

The Present Importance of a Promised Inheritance

Hebrews 9:15-22¹

I love the mysteries by Dick Francis. In one of his novels, there is this very rich gold trader who has had two attempts on his life. He is an older man with many heirs. He has begun to spend his money in a way that he never did before. The heirs are trying to get him to stop spending their inheritance away. As the story unfolds, each heir is revealed as having enormous present financial need that provides a motivation at least for stoppage of the spending, or at worst, murder. The solution to the problem? Distribute some of the inheritance now to remove the motivation. It turns out that his wealth is growing faster than most human beings could spend it anyway and their inheritance was never in jeopardy to begin with.

Sort of reminds of a bumper sticker I saw recently on a very expensive motor home. It announced, "I'm retired and I'm spending my children's inheritance." The story is told of a family gathered in lawyer's office in breathless anticipation of the reading of a rich grandfather's will. "Being of sound mind and body, I spent it all."

We also have a spiritual inheritance. The Bible often refers to the promise of the wonders and wealth to be inherited by God's people. And our text this morning refers to it as well. "Those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (v.15). But to be frank, we really don't care too much about it, do we? When was the last time you sat down and thought about this eternal inheritance, what might be in it and what it might mean to actually receive it?

I want to strengthen your faith by showing you the present importance of our promised inheritance in the New Covenant.

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Its Purpose (v.15a)

The present importance of our promised inheritance is seen in its purpose.

In the Person of Christ

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant. All of the attention is to be focused on Him. Our author wants to be sure that we do not lose sight of the superiority and supremacy of Christ *in all of God's doings and dealings*.

Now we need to think clearly about this idea of Christ being a mediator.

A Modern Idea

We think of a mediator as someone who is called in to settle conflict by negotiating a contract. Usually, both parties have to compromise until an agreement is reached that satisfies both parties.

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The Biblical Idea

Jesus is a mediator as the one who comes in between the sinner and a holy God. He does not negotiate. He Himself fulfills the terms of the contract

In the People who are Called

The superiority of the New Covenant is shown in that there are a particular people who are going to receive the benefits of it. This is not a contract or an agreement or a will that is for just anybody. It is for those who are called. Now who are these who are called? We know from Hebrews 3:1 where the Author writes, "Therefore, *holy brothers*, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus." Those who receive the promised inheritance are those whose summons from heaven transforms them into holy brothers.

In other words, God has chosen a people to whom He sends a Divine and irresistible summons (a call). When they respond, they become holy and brothers, finding their names already were written on the Divine Covenant, the Heavenly Will and begin immediately receiving the benefits promised in the inheritance.

In the Promises that are Received

Time does not permit me to unfold what is encompassed by the promised eternal inheritance. It reaches back to Abraham and David. It lived and died and lived again in Jesus. It is the restoration of all things. It is the making of all things new. It is all that God has purposed to give to Jesus, and thus, to us as well. It is the package of all the good that God is for us in Christ. And we will actually receive it.

How is this purpose possible? How is it that God's called people are going to receive the promised inheritance? How is it that the Jews were going to see the fulfillment of all their expectations? How is it that people from every tribe and tongue and people group were going to receive an eternal inheritance?

Its Provision (v.15b)

We will receive our inheritance because of the provision in the New Covenant, in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

In the Ransom that was Paid

Here is the necessity of redemption. Our sin and transgression incurred a debt we cannot pay. It sold us into the slavery of sin. It corrupted us in the very core of our beings. So Jesus died. He gave up His life on the cross. His death paid the price, bought us from slavery and delivered us from the power of sin. His death satisfied the just demands of God.

In the Freedom that was Given

But notice the backward (as well as forward) effect of His death.

It set the Old Testament saints free from the sins they committed while living under the Old Testament. Now get this. Sins in the Old Testament were simply covered until Jesus died. Since He has died, they are washed away.

It sets New Covenant saints free from their sins. You can be free from your sin. You can be free from its addictive power. You can be free from its accusing guilt. You can be free from its corrupting disease. This is what the sacrifice- the death and blood of Jesus has done for the ones God calls to salvation.

Now I know that in this modern day it is usually not acceptable to talk about Christianity in terms of death and sacrifice. "We have to change our way of talking about the life and death of Jesus so that we will gain a hearing and be accepted by people today." *To the degree that we do*

that, we change the gospel so that it is no longer the gospel and is in fact, a false gospel. Listen, if people reject the message that they are sinners who have not magnified the worth of God in every choice and decision of their lives, in every attitude and action and that Jesus' death and resurrection is the only solution to the immense problem of their sin and God's holiness, then they are simply lost and damned. I make no apology for declaring to moderns here in the 21st century that your salvation comes only through the sacrifice of Jesus. For I know that those with a heavenly calling will hear with born again ears.

Its Perspective (v.16-17)

¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Our author has talked about the New Covenant in terms of death and an inheritance. When we talk like that, immediately the idea of a will comes to mind. This is the comparison he makes. The New Covenant is not only a contract, but it is also a will.

In the Reasons for the Comparison

Why can we think of the New Covenant like we think of a will?

Because the Greek word here was commonly used that way. That is why some translations refer to it as a will, a covenant or a testament.

Because a death makes the New Covenant come into effect. When Jesus died and rose again, the New Covenant then began to be executed or carried out.

