

# His Glorious Inheritance

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning, Church of the Advent. My name is Jeff. I'm one of the pastors here. If this is your first time with us this morning, I just want to say welcome. I hope to meet you soon, if I haven't had the privilege yet. I wanted to wish you a happy All Saints Day. I don't know if you knew it or not, but Monday, actually, was All Saints Day, and this is the Sunday that we celebrate and commemorate All Saints. And All Saints is the day in the church calendar when we reflect together on our union together with the whole church, all saints, all believers, across time and space, language, and culture. And we think back to the Christians across the ages who have come before us and set an example in the faith. And we also look forward to the day when we will be united with all believers in the new creation. So multiple times throughout the book of Revelation, we get this vision of this great multitude from every tribe and tongue and nation that no one could count. And that is what we are looking forward to, our communion with saints.

And so this movement across time and space gives us perspective for the present moment where we experience the communion of saints in the church today. That's what All Saints is about, and it's kind of captured in this prayer, this colic that we just prayed a few moments ago, which says, Almighty God, you have knit us together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son. But I don't know if you're like me. I get kind of skeptical of stuff that sounds too ethereal and overly spiritual. You know, is all this talk about communion with the saints across time and space through Jesus' mystical body? Like, is that too, are we being too spiritual? Are we being too ethereal when we talk about those things? You know, sometimes I think Christians can be critiqued for being so heavenly minded that they are of what? Of no earthly good. That they are so focused on the world to come that they ignore the earthly realities and the problems of this world. And some Christians and churches throughout church history have probably been rightly deserving of this critique. But our New

Testament text this morning in Ephesians 1 shows us that if Christians are, in fact, overly unconcerned with the earthly realities of this world, it's not because they have thought too much of heaven, but too little. But too little. Our New Testament passage helps us to see that what unites us to the saints across the ages as our common inheritance in Christ. Through our baptism into Jesus, we have been adopted into God's family as his sons and daughters, and therefore we are recipients of a gloriously rich inheritance awaiting us in the age to come. And far from making us too heavenly minded on ethereal things, this inheritance is actually the only thing that makes us of any earthly good at all.

And that is because, and this is what we're going to look at this morning, that's because it makes us radically secure, deeply loved, and greatly empowered. Radically secure, deeply loved, and greatly empowered.

First of all, Ephesians 1 shows us that our inheritance in Christ makes us radically secure. The word that Paul here uses in Ephesians 1 for inheritance has a rich Old Testament background.

[ 3 : 3 6 ] In the ancient world, in the Old Testament, inheritance most commonly, most often refers to land. The land that you inherited from your parents, from your father, was everything. It was your income, it was your savings, it was your retirement plan and 401k, it was your financial and social security.

And throughout the Old Testament, God promises Israel an inheritance of land from Genesis through Deuteronomy. And then in Joshua, they actually enter that land. They enter the promised land.

All throughout the history of Israel, they dwell in the land. Israel grows into a kingdom. And of course, after many generations of disobedience, they forfeit their right to this inheritance.

And so God takes them from their land and sends them into exile. And so a live question in the first century in Paul's day was this. When is God going to restore our land?

When is he going to restore our inheritance, our security? And this is also a question for us today too. We may not all be looking to purchase a piece of land, but all of us long for security.

[ 4 : 46 ] All of us long to know that we're secure because we live in a world that is insecure, that threatens to take things from us. And so we look for security through financial security, through a stable job, through savings.

We look for security in relationships by finding emotional security. And these are all good things, by the way, but they don't meet our deepest desires.

They don't meet our deepest longings for security. Paul here in Ephesians 1 says that our deepest longings for security are fulfilled in the inheritance that we have in Jesus Christ.

Verse 11. Verse 11 says that in him we have obtained an inheritance. This phrase in him is repeated like over a dozen times in Ephesians chapter 1.

And it is a phrase that Paul repeats all throughout his letters. In him is this language of union with Christ. And the inheritance that we have in Christ is nothing less than the renewal of all creation and the resurrection of our bodies.

[ 5 : 49 ] Some of us may have grown up with something like a lifeboat theology. That the world is kind of this sinking ship that's doomed to destruction.

And so therefore God's plan of salvation is to get as many souls off this ship and get them into heaven. And so it's this view of heaven that's kind of disembodied and ethereal. Somewhere where we are up in the sky floating on clouds and playing harps.

