

## Galatians 4

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By Krish Kandiah, founder and director of Home for Good.

The suggested reading for this sermon is Galatians 4:1-7:

*What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his 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 God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

Other passages you might also consider using are:

John 1:12

*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*

Romans 8:14-17

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 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." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*

Galatians 3:23-27

*Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.*

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*

Ephesians 1:5

*In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will*

Ephesians 2:19

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household*

## Before

Many of us will have heard numerous accounts of people's lives being transformed by an encounter with God. Some of these testimonies will be dramatic, others more of a gradual journey. However someone comes to faith, the fact remains that our position in life, in the kingdom is significantly altered when we accept Jesus. [You may want to include a recent testimony from someone in your church at this point.]

Regardless of our situation in life or our circumstances at any given time, we know that we all fall short of God's standard, struggle with sin and are bound to punishment because of our sin (Romans 3:23).

In our reading, Paul explains how the status of a child in a household, despite being an inheritor of a great estate might sometimes feel no better off than a slave as the inheritance is not yet in their position. Paul argues that before his audience knew Christ, they were held captive by the basic principles of the world. John Stott expands this as follows:

*"the devil took this good thing (the law) and twisted it to his own evil purpose, in order to enslave men and women. Just as during a child's minority his guardian may ill-treat and even tyrannize him in ways which his father never intended, so the devil has exploited God's good law, in order to tyrannize men in ways God never intended.*

*God intended the law to reveal sin and to drive men to Christ; Satan uses it to reveal sin and to drive men to despair. God meant the law as an interim step to man's Justification; Satan uses it as the final step to his condemnation. God meant the law to be a stepping-stone to liberty; Satan uses it as a cul-de-sac, deceiving his dupes into supposing that from its fearful bondage there is no escape."*<sup>1</sup>

It doesn't matter if we are Jews or Gentiles all of us are in the same situation. We all need rescue and redemption. We all need to be liberated from slavery to sin and the punishment it brings.

Before we come to faith, we live as if we were a slave, as if we have to work hard to earn any good thing that comes our way.

## Then

But God didn't confine us to this way of life.

God the Holy Trinity acted. At just the right time God the Father sent God the Son in the power of the Spirit to face life under the captivity of the law to rescue and redeem us from its clutches. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection we are liberated and vindicated. Rescue and Redemption are wonderfully rich images of what God has done for us.

But that is not where this passage leaves things.

## Now

[You may want to do a bit of audience participation at this stage and ask the question: *What does the idea of adoption give you that you don't have through rescue and redemption?*]

When we 'come of age' as Paul puts it, in other words, when we come into the Kingdom, we step into the family God has promised. We no longer live as slaves or strangers, but are called co-heirs with Christ and are known by the Father. Nothing we can do changes our new position, we cannot earn our place; it is given unconditionally simply because we accept the gift of God's grace to us.

Adoption into God's family gives us intimacy and a relationship with God. God becomes our Father; Jesus becomes our brother; the church becomes our extended family.

God is a Father who delights in his children, who promises a future that will prosper and not harm, who will never leave us, nor forsake us. Our old sinful selves are hidden in Christ so when the Father looks at us, He sees His perfect son Jesus, pure and righteous, and an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven. The veil in the temple was torn in two when Jesus died, and where there was previously a barrier of sin between us and God, we can now be in relationship with God the Father and approach Him with confidence (Hebrews 4:14).

Jesus is a brother (Hebrews 2:11). He was made wholly like us and knows what it is like to live on the earth. Though we may have different experiences of earthly brothers, a brother is often perceived as one who sticks up for their siblings, who defends them. Jesus did this for us on the cross. And he continues to do this for us, interceding on our behalf (Romans 8:34).

The church is a family. Acts 2:44-45 talks about how the early church operated as community. This picture of the church sharing their possessions and ensuring none of them were in need tells us something of how we can practically demonstrate God's family to one another.

Through our adoption by God we have a family.

We have a hope.

We have an inheritance.

We receive the Spirit who helps us to cry out that God is our Abba, Father.

### **What does this mean for us as individuals and as the Church family?**

If we are the adopted people of God...

- Shouldn't we celebrate our adoption more?
- Shouldn't we explain the gospel including adoption at least some of the time?
- Shouldn't we consider the needs of vulnerable children in our towns and cities that need to know something of the same love and security that we have received from God?
- Shouldn't we think about adoption not as something to be hidden but actually one of the most wonderful reflections of God's grace and compassion?
- Shouldn't that change the way we look at children in care? They are children that God loves and that we need to show his love to.

### **How might you respond?**

Today, as we've been thinking about our adoption into God's family and the urgent need for people to step forward to foster and adopt, has God been speaking to you?

- Is God calling some of us here to step forward as foster carers or adopters?
- Is God calling us, as his family – the church, to do more to support families that foster and adopt?
- Is God calling us to use our voice, our influence, our prayers and our money to make sure every child that needs one has a home?

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