



A Prodigal's Inheritance

Sunday, November 2, 2025

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New Testament Lesson, Ephesians 1:11-23

¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Sermon, “A Prodigal’s Inheritance” by Pastor Dave

One of the most well-known stories in the Bible is the story of the prodigal son. It’s a long story; it goes on for 22 verses in Luke 15. I know what you’re thinking: *I thought Pastor Dave was going to preach from Ephesians 1. Why is he bringing up the story of the prodigal son? Is he going to preach two sermons this morning?*

While I find that tempting, I only need to call your attention to the first two verses in the story of the prodigal son:

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them.

Generally speaking, when we talk about inheritances, we are talking about that which we might receive after someone has died. We’ve been experiencing that in our family with the death of Richard Adamek this past April; he was 93. Candice and I had adopted him as a second grandfather to our children. He was a part of our family for over 50 years.

With his passing, we’ve had the responsibility of dividing his earthly possessions and, in some cases, of disposing of them. But there is no way we could have done any of that when he was still alive.

When this younger son asked his father for his share of his inheritance, he was effectively saying to his father, “I wish you were dead.”

But here’s the thing: *his father gave him his inheritance even though he was still alive.*

As Paul’s letter to the Ephesians starts out, it is, quite frankly, rather theologically dense. I’m not being critical of chapter one; I’m just telling you that there’s a lot packed in to a few verses. But we can better understand those verses if we use the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to help us interpret Ephesians 1.

That’s because Luke 15 begins when the younger son receives his inheritance. And the keyword in the passage I read to you from Ephesians 1 is the word *Inheritance*.

Paul writes that as the children of God, “we have obtained an inheritance.” But like the father in Luke 15, God the Father gave us our inheritance when he was still alive. And he is still alive today, fulfilling the promise of James 1:17—

Every good and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

Paul tells us that we have received our inheritance “having been destined”—some translations say *predestined*. That has provided all kinds of theological fodder for Reformed theologians who believe in predestination. They believe that the atonement of Christ was “Limited” to only the chosen ones or the Elect. That suggests that only the Elect are predestined for salvation while others are predestined for punishment and hell.

Paul tells us exactly who is to receive this inheritance. In verse 12 he identifies “the first to set their hope on Christ,” which is most likely a reference to the first Christians, and they were all Jews. Especially in the Old Testament, the “Elect” were the Jews; they were the Chosen People. But that was never meant to be exclusionary. In fact the genealogy of Jesus

includes Rahab and Ruth who were Canaanite women who, by faith, were welcomed into the Jewish family.

In addition to the Jews, Paul tells us that those who “heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in [Jesus],”—in other words, non-Jews—“were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit [as] the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption”

In other words, those who were not originally among the Chosen Ones, the Elect, the Jews, may also obtain God’s inheritance. Indeed, if you search the scriptures, you will find no scriptural evidence that *any* are predestined for hell. I maintain that every human being is predestined for heaven. The only question is, “Are you living up to your destiny?”

Like the father of Luke 15, God the Father grants us our inheritance as an act of grace. And when you search the scriptures, you discover that there is a tension between grace and law. And law would say that before anyone can receive any kind of an inheritance, someone must first die.

Paul, steeped in the teachings of the Law, knows that someone has to die before we can receive our inheritance. That is why Paul writes that we have obtained our inheritance “in Christ.” In other words, we have received our inheritance because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cruel cross of Calvary. That means that we obtain our inheritance according to the Law but also as an act of grace.

So what is our inheritance? We tend to think of an inheritance as money. But “the basic inheritance that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the land of Canaan.”¹ To a people living in Egyptian slavery, that meant coming out of the slavery of sin and on to the new promised land.

We might immediately assume that our promised land is heaven. And that’s true. But it’s so much more than that. The inheritance Paul has in mind is the whole world, when it’s been renewed by a fresh act of God’s power and love.

And while that hasn’t fully happened as yet, it does tell us that we don’t have to wait until we die to enjoy the power and the love of God. That’s why God gives us the Holy Spirit now, in this life. Indeed, the Spirit is actually part of the promised inheritance because the Spirit is God’s own presence. The Holy Spirit is the “down payment,” part of our promised future, joining with us in our present life.²

Quite honestly, like the prodigal son of Luke 15, we don’t deserve our inheritance. We’re all prodigals. But God in his grace grants it to us anyway. May we not squander our blessings. May we not take them for granted. Instead, let us, like Paul before us, join in the glorious hymn of praise to God.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Paul the Prison Letters for Everyone*, WJK, pg. 11.

² Ibid, pg. 14.