



February 25, 2007

Our Heritage

I heard a pastor talking about a recent family vacation. His young daughter was a little bit distressed after a couple days on the vacation, you see, they were visiting where the father had grown up and she finally said, "I'm tired of our heritage". She didn't like going to all these different places remembering all the things that her family came from but I think heritage is very important. I got a real wake up call to that at Arlington National Cemetery. When you go to the tomb of the unknown soldier looking down the hill you can see tens of thousands of graves and there's a bench that sits there. There's a little inscription on it, it says, "the key to avoiding all wars is an understanding of the past." You see, if you understand your heritage and what your heritage has included war by understanding that you may figure out how to avoid war. You may figure out how to have peace. Or again in Washington D.C. if you go to the Holocaust museum at the entrance there is one simple word on the wall, "remember". Remember what happened; remember the heritage and all that it has in it both the good and the bad.

Heritage; a very important thing within Christianity because God believes in heritage. In Deuteronomy 26:3 God sets up some heritage, the festivals and here He speaks about the first fruits where the people are to bring the first fruits from their harvest and say to the priest, "I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our forefathers to give us." That heritage of the Jewish people was basically saying, "I'm here in the promised land because God fulfilled His promises and brought me here." And the way to show that was to take the harvest, the very first part of the harvest and to use that before you used it for anything else to give back to the giver. But it was more than just a symbolic thing of

bringing your first fruits from the harvest and giving them to the priest and saying I declare today that the Lord our God has allowed me to come to the land that he swore to our forefathers to give us with it comes a tremendous declaration. The people were to declare number one, "The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer putting us to hard labor then we cried out to the Lord the God of our fathers and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery toil and oppression", Deuteronomy 26:6-7. They begin with the declaration of "we were in Egypt we cried out to the Lord, the Lord heard us and came to us." So what did he do? Deuteronomy 6:8, "so the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and great terror with miraculous signs and wonders."

The plagues, the parting of the Red Sea does it stop there? No, 26:9, "He brought us to this place, gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey." After 40 years in the wilderness God delivered them and brought them into the promise land, the walls of Jericho fell down and the whole land of Palestine became theirs.

Does it stop there? No, 26:10, "and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you O Lord have given me." And then they would place the task before the Lord and bow down before them. Does it stop there? No, 26:11, "and you and the Levites and the aliens among you", that's the gentiles, "shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household."

You see this whole festival bringing this first offering to the priest and saying I'm bringing it because God brought me here and then recounting the history of how God brought them there culminated with this is just an example of what God does because all good things has come to us through God. You see, this with the other festivals, which we heard about this past week on Wednesday night, preserved the Hebrew heritage and reminded the people of what God had done for them. And its based on this same thing this same idea of a heritage that continues that we have a church year which began with Advent as we prepared for the coming of Jesus went into Christmas where we celebrated His coming, Epiphany where we talk of His manifestation being made known as the Messiah which culminates on transfiguration Sunday where god Himself comes over Jesus and says, "This is my beloved son listen to him." Now we transition into our next season, the next part of our heritage, Lent.

Lent comes from the English word "to lengthen". It speaks about very simply the dark days of winter are getting longer. The darkness is being replaced by light and as light comes temperatures rise as temperatures rise plants begin to grow, flowers begin to bloom, trees begin to bud out, there's new life and it's all symbolic of what's happening during the Lent season. From a spiritual standpoint we live in the darkness of sin, which leads to death but sin and death, is going to be replaced with the light of the world, Jesus Christ and the light of His resurrection, which brings us new life. You see, our heritage, the church year, reminds us of His story not just history. And that tradition of Lent begins with the temptation of Christ. It reminds us of man's longest standing tradition, a heritage of sin. And so we see in our Gospel this morning that Christ is baptized and, verses 1 and 2, "He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness." You see this wasn't just Jesus deciding to go for a walk in the wilderness, no, the Spirit led him to forty days of fasting and led Him to face Satan.

