

A Guaranteed Inheritance

Ephesians 1:11-23

Introduction

I want to introduce this sermon by presenting three scenarios.

Scenario #1: Just over four years ago I visited with my Aunt Doris on her 90th birthday. August 31st. Now, you might be thinking, "What a thoughtful and considerate nephew he is." But truthfully, I didn't know it was her birthday.

- In what I now believe to be a prompting from the Holy Spirit, I was driving through the community where she lived – St. Marys, OH – which I don't often do – and had the thought "You've got time. You should visit your Aunt Doris." So I did.

During that visit with her, she told me that she was being urged by her doctor to get her estate in order. I learned that she had an appointment with her lawyer the following week to draw up a will. She had never had a will before. And given that she was now 90 years old, I agreed with her that getting one was a pretty good idea.

- Then she told me something I wasn't expecting. "I'm going to name you as the sole beneficiary of my estate."
 - What? I didn't see this one coming.
 - Aunt Doris had never married, had no children and no living siblings. But counting me, she did have 8 nieces and nephews.
- Before I could recover from that shocker she added, "And I want you to divide it among all my nieces and nephews however you see fit. If you would like to keep it all, it's yours."
- Fortunately for me, that's not the way the final draft of the will actually read. Yes, as Aunt Doris had said, I was named the sole beneficiary, but the will instructed me to divide the estate equally between all eight cousins.

Wills are interesting things. By law I was guaranteed one-eighth of all her assets once she died. A little or a lot, one-eighth of it was guaranteed to me.

Let's contrast that with another scenario. The granddaughter of a man I know was going through a difficult financial time, so she called her grandfather to ask for her share of his estate in advance. It turns out she wasn't in the will. None of the grandchildren were. That man was married to a woman 30 years younger than he was, and he planned to leave everything to his wife. There was nothing guaranteed for any of the grandchildren or for his children for that matter.

One more scenario:

In 1994, a 67-year-old carpenter named Russell Herman of Marion, Illinois died. In his last will and testament he bequeathed the following:

- \$2.4 billion to the village of Cave-In-Rock, Illinois
- \$2.4 billion to the city of East St. Louis
- \$1.5 billion for projects in southeastern Illinois



And in a final act of unprecedented generosity, he left \$6 trillion to the Federal Reserve to pay off the national debt.

- There was only one problem: at the time of his death, the only thing Mr. Herman actually owned was a 1983 Olds Cutlass Supreme.
- Russell Herman may not have left behind anything of monetary value, but he did leave us all with a good reminder: you can't guarantee what you don't possess.
- The bottom line is that he did not have the resources to make any of this a reality.

So ... three scenarios:

1. In the first, there was a will and you are in it.
2. In the second, there was a will and you are not in it.
3. In the third, there was a will, you are in it, but there is nothing to inherit.

Do you see the distinction?

I am about halfway through a series of sermons titled "I Am Convinced." In this series I am taking us into the Scriptures to show us some of the guarantees that we as Christians can bank on. These are truths about which every believer should have 100% certainty. For each of them, you should be able to say with me "I Am Convinced."

Already in this series I have taught how I AM CONVINCED that ...

- Our eternal salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
- Our Bibles are the inspired Word of God and can be fully trusted as the sole rule and guide of our lives.

Today I take you into Ephesians chapter 1, where we read:

When you believed, you were marked in him (Christ Jesus) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit **guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.
(Ephesians 1:13b-14)

Let me make three observations by asking three questions:

#1: WHAT AM I INHERITING?

Simply put ... Heaven is our inheritance.

That's what Jesus taught us when He was still walking and teaching on earth:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:1-3)

A group of students was once asked to write a description of what heaven would be like. Most of them wrote paragraphs, a couple of them wrote poems, but one creative girl wrote her description as if it were a newspaper advertisement. It read:

Free, beautiful homes to be given away in a perfect city! Comes with: 100% pure water, no electric bills, perpetual lighting, permanent pavement, nothing undesirable, everything new, perfect health, immunity from accidents, best of society, beautiful music, free transportation."

It sounds like a great place to be, doesn't it? I'm glad ... because that is I what I will be inheriting some day.

#2: HOW DO I GET THE INHERITANCE?

Our text answers that question in the first three words:

When you believed, you were marked in him (Christ Jesus) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13b-14)

If we were to back up one verse, we get even greater detail:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. (Ephesians 1:1a)

The inheritance promised in these verses is the result of putting our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

- I was thinking about how easy it is to receive this inheritance... but then most inheritances aren't based on difficult steps.
 - For me to be included in my Aunt's will, all I had to do was be born into her family.
 - I didn't have to earn a degree of any kind. I didn't need to pass any intelligence tests or earn a specific income.
 - I didn't even have to remember that August 31st was her birthday.
 - It wasn't hard.
- In the same way inheriting heaven is not difficult either.
 - I don't have to perfectly keep the Ten Commandments, or spend my free time memorizing entire books of the Bible.
 - There's no income level, educational level or social level.
 - All I have to do is be a part of God's family.

When we believe that Jesus Christ has come to save us from our sins and to restore us back into a right relationship with God, we become a child of God. John's Gospel again states it simply:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

#3: HOW CAN I BE SURE THE INHERITANCE IS MINE?

Let's go back to our text for the answer:

When you believed, **you were marked in him (Christ Jesus) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13b-14)

A wealthy man once called his administrative assistant into his office and said, "I've put your name in my will, and you will get \$100,000 when I die. I am hoping that it will be some time before you get that legacy, so I want to make you happy by paying you each year the legal interest on that amount. Here is a check for \$6,000 as a starter." The clerk was doubly gratified. The prospect of the inheritance was good news, and the money she received in advance assured her of the reality of his joyous hope for the future.

One of the many purposes of the Holy Spirit is to remind us that we will one day receive an inheritance if our faith in this life is anchored in Jesus Christ alone.

- It is the Holy Spirit who works in your life every day, helping you pray, make decisions, know what is right and best.
- The Holy Spirit prompts you – like it did me on August 31, 2021 – to do things you otherwise would not have done.
- The Holy Spirit is not the inheritance. Heaven is the inheritance. But the Holy Spirit is God's down payment to assure you that heaven will one day be yours.

APPLICATION

As I prepared for this message, I came across the story of Ben Hooper.

- He was born in Newport, Tennessee in 1870.
- He was born out of wedlock to Sarah Wade and he never knew who his biological father was.
- As a result, he had a tough childhood, being taunted by others, including his school classmates who called him names that really can't be repeated in polite company.
- Eventually, his mother was forced to place Ben in an orphanage in Knoxville.
- At age nine, he was adopted by Dr. L. H. Hooper and had to move back near his Newport home – back to the taunting and name-calling.
- It was about that time Ben started to attend church.

He writes: "I would go in late and slip out early so as not to be noticed and to avoid talking to anyone. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught

and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in the church on me. Just about the time I got to the door, I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking right at me.

“Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?” I hung my head in shame. Even the preacher was making fun of me. But as he looked down at me, and studied my face, suddenly he began to smile a big smile of recognition.

“Wait a Minute” he said, “I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a child of God.” With that he slapped me across the rump and said, “Boy you’ve got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.”

Years later as Ben Hooper would write and tell about that event he would say “That was the most important single sentence ever said to me. God used that preacher to plant in me the seed of salvation.”

Years later, Ben Hooper would get married, become a lawyer, and eventually would serve as the first Republican Governor of Tennessee from 1911-1915.

The difference in his life began when he became convinced that he had a great inheritance.

I AM CONVINCED that this same thing is true for everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ.

Amen