that's what Paul means when in verse 14 he says those who are led by so verse 13 those who are led by the spirit put to death the flesh because when you know that you say I'm a child of God so I don't need to do that so I say no I'm not going to do that I'm not going to worry I'm not going to stress I'm not going to do all those things that naturally we do when we're living as orphans because I know who I am and the spirit is reminding me I'm a child of God if you don't know that as the center all other change is just window dressing you need to put on your spiritual headphones we need to do it with each other if you're in a community group let that be one of the key things that you're continually telling each other reminding each other of who you are last thing and we're finishing here children of God look forward to a bright future you see if I can find the verse it says that we are not just children but we are also heirs verse 17 if children then heirs heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him there's too much to go into in this but what he's saying is this if you think adoption of sons is just about you and your relationship with God you've got too narrow a view of adoption verse 23 also goes on to talk about we are eagerly waiting we who have the first fruits of the spirit grown inwardly as we eagerly wait for adoption of sons the redemption of our bodies it was in this hope that we were saved because adoption us getting right with God knowing who we are is the beginning of the process of restoring everything so in this insecure world of corruption cancer aging rebellious kids of women trafficked as objects for sale

God says there's going to come a time when those things are a distant memory I'm going to wipe it out I'm going to restore all the insecurity in this world all the tyrannical bosses all the unfair market systems it's going to be a thing of the past and we will be on the managing committee of the biggest facelift this world has ever seen God is going to restore everything and we are going to be those children who inherit the restored creation now if I'm honest I probably don't eagerly wait for that that often because I often more eagerly wait for my next holiday or your next job promotion or the next break from your kids or your work or whatever it is but let me think about this Russell Moore who mentioned who we mentioned earlier he told when he picked his two new kids up from the orphanage this is what he says we nodded our thanks to the orphanage personnel and walked out into the sunlight to the terror of the two boys they'd never seen the sun they'd never felt the wind they'd never heard the sound of a car door slamming or felt like they were being carried along a road at 100 miles an hour

I noticed that they were shaking and reaching back to the orphanage in the distance I whispered to Sergei now Timothy that place is a pit if only you knew what's waiting for you a home with a mummy and a daddy who love you grandparents and great grandparents and cousins and playmates and McDonald's Happy Meals he's American it's okay but all they knew was the orphanage it was squalid they had no other reference point it was home that restored creation that we talk about that is our home and our lives here are often those of the orphanage but that's not all because in some ways that may seem just a pipe dream away but the Bible says unlike those orphans we do have a reference point to that great restoration and that reference point is your experience now of the Spirit telling you making you secure in who you are in Christ in his adopting love that when you see the reality of that worked out in your day to day when you're facing your fears when you're facing the worries and the stress that is a tangible sign of something that is going to be so much greater later on and I wonder for me and maybe for you the reason I feel that hope of restoration is so intangible is because my experience now of the

Spirit reminding me is often intangible because I've grown busy and distracted and deaf to the Spirit telling me that I'm his child if you're a Christian you're not an orphan you're a child if you're not a Christian the call is come to know your Father know security in him and let us be children of him who continually remind each other of that fact we need spiritual headphones when you're in distress we have somewhere to run to we have someone who listens we have a witness telling us again and again don't fear you're not a slave to fear you're a child of God let's pray Father I pray that you would take these things and think in our lives

[45 : 52] Lord where some of us know this but actually there are so many areas in our lives where we don't live this I know that's true for me I pray for each one of us that you show us those areas in our lives where we actually do live in fear of other people we live in fear of circumstances and you show us and you speak to us again that we're secure that you'll provide that you're in charge that we don't have to fix everything by ourselves you're the one who takes it and will make us fully restored one day and in that meantime you are as we wrestle with being an orphan with living as a child of God in a world which calls us to be an orphan I pray that you would just continually speak those words of comfort to us Amen