

***Inheritance* – Ephesians 1:3-14**

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The shooting in Pennsylvania yesterday that wounded former President Trump and an attendee, in addition to taking the life of another, should have us consider the legacy we as a generation of Americans are leaving the next generation. Political violence and heated rhetoric have caused a great divide and distrust among people of different political views.

We should pray for the victims of the shooting and their families. And we should consider further the legacy we want to leave those who follow us when it comes to how we live as a society and as citizens with different views.

I know that most of you in this congregation, being in the stage of life that you are in, have spent time considering your legacy and what you will leave as an inheritance to those you've designated to receive it.

It's tricky sometimes. Our children and grandchildren seem like the natural heirs to the assets we've accumulated. We love them deeply, and the bond of family is so strong that it's a given—usually—that they receive the entirety or the majority of what we leave behind.

However, it's not an automatic, given the sometimes unique and delicate natures of our heirs and the relationships we have with them. In fact, there are occasional situations where we know it would be unwise to leave our estates entirely to our remaining family members.

Ann Kate Smith, writing in Kiplinger's Personal Finance, wrote back in January that studies show 70 percent of the time,

family assets are lost from one generation to the next, and assets are gone 90% of the time by the third generation.

What does this tell us?

Well, as inheritors, it tells us we have a hard time managing the gifts that we inherit—especially when those gifts are significant.

And the majority of gifts we inherit are not physical assets. We inherit the blessings and lessons of our ancestors as much if not more than we inherit their wealth.

As people of faith, we're reminded that we inherit bountiful gifts that come to us from above that far exceed any amount of money our parents or grandparents could leave us.

Any kind of inheritance we receive usually comes without us earning it. In fact, we at times inherit despite all we've done to not be worthy of it. As God's children, we are still God's heirs, have been from the beginning, despite our sinfulness.

In Ephesians 1, Paul states that God chose us in Christ *before* the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

God chose us *before* the foundation of the world. In doing so God "destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ."

So, before the foundation of the world, we were destined for adoption as God's children.

That is what we have inherited, none of which is our doing. Despite all that we do wrong and the times when we do right, we've been destined to be loved and cherished by God since before the foundation of the world.

What a generous inheritance! And it's not just for some of us but for all of us.

You know, in Reformed Theology and Presbyterian circles, there's a concept that sticks to us like a barnacle. It's the concept of predestination. And so many people hear it as the notion that God has already predestined some of us for salvation and some of us for...damnation. And while at the crux of that concept is the imperative that God is in control of all such matters, a better notion of predestination is that of which we've just discussed: From before the foundations of the world, we were destined to be adopted as God's children. All this due to the grace bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ.

As a result of our election, we are made holy (verse 4), adopted as God's children (verse 5), claimed as God's possession (verses 11, 13, 14), and marked by the Holy Spirit (verse 13). The ultimate goal of God's predestining activity is not just our salvation as part of Christ's administration of the universe (verse 10). It is also for our praise of God for who God is and what God has done (verses 6, 12, 14): choosing us before the foundation of the world and adopting us as his own.

That inheritance can never be taken away. We are beloved children of God and have been since before we were born. It is an inheritance, according 1 Peter, that nothing can destroy or spoil or wither.

So, what do we do with this inheritance? If it is generous and not able to be retracted from us, what do we do with it.

In this earthly world, there are numerous examples of financial inheritances being either wasted or used as a crutch to foster inactivity. In fact, some of the world's richest people are shying away from leaving their fortunes to their kids for fear of what it will turn their children into.

The billionaire investor Warren Buffet, upon deciding not to leave his fortune to his kids, famously once said, “the ideal inheritance for kids is enough money so that they would feel they could do anything, but not so much that they could do nothing.”

As the recipients of God’s inheritance, we should not sit back and do nothing. Instead, this wealth, this abundance should give us incentive to do and accomplish anything in God’s name.

In other words, because we have been so blessed, we should then use those blessings to bless others.

As the apostle Paul says in our text, we have received “every *spiritual* blessing” so now we try to offer others every *tangible* and emotional blessing that we can. In all we do, we should bless others, and our lives should be blessings in action.

