

HOPE FOR PEOPLE & PLANET

Mul Zoom 19/07/2020

Matthew 13 vv. 24 – 30 & 36 – 43; Romans 8 vv. 12 - 25

I don't want to dwell on the parable we read earlier – Jesus explains it rather well!
But notice how he finishes:

“The righteous will shine in the kingdom of their Father” (v.43). He focusses on a HOPE for God's children.

And the Romans 8 passage is also primarily about HOPE. Not a vague sort of wish, like the word 'hope' is usually used today – 'I hope so....' or 'Hopefully we can....' But this is a 'sure and certain hope' – albeit for the future.

In fact, hope is defined in v. 24 as exactly that – something we know is coming but don't yet have. As Paul says, 'Who hopes for what they already have?' So we look to the future, the 'not yet', but we are looking with certainty – I hope!
So how can we be sure?

Paul is writing to Christians in Rome – then the capital of a vast empire. You've heard the phrase “all roads lead to Rome”. Think of London in the heyday of the British Empire – when Victoria was Queen and Empress....

Paul was probably writing in the Spring of AD 57 while he was in or near Corinth on what we call his 3rd missionary journey. And to explain his point he uses a picture that would have been very familiar to any Roman – and possibly headline-grabbing at the time, if they had headlines. It's the analogy of ADOPTION.

v.15: '.... The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.'

In our society adoption is a legal process – though only since 1925. We tend to think in terms of adopting abandoned children so they are wanted, find a family, have love and security. The child has new parents and a new name – and the possibility of a future inheritance, along with any other children. It's often seen as an act of mercy, and Christians are exhorted in the N.T. to care for orphans.

But in Roman society, adoption was all about privilege and status, and was an even more complicated legal process. No doubt there were *ad hoc* arrangements whereby orphans were looked after by others in the family, or taken in by friends, but legal adoption – the term used here by Paul – was very much an upper class thing because it was expensive and involved petitioning the Senate (= petitioning Parliament, just as you once had to do in this country to get a divorce). Why bother? Well, it's all to do with having a son and heir to inherit not only your wealth, but your position of power.

Occasionally a slave was adopted as an heir – thereby gaining his freedom and a whole new status. More often it was a relative or the child of a business partner who was adopted when wealthy men didn't have a male heir.

You will all have heard of a couple of examples:

Caesar Augustus, Emperor when Jesus was born, was originally named Gaius Octavius but was adopted by his uncle Julius Caesar as his heir and successor. He was only 19 when Julius Caesar was assassinated and had to bide his time to claim his full inheritance.

But more to the point in the time when Paul was writing is the case of LUCIUS DOMITIUS AHENOBARBUS. Who's he? You might well say. He was adopted by the Emperor Claudius and renamed Nero – and he came to power a couple of years before Paul wrote to the Romans. Once again there was an adopted son, originally from a rather minor family, elevated to be in charge of the empire. That no doubt fuelled gossip in the bars!

And Paul is telling the Christians in Rome, this is what God has done for you. He took you from your past life, made you his child by adoption, brought you into his family, gave you his Spirit – his Name, if you like – as a guarantee, and now you are an heir. You have a new status NOW and a most wonderful and glorious inheritance to come. An inheritance along with God's own Son, Jesus – who is YOUR CO-HEIR! (v.17)

It's breath-taking!

Peter used a similar analogy (1 Peter 1 vv. 3 – 4):

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living *hope* through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and into an *inheritance* that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for **you....'**

Each one of us is due an inheritance – from God!

But – we haven't got it yet.

We are now part of God's family – his children.

[I've just heard that the well-know theologian and writer J I Packer died on Friday at the age of almost 94. He wrote: '*Adoption is the highest privilege of the Gospel... To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.*']

Adoption transforms our prospects and our identity.

It should transform the way we treat one another – all other Christians are our brothers and sisters.

But if we think about it, it also comes with a warning – because we are joining Jesus'

family, he is now our co-heir, Paul says, so we must expect to share in his suffering, too (v. 17).

