

Sermon 7, God's Clergypeople: Our Inheritance and its Purpose, Ephesians 1:11-12

We have also received an inheritance in Him, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will, 12 so that we who had already put our hope in the Messiah might bring praise to His glory. (Eph 1:11-12 CSB)

ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργουῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, 12 εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ, τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ χριστῷ· (Eph 1:11-12 BYZ)

In Him, in whom also we received an inheritance, being pre-encircled according to the settled purpose of the one working all things according to the counsel of His own will, so that we might be toward the praise of His glory, who had already hoped in the Christ . . .

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Proposition: If you are in Christ, then He died and left you every spiritual blessing as your inheritance, even before you thought to hope for that — which means that you exist to praise His glory!

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I know that Greek roots don't excite most of you. But bear with me, please.

In the first several centuries of the church, a distinction emerged between ordinary Christians on the one side and priests and bishops on the other. The priests and bishops began to call themselves “clergy,” while they called the rest of the Christians “laity.” Why? Well, the answer is that they totally misread this morning’s text, and others like it. The word “clergy” does indeed appear in the Greek original of Ephesians 1:11. Paul says literally that in Christ, we have been “clergified,” being predestined according to God’s purpose, and so on. Who has been “clergified”? Just priests and bishops? No. As we have seen so many times already in our examination of this passage, “we” is the subject here and “we” refers not only to Paul and his associates, but also to Christians in general. The things predicated of the “we” in this passage are things which are true of all believers. And this, brothers and sisters, is no exception. If you a Christian, then in the etymological sense you are a cleric.

But what is the original meaning of “clergified”? When Paul describes all Christians that way, what does He mean? He means that all Christians are God’s inheritance and that all Christians have received an inheritance from Christ by His death. That is all that “kleros” means in Greek — chosen for an inheritance. Priests and bishops in the early medieval church got hold of this idea that they were God’s special inheritance in a way that ordinary Christians were not, and so they started calling themselves “clergy” and referring dismissively to the rest of the flock as “laity,” from the Greek word for “people.”

I’m not here to tell you that there is no distinction between what we call clergy and what we call laity in the church of Jesus Christ. There is. Church office is real and ministers, elders, and deacons certainly have a specific and special call from Christ. But the words themselves are an utter betrayal of their roots in what the New Testament says about how every single believer is God’s inheritance and receives God’s inheritance. In fact, what I hope to show you this morning is that if you are in Christ, then He died and left you every spiritual blessing as your inheritance, even before you thought to hope for that — which means that you exist to praise His glory!

I. Our Inheritance in Christ, vv. 11a-c

Paul has spoken of our redemption in Christ. He’s spoken of how that redemption is a component part of God’s cosmic plan to place everything under the heading of Christ. And now, he goes on to tell us that in addition to forgiveness and subjection to Christ’s headship, we get the added benefit of an inheritance.

A. What We Have in Christ: An Inheritance, v. 11a

In Christ, we have an inheritance. Now, what is an inheritance? An inheritance is something valuable given to you by someone upon his death. We are all familiar with the trope of the rich uncle who dies and leaves millions of dollars to you, his favorite niece. Well, that’s an inheritance. It is a gift that someone decides during their lifetime to give to you upon their death. It is a settled and sure thing, because we know that a dead person cannot change his mind or come back to claim that he never intended to give you all that. In Christ we have obtained an inheritance. The Greek word for “inheritance” is “kleros,” from which Christians derived the

word “clergy.” But it’s not just the clergy who receive an inheritance; all believers receive an inheritance.

But as you know, there is only one way to obtain an inheritance. A will only takes effect at death. My will leaves the guardianship of our children to my parents. But my parents will not become the legal guardians of my children unless both Alexa and I are dead. Until then, our will is null and void because it has no force while we are still alive.

So who died and left us this inheritance? Jesus. He made us His heirs and then He died, so leaving to us in His will every spiritual blessing and every kind of riches that He Himself possesses as the only Son of the most loving Father ever. Everything that belongs to Jesus Christ belongs to you! The Bible falls all over itself multiplying metaphors to show this. It uses the metaphor of adoption, which we saw a few weeks ago. When you have been adopted, everything that belongs to your new family belongs to you. That house is yours; that car is yours; the benefits and blessings of that family belong to you. But the Bible takes it one step farther and says not only that we have been adopted but that we will be married to Jesus Christ. When you get married, legally and really all your property is pooled by default. Under our American legal system, of course, you can take steps to prevent that from happening. But if you do nothing, then your spouse automatically obtains joint ownership with you of absolutely everything you have.

