



MOUNT MERRION FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[BELFAST NORTHERN IRELAND].



Pulpit Ministry of Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church

Lord's Day Morning 23rd December 2007.

Series God's Covenant Heritage

No. 2 "Preserved and Provided."

Scripture Reading 1Peter Ch 5:3

By. Rev. Paul Thompson.

Last Lord's day we commenced what will be a series of messages entitled '*God's Covenant Heritage.*' Time did not permit us to complete the intended content of that first message, however, we return to it today. Last week the primary focus was upon the establishment of the relationship that exists between God and His Church, a relationship that was formed by way of '*Covenant.*' Time was taken to explain the term '*covenant*' [an agreement of two parties]. Adam was shown to have broken the Covenant of Works; as the Covenant Head he brought death upon all men. God should have destroyed Adam, "*But God*" foreseeing the fall of Adam from all eternity had already entered into another covenant arrangement with Christ the Son, a covenant of grace so designed to effect the redemption of Adam and those chosen in Christ [the Church]. There is a Church today because there is a Covenant! Without the Covenant of Grace there would be *no Saviour - appointed to save; No Gospel - for us to preach; No Church;* no hope for man, all are the fruit of the Covenant of Grace! But because there is a Covenant of Grace, there is a saviour, there is a gospel and there is being yet build through the outworking of the Covenant of Grace a Church which God in Christ sees as His own prized possession! The Church of Christ is formed by those called out of darkness by Grace, grace that originated in a '*Sovereign Covenant.*' It is Sovereign because it was God alone that was moved to bring about this Covenant, it is God alone who acts in Grace to us in the Covenant, we do not contribute to its formation in any way, all we possess is our sin!

We mentioned how that the Holy Ghost employs various terms describing those that are the Lord's by grace, '*The Church*'; '*the redeemed*' etc. It was one such term found in 1 Peter Ch5:3 that provided for us the title of this series, "*God's Heritage.*" because of the Covenant of Grace they are '*His Covenant Heritage*' a '*covenant Church*' etc. a further dimension that we looked at was, that God's people being designated as His '*Heritage*' are a Covenant Purchase; They are purchased by the "*Blood of the Everlasting Covenant*" [Heb Ch13:20]. See also Zech Ch9:11, "*By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit {the grave} wherein is no water.*" Christ by His own blood has purchased the Church [Acts Ch20:28], "*The Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.*" [Heb Ch9:12], "*By His own blood...obtained eternal redemption for us.*"

1) A Preserved Heritage.

God's Heritage are exceedingly precious to Him, He has bought them and will preserve and protect them. Their preservation and protection is demonstrated in at least two ways. Firstly by the:

a) The Immutability of The Covenant.

Because the Heritage of God [The Church] has been bought by the blood of the Covenant, that covenant is ratified and is beyond change, no adjustment can be made, if God has purchased something, then it will ever remain His possession! The Covenant relationship that God has established with His Heritage cannot be broken, "*My Covenant will I not break*" [Ps 89:34]. (i) Even when believers sin the Covenant stands unchangeable, ratified forever with Christ's blood! The Lord will never cast off His Heritage, even though they deserve to be cast off. Paul tells the Ephesian Church that they are not to "*grieve the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption*" [Eph Ch4:30]. Psalm 94:14, "*For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance.*" (ii) When God's people feel the Lord has left them during some dark period of their experience, their relationship remains. The expression "*cast off*" in Ps 94:14 is often rendered '*leave*' or '*forsake*' [Ps 16:10; Ps 37:33; Ps 78:60]. Yet the Lord says, "*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*" Compare [Gen 28:15; Joshua Ch1:9, Deut Ch31:6,8; Heb Ch13:5]. The Lord can never cast off one that is His own. We are no more or no less justified than those already in heaven, "*More happy but not more secure, the glorified spirits in heaven.*" Why do we have a problem with Arminianism? Here's why, because it destroys the efficacy of the blood of Christ and destroys the nature of God! If we believe the blood of Christ has the power to redeem a man from the pit, but has not the power to hold that man, we rob the atonement and Christ of any saving virtue. To teach that God changes in His love towards those who are His own possession, destroys God's nature! The Lord says, John Ch10:28, "*I give unto them [my sheep] eternal life and they shall never perish neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*" The '*any man*' is the '*strongman*' Satan [Matt Ch12:29].

The continuity of the believer's union to Christ is not found in our personal ability to maintain that

*"Nothing created can ever alter the creator."
...Stuart Olyott...*

relationship, rather it is rooted in the unchangeable nature of the Covenant of Grace, a covenant sealed by Christ's blood. Application - [Rom Ch8:34,35,39] - There are many things that seek to fragment my love for Christ, very often they succeed. The question relates not to my love for Christ, but the love which Christ has for us! The question posed is not saying, "Will anything cause me to cease loving Christ?" But is in effect stating, "Is there anything that will cause Christ to cease loving me?" The world delights to tell the Christian "Your afflictions are proof that the Lord has ceased to love you!" When these things mentioned by Paul come upon the Christian they do not look like the caresses of love! The ungodly interpret the believer's afflictions as a sign of abandonment by God! All these things cannot separate me from the love of Christ, because it is Covenant love, immutable love! The covenant upon and around which the connection between the Christian and Christ stands, ensures security against anything that would hinder their partaking of eternal life! Horatius Bonar, "The clouds may come and go, and storms may sweep my sky, this blood sealed friendship changes not, the cross is ever nigh. My love is oft-times low...but peace with Him remains the same no change Jehovah knows...His Love not mine the tie." We can be sure that Christ as covenant head will employ all the power of His Godhood ensuring that not one of those given to Him in the covenant of Grace will be finally lost, he has said, 'I will raise them up at the last day...I will lose none'

b) The Intimacy of the Covenant.

