

**Sermon Life with God: Present and Future**  
**Romans 8:12-25**

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**Intro**

Is the church of Jesus Christ a matter of the past? Are Christians people of yesterday? In our western societies you would sometimes think so; if you look in the rest of the world, we see a different story. The church is growing fast.

More important, whether the church is large or small - we are people of the future. We are people of hope, even if we are from countries where the christian faith seems to be a matter of the past.

In one sense we are really people of the past - our hope is anchored in what Jesus Christ has done for us. St Paul explains his Gospel in the letter to the Romans and writes that we have been baptised in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of what he did, long ago, our lives have been renewed.

In Romans 8, in the part we read, Paul shows how we, grounded in the historic life, death and resurrection of Jesus, have become people of the future. This is, because we have become children of God - the God who holds past, present and future in his hands.

**1. Children of God**

This is Good News. The renewed people of God has received the Spirit of God, as promised by the prophets in the Old Testament; God himself lives in our midst through his Spirit. And the fact that God has returned to his temple, to us, means that he adopted us as his children. No longer is there a chasm between God and us - we have become united. We have become part of the family of God.

The Holy Spirit ensures us that we are children of God, by testifying this in our own spirit. God confirms to us – you are my child. For doing this, the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God; even now, as you listen. He confirms to your heart: I am God's child! The Spirit assures us that God adopted us as his sons and daughters.

God our Father adopted us as his children by making us part of the life of His One and Only Son, Jesus Christ. Our unity by faith with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had made us children of the Father. And the Holy Spirit of God, who is in our life, testifies to this.

The Spirit makes us address God as 'Abba, Father', and therefore we can be sure we have been adopted by God as his children. This word Abba is Aramaic. It is the word Jesus himself used when He spoke with God in the garden of Gethsemane. It was also the word Jesus taught his disciples to use when praying to God. 'Our Father who art in heaven.'

To address God as Father is not something small. It is a sign of our confidence actually, because it suggests closeness and intimacy. It suggests we are not afraid of Him. Is God not angry at us? Is He not a dangerous God? Can we really speak with Him, in a manner that is so close?

The Holy Spirit drives the children of God to talk with him, to communicate with Him in a manner that is personal, intimate, and full of confidence. And this in itself shows that we are indeed children of God - and children of hope, or the future.

We are truly children of God, and Gods inheritance is ours.

## **2. Our inheritance**

When we hear the Jewish apostle Paul speak of inheritance, we should immediately think of Gods covenantal promises. What was the inheritance promised in the Old Testament? Think of God's promises to Abraham. "I will give you this land as an eternal possession." For every Jew, this was the ABC of his religion. And their main concern was how to ensure they would be part of this coming new world.

In the Old Testament we also see that the inheritance went beyond the land of Israel. Think for instance of Psalm 2, where God promises the Messiah, the Christ:

"You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

The Apostle Paul in his letter follows very clearly the order of salvation history as described in Israel's exodus and also the order of the salvation that Israel was waiting for, the final exodus.

In chapter 6 he speaks of the journey through the Red Sea - our baptism.

In chapter 7 he speaks of the law that was given to Israel after they went through the Red Sea, into the desert. And the law, God's good and perfect revelation, hammered into all Jews that they are just as sinful as all people. We all come to God with empty hands.

In chapter 8 Paul shows how God fills our empty hands... with himself, with his Spirit, just as God was graciously with Israel in the desert through the Holy Spirit who dwelled in the tabernacle.

Now, in chapter 8, Paul shows that God has made all things well for us, we are his children, His Spirit lives in us as in the tabernacle. And we are about to enter into the inheritance God always promised, just as Israel after the gruesome trip through the desert entered into the promised land.

In the future God will make *us* part of the promised land, of the whole renewed earth.

As we are in Jesus Christ, in Him and in His Church, we will inherit with him all that the Father will give to his Son. What Jesus Christ inherits, we inherit, because through him, we are children of God.

“Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” This is the inheritance of the Messiah; this is our inheritance. Life in a new heaven and a new earth.