So no matter how you look at it, you see the theme emphasized: what belongs to Jesus Christ belongs to you, because you have been adopted by His Father; you will be married to Him; and you have received an inheritance from Him upon His death. Praise God! Thank the Lord Jesus for all that He has done for you! And He did it at the cost of His death. He bled and died on the cross so that you could have an inheritance.

Once again, in the apostle’s mind there is no room for a Christless Christianity. The only way that all these spiritual blessings could come to us, the only way we could get this inheritance that we have, is through the Son of God taking flesh and dying in our place. Without Christ and His death, we would not and could not have this inheritance. No wonder, then, that we sing the glories of the death of Jesus in our place; no wonder that we sing about the cross. Without it, we would never have obtained an inheritance.

B. Why We Obtained This Inheritance: We Were Pre-Encircled by God, v. 11b

Yet Paul immediately passes from the death of Christ to God’s pre-encirclement whereby He marked us out as His before the foundation of the world. Why did Jesus die for you in particular? Why did He write you into His will? Because you were pre-encircled! We talked a few weeks ago about why “predestined” is a terrible translation for this word. You should hear in the translation not the word “destination” but the word “horizon.” He went down the list and circled you, as it were, to be his own special possession. He wrote you into His will before you even existed.

Now, as human beings the only reason we might do that is to spite someone today. I currently have no grandchildren, of course; my children are less than two years old. But imagine that I write my will in such a way as to leave everything to my grandchildren. That would simply

be a way of telling my kids, “I don’t value you. I don’t want you to touch a cent of my hard-earned money.”

But God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He pre-encircled us with loving care, and explicitly wrote us into His will as the very people who would benefit from the death of Christ. It is not the human race in general who has been granted an inheritance by the death of Christ; it is “us,” the people who were written into His will before He ever came to Earth and died.

Can you believe that God’s loving care pre-encircled you like that? That it wasn’t because you were wonderful, but because He is unimaginably generous and loving that He made you His heir?

What does an heir of Jesus inherit? He inherits the Earth, and Heaven itself. Can you worship God for this? Can you begin to live as a wealthy heir or heiress of all God’s riches in Christ? After all, that’s exactly what you are, according to this very passage of Scripture.

C. Why God Pre-Selected Us to Inherit: His Own Purpose, v. 11c

But Paul goes even one step farther. Why did God pre-encircle you? Why were you marked out? The answer is that it was for the sake of God’s own purpose. Once again, then, we see that the reason is not “Because God wanted to reward good people,” or “because God knew who would love Him and selected those people to receive His love.” No. The reason God loves you is because of His settled decision to do so. He purposed in Himself to give you an inheritance in Christ, if indeed you are in Christ by faith.

Brothers and sisters, to what does Paul ascribe the ultimate reality of salvation? He roots it in God’s settled purpose to pre-encircle you and grant you an inheritance. That is where salvation comes from. As Jonah put it, salvation is of the LORD!

That doesn’t overthrow the apostle’s other teaching that if you confess the lordship of Christ with your mouth, and that if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Not at all! The two work together. God saves because of His own settled purpose — but we must repent and believe or we will never be saved. If you can’t believe both of those truths, then I must inform you that you are more narrow-minded than the apostle to the Gentiles.

II. Our Inheritance in Relation to God’s Cosmic Working, v. 11d

Well, St. Paul doesn’t leave it at that. He has already mentioned our inheritance and its roots in God’s pre-encirclement and settled purpose. But now He goes on to say that our inheritance is actually part of something much bigger — something we can only term God’s cosmic working.

A. Our Inheritance Is Part of God’s Working All Things

First of all, our inheritance is part of God’s working all things. Such a statement immediately brings up questions in our minds, of course. What does it mean? How could it possibly be true? We will get into those questions next Sunday, and if some of them are particularly bothering you, I urge you to come talk to me. I will be happy to discuss your difficulties with you, and your question might even make it into next week’s sermon!

