

Heirs with Christ

Romans 8:12-17

As many of you know, during the past 6 years, I had the privilege of serving as the District Superintendent of the Delaware Bay District of our conference. It was a ministry with both joys and challenges being a pastor to pastor as well as a supervisor and coach. I also had the opportunity to work with many dedicated laypersons in 70 local churches.

One of the responsibilities of the District Superintendent is to hold a special church conference whenever a bequest is received. Usually this becomes welcome news for a congregation, that someone cared enough for the ministry of the church to remember them in their will. When we include the church in our final wishes, it is a way for us to continue to support and give to the ministry of the church even after our death.

Of course there are those times when receiving a bequest gets more complicated when a number of stipulations and conditions are placed upon the use of the gift. Sometimes it takes a while to sort everything out. And not everybody always agrees and how the gift should be used.

I've seen it happen a number of times in dealing with families who are trying to come to terms with a deceased person's wishes. And what may have been the good intentions of someone who has died ends up in family quarrels, hard feelings, and sometimes legal battles.

If I were to ask you: How many of you have taken the time to have a will written, there is the likelihood that the response would be lower than what you would expect. It is reported that only 42% of adult Americans have a will. I think most of us would say a will is important, but it's one of those things we keep putting off. I guess it's because it's connected to our mortality and it is a matter we choose not to confront.

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Yet we know a will is necessary to assure that what you have to leave will get to whom you wish, or that matters pertaining to your children are properly cared for.

There have been some pretty interesting wills drawn up by persons wanting to give specific instructions about their wishes. One is particular I wanted to note was one written by Canadian lawyer and financier, Charles Vance Millar who died in 1926. He had a very strange sense of humor and it was in part reflected in his will. He said: "This will is necessarily uncommon and capricious because I have no dependents or near relations and no duty rests upon me to leave any property at my death and what I do leave is proof of my folly in gathering and retaining more than I required in my lifetime."

The will was full of very funny and playful bequests. Such as:

Three men who were known to despise each other were granted joint lifetime tenancy in Millar's vacation home in Jamaica.

7 Prominent Toronto Protestant ministers who were temperance advocates were to receive \$700,000 worth of O'Keefe Brewery Stock, a Catholic business, but only if they participated in its management and drew on its dividends.

Three fervent opponents of horse racing were to receive \$25,000 worth of Ontario Jockey Club stock,

But the final bequest of his will was the largest and strangest. In the will's tenth clause, it required that the balance of Millar's estate was to be converted to cash 10 years after his death and given to the Toronto woman who had given birth to the most children during those 10 years. In the event of a tie, the bequest would be divided equally. The resulting contest became known as the Great Stork Derby. Well, his estate increased drastically during those 10 years, and was worth \$750,000 when it was time to liquidate the asset. Remember this was now 1936. It turned out that most of the bequest was shared by 4 Toronto women each who had 9 children during those 10 years.

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Wills are all about communicating our wishes. We've all read about a dog, a cat, or even a bird who were left large sums of money because they were named as beneficiaries of a will.

Well, personally, I don't ever expect to receive any large amounts of money in a will. But, really, that's not that important. What really is important is to realize that we can receive an inheritance so much more than silver or gold.

And so we have Paul's description of that wonderful position we are in as believers in Jesus Christ. "We are children of God and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba!^[a] Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness^[b] with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Now that's a will I want to be included in...because that's a will of great worth!

When you think about it, there are 3 basic parts to a will. There's the giver, there's the beneficiary, and there's the gift itself.

The giver is the person who determines the terms of the will, He or she indicates what he or she wants to leave.

Have you ever thought about, whose will you would like to be included in: Whose will? Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, In the list of Forbes's 500 richest persons in the world, Bill Gates is back on top. It is said that his net worth is 76 Billion dollars. Can't even begin to comprehend that amount. Well, we know in reality we will never be in any of those wills. But I tell you the Good News of the Gospel is that will has been drawn up for you and me and God is the awesome and almighty Giver. This God of unlimited resources is the graceful and merciful giver. It is the basic premise of the Gospel...God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son. God is not willing that any should perish. The very nature of God is to give. And

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our God is a generous giver, a God of abundant love. There could be no greater grantor of a bequest. God so loved the world, He gave!

A will not only has a giver, it also includes a beneficiary...someone who is the recipient of giver's wishes. God's love extends the invitation for all of us to be included in the will. God invited you and me because of God's amazing grace to be recipients in the will. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of a family relationship, for now you are one of God's children. Last week we talked about how that relationship with Jesus Christ made us friends, today we are reminded that this relationship is about being in the family. Our faith in Jesus Christ has brought us into the family of God. Or maybe you could say...your name is in the will.

In years past, among the Cherokee Indians was a law of capture and adoption. A soldier who had been travelling North from New Orleans had been taken into captivity by the Cherokees. Not long afterward the soldier was bought by one of the Indians. According to Cherokee custom, he was to be no longer treated as a slave, but he was to be regarded as a brother or cousin of the one who had purchased him. The whole tribe was required to treat him as another member of the tribe. In a few known cases, a captive who was adopted into a tribe, eventually became a chief.

