

The Compassionate God

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Date: 10 May 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. Can I add my word of welcome? My name's Martin Ayers and I'm the Rector of St Silas Church. And whether you've been coming to St Silas many years or you just tuned in for the first time to us this morning on YouTube, it's great that you could join us. We're continuing in a series as a church family looking at knowing the living God.

So let's ask for God's help as we seek to know him better. Let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer. We praise you, mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, that you are glorious, powerful, majestic and holy.

We pray that you would speak to each one of us this morning, that where we're on the wrong track, you would lead us and correct us. Where we're being foolish, you would give us wisdom.

That where we're distressed or grieving, you give us comfort. And that where we're afflicted or in despair, you would give us hope. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we've come this morning to this theme of God our Father. And you could say, I think fairly, that this is one of the two or three most important things that God ever says to us.

[1 : 1 8] This is what Jim Packer says in his book, Knowing God. 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 his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

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that my heavenly father will be different or whether we need to say actually I never had a dad and I one of the most powerful moments I had on a youth camp I was helping to leave was when my friend Adam addressed all the teenagers on the camp and he said you know I never knew my dad you could say I really I never had a dad but it is okay because I've come to know God is my heavenly father and he will always be close to me and he'll never let me down we're going to think first about the adoption of the father there's a sense in which we talk about every human being as a child of God we use that kind of language and Acts 17 28 suggests that connection that because we're made by God in one sense we're his children the the issue is that that's not the primary way the scriptures talk about being children of God and the reason for that is that we've all rejected that fatherhood of God we've rebelled against it it we've we've run away from the family home we've done the spiritual equivalent of divorcing our parents and God's response to that in the gospel is that he offers us that we can come to him and he will adopt us as his children he'll welcome us the apostle John introduces his gospel account of Jesus life with this magnificent prologue and the climax of that prologue is John 1 verse 12 having just talked about how Jesus who came into the world was rejected by so many people he says 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 and there was no twisting God's arm for this when there's no sense in which that when God the father opens the door to welcome us home and he looks at us coming in and and picks out one or two of us and says what you as well oh go on then and reluctantly allows us back now when Jesus wanted to convey to the religious leaders of his day the attitude of God towards people who turn back to him he told the story in Luke 15 of the two lost sons and there's the younger brother who runs away and he squanders the inheritance then he comes to his senses and he heads home and he knows on his way home what he plans to say because he knows he doesn't deserve to be still part of the family he plans to say make me like one of your hired men and Jesus says when the father sees the son he runs towards him throws his arms around him and kisses him and then the celebration the feast and Jesus Jesus says this in the same way I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents who turns back to God the pleasure of the father having us turn back to him and become his sons and daughters being part of the family carries with it responsibilities but this adoption is liberating

God sets us free he redeems us to be his children in Galatians chapter 4 Paul describes our journey if you become a Christian from slavery 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 it's provocative isn't it the Bible says before we become sons we are slaves we there seems to be two different ideas Paul's referring to there in Galatians one is that we might be slaves to religion to a sort of churchianity where because we've not grasped that God is our father in Christ we think that we have to obey all these religious rules to be accepted another way we we might be a slave is if we've moved away from God what we do instead is we enslave ourselves to something else that we think will give us what only God can give us so we might take a good thing popularity or success or comfort but we enslave ourselves to it and we serve it and the offer from

Jesus is come home to God you can be set free to rest in his unconditional love so spiritually we're a bit like Ray in the Star Wars saga she introduces herself in the ninth episode in in the Rise of Skywalker she introduces herself to a creature who says they would be honored to know her family name and she says I I don't have one I'm just Ray but at the end of the movie with having become a Jedi Ray is at the home where Luke Skywalker grew up and a lady goes past and says who are you and she says I'm Ray and the lady says Ray who and she looks up and sees Leia and Luke and she says I'm Ray Skywalker and it's a coming of age moment she's saying I finally know who I am I've got a family now well so it is spiritually for us when we come to Christ that we could say you know I know who I am now spiritually I am a child of the living God it's a wonderful reality Robert Peterson says this the doctrine of adoption is as warm as the Bible gets I can hardly think of anything more comforting more nourishing more uplifting than the glorious truth that when we trust in Christ we are made into the sons and daughters of the creator God that's our first point the adoption of our father and that status is there to be experienced so our second point the closeness of the father in Luke 11 Jesus goes off to pray he comes back the disciples say to him Lord teach us to pray he says to them when you pray say father this is the primary image to govern how we relate to God and Romans 8 verse 16 says the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children in other words the Holy Spirit gives us a subjective reassurance that we can call on God as our father we can know his closeness his dependability his help God invites us to take hold of this relationship to experience it it means we can we can walk through life sharing it with God here's Jim Packer again this is momentous knowledge there is unspeakable comfort in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good there is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me in the way I'm so often disillusioned about myself we can't mess this up and what an encouragement this is as well to ask of the ask things boldly of God children ask their parents for things all the time all day they ask as things go wrong as they want things dad could I have this dad could I have that dad look at this without any worry or shame about that and Jesus says in Luke 11 13 if to parents if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him