### **3. Hope and patience**

Well, nice, all this, but look at us today. Paul points at the suffering of the people of God. There are so many problems all over the world for Christians. Our lives are not always easy. Maybe that is what you also feel personally. Nice paradise in the future, but look at me now.

Paul says in verse 24 and 25 that our inheritance is not visible yet, but we hope. “If we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently.” And he encourages the Romans: the glory we will one day receive is so much more overwhelming than what we suffer in this present life. We must hold on to our hope, patiently, even in the midst of hardship.

If we share in the sufferings of Jesus, in hardship now, then we can be assured we also share in his inheritance. And the glory, the inheritance later, is not just compensation for your tough life now. Glory actually grows out of your suffering. There is an organic relation between the two, just as it was for the Lord.

The expectation of perfection today is an exaggerated hope - because our hope is for the future inheritance. We hope for what we do not see. We need patience.

That is not always easy, we see our painful shortcomings. We are not perfect yet, not at all. It is shameful how much wrong we are able to do.

And not only we personally but all of creation is waiting for the total renewal of all things.

Paul draws a great picture of the groaning of all nature for renewal. He speaks with a poet's vision. He sees all nature as if it were a person, waiting for the glory that shall be.

Jews would recognise and understand these images of Paul. Some day there would come the Day of the Lord. That would be a day of judgment when the world would be shaken to its foundations; but out of it there would come a new world.

Paul describes nature as longing for the day when sin's dominion will be broken, death and decay will be gone, and God's glory will come.

Creation groans. Look at how we exploit nature. And how things in nature go wrong even without us interfering.

In Romans 8:19 Paul uses a wonderful word for the eager expectation of all nature for renewal. It is *apokaradokia* and it describes the attitude of a man who scans the horizon with head thrust forward, eagerly searching the distance for the first signs of the dawn break of glory.

If that is true of nature, it is still truer of man. In our own lives we are able to mess up ingloriously. We are sick and dying and to some extent this is our own doing.

So Paul goes on to discuss our human longing. With the experience of the Holy Spirit we have a foretaste, a first instalment, of the glory that shall be; we long with all their hearts for the full realisation of what adoption into the family of God means.

That final adoption will be the redemption of their bodies. Paul did not think of man as a disembodied spirit. Man in this world is a body and a spirit; and in the world to come, the total man will be saved. But our bodies will no longer be the victim of decay and the instrument of sin; it will be a spiritual body fit for the life of a spiritual man.

But for now, we are involved in the normal human situation. On the inside we must battle with our own bad inclinations, and that is tough. On the outside we must live in a world of death, decay and suffering.

But, the Christian does not live only in this world; he also lives in Christ. He does not see only the world; he looks beyond it to God. He does not see only the consequences of man's sin;

he sees the power of God's mercy and love. Therefore, the keynote of the Christian life is always hope and never despair. The Christian waits, not for death, but for life.

And this vision of eternal restoration and glory of ourselves and all of creation, has its focal point in the fact that we are children of God. One day, that will be fully realised. It is fully true today, but it is as if our Father beckons us from the other side of the Jordan river, hold on, go ahead, have hope, be patient.

And the Father has given us His Spirit in order to see Him, and to hold on in hope. He has given us His Spirit as a deposit of the glory on the other side of the river, and in order to give us strength to live in this world in which we suffer so much. We suffer from life, from nature, from enemies, friends, even as family-members we inflict so much pain on each other.

### **Conclusion**

But because we are children of the God who is there on the other side, and because the Spirit lives us in, even today we try to live as if we are already with God. We want to do his will.

That is the Christian life. We know we are not perfect, far from it. But with Gods help, with the Spirit in us, we try to live in accordance with the Perfect Christ who went before us.

This does not mean we become perfect overnight; it means that when we sin, there is this voice in us – the voice of the Holy Spirit actually - telling us to change our life and to return to God. This leading is an ongoing process. It is God the Spirit in our life and in our church who desires that our lives are committed to God the Father and God the Son.

This is why the Holy Spirit was given to the Church. So that we are drawn up to God again and again. He leads us; He develops our conscience; He helps us to live a life for God the Father, today. And if we stumble, even when we stumble badly, he helps us to get up and continue behind Jesus Christ again.

**Amen**