

Adoption

Matt Hall

West Valley Presbyterian Church

Today we continue our series exploring biblical themes in the movie, Les Mis. We began this series by looking at the grace that was offered to the main character, Jean Valjean. We continued by contrasting the grace offered to Jean Valjean, with the relentless passion for the law that consumed Javert. This contrast of grace and law becomes a dominant theme in the story of Les Mis – just as it is a dominant theme in scripture.

One of my favorite redemptive storylines in Les Mis, which echoes scripture, is the story of the orphan Cosette. In the movie, Jean Valjean in his quest to live a new life becomes a factory owner. His factory employs a young woman named Fantine. Fantine has a secret, she has an illegitimate daughter named Cosette. Cosette is living with a corrupt couple and their daughter, Epinoine. Fantine is sending them money so they will continue to care for Cosette. When the secret is revealed, the factory foreman fires Fantine and throws her out onto the street.

Struggling to provide for her daughter Fantine sells her hair, then her teeth, and eventually becomes a prostitute. Javert, the fierce defender of

the law, will arrest her after she attacks a customer, and it is Jean Valjean who will rescue and hospitalize Fantine. Jean realizes his role in her predicament and makes a promise to care for her daughter, Cosette, after she dies.

When Fantine dies, Jean goes to the couple who have Cosette, and we discover that Cosette has been horribly treated. She is used for labor, forced to go into the woods at night to fetch water, while the couple's daughter Epinone is spoiled. Jean pays the couple 1500 francs for their trouble and takes Cosette.

Jean adopts Cosette as his own, she refers to him as Papa. Jean, having made a name and fortune for himself cares for Cosette and provides a great life for her. In fact, throughout the rest of the tale of Jean Valjean we see him risk his life for her happiness.

Cosette, surely felt abandoned by her mother, she is left in a horrible home with people who mistreat her. She does not know love.

Now that I have outlined the entire story for you, you're asking what does Cosette's plight have to do with scripture? Well Cosette's situation would have been well known by the readers of Paul's letters.

**Throughout the Roman Empire, at the time of Paul there was a culture of abandonment and infanticide.** Children often found

themselves in situations worse than Cosette. When families were unable to care for a child they were often tossed out into the garbage or on a dung heap to either die or be taken by someone and used as a slave, prostitute, gladiator, or worse. Infanticide was also common, particularly with disabled children and girls.

Imagine what that would be like? To be a child thrown out of your home, or to have parents no longer able to care for you, and to find yourself enslaved?

I believe you and I have a lot in common with Cosette, and with the abandoned children of the Roman Empire. I would argue, that we are born spiritual orphans in this world. Now I call us orphans because Jesus says we are orphans. **John 14:18 says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."**

We do not know God the father, and we are vulnerable. We are vulnerable to be mistreated by a sinful world, a sinful world who will tell us to find a family in places other than God. Further, we have become enslaved to sin. How many of you have felt like crying out Paul's cry "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

Do you see how we are orphans before we know Jesus and have a relationship with God? Do you see how we have become enslaved to sin? So the question is, **when** did we become orphans?

I want to take a look at the early chapters of Genesis and change our normal perspective on what is happening in those verses in light of this verse, this idea that we are spiritual orphans.

In the beginning, God created Adam and then Eve in a perfect world. Man and God enjoy a face-to-face relationship. For a period of time they enjoy each other without anything in the way. God, Adam, and Eve form a family of three. Luke agrees with me, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of his gospel he calls Adam, “the son of God.”

But when Adam and Eve reject God’s instructions, God is forced to remove them from the garden, and his family.

Now God, being loving, doesn’t abandon them to the fate of the children of Rome, he does not toss them aside into a garbage dump or leave them with evil surrogate parents like Cosette.

We do know there are consequences though. The relationship between God and Man is severely damaged. God can no longer be in true fellowship with us, because it would be unjust, and as we see in Adam and Eve who hid from God in their shame – our shame creates a barrier as

well. The result is that God no longer appears face-to-face with man, and ultimately we are told that the punishment for our sin is death. We have been orphaned, enslaved, and are now facing certain death in the world.

But, God does not leave man in this orphaned and terminally ill state. God works to restore our family relationship. You see, Adam and Eve, are orphans by choice, and God is going to set a plan in motion to adopt us back into his family.

