Session 6: Hope. What has God promised?

Welcome to Session 6 of our teaching series on Romans. In this session you will find worship song suggestions, a sermon outline and a written prayer.

KEY VERSE:

'... we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.'

ROMANS 8.23-24 (NIV)

BIBLE READINGS:

Romans 8.14–19; 31–32; 38–39

Context:

Chapter 8 is the high point of Romans, where Paul celebrates the enormous ramifications of the gospel – for us and for all of creation.

MAIN QUESTIONS:

How does the gospel change our identity now? And what does God have in store for the future?

MAIN THEMES:

Gospel, spirit, sonship, adoption, inheritance, glory, new creation, suffering, hope

Summary:

Having considered the power of the gospel and the freedom it brings us, Paul now arrives at a high point of praise. He celebrates what the gospel means for our relationship with God – we are adopted as his children and given a new identity. Then he widens his view, celebrating what God will do for all creation – making it new, and raising us to eternal life.

No Longer Slaves Love For Us

Reflections:

Romans 8 is a glorious chapter, filled with wonder at what the gospel has already achieved in our lives, and hope for what God has in store for all creation. As though you're standing at the top of a mountain, you can see beauty all around you in every direction, but there is far too much to take in! Preaching on a passage such as this can feel like trying to take photos on a mountaintop to show to people back home. There's no way you can do justice to its majesty in a single picture, no matter how great a photographer you might be.

So in this talk, there is plenty you won't be able to cover. For instance, you could give a whole talk on creation and how Christians should think about caring for our planet. Chances are you won't get to that in this sermon, so why not find another time in your church calendar to address that?

As you prepare, it's worth noting a few potentially painful points within this passage. Be aware of whether any of these might be difficult for members of your congregation. Three pain points may include:

- 1. Suffering. Paul says our present sufferings aren't worth comparing to the glorious future God has for us (verse 18). Given that this will only be a short part of your talk, be careful not to state it too quickly, in a way that may seem glib or insensitive to those going through difficult times.
- 2. Fatherhood. For those who have had a bad experience of fatherhood, or an absent father, the idea of God as Father may come with a lot of baggage. You might find it helpful to acknowledge that, and help people to see that God is a perfect Father, far better than even the greatest earthly dad.
- 3. Adoption. While adoption itself is a beautiful thing, the circumstances that lead to someone needing to be adopted are usually not! So be aware of any in your congregation who are adopted or are adopting. You might find it helpful to warn people in advance, especially if parents have adopted children who might be in the service.

But with those caveats in mind – this chapter truly is filled with joy and hope. You're going to have a great time preaching it!

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Suggested sermon outline

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 8 is the absolute high point of Romans. It's a chapter filled with celebration and wonder at the hope of the gospel.

What is the best news you have ever received? Do you have a story of a time where something so amazing happened that it took your breath away? Maybe use this as a way of setting people up for the glorious truths they're about to encounter in Romans 8.

In this talk, we're going to look at the idea of adoption into God's family and then unpack three of the benefits it brings.

KEY POINTS: THREE HARD TRUTHS

A new identity (Romans 8.14–16)

- Paul uses the metaphor of adoption to describe the radical life change that has been brought about through the gospel. Take some time to unpack the idea of adoption, showing how it was understood in ancient Rome, and what a privilege it was considered to be. You should also explain the significance of Paul's use of the word 'son', and how it challenged some of the cultural ideas around male and female rights.
- The Spirit has radically changed our identity. We are not slaves, but sons brought into the family of God.
 Consider the contrast in verse 15 between being a slave and being a son. How does that affect the way you view your relationship with God? You may find it helpful to imagine what it would be like to conceive of your relationship with God in slave/master terms. How would that affect your prayer life, worship, sense of identity? Now imagine how different it is to see yourself as a child of God!
- Paul uses an intimate term to cry out to God: Abba! Explain what this word means, perhaps with reference to Jesus' own prayer life, and the prayer he taught his disciples to pray (Matthew 6.9–13; Luke 11.1–4). Do you have a story of how you experienced the love of God in a way that changed your life? Why not share it as part of the sermon?

2 A new inheritance (Romans 8.16–17, 31–32)

- Now that we are sons, we also receive an inheritance from our Father.

Take some time to unpack the idea of an inheritance, and help people appreciate what a privilege it is to inherit

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from the eternal God. Inheritances often include things of financial worth – and certainly the inheritance from God is comparable to great riches! But we often also inherit things that have great sentimental value – they remind us of the one who left them to us, and assure us of their love for us. Do you have an example of an inheritance like that? If so, why not share that, and then apply that idea to the inheritance we receive from God. How does our inheritance from him both bless us richly and give us a deep assurance of his love for us (compare with verses 38–39)?

- The inheritance we receive is not just one we enjoy now, but that stretches into eternity. And it benefits not just us, but all of creation.

Draw out some key points from this passage that are included in our inheritance. For instance, the renewal of all creation (verse 21), and the redemption of our bodies (verse 23). This chapter doesn't give an exhaustive list. For more, read Ephesians 1, where Paul uses the similar idea of us receiving an inheritance from God (see verse 14).

3 A new confidence (Romans 8.17–18; 31–39)

- In the light of all this, Paul says that we can live with a new confidence. He gives two reasons for our confidence. Firstly, our future inheritance.

Paul doesn't promise that the Christian life will be free from suffering. In fact, he says we will share Christ's suffering (verse 17) and he also lists 17 possible calamities that may come our way (verses 35–38). But knowing how glorious our inheritance will be gives us a different perspective on our sufferings (verse 18). You may want to draw from Paul's own story in Acts, or his testimony in 2 Corinthians 11.23–29, to show some of the suffering he went through. He certainly knows what he's talking about!

- Secondly, our present ongoing experience of God's love. The final verses of this section celebrate how nothing at all can separate us from God's love (verses 37–39). When we face hardship or pain, we can be sure that God has not abandoned us. And we can still experience his love even in the midst of our trials, through the Holy Spirit who pours out God's love into our hearts (Romans 5.5). Do you have a personal experience of how an awareness of our future inheritance or our present experience of his love have sustained you through difficult times? NOTES

CONCLUSION How do we live in the light of this?

Below are some suggested points of application. Feel free to select a couple of points which are most appropriate to your setting.

- If it's true that we are God's children and he is our Abba, that changes our relationship with him, dramatically! Think about some areas where people in your congregation may be tempted to see themselves as 'slaves' rather than 'sons' and give some specific action points for how they can change that mindset. Perhaps offer prayer for people, to help people live in the good of their identity in Christ.
- You may want to give some specific application about worship and prayer, and invite people to receive prayer to experience the love of God afresh.
- When we face hardships, we need to hold onto our future hope. We shouldn't be surprised or interpret suffering as a sign that God doesn't love us or has abandoned us. Nothing can separate us from his love! As we learn to experience his love and to be captivated by his promises for our future, this changes our perspective and helps us to endure our sufferings. Be mindful of those who are facing suffering right now, being sensitive towards them, and offering them hope, support and prayer.



- Romans: A Letter That Makes Sense of Life by Andrew Ollerton

- The Message of Romans by John Stott
- *Romans* 8–16 *For You* by Timothy Keller



WRITTEN PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the message we've heard today. We are forgiven, we are loved, we are children of the living God. Lord God, where we are facing hardship, suffering and challenges, please assure us of your love and presence with us. Help us not to feel abandoned or on our own. Thank you that you care for us and that nothing can separate us from you. We are your children; help us to trust and love you as our wonderful heavenly Father.