- People who are blessed should not curse (see James 3:9-10).
- People who are blessed should not listen to complainers and naysayers (see Psalm 1).
- People who are blessed should not feel entitled; they should be grateful.
- People who are blessed should tend to pay their blessings forward; in other words, they are generous.
- People who are blessed should vividly be aware of their blessed-ness and be humbled by it.
- People who are blessed should see the sacred and holy in every aspect of their lives.

This last thought is particularly significant. The apostle Paul had some incredible adventures that included shipwrecks, floggings, imprisonment, false accusations, the misunderstanding of colleagues, and illness. But Paul always regarded himself as blessed. *He wasn’t blessed on some days but not on others.* He lived and breathed in the blessing of God!

A blessed person (one who knows the rich inheritance they've been given) perceives that blessing when others are oblivious to it. In turn, a blessed person blesses everyone!

To blessed people, every day should be the Super Bowl, or Christmas Day, or their birthday, or the 4th of July. Every day should be their wedding day or the day when their kid was born, or the first day of retirement after a long, demanding career.

It should be. But none of us (or at least very few of us) is capable of living in that reality every day. That's why we need to be reminded of what we have indeed inherited: blessings galore from a creator who has chosen us since before the foundation of the world.

Storyteller Kathy Culmer tells a fable of two good friends who are on a journey. One man is a believer, the other is not. The two friends love to debate one another, especially on the question of whether there is a God and whether God is good. Besides their packs, they have three things with them: a donkey for carrying their packs, a torch to provide light at night and a rooster.

Stopping at a village, they find no one willing to rent them a room, so they set up camp just outside the little town. The one man has just been telling his friend how good God is. His friend replies, "If God is so good, then why could we find no room in the village?"

"I still believe God is good," his friend replies. "God has decided that this campsite is a better place for us to be this night."

Just then they hear a terrible sound. A lion has killed their donkey and is dragging it off.

"Do you still believe God is good?" asks the unbeliever.

“Yes I do,” replies the believer. “Had the lion not taken our donkey, the ravenous beast could have come after us.”

Just then they hear another terrible noise: the rooster crying out in terror. They grab the lighted torch and climb a tree — just in time to see a bobcat carrying off the rooster.

“Do you still believe God is good?”

“Yes I do. If the bobcat didn’t take the rooster, it would have attacked us.”

Moments later, a powerful wind comes up. It blows out the torch, their only source of comfort in the dark night.

“Where is your good God now?” demands his friend. The man of faith has no answer, but he continues to insist God is good.

The next day they walk back to the village, only to find that a band of thieves has attacked it during the night and stolen everything from the inhabitants.

“Had we stayed in the village,” explains the believer, “they would have stolen everything from us, too. And even if we’d been at our campsite, the thieves would have seen the light of our torch and come after us as well.”

After telling this story, the storyteller, Kathy Culmer, comments:

“Sometimes I think we don’t recognize joy because we’re expecting it to look and feel like laughter, when joy may be more about what prompts the laughter or lingers after or what sustains us when we can’t find the laughter. Joy is there even when the laughter isn’t, because the Source of our gladness resides within us and we know is working all things together for our good. The joy of the Lord, when fully real-eyes’d (aka, realized) gives us strength.

“Like joy, I wonder if gratitude, too, can’t be misunderstood when we think that it exists on the condition of our getting something, especially something pleasant or desired or hoped for. Gratitude goes deeper than simply finding the right words to respond to what we get, though words are perhaps the most convenient way we have to express it. But it, too, must come from a deeper place. It, too, must reside within us; otherwise, it becomes mere lip service.

“Both joy and gratitude are a way of seeing and of being. They do not come and go. They are not conditional, but fully express themselves in the way we see and live our lives. That is why the man of faith in the story was able to see the goodness of God in every unfortunate occurrence. If joy is the lens that lets us see the blessing in our blessings, then it is gratitude that frames our response.

“Gratitude gives us reason for celebrating all we have been given, whether because of, or in spite of, what it might be. And joy keeps us celebrating, even when given no reason.”

Our joy, our gratitude, comes when we fully embrace the inheritance to which we have been given. And as much as an earthly inheritance might set us up financially, the inheritance to which we were born—one that nothing can destroy or spoil or wither—is the one that should prompt us to bless others. It is an inheritance rooted in the love and grace of Jesus Christ. An inheritance that can never be taken away.

May that inheritance of blessedness also forge us toward a kinder and gentler posture as believers, friends, neighbors, and citizens.