Our Scripture today speaks of people being children of God by adoption. To be in a new and special relationship. We are given the wonderful privilege to speak to God and to be on intimate terms...so we can cry "Abba" Father to the One who created us. We are part of the family, Heirs with God and fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. The promise of a wonderful inheritance is given to us.

But you know there's another reality that we often confront as we live our lives. We are often tempted to substitute our inheritance for something other than God's gift to us. We are tempted to go after worldly treasures and pursuits in place of finding God's best for us. What happens is that our relationship with God suffers, we begin neglecting that relationship and we find ourselves exchanging God's gifts for the things of the world. We wonder how it happens, who we forget the terms of the will and eventually we try to live life on our own terms.

Maybe one of the most famous stories of this happening is found in the Bible. It's the story of Jacob and Esau. In the book of Genesis, we see Esau returning to his

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brother Jacob, he comes home just famished from his time in the fields. He begs his twin brother to give him some red pottage. And Jacob bargains with his brother and gives Esau this bowl of stew in exchange for his birthright (the right to be recognized as the firstborn) And somehow Esau agrees. And this was a big deal for now Jacob could receive a double portion of the inheritance. But just like Esau lost sight of what was really important, it can happen to us. We think the things of this world are more important than what God wants for us.

I came across a letter written in the Upper Room by Ken Lambertson of Arizona:

“Once I had everything I could want. Shortly after graduation from college, I married a beautiful woman and started a new career in teaching. I found a lot of happiness and success. My wife and I had three wonderful little girls and my career blossomed. I was honored as “teacher of the year”. But at the climax of my success, I moved away from serving God to serving myself. With glowing pride in my accomplishments I became indifferent and complacent towards by wife, my family, my career, and my faith. In the pursuit of my own selfishness, I betrayed all those who truly loved me. I ruined every relationship.”

He goes on...”I am now serving 12 years in prison. Through no one’s fault but my own indifference, complacency, and self-centeredness that led me here. But I have discovered once again my relationship with God. Though all the material things have been left behind, I have discovered the value of God’s love, together with that of my wife and children. And I have found a real joy and peace in being free from things. I have learned real contentment.”

This special relationship God makes possible for each of us. Adopted into the family. A beneficiary of God’s will.

Which leads us to the third part of a will...the gift itself. The inheritance to be received. An inheritance that is so much more valuable than any earthly will could describe. Peter describes it in that passage about having that living hope...he says we have an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you. What a glorious inheritance. God’s precious gift of life eternal.

I believe our grasping of these wonderful truths makes a big difference in how we look at life. When we consider our position in Christ, it gives us a whole new

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perspective. It should affect our attitudes, our outlook on things. We are heirs with Christ, we are beneficiaries who have all the resources of heaven.

I wonder how often as followers of Jesus Christ, we forget this. We get discouraged, we complain about our problems, our circumstances. We live as people caught up on the mindset and mentality of the world. We argue and fight among ourselves. We forget we have a wonderful inheritance that we share.

This morning, I'm asking you to re-evaluate your resources, You have a rich inheritance... and the great thing about the will that God has written, you don't have to wait until you die to cash it in! It is like those wills that provide gifts and annuities before someone dies. Because God's gift of eternal life begins as soon as we receive it by faith. As believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we are already son's and daughters with all the rights and privileges thereof. Now that should cause us to look at life differently, to live life from an eternal perspective. Some of the things that I think are so important are really insignificant in light of eternity. Some of the material things I try to accumulate or the issues I think are so important, or the things I need to accomplish.. I have to look at them in a different light, when I consider their eternal value, or eternal significance. I want to be able to see them from God's point of view.

An heir with Jesus Christ, a child of God. Getting a hold of that, you cannot look at life in the same way. You begin to ask yourself different questions about life. It's not about my net worth, it's about helping others discover their worth. It's not about holding on to hurts and grudges and resentments to those who have wounded us, it's about forgiveness, and healing and new beginnings. It's not about worry and anxiety about what others think of me, it's about cherishing the relationship God has given us and seeking to please the Lord in what I do.

When Cyrus the Great was a baby, his grandfather, out of jealousy and fear that Cyrus would one day take the Persian throne from him, called a servant and charged him to take the baby away and destroy him. But instead of slaying the child, the servant gave him to a childless shepherd living in a distant province. Cyrus grew up supposing himself to be only a poor shepherd's son. But one day he learned the truth, that he was a prince of a royal family and heir to the throne of Persia. From that point on, there was no tending of sheep for Cyrus. He immediately begin to prepare himself to rule the kingdom and eventually he did just that.

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You see the turning point in his life was when he realized whose child he was. This is the great realization for each of us in the fulfillment of God's purposes for our lives. You are a child of God and when we turn to Christ in faith, we are fellow-heirs. We have a new purpose for living, a new outlook, a new perspective. We can now live with an eternal point of view. It changes how you view life, the value you place on things, how you view your problems, how you relate to people. What a difference in how we now live our lives. We can live with a sense of great joy and peace, why not. There's good news...you're in the will!