For now, though, recognize God works all things. Some translations say “working out all things,” but as far as I can tell such a translation totally misrepresents the Greek. The participle is “working” and its object is “all things.” To dynamically work all things — not simply to work in all things, or to fudge the final results, but to actually work all things — is here ascribed to God. I know that the first question in your mind is, “So Paul is saying that God works sin?” The answer is no. But for a fuller discussion of why the answer is no, you will need to wait for next week. Right now, don’t get lost in the implications of this statement. Rather, see the grandeur of Paul’s vision. Your status as an heir of God and joint-heir with Jesus Christ is only one small part of God’s overarching meticulous providence. It is His dynamic energy that is at work in everything that goes on. It’s not that God only shows up when you need some saving, but otherwise leaves the rest of life to run pretty much on its own. No. God is at work in the affairs of nations, in the affairs of households, in the affairs of atoms and molecules. There is not a single rogue atom, running amok outside His control, anywhere in the entire universe.

So you should rejoice, number one, that God is providentially caring for everything, working everything. Number two, you should respond with a prayerful heart. You have the privilege of speaking directly to the God of the Universe. The one who plans and works all things is also the one who available at all times for a deep conversation. God knows your name and He literally has a wonderful plan not just for your life, but for the universe and everything. That’s why you can have confidence in this inheritance. Sometimes things intervene to prevent you from receiving an earthly inheritance you were intended to get. But that won’t happen with this inheritance. It is a gift to you from the one who works out *all things*.

B. Our Inheritance Accords with God’s Will

And what is God’s standard for working all things? It is the settled decision of His own will. God doesn’t work all things in accordance with the whim of His teasing streak. He doesn’t work all things in accord with a great plan that a wise human being set out for Him. No. He works all things according to what He has decided to do. To give all believers an inheritance is His settled purpose, and it will most certainly happen because He doesn’t just control the granting of this inheritance; He controls the outworking of absolutely *everything* according to His will.

Again, this means that nothing can take this inheritance away from you. God wants to give it to you and no one can frustrate His settled purposes! Your Christian life ought to be overflowing with confidence and joy and especially *hope* as you look to God’s benefits and blessings in Christ.

III. Our Inheritance in Time, vv. 12a-b

Well, our inheritance is a cosmic reality, a settled decision in the mind of God made long before anything we did or might do. But it is something we receive at a particular point in time. Now, this whole interface between time and eternity is a tricky area. We must be careful here, because the paradoxes multiply easily. We don’t even understand time; how, then, can we hope to understand eternity or compare time to eternity in any kind of fruitful way? Just as an example, think about this question: does God know what time it is? If you say “No,” then you have

postulated that God is ignorant. But if you say “Yes,” then the question becomes “Doesn’t God’s knowledge change from moment to moment as the particular moment of time changes?” And at that point, of course, you have made God subject to time rather than Lord of time. Or so it would seem. Again, as I said, a few moments questioning will produce insoluble contradictions in this area, such that it would seem only logical to say that time and eternity cannot possibly interface. But the Bible tells us that they do, and have. Indeed, Paul boldly puts another timestamp on matters that, it would seem, are best left in this time-eternity flux without any such thing. He says that we already hoped in Christ, or pre-hoped in Christ.

A. When We Hoped: Before Receiving any Inheritance

That timestamp has caused a lot of discussion among commentators. What does it mean to say that we pre-hoped in Christ? Was it pre-receiving the inheritance? Was it pre-other people hoping in Christ? Was it pre-receiving and understanding this letter? Or what? The arguments for each of these is rather complicated. Suffice it to say that I believe the timestamp refers to us hoping before receiving the inheritance in its fullness. We who have already hoped in Christ, we who began to hope in Christ before (perhaps) experiencing a dime of our coming inheritance and certainly before experiencing its fullness — we are ordered to the praise of God’s glory.

Well, what is hope? Hope is the same thing as faith. It looks forward trustingly to something. But whereas faith looks particularly to the person promising, hope looks to the thing promised. To hope in Christ is to entrust yourself and build your life on the future benefits you hope to receive. In this sense, all hope is future-oriented. To say “pre-hoped,” then, is a strange phrase. To have pre-hoped in Christ is to have already looked to Him for the inheritance He grants in His death, before some particular point in time. Paul says that we didn’t just hope; we pre-hoped. We don’t want to read too much into that “pre,” but at the very least it emphasizes the future-looking aspects of hope. Our hope is a pre-hope. It is a hope that exists in spite of circumstances, in spite of appearances, in spite of the present lack of encouraging signs.

Are you someone who has pre-hoped in Christ? Do you have an eye toward the things He has promised?

