

We're in the middle of 14 weeks of Epistle readings from Romans, from mid-June through mid-September. And we're also right in the middle 3 weeks of readings from the glorious 8th chapter of Romans. The 8th chapter of Romans is arguably the greatest chapter in any of Paul's writing, if not the greatest chapter in the entire New Testament.

So I want to deal with Romans 8 during these last 3 weeks of July. During this pandemic we're trying to shorten the services. Thus I'm preaching only half-length sermons. So 3 half-sermons will not even begin to scratch the surface of the depths of Romans 8. But we will get to talk about a few of the high points.

Today, in the middle the chapter, there are two things I want to look at briefly. They're actually tied together. Paul talks in verse 15 about our adoption as children of God. And then he talks in verse 23 about how we are still waiting for adoption.

It's not a contradiction. But it is a paradox. And there are a couple things here that are important for us.

First is that idea of adoption as God's children. It's not the first time Paul has used this language—it appeared previously in Galatians and Ephesians. God adopts us as his children. God is not just creator. God's care for creation is far greater. God wants to be in relationship with his creatures, including us. God chooses to love us, to invite us into loving relationship.

In the Greco-Roman world, the gods were viewed differently. They were capricious. They might have a hand in creation. But they didn't really care for their creatures out of some sort of parental love.

Not so with Judaism, and not so with Christianity. In both the Old and New Testaments, God is compared to a loving father, and a few times to a loving mother.

And this loving God want relationship with us. The word Paul uses to describe this is "adoption," God adopting us as his children.

Adoption was a strong relationship in the Greco-Roman world. An adopted child had full inheritance rights that were just as strong and binding as they were for any biological children.

Paul says point blank in Romans 8 that we are not God's slaves, but rather adopted children, and thus heirs. What's more, we are full joint heirs with Jesus Christ. And we will one day share in his glorified and resurrected state.

But here's the paradox. We have that status, God's children and heirs. But we haven't fully lived into that status. Yes, earlier in Romans Paul tells us that we have shared in Christ's death and resurrection through our baptisms. But we haven't yet experienced the fullness of that resurrection. We have died metaphorically and sacramentally. But we haven't yet experienced death literally.

And so there's an "all ready" and "not yet" quality to Christianity. There is the paradox. We've arrived and are also in the process of arriving. We are raised with Christ already but have not yet experienced resurrection in all of its fullness.

And so in the 2nd half of our Epistle, Paul plays with this already and not yet paradox.

Right now we may experience suffering in the world, but that's nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us and in us.

And even the rest of creation is eager to see the glory that we will be experiencing. And we will experience creation itself being glorified. The current universe is subject to the decay and entropy. If you're a science geek, the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics is still in force. Entropy, disorder, decay all tend to increase.

Paul poetically talks about the groanings of creation in the bondage of decay. And he says creation is in labor pains waiting to be born into a new glorified state.

And we too groan as we wait to experience new and resurrected life in all of its fullness.

And yet, the promise of the glorious 8th chapter of Romans is that we will experience resurrection, and the renewal of all creation. There's a reason that we often read this chapter at funerals. It's a glorious promise.

We have been adopted by God as his children already. And one day we will experience what that means in all of its fullness. It's not just some dream. It's a promise.

We may groan at times for now. Life can be difficult at times, and sometimes extremely difficult. But God has started his work of adopting us, renewing us, helping us to grow spiritually.

And one day, we will arrive. We will arrive in the fullest sense, experiencing the fullness of who God creates and calls us to be.

That is our hope. That is God's promise.