I don't know if this sounds familiar to you or not. But in Revelation 21 we see something completely different than this. We see Jesus sitting on the throne saying behold I am making all things new.

And all things means every square inch of the physical material world. Plants, animals, rainforests, rivers, mountains, flowers, birds and trees and even our own bodies.

Now we don't get a ton of detail about what exactly this looks like. But what we do get is poetic imagery throughout scripture that stirs our hearts with hope. So Isaiah talks about the wolf and the lamb who one day are going to lie down together and cuddle.

[ 6 : 56 ] That in God's new creation animals will no longer experience the curse of the fall. Isaiah also talks about swords being beaten to plowshares. That there will no longer be any war or violence or conflict.

Amos talks about new wine dripping from the mountains and flowing from all the hills. Revelation talks about it being a wedding feast. This is God's good world being liberated, rescued and redeemed from the effects of sin and the fall.

And I don't know about you but this is a world that I really want to live in. And friends if you're in Christ this is your inheritance. And this is a hope.

The hope of this inheritance is radically secure. It's radically guaranteed. And that's what Paul tries to show us in verses 11 through 14. That it is an inheritance that is guaranteed both by the eternal purposes of God and by the presence of the Spirit.

So in verse 11 he says, In him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

[ 8 : 02 ] Paul says here that our inheritance was actually secure before time began. Now I think that for some of us, maybe some people we know, this idea of predestination can be troubling or confusing.

But the Bible almost always talks about predestination as it does here to bring us deep comfort and assurance. From time to time I think many of us may kind of doubt the assurance of our salvation.

I know that I have. At times I've wondered, am I really a Christian? Am I really saved? Am I really eternally secure? Am I really in Christ? But often these doubts are usually based on my own feelings.

Like on my own subjective experience. Because I don't feel close to God. Or I don't feel like my faith is active or fruitful. But verse 11 reminds us that the security of our inheritance isn't based in our subjective experience.

But in the objective sovereign plan of God. Who works all things according to the counsel of his will. And our inheritance is also guaranteed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

[ 9 : 12 ] This is what he says in verse 13. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. This language of being sealed by the Spirit is the language of baptism.

We're going to do some baptisms in a moment. And Tommy is going to say these beautiful words to those being baptized. You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

That's what Paul is talking about here in Ephesians 1. Through baptism the Holy Spirit says to each of us, You are in Christ. You're his. You're his. And there's a lot more where that came from.

That is what it means to have an inheritance in Christ. It is the guarantee that though we taste the new creation now through the Holy Spirit, one day we're going to feast on it.

[ 10 : 18 ] Brian Chappell in his commentary on Ephesians says this, The Holy Spirit who has already enabled you to taste the sweetness of God in the gospel is giving you a foretaste of the glory that awaits you.

He is the deposit of God, of the full redemption that is ahead, given to assure you that what you face in this world is not without purpose. And what you most cherish is not in jeopardy.

Even when you cannot do everything right, even when things seem all wrong, you are all right with God. Because he who chose you is working out everything in conformity with a purpose of his will to the praise of his glory.

And in a world of insecurity, there is no greater assurance than this. If you ever doubt the assurance of your own faith, of your own salvation, look not to your own feelings, but to the eternal purposes of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So our inheritance in Christ makes us radically secure. And it also makes us deeply loved. Deeply loved.

[ 11 : 25 ] Paul continues on from talking about the guaranteed assurance of our inheritance to the glorious riches of our future. Verse 15 says, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

And then he tells us what he prays for. He prays for, verse 17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

So this is a prayer for spiritual insight, that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes and give us wisdom, even though we have the Holy Spirit as a deposit of our inheritance.

We need the Holy Spirit to continually enlighten our eyes and our hearts to see. To see what? To see verse 18. To see that you may know the hope to which he has called you.

What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints? This riches here, riches, is inheritance language.

[ 12 : 33 ] It is cash money. That's what he's talking about. And it's interesting because in verses 11 through 14, Paul is clearly talking about the inheritance that we have obtained in Christ.

But here in verse 18, if you notice, here in verse 18 he says, I pray that you would know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

Of God's inheritance in the saints. So which is it? Is it our inheritance? Or is it God's inheritance? Yes.