Obviously we haven't reached glory yet – although we do have new life NOW, and we have the Holy Spirit as God's guarantee.

Life isn't perfect yet:

- we are still tempted;
- we still face suffering;
- our bodies are deteriorating

– Paul compares us to breakable clay jars in 2 Corinthians 4; and the more we look at ourselves and the world around, at the pain, the sin, the injustice, the more we might want to GROAN. The Christian life is frustrating!

And we are not alone, Paul says – the whole creation groans with us, it says in vv. 22 & 23. He talks about creation being frustrated; hoping for liberation along with us in v. 21.

In the parable we read, it is the devil who deliberately sows the weeds – in the earth. That's an apt symbol of frustration! [Bindweed] And they are there until the end of the age, Jesus says.

We are so much more aware now than even maybe a year ago of the damage that is being done to the environment. Most scientists think this virus jumped to humans from wild animals trafficked for quack medicine or culinary delicacies. It has highlighted the destruction of habitat – largely due to human greed. The lockdown led to a measurable drop in pollution – so the Himalayas were visible from hundreds of miles away, and Trevor quotes a friend who'd witnessed the same for Mount Fuji in Japan. We've enjoyed clear skies without aircraft vapour trails or noise. That's all a reminder of how life might be improved – for us and the environment. But we've also heard of the scale of plastic pollution, and the amount of litter left as soon as people could go out. We've seen wonderful examples of people rallying to help neighbours, make scrubs, clap the NHS – but we've also heard about exploitation, scams and now cyber hacking.

Sin has not only alienated people from God, but from each other and from the natural world.

And this is where Paul expands our vision of salvation – it's not just about an individual being right with God and having a new hope: the whole of creation is waiting for our ultimate salvation. Maybe the most famous verse in the Bible says, 'God so loved the world....' – the cosmos, the whole creation. Writing to the Colossians, Paul waxes lyrical about Jesus: Son of God; Creator; head of the church;

firstborn from among the dead, then he writes: *'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross'* (Col. 1 vv. 19 – 20).

That's pretty comprehensive! Are we in danger of diminishing the scope of what Jesus did on the cross as we concentrate on us and our salvation? Let's enlarge our vision – and our praises!

We are not there yet – but if we are longing for our redemption to be complete; to have our new, resurrection bodies; to reach our inheritance – then creation is cheering us on. It 'waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed' – v. 18. Or, as Tom Wright puts it: 'the whole creation is on tiptoe with expectation, longing for the day when our resurrection will herald its own new life'.

We await a world without weeds – but it is still this world. When Paul speaks about the whole creation 'groaning' he uses another analogy, although more appropriate to new birth than to adoption, but then he never married and had a family.... He talks about the pain of childbirth (vv. 22 – 23). There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that this world, or the people in it, are going to gradually evolve into something better. Nor does it support the view held by some Christians (especially In America) that this earth is going to be destroyed altogether so it doesn't matter how we treat it now. Here, Paul chooses this metaphor of birth-pangs to indicate the drastic and dramatic birth of a new creation out of the womb of the old. Creation as we know it will be recreated by God, when he has dealt with the evil that is defacing and distorting it – or, as Paul says, frustrating it. The Bible is consistent in seeing heaven on earth, in a world renewed with people renewed.

Meanwhile, NOW, we have an 'obligation', as it says in v. 12:

An obligation to live according to the Spirit, God's guarantee, and not according to our own selfish desires, because we are his adopted children. And surely that includes....

An obligation to love and obey our Father – to come to him as 'Abba' and enjoy a relationship with him.

An obligation to care about what our Father cares about – the one who loves the whole world, people and planet – indeed, universe.

An obligation to wait patiently for our inheritance – but to wait with a sure and certain hope of the glory that is to come for us and for all creation – **BECAUSE OF ALL JESUS HAS DONE** through his death and resurrection.

Praise be to his Name!

PRAYER, using Romans 15 verse 13:

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust him so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. AMEN