You know in today's day and age in the church there's a lot of what we call prosperity preaching that talks about the Spirit leading you. If you're spirit led you'll have self-fulfillment, if you're spirit led you'll have great self-esteem, if you're spirit led you'll have financial success, if you're spirit led all is well in the world etc. But you know, I think we have to look at a little bit of biblical reality preaching because as we see here the Spirit leads to where you are needed or where you need to be and two of those places where the Spirit leads are not always the most self-fulfilling and happy places. One thing that we may need is a little humility and so the Spirit will lead us to some humble pie and the other place, lead you to where Satan is on the attack. I have to believe that Jesus probably was feeling pretty good after His baptism having the cloud coming over again and the Spirit of God the Father speaking and the Spirit descending on Him like dove. When you go out in the wilderness no food for forty days and forty nights you're not feeling all that big and powerful and wonderful anymore. You're humbled you have to rely on the Spirit, you have to rely on God for sustenance and that is when Satan comes on the attack.

And where is Satan on the attack nowadays? Well, Matthew 24:9-12 tells us, "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death. You will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from faith, will betray and hate each other, many false prophets will appear and deceive many people because

of the increases of wickedness the love of most will grow cold.” And I have to ask you; do you see some of that now? False prophets, preaching in the name of Jesus maybe but really not preaching what the Bible says, preaching what people want to hear, but not staying true to scripture. Do you see the love of people maybe growing cold that they really don’t care about each other anymore? Do you see wickedness growing? You see, I think this is where Satan is leading in many cases. He’s leading us to places where these sorts of things are happening but where else does this happen?

2 Peter 2:1 says, “There were also false prophets among the people just as there will be false teachers among you.” Yeah, Peter is saying there’s even going to be problems in the church. In fact 1 John 2:18-19 backs it up, “Dear children this is the last hour and as you have heard that the anti-Christ is coming even now many anti-Christ’s have come. This is how we know it’s the last hour they went out from us.” If you’re led by the Spirit no matter where you go you will be confronting Satan because when we look at this world as in Matthew 24:9-12 it’s a mess out there. But when you look at the church guess what, it’s a mess because Satan is going to be working hard here. He doesn’t have to work that hard in Vegas, he’s got to work harder here.

Satan’s MO, attack when we are weak or our guard is down, just as Jesus was weak we see that there in Luke 4:2, He was weak He had been fasting for forty days. And then he uses a word, “if”, he likes to be sly. It’s a conditional word, he used it back in the Garden of Eden, “If you eat of the fruit you will become like God.” If this, then this. And with Jesus he starts out like this, “If you are the Son of God turn this stone into bread.” Now what’s so bad about that? Well, he’s appealing to Jesus’ pride. If you are the Son of God do this. Of course Jesus was tempted to say, “I’ll show you who’s the Son of God.” But there’s even more to that temptation it’s a temptation of spirit. When Jesus entered into a forty day fast, forty days is God’s timing of completion of God working a great act in someone’s life. So we’re here on the fortieth day, we’re almost done and basically Satan’s saying what’s an hour or two, eat a little you have given enough. And then there is the physical aspect, “Come Jesus you’re hungry turn the stones into bread.” I’m sure Jesus wanted to eat. So, he appeals to pride, spirit and physical needs when a person’s weak.

He says, "If you worship me I'll give you all these nations that I have been tempting." In other words, if you worship me Jesus No cross, you won't have to die. That's a pretty big temptation. Then the third is kind of a repeat of the first, "If you are the Son of God", now here comes the next part, "fulfill scripture because scripture says God won't allow you to stub your toe." In other words if you're the Son of God fulfill scripture and if you do it, it can't be wrong you're doing what the Bible says. How does Jesus shut all of this down? Every time He replies with scripture. "Man shall not live by bread alone you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." "Do not tempt the Lord you God."

The Bible is an amazing thing, Romans 10:17 says this, "Consequently faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Paul tells us that if we have faith we get it from hearing the message of God. We get it from hearing the bible but how important is that faith? Ephesians 6:16, "In addition to all this take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming areas of the evil one." You see, knowing God's word strengthens our faith and a strong faith is what can resist Satan. The Spirit is going to lead us where we need to be or where we are needed most. And when we are in any of those places we are going to be facing Satan, he's going to try to oppose us as Christians as a church. This is reality, this is biblical reality preaching. But as the Spirit leads us we need to embrace our heritage. Embrace the church year embrace Lent which lets the light shine into the darkness. Embrace the Bible, our heritage says that the Bible is God's word in errant without flaw; take it and hold it as that and study it because as we are in God's word our faith will strengthen us and we need to embrace our heritage and use the faith of our heritage, use the faith that comes from God's word to take a stand, renounce all that is evil and follow the Spirit.

In Our Savior's name, Amen.