Yes, it's both. Throughout scripture we see that God promises inheritance to his people and that God's people are his inheritance.

Let me just give you a few examples. Exodus 19, God says to Moses on Mount Sinai, to the people of Israel, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession.

[ 13 : 35 ] Psalm 78 says that he chose David his servant, Israel his inheritance. Jeremiah 10 says he is the one who formed all things and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance.

The Old Testament reveals that God's purpose in redemption is to form a people who he loves, treasures, and delights in. That's your inheritance. And then in the New Testament, we see that this inheritance centers on Jesus, who is the heir of all things.

Hebrews 1.1 says, long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, who he appointed heir of all things.

Through his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus has rightfully become the king and appointed heir of all things. And as we become united to Jesus by faith through the gospel, the New Testament teaches that we become co-heirs with Christ.

Romans 8.16-17 says, the Holy Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

[ 14 : 54 ] What are the riches of God's glorious inheritance? It's all the saints. It's all of us. It's the church. It's the whole church united across time and space, ethnicity, language, and culture.

And this is one of the richest ways to think about God's love towards us. If I'm being honest, probably my greatest spiritual struggle is believing that God loves me as much as he says he does in his word.

There are probably a thousand reasons why I doubt, underestimate, and trivialize the depth of God's love for me. And 999 of them have to do with me.

But this right here shows us that not only do we have a glorious inheritance to look forward to, but also that we are reminded of the depths of God's love, that we ourselves are the glorious inheritance that God looks forward to.

The communion of saints is what fills God with delight as he thinks about his future. He is like a kid on the night before Christmas. who can't sleep because he is so excited about Christmas morning.

[ 16 : 07 ] That is how he feels about the church. That is how he feels about you. He cannot wait to spend all of eternity with us. You are his treasured possession.

You are deeply, deeply loved by God because you are a co-heir with Christ. Baptism means adoption. And adoption means inheritance.

And inheritance means that God says to you, you are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter, and in you I am well pleased.

And it is knowing that we are deeply loved that actually empowers us to live out the communion of saints. It actually empowers us to treat one another as co-heirs with Christ.

But sometimes loving one another in the church is hard. Sometimes we treat one another as less than this, as less than co-heirs. And I think sometimes we treat Christian community as kind of this zero-sum game that I can only gain if you lose.

[ 17 : 17 ] And therefore, I have to make sure that I look better than you. It might motivate me to criticize you before others. But sins like gossip and slander aren't just morally wrong.

They are out of step with our identity as co-heirs with Christ of the new creation. I know this is gonna be cheesy, but look to the person on your left.

Look to the person on your right. I know this is a cheesy, awkward moment, but just do it. That person is God's own inheritance. That person is God's treasured possession.

Do we treat one another as if that's true? Like, do we actually treat one another as if our brothers and sisters of Christ are gonna inherit the new creation along with us? The basis of our relationship with others in the church is that we are fellow heirs of the same glorious promises, that we are deeply loved by God, and therefore, we must love one another.

So our inheritance in Christ makes us radically secure. It makes us deeply loved, and it also makes us greatly empowered. Greatly empowered.

[ 18 : 28 ] Paul continues praying for the Ephesians in verses 19 through 23. So he says, I pray that you would know the glorious riches of God's inheritance in the saints.

And then he says, and I pray that you would know, verse 19, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. According to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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 one to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. What in the world is Paul talking about here?

He's talking about the ascension. He's talking about the ascension of Christ, the exaltation of Jesus after his resurrection at the Father's right hand where he reigns as king over all creation and intercedes for us as our great high priest and empowers the church by his spirit.

I don't think we think often enough about the implications of the ascension for the Christian life. There are many, but one of the things is that the ascension is the objective evidence that to be heavenly minded is to be, by definition, to be of great earthly good.

[ 20 : 05 ] The ascension helps us see that in heaven is one who is fully divine and yet fully human.

Jesus Christ stands in the throne room of heaven, fully God, but with a fully human physical body with ears and eyes and toes and a belly button.

That's what the ascension means. This is the greatest affirmation of what it means to be human, that the ascended humanity of Jesus in a physical body means that the goal of the Christian life is not somehow to transcend our bodily, earthly existence for a more spiritual, ethereal one, but that we are to live our earthly, physical life empowered by the spirit, lived with the incredible power of God toward us who believe.