Because even the first covenant was associated with death. It anticipated and pointed to the realities that would come in the New Covenant.

Because what the New Covenant promises and brings to us is referred to as an inheritance. We can all see that if there is an inheritance, then there must be some kind of last will and testament that tells who the heirs are and what inheritance they get. This is what the New Covenant does.

Because a will is not something heirs negotiate about. (Piper) It is decided by the one who writes it and the heirs simply receive what is promised. The new covenant is drawn up by God without consulting anyone. It is a sovereign expression of God's will, not a negotiated agreement.

You can see that all these reasons flow like an exhilarating river of sparkling truth through this text.

The Requirements of the Comparison

When does a will take effect? When a person has died. This is point of verse 17. A will comes into force or is executed when a person dies. Most of you have wills (or you ought to). The provisions of that Testament will become valid upon your death.

So it is with the New Covenant. It is a testament in the sense that its provisions and promises will be executed upon the testator's death. Christ has died. He has not only simply passed away, but has died as a substitutionary sacrifice. Upon His death, the New Covenant comes into force. And the amazing thing about this Covenant, this Testament and Will is that it has provision in it for the sins and transgressions of all of God's saints *even back under the Old Covenant*. Their sins were simply being held in escrow, put on the debit book and then the full measure of them paid as well.

Let me bring out more fact about a will that makes the New Covenant amazing. It is not possible that the testator of a will to also be the executor of the will. The one who has died cannot then after his death, administrate the execution of that will. *But this is not so with Christ*. Christ

is supreme as both the testator, the maker of the will, and its executor. How is this possible? Because He has not only died, but He has risen again. What His death purchased for the chosen and called, He distributes by His Spirit in their lives and out into eternity.

Verse 16 also says that not only must death occur, but there must be proof of death. When someone dies, the coroner's office issues a death certificate. This certifies that the person is actually dead and this can be legally proven.

Its Proof (v.18-22)

¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

In the entire Bible, blood is the symbol of life. Blood was the proof that a life had been ended. The blood of Jesus is the unalterable and irrefutable proof that Jesus sacrificed His life for us. One of the primary reasons for the long years of bloody sacrifice of innocent lambs and goats and calves and pigeons in the Old Testament was to establish categories to understand the death of Jesus. That is the heart of what the author is arguing in this paragraph.

In Its General Impact (v.18)

Even the first covenant required that death occurred and that it be validated by blood. The people of Israel, and through them, we are taught to think of Jesus as a sacrifice. Now most of us don't even see animals die. Most of you probably have not seen a live animal killed. None of you have seen an animal brought to an altar and watched its throat slit and seen its blood caught and watched it sprinkled. We are very distant from what were daily realities to people living in the Bible (and too many cultures today.)

In Its Specific Illustration (v.19-21)

Our author goes back to the time when the Old Covenant was to be executed in Israel. The terms and promises of the Covenant had been read. Now, for the Covenant to come into force, blood was shed and then sprinkled on the Scriptures, the Tent of Meeting, the altars, the tables, the bowls, the knives – everything that would be used in the carrying out of the Old Covenant.

We are shown this so that no one can say that this whole understanding of Jesus Christ is new or different or unnecessary. That Moses did this under the Contract or Agreement of the Old Covenant means that it must certainly be true under the New Covenant as well.

It is so important that we understand this sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

This whole passage back to the beginning of chapter 9 and forward to chapter 10 shows us the supremacy of Christ's sacrifice. This text actually divides into two distinct divisions. Verses 15-17 talk about death. Verses 18-22 talk about blood. It is the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus that saves. That sacrifice involves death – the pouring out of His life and blood – the proof that death occurred.

Not only must there be death and the proof of that death: there must be blood shed, there must also be the blood sprinkled. It must be applied in order for there to be cleansing. The Puritan, John Owen writes, "We are saved by the blood as shed; we are sanctified by the blood as sprinkled." It is the application of sacrifice of Jesus to us that we receive all that Jesus' life, death and resurrection mean.

In Its Supreme Importance (v.22)

How important is the blood as proof of sacrifice and death?

Without it there is no cleansing. Even in the Old Covenant under the Law nearly everything was cleansed by blood. Why is it only “nearly everything”? Because there was one thing left uncleansed by the sacrifices of the Old Covenant: their consciences. Hebrews 9: 14 and 1 John 1:9 assures us though that the blood of Jesus cleanses our consciences.

Without it there is no forgiveness. Let us be clear about why this is so. Our sin becomes a debt held against our account. We owe the penalty of death for having sinned. Jesus’ death is the payment of that penalty and debt. Since that debt has now been paid and proof is shown in His blood, then that debt is no longer held against us. It is *forgiven*.

Reflect and Respond

Here is what the New Covenant brings to believers:

We have *an inheritance* of all the promises God makes to us. We are to obeyingly believe what God has guaranteed to us because of Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection.

We have *freedom* from the enslaving power and burden of our sins. Sin does not have to control us or enslave us. The addictive power of each of our sins is broken.

We have *forgiveness* of the debt owed due to our sins. What we owed God because we sinned has been paid and is no longer held against our account.

The challenge and invitation for many of you today is simply this: Is God calling you to Himself? Do you sense how you have offended God? Do you believe Jesus’ sacrifice could be for you? Will you bow to Him as King and Lord. Today is the day of salvation. Make it so.