Friends, this is the gospel. We are removed from God's presence because of our sin. God is just and cannot allow our sin to be overlooked. There must be a punishment, or God would be wrong to say he is a God of Justice. so we are kicked out of the garden, his family. But, just as God is forced to punish us to remain just, God is also loving, so he works to restore us to that family.

Those of you who are familiar with the gospel know that we are restored to God's family by the work of Jesus Christ, God's son. This is why Ephesians 1:5 tells us that we are **“adopt[ed] as sons by Jesus Christ.”**

God uses our brother, Jesus, to return us to his family. Jesus went to the cross so that we could be a part of God's family.

Paul writes that **“The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, [Jesus] a life-giving spirit.**” The son of God, Adam, was made to live, the Son of God, Jesus was made to restore and give life.

Friends, what you see here in the doctrine of adoption is the entire Gospel message. We had a family, but lost it, and our brother Jesus paid the price and adopted us into the family of God. One day, those of us who confess Jesus Christ as Lord will be returned to a Garden where we can enjoy being the family of God as Adam and Eve once did.

This brings us to another aspect of our adoption. In the Roman Empire adoption was a little bit different than what you or I think of today.

Adoptions happened, but were generally done selfishly. John Billings writes, “In this ancient Roman context, adoption was generally not about babies and childless couples finding a way to have children. Instead, the adoptees were usually adults, and adoption was first of all a legal arrangement.

You see, the family structure that we think of today, a mom, a dad, two children living in a home was not the family structure that existed in the Roman Empire. The family structure rather was an entire household. It was

the head of house, his wife, their children, other relatives, servants, and slaves.

I want you to think of all the people who live and work in the White House, Buckingham Palace, Downton Abbey. This is a picture of a household, it could be 30 people or more.

A household cared for individual members, and were a great place of community. But there was a flaw. A male heir was needed to assume the role of head of household to continue this community on through the generations.

When a male heir was not available, this is when adoption would happen. Simply put, men in need of protecting their households, and sometimes empires chose an adult heir to adopt in an effort to extend their families way of being.

This is not exactly the image we see in Les Mis. Cosette is not adopted by Jean Valjean to continue a household or empire. But this is the image that would come to mind when people read the letters of Paul. So let's take a look at some of these passages of scripture.

Paul talks about heirs a lot. It's an important concept. In Ephesians, Paul writes, **“Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the**

**promise in Christ Jesus.”** And In Galatians 3:29 he tells us that, **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**

The image here is that through the gospel we are adopted into God’s family, and that we are co-heirs with Israel to the promises that Israel received. You will remember that God promised to make Israel a great nation, and that Israel would be his chosen people. We, as Christians, adopted into God’s family, now are a part of that promise. This is a pretty fantastic blessing, that you and I are a fulfillment of today.

**Romans 8:17 reads, “Now if we are children [of God], then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ,”**

You see, in this culture, the eldest son would be the heir. The other children might receive a small portion of the estate, but the bulk would go to the eldest son. This was a position of great honor. But you and I are called co-heirs because Jesus shares his inheritance with us.

The greatest inheritance, the greatest gift that we receive by being adopted into God’s family is God himself. Revelation 21: 3– 4 gives us wonderful imagery of the day when God will dwell fully among us, as he did before the sin of Adam and Eve, it reads, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his

people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’**

Jesus is the heir of all that is the Father’s and has chosen to share his inheritance with us. Mark Driscoll writes, **“When the kingdom of God is fully established, this will include a resurrected glorified body, entrance to the kingdom, and the new heavens and the new earth, which will be a huge family reunion filled with worshipful feasting and celebrating at the table of our Father.”**

Friends, God loves you. He sees you in your orphaned state, he knows that you have been enslaved to slavery, and he knows that you will surely die. But he loves you, so he sent his Son Jesus to adopt you back into his family. Just like in our adoptions today, adoption is instigated by a loving father. Ephesians 1:5 tells us that we were *predestined* to be adopted. Meaning, God, has had a plan to adopt you all along. He’s looking at you in your orphaned state, he knows that you have nothing to offer him. You can’t save yourself. But he sends Jesus to come down and look at you and say, “I Love You. You are precious to me. You belong to me. You can’t give me anything, but I want to give you everything. I want to give you my

father, I want to give you my position of honor, my inheritance, and I want to give you myself for all of eternity.”