In the midst of this world, God's power, his immeasurable power towards us is for us in embodied life in this world, in this world of diapers and email and soccer games and tacos and also sickness and suffering and pain.

In every part of life, we have access to the power of him who is seated at the Father's right hand in heaven far above all authority and power and dominion. That is our inheritance, that in the ascended Jesus, we are radically secure, we are deeply loved and we are greatly empowered and this is a reality that shapes our everyday life.

[ 21 : 55 ] There's so many implications that we could talk about but I wanna just talk about one as we close. You know what I've noticed about young kids, especially those who can't talk yet?

What I've noticed about young kids, those who know that they are deeply secure and deeply loved. You ever seen a kid like that? What I've noticed is that those kids take risks.

They try stuff they're not good at yet. They learn how to walk. And they fall a lot. They're terrible at speaking English but they like keep trying to talk to people because they know dad's got me, mom's got me and I am deeply secure in their love even though I can't fully articulate that yet.

How would you live your life if you knew that you were radically secure and deeply loved? How would you live your life if you knew that the ascended power of Jesus was available to you by the Holy Spirit right in the midst of your ordinary life?

I think it would lead us to live lives of redemptive risk. To live lives of redemptive risk.

[ 23 : 20 ] This past week several of us traveled to Greensboro, North Carolina to attend the convocation and synod for our diocese. It's the annual gathering of the group of churches or regional group of churches.

And we were at this church in Greensboro, North Carolina. And it's an all-day conference so they got us squeezing some coffee and bathroom breaks.

And during one of the coffee breaks outside the church, I noticed that the cardboard sleeves for the coffee had been colored by hand with markers and pencils.

And I asked a woman behind the counter and I said, what's the story behind these coffee sleeves? And she said, actually, those are colored by our employees. I'm the founder and the president of this coffee shop and we employ adults with physical and mental disabilities.

And I asked her, I said, wow, I want to hear more. So I asked her more of her story and how it got started and she said that her teenage son has a disability and couldn't find a job. It's hard for adults with disabilities to find jobs and he was sitting at home all day watching TV but yet she knew that her son could still contribute meaningfully in the world and so she just said from the Lord, she sensed the Lord was calling her to start a business to give adults with disabilities a place to have meaningful work.

[ 24 : 46 ] And so she started a coffee shop even though she knew nothing about coffee. She was a counselor by training but she thought, all right, I'm going to learn about coffee and we're going to make a coffee, we're going to grow a coffee shop.

And the business grew and grew and now they're actually the number one coffee shop in Greensboro because they make good coffee and because people love what they do. She said, we have over 40 employees over 90% of which are adults with disabilities.

And what struck me about this woman's story is the incredible amount of risk this must have taken. To know nothing about coffee and yet to say, I'm going to start a coffee shop.

to employ people who aren't often employed. But what I couldn't help sense in her voice and her story is that this risk was rooted in her faith in Christ and her knowledge of her inheritance and inheritance where she was radically secure and deeply loved.

And so she was free to take a risk in this world, a redemptive risk. How would your life look if you knew at the core of your being that you were radically secure and deeply loved?

[ 25 : 57 ] What kinds of creative work and redemptive projects might God call you to do? The great witness of all the saints who have gone before us is all the risk they took to carry on the mission of the church and to love the poor and the marginalized and their generation.

To take the gospel to unreached places, to plant new churches, to seek out and love those who are on the fringes of society, to face suffering and imprisonment and martyrdom. But they did it because they knew that they had a secure inheritance in Christ and that that inheritance empowered them by the power of the Holy Spirit because of the ascended Lord who reigns in heaven.

And now it's our turn. It's us as the communion of saints right now to live into our inheritance today which starts in our baptism and is fulfilled in the age to come and that plays out in the midst of our ordinary earthly lives.

And one day we will experience the glorious riches of our inheritance in Christ that are promised to us and God himself will experience the glorious riches of his inheritance in us, the church.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for this vision of what it means to be radically secure and deeply loved by you.

[ 27 : 29 ] Thank you for the inheritance that we have in Christ. Thank you for the saints who've gone before us. Lord empower us by your spirit to live lives of love towards our brothers and sisters in Christ to treat them as co-heirs and to live lives of redemptive risk on behalf of our neighbors that we might see your church grow and your kingdom advance in this world.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.