

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

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The Family of God - Part 1 - Joss Bray

Families come in all shapes and sizes don't they?

For example, Christmas is a particular challenge for some and a joy for others and a quite often a mixture of both.

In the bible, the church itself is described as the "family of God" in 1 Peter, and the "family of believers" in Galatians 6.

And this family spans space and time. Paul says in Ephesians 3:

EPH 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

There is a big family that we are part of. Just like earthly families, that may be spread in distance and time. We can identify with the family of God here and all over the world - and even past, present and future.

How do we get to belong to God's family then? It's all about Jesus of course. This is what John said in Chapter 1 of his gospel:

JN 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Jesus gave this right to all who believed in him. We can become children of God through believing in Jesus. If we remember nothing else from this talk, remember this. We have one right - and one only as far as I can see biblically - and that is to become children of God. And what a right that is!

This is what we read again in Galatians 3:

GAL 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus

And there is no need to worry about whether daughters are included because Paul goes straight on to say:

GAL 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So we can safely take the term "son" as being male and female. The point about sonship was that there were certain things that went with being a son in that particular culture that Paul was living in. He uses the term "son" as a shorthand term to try and explain what it meant to be a child of God in kingdom terms.

So what does it mean to be a son of God?

The same passage in Galatians 3 goes straight on to say this:

GAL 3:29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Our position has therefore changed from being children of the world and slaves to sin. We were being governed by this world's influences and the things that drive it.

But now we are heirs - but what does that mean to be an heir? What do we ultimately inherit because we are sons of God?

First of all, God gives us the Holy Spirit to confirm who we are. He enables us to now say "Father, daddy" - an intimate picture of identity and trust. We receive an immediate deposit of what is to come - a permanent and irreversible family seal.

In John 8 we read:

JN 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

And then, there is more to come later. Here are a couple of clues from the book of Revelation about the ultimate bigger picture.

Here, those who are heirs - and thus have the right to be called children of God - are given promises:

REV 3:21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

REV 22:14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

So the picture is of eternal life with Jesus on his throne in the heavenly city. That certainly sounds like something to look forward to. Remember too that an inheritance comes when someone has died. Jesus died for us so we can receive this glorious eternal life. God demonstrated that Jesus was the one he said he was, by raising him from death and giving him a heavenly throne. That is our inheritance alongside Jesus.

It was always God's plan that we became part of his family. Ephesians 1 says:

EPH 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ

We may not understand how that all works, but we can say that it was God's plan for you and me to be adopted into his family from the very beginning of time. Adoption is no accidental or casual process as those who have been involved with it will testify to. There is a definite and rigorous process involved.

It is often said you can't choose your family but you can choose your friends. However, in this case, God did choose his family. In adoption the parent chooses the child - and that is exactly what God has done for us. We have often said it is no accident that we are here together at this time - and it is no accident that when we have faith in Jesus, then we are adopted into God's family.

In adoption, the child is loved by the prospective parents and chosen by them. The parents love the child first and the child comes to love the parents. That is how it is with God and us.

It wasn't that we chose God when we became Christians, out of theoretical belief or for any other reason - although it may have seemed like we initiated the process. It was actually that God

chose us first and loved us first. He was calling to us and longing for us to respond. We got to know and love God as our heavenly Father as a result of his initiative. We can only come as little children and put our trust in him.

Somehow we need to get hold of this so that we realise that the foundation of our lives isn't what we feel or even how much faith we believe we have. The foundation, when everything else is stripped away, is that we have been chosen by God and adopted into his family.

The consequences now of this sonship are:

We have a bigger, older brother - in Hebrews 2 it says:

HEB 2:11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

And we are led by the Spirit and not slaves to sin or fear as in Romans 8:

RO 8:14 ...those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear

We can call God our Father as in Romans 8v15:

RO 8: 15..... And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

We can expect to suffer for our faith as well - and it shouldn't be a surprise - Romans 8v17:

RO 8:17 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.

But the next verse puts it in perspective:

RO 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Being part of the family brings opportunities as we hear in Galatians 6:

GAL 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

We will explore what that may look like in a couple of week's time - but I do believe that we are a church that is looking to God to help us to be the family that he wants us to be.

But what if you are not "in the family" in the sense of knowing that you are not yet a child of God?

There may be people thinking - I haven't made that step of faith and believed in Jesus. I haven't been adopted into his family yet. I am still a "friend" of the family so to speak (but still much loved).

Well, the good news is this in Romans 8:

RO 8:19 ..creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

That means that there are plenty more people that God wants to adopt into his family. If God is calling you and drawing you to him - don't ignore him. His love for you is sincere and total and he wants you to find new life in him - in fact, to be born again as a new child into a new family with a completely new start and a new destiny.

So let's take a moment to reflect and pray now:

If this has spoken to you - please do something about it. So if you want to give your life to God for the first time, or to recommit your life to him, talk to God now. Say that you don't want to go your own way any more. Tell him that you are sorry for things you have done wrong and for not going his way. Tell him you believe in Jesus, that he is the Son of God and thank him that he died for your sin so that you could be born again. Thank him that because he rose again from the dead, you can be assured of eternal life. Ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit who enables you to call him "Father, daddy". This Holy Spirit will give you the power to live a new life that reflects God's love and power. Amen.

If you have done that today for the first time, or want some more help with it - then speak to me or someone you trust in the church. It is a wonderful thing to see new life being born - we want to share that together and rejoice with the whole family of God.