B. What We Hoped: To Receive that Inheritance

After all, if we are Christians then we are called to be people of hope. We must hope to receive the inheritance that comes to us in Christ. We should be looking forward to it. We all recognize that faith is a virtue. Surely it’s a good thing to trust God! But brothers and sisters, hope is also a virtue. In fact, you should be looking forward to the consummation of your inheritance in Christ. Your mind should be filled with thoughts of the joys of Heaven. Your heart should be full of longing for Heaven. You should be a hopeful person!

I’ve read recently that modern people don’t have faith, but that doesn’t bother them. What bothers them is their lack of hope. It is in fact with this virtue of hope that we have the most profound opportunity to witness to our generation. Did you hear that? Most people aren’t interested in hearing about your faith. But you might find a far more receptive audience when

you speak of your hope. So don't neglect hope. It won't put you to shame, provided that it is directed toward the right object.

C. Where We Hoped: In Christ

Where is your hope fixed? In better technology? In 3% economic growth? In more productivity and innovation? In Republican political candidates? Paul says that our hope must be fixed in Christ, regardless of what we see around us. If your hope is not in Christ, then you will be put to shame. But if you hope in Him to give you everything that He has promised, to fulfill everything that He has ever said He would do, then you will never be put to shame. The thing you hoped in will come to pass.

So is your identity that of a pre-hoper in Christ? Do you think, "I am a hopeful person because I know Christ and I know that I will receive from Him every last one of the promised blessings!"?

But it gets better than that. Ultimately our hope is not just to receive these lesser benefits and blessings. It is to receive Christ Himself. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" (Lam 3:24 NKJ). Is that your testimony? Do you hope to receive Jesus Himself, with all His glory and with all His benefits, as yours? After all, when you're looking forward to your wedding day certainly you have some thought for what will be yours. You might, like Elizabeth Bennet, confess that you didn't really fall in love with this man until you saw his house!¹ But what Lizzie Bennet was looking forward to on her wedding day was not primarily the 10,000 pounds per year and becoming mistress of Pemberley. She was looking forward to the benefit of being united to Mr. Darcy! And so it is with us. We are looking not most of all for the joys of Heaven and the riches of our inheritance. We are looking to be united to Christ our Head and Husband. That, brothers and sisters, is the Christian's hope. Is that where your hope is located?

How would you know that you were hoping in Christ? You would fight sin. You would not give way to despair. You would always have a bubbling undercurrent of joy in your heart as you contemplated your soon-approaching wedding day. Are you a joyful, hopeful person? If you have pre-hoped in Christ, you have every reason to be one.

IV. Our Inheritance in Relation to God's Purpose, v. 12c

Well, finally, Paul describes our inheritance in relation not just to time and to God's cosmic plan, but also to its goal. What was God trying to do when He pre-encircled us for His heirs? Really, there are two things to see here.

¹ "My dearest sister, now *be* serious. I want to talk very seriously. Let me know every thing that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley." — Jane Austen, *P & P*, ch. 59

A. We (the Heirs) Are Ordered to the Praise of His Glory

First, as heirs of God we exist toward, are ordered to, the praise of His glory. Now, to be “ordered to” was a concept that used to be a standard idea. Aristotle was the one who pioneered it. For instance, he noticed that lungs are ordered to breathing and genitals are ordered to reproduction. Well, we as Christians are ordered to the praise of God’s glory. That is the purpose of our existence. That’s what we are *for*: to praise God’s glory. Do you praise God’s glory? Does your life praise His glory?

You praise God’s glory by singing beautifully to Him. You praise His glory by your prayers of praise. You praise His glory by telling your friends about it. And your life praises His glory by manifesting just how glorious He is, just how much He has changed you, just how different your life is because of Him. If you are the hopeful, joyful person we just talked about, that in itself goes far toward praising God’s glory.

B. God’s Prior Choice Ordered Us to that Praise of His Glory

But furthermore, it was His prior choice which ordered us to the praise of His glory. We were pre-encircled ultimately for this purpose — that we might demonstrate how praiseworthy God’s glory is.

Predestination, then, is ultimately for the purpose of God’s glory. That is why it exists. That is why God pre-encircled you. He wants to demonstrate His glory!

Did you hear that? Salvation is not all about making your life more pleasant. It’s not all about meeting your needs and giving you your best life now. God didn’t select you so that you could be the world’s most problem-free person. He selected you so that you could show a watching world how glorious He is — almost as if to say “If I can save these people, I can save anybody!” Believe it. Rejoice in it. Hope in it. You exist to make God’s glory look good. That is His settled purpose for your life. So get after it! Amen.