

Passion Sunday 2017

The Cost of Inheritance

Hebrews 9:11-15

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From Origen, 2nd century, *“This is what the letter of the law explains to us, so that, collecting seeds of mysteries from them, we may use them as steps to climb from the lowly, to a lofty place, from earthly to heavenly things. Therefore my hearer, climb up now, if you can, and mount above earthly senses by the contemplation of your mind and by the discernment of your heart. Forget for a while earthly concerns; climb above the clouds and above heaven itself by the tread of your mind. Seek there the tabernacle of God where “Jesus has entered.”*”

And this is the foundation that Lent lays before us. It is a time of cleaning out so that we may gain perspective. It is a time to unleash our earthly concerns and climb above the clouds filling our hearts, our souls and our minds on the eternal truth of God with us.

We have talked at length in sermons past concerning our growing sanctification...the process by which we come more fully into the presence of God. Origen was keenly aware of mankind's progression toward the heart of God even as we move through the affairs of this worldly life. It is possible to lift our worship to a level that pulls us out of our dusty habitations that we may realize the glories that await us; and if we look closely we can see how even our sanctification is a gift of grace from the Almighty.

In our Epistle we read, *“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”* As we sit here listening to these verses from our Epistle we should find great comfort and joy. Our modern day worship has us putting on our good clothes, cleaning the church for the arrival of God's people, and setting out our best linens on the altar, Christ is in us and we are in him, but in times past worship was

a bloody mess where the sacrifice of animals was repeated over and over again in order to ensure forgiveness to repentant sinners. Ever wonder why this was so? How could the blood of animals provide forgiveness of sins? It may be hard to digest, but once mankind chose the sinful path and death entered the picture, blood became the required payment to pull us back to victory. In order to gain eternal life, to obtain our heavenly inheritance, death would be the requirement. Is this really so surprising? In order to gain **any** inheritance what is required? It is an awful thing to have to think about, but it is part of life. In order to receive an inheritance someone else must die, leaving you with his or her offering. Happiness can be wrought from the gifts received, but at the same time, realizing the requirement, that someone had to die, makes us sit back in retrospect. A greater future is something we all long for, but the requirement of death to procure such a future requires us to not glory in the death but in the life that we were able to share in. This is how we are able to go from penitence to celebration in this life and look forward to the life to come.

So, death is required before an inheritance is obtained. On the account of goats and bulls though, being slaughtered on behalf of our sins, death seems to be a continual requirement in order to maintain our eternal inheritance and good position with God. I won't go into the lengthy rituals that God required of the Jews (you can read of them in Leviticus 9 and 16), but I would like to us to heed this verse from Leviticus 9:5 concerning these rituals and their importance, "*They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. Then Moses said, 'This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you.'*" Again, I am not going to cover the ritual, suffice it to say, it was a long and bloody ordeal, but a requirement nonetheless to be in the presence of the Lord. This continual example of what sin had done to the spiritual welfare of mankind only illustrates how dire our sinful choices are in the face of God the Father. We know from scripture that it was only for our admonition to experience such dreadful rituals, and that God in his wisdom, had a better way in mind.

And how do we know this? Listen to Isaiah in chapter 1 as the prophet speaks the words of God, "*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams,*

and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats” (Isaiah 1:11).

The continual sacrifice and shedding of blood is not something that our Lord enjoys. Sin has created a dreadful circumstance that must be dealt with and for a time God has let his people experience the burden of blood that was brought on by mankind in the first garden...the Garden of Eden. Blood in the Garden...does this ring a bell? It was in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus, in his anguish, prayed so fervently that blood came through the pours on his face. That's right, the blood of Christ was not first shed during his persecution nor on the Cross, but in a garden...a reminder of where we first fell from grace. And now it will be the grace of God through the Son Jesus Christ that His shed blood will be for us the ultimate victory over sin and our inheritance unto life everlasting! Let's look at Hebrew 9:11-12 once again, *“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in **once** into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”*

This is where the rubber meets the road. Jewish readers of the day would be very familiar with the bloody rituals required under the first covenant. It is the writer of Hebrews who shows us step by step (remember those condensing lines of sanctification) how the new covenant under Christ improves upon the old one. Instead of constant sacrifices, Jesus made only one, himself, obtaining for us eternal salvation through the forgiveness of our sins. And now, step by step, we may come to the Father as we look to Jesus...the bridge of our salvation.

Why all this drama? Why all the fuss? Was there not an easier way? If there were God would have provided it. Any wrong action has a price that is required and sometimes the price is too high for us to pay. Sometimes the price requires a death. No matter how sorry we are, no matter hard we try to be righteous, no matter how many animals we sacrifice, nothing we could do would ever come close to paying the price to get us beyond our sins. We will celebrate come Easter Sunday and rightfully so, but we must not dismiss the reason for God's incarnation and his blood first poured out in the Garden of Gethsemane. You see...no parent should ever outlive their children...and who are we but

the children of God who by transgressing God Almighty chose death. How far would any of us go to save our own children? Our God, in his wisdom...our God, in a perfect and true love, went the full distance and paid the ultimate price that ensures our eternal inheritance...an inheritance gained by his own death through the Son Jesus Christ.

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”

As we come to the Table today and rise above the clouds, the lines of our sanctification narrow with every step, bringing us so much closer into the presence of God. It is here where we offer ourselves and submit to our Lord and it is here where grace bridges the final gap and Jesus reaches out to each of us. May you glory in the full love of God, may you continue steadfastly in the fight, and may the love that resides within you pour upon all those who cross your path.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.