The nature of this Covenantal relationship which God's Heritage enjoy is a personal union that is intensely intimate! Peter refers to the Church as being "the flock of God" yet Christ as the Chief Shepherd has a personal, intimate knowledge of all His sheep, [John Ch10:14,27], "I know my sheep...I know them." "they are mine." the word 'know' means 'to love.' Oh how Christ loves His people..."Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it!" [Eph Ch5:25]. He makes it His business to be acquainted with His sheep! How ought we to be acquainted with Christ! A mark of the God's Heritage, they know Christ and show it! "by their fruit ye shall know them." You could be known as a member of this Church, but unknown to Christ Matt Ch7:23, "I never knew you." Knowledge of Christ is vital to the preservation and protection of the Church...we ought to recognise Christ, if we know Christ, we will know Him when He is preached! Our judgement of the pulpit ministration will only be according to our recognition of Christ! On hearing many sermons preached it can be said by God's people due to the absence of Christ, "They have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him!"

The more acquaintance with Christ the more our minds are filled with trust for Him. That knowledge is also vital if we are to enjoy a victorious journey through life, for when the times of trial come, it will be this knowledge alone of Christ's intimate presence that will preserve us. Turn Ps 23:4, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...thou art with me (protecting me)." The Psalmist could say He [Christ] is a "very 'present' help in trouble" [Psalm 46:1]. Application - it is Covenant Theology alone that will sustain a person in such circumstances. Unconverted you have every reason to fear, outside of the 'flock of God' you must continue on the uncertain path of life alone, and if grace prevent it not you must face eternal death alone! You do not possess the benefits of preservation and protection that result from such an intimate Covenant relationship, Isaiah Ch43:3-5, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee...since thou wast precious in my sight...and I have loved thee...fear not: for I am with thee." [A covenanted presence].

2) A Provided Heritage.

The covenantal purpose of God for His Heritage does not merely begin and end with their salvation, 1 Peter Ch5:3 clearly shows that God intends that His heritage be supplied, fed and furnished with spiritual food in order that they may be nourished. He loves His sheep so much that He wants the best for them. The amazing thing is, that God has appointed and charged men with that task, those described as 'pastors', 'ministers!' That really introduces us to the work of the pastor. The intention of these messages is to focus our minds on the relationship of pastor and congregation, the undershepherd and the sheep; Peter's words denote that it is a covenant initiated relationship. God has a covenant people, in His eternal purpose He has also covenanted to His sheep the provision of Pastors, see Jer Ch3v15, "I will give thee [the Church] pastors after mine own heart which shall feed thee with knowledge and understanding." the whole of the trinity is engaged in the provision of pastors, The Father - Jer Ch3:15; The Son - Eph Ch4:9-12; The Holy Ghost, Acts Ch20:28, "feed the flock of

*"God's love is a free love having no motive or foundation but within itself."
...Thomas Brooks...*

God”; see also - [Jer Ch23:4; Ezek Ch34:23, John 21:15-16, Eph 4v9-12]. That’s the divine order for the Church! A Covenant people redeemed by the blood of Christ, overseen by elders and pastors. You can gauge the high calling of the elder and the pastor, not a office to be sought for in a light fashion.

The Christian minister labours under the shadow of the Triune God, as He prays, as He applies his mind in the study, as he manages his time throughout the week, he does so (he ought to) with a great sense of accountability to Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Likewise the flock of God must be conscious that they are under the scrutinizing eye of all three members of the Trinity. I will say no more for it is my purpose to look further at the accountability of the pastor and His flock at a later time. Pray for the leadership as they discharge their offices with the knowledge that this is God’s heritage.

In Eph Ch4:11-12 we read that Pastors are Christ’s gift to the Church [v11]. In giving the gifts of Pastors and teachers to the Church Christ is showing His recognition that the Church is in need of pastoring. When a Church is gifted a Pastor it is by Christ, by God, and by the Holy Ghost. The Church that receives such a gift from Christ is a privileged Church, I do not say that because it is myself making this statement! The gifting of a pastor to a congregation demonstrates that in that place there are those whom Christ loves, it is a sign of Christ’s love for His people, He only gives Pastors to His own ‘*Purchased Covenant Heritage*’ to supply and nourish them! The union of Pastor and people is one that Christ has died for and has and continues by the merit of His death to effect! Only Christ can dissolve that union!

Further Reading

- Westminster Confession of Faith Ch 7 ‘*God’s Covenant With Man*’
- Westminster Larger Catechism - Questions 31-36

By. Paul Thompson.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”

Hebrews 10:16