[12 : 53] Jesus calls us out for being too slow to ask God for things sometimes we're held back as though we think I don't want to bother God or he won't be interested in this or I don't want to look like I'm asking for too much when in reality we should be casting our burdens on God's shoulders because it demonstrates as we ask him that we trust that he is a generous God a great provider and giver but what about the times when we don't get from him what we wanted when we're disappointed well our third point the discipline of our father just imagine for a moment a child who always gets everything they want we have words don't we for children like that if a child if the parent never says no we we call out parenting like that we'll say things like well how are they going to get on in the real world what are they going to become the truth is even though a child might not like it when a loving parent says no to their child it is for their good and we know that about human parenting the issue is we have to learn that lesson about the way that God is our father

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 7 endure hardship as discipline God is treating you as his children and the writer there he quotes Proverbs 3 and says we should be encouraged by it that it says in Proverbs 3 the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son I don't know what you think about that but I think Hebrews 12 there turns on its head the way that we tend to think about suffering and hardship we experience hardship as we are doing in this pandemic and in lockdown and we think things like is God even there is God really good how could God let this happen to me if he's really for me Hebrews chapter 12 says if you're a Christian if you're a Christian then hardship is a sign to you that you are a child of God he's treating you as a good father treats his children and by discipline that it doesn't just mean punishment for doing wrong discipline is a much broader concept than that it's about any challenges that come a child's way as a good parent trains them for life in the real world it's the walk up a mountain that is really hard and you grumble about it but afterwards you can see why it was a good thing to do it's the exam or the competition that you're entered for the challenges discipline is the not being wrapped in cotton wool approach to parenting it's about being trained stretched supported by a father who is ambitious to see us become the very best we could be it's that caring controlled exposure to difficulty to build our character in Hebrews the writer then compares discipline from God our father with discipline from our human dads verse 10 they are earthly dads disciplined us for a little while as they thought best but God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in his holiness so God because he is wise and good he will never test you more than you can bear he'll never get this wrong at the same time he does care more about our holiness than our happiness so does knowing all of that make it easy then to go through difficulty well verse 11 is so realistic isn't it no discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful and yet what a difference it makes to experience to experience to endure difficulty and disappointment and trust that God is a good father who in his wisdom will accomplish his good purposes through it because he's committed to us as his children end of verse 11 later on however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who've been trained by it therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees so folks these are difficult days during the pandemic and lockdown the temptation is to think

God is not good or God is not there and we need to speak this truth to ourselves however you feel today God is your good father if you are trusting Christ and he lovingly disciplines his children John Newton wrote this everything is necessary that God sends nothing can be necessary that he withholds could you argue with your own heart about that as you think about your own disappointments your disappointments your disappointments even with God don't listen to the feelings of your heart but argue with it the truth everything is necessary that God sends nothing can be necessary that he withholds he's the perfect father and he's preparing us for a terrific future that's our fourth point the inheritance of the father the bible connects our status with our future our identity as children of God with the guarantee that he will see us through this to be with him forever why because we are royal children it's extraordinary Romans 8 17 now if we are children and that's a kind of since we are children since 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 and that inheritance that we are co-heirs of with Christ is God himself being with him and the pleasure that will bring us and it's the new creation with our brother Jesus Christ it's the inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade folks these are the privileges of being children of the living God how did we land on our feet like this well there's only one place I can find as I looked at the gospels this week there was only one place I could find where Jesus prays and he doesn't call God Father it's on the cross my God my God why have you forsaken me as the only perfect son was thrown out of the presence of his father because it's what we deserved so that the father could give his son willingly for that mission and bring us home so that on the third day risen the Lord Jesus says to Mary go to my brothers and tell them

I'm ascending to my father and your father to my God and your God he's gone now to prepare a place for us in his father's house where he assures us there are many rooms 1 John chapter 3 verse 1 see what a great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are let's pray together our father we praise you that you are father thank you for your adoption by your grace in Christ in our joys and sorrows would we experience and enjoy your closeness as we pray when we think about our hardships would we trust your goodness and wisdom as you work in us for your praise and glory and for our good when we think about our disappointments father help us to trust your fatherly care in our frustrations would you set our hope fully on the inheritance you're keeping in heaven for us and in our words and in our work and in our hearts would you help us to bear the family likeness to be holy because you are holy and you are our father we ask for your name's sake amen you you