

# The Reading Of Our Elder Brother's Will

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's late 17th century Scotland in what was known as the killing times.

The king was attempting to force everyone for political reasons to worship in the way he favoured and our covenanting Presbyterian predecessors were not having any of that at all.

No king except King Jesus had the right to tell people how they should worship. So worshipping God as set out in the Bible was against the law.

So as those of you who know and those of you who don't know, let me tell you that Presbyterians used to meet for worship in secret and isolated places. And one morning a young woman was making her way to a communion service which was being held on a remote mountainside.

And as she was going there, she was stopped at a checkpoint, manned by government soldiers. Where are you going? They asked her sharply.

[ 1 : 27 ] Now she couldn't say where she was going because she knew if she did, she would get arrested immediately. However, she didn't want to lie. So she replied, I'm going to the reading of my elder brother's will.

And the soldiers looked at each other and thought, well, there's nothing illegal about that and let her through. And she makes her way to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Now, that young woman's understanding of the Lord's Supper really had mileage to it, didn't it?

The reading of our elder brother's will. And Jesus himself pictures salvation as a will.

In 1 Corinthians 11, 25, which we'll read later on in the service in the words of institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Jesus describes salvation as a covenant, the new covenant in my blood.

Now, the Greek word Jesus uses, *diatheke*, is usually translated covenant. However, it can also be legitimately translated as testament.

[ 2 : 43 ] And if those of you who were brought up in the authorized King James version, you know that that's how it's translated in the authorized version, the new testament in my blood.

But *diatheke* can also be translated as will, as a will, as in Hebrews 9, 16 and 17. So if we translate *diatheke* as will in 1 Corinthians 11, 25, then Jesus, our elder brother, sees his salvation as a will.

And therefore, the Lord's Supper, one of the two signs and seals of salvation, he sees it as a multi-sensory reading of his will.

And that's what we're here to do this morning. We're here to hear the reading of our elder brother's will. So let's spend our time for a few moments unpacking this idea of salvation being Jesus' will and the Lord's Supper as being a multi-sensory reading of his will.

And as we go at it from that angle, the first matter we need to grasp is this. Jesus' will was drawn up in eternity.

[ 4 : 01 ] Jesus' will was drawn up in eternity. One of the staples of BBC morning television, maybe about a decade ago, used to be the program *Air Hunters*.

H-E-I-R, not A-I-R or A-Y-R. *Air Hunters*. And it was about a firm that discovered people who hadn't left any will.

And they tried to find out their errors so that they could share the money that was left to them rather than the government getting it. And of course, they took a percentage of it.

That's how they made their money. And it was amazing how many types of people didn't make a will. Now, failing to draw up a will was something that Jesus, it can't be said of Jesus.

The Bible tells us he drew up his will. And he drew up his will a long, long time ago. In fact, he drew up his will when there was no such thing as time.

[ 5 : 16 ] He drew it up in eternity, in what is referred to in theologians speak as the covenant of redemption. Now, you won't find that term covenant of redemption in the Bible.

But that doesn't mean its idea is not a biblical one. You won't find the word sacrament or trinity in the Bible. But sacrament and trinity are definitely biblical ideas.

And covenant of redemption is not a phrase that's found in the Bible, but it's an idea that's very firmly there in the Bible. And we get more of a hint of the reality of this covenant of redemption in Ephesians 1 verse 3 that we just read, where Paul describes God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we're familiar with the idea of Jesus being, about God being Jesus' Father. and we're familiar with the idea that by grace and through faith in him, we have come to know God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

So, when he talks, Paul says about being the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we've got to handle on that. But what about this idea of Jesus being the God, or the Father being the God of our Lord Jesus Christ?

[ 6 : 48 ] Now, that's a strange way to describe God, if you think about it. Doesn't it sound a wee bit like God saying that he's the God of himself? What on earth is Paul on about when he describes God as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, Paul is doing what Paul does. Paul is taking us back into the Old Testament. See, we can't understand the Old Testament if we haven't got the New Testament.

But neither can we understand the New Testament if we don't have the Old Testament. And Paul's taking us back into the Old Testament. And particularly, he's taking us to the early chapters of Exodus, where God explains to Moses why he's going to come and rescue his people from slavery in Egypt.

And it all has to do with covenant promises that he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the founding fathers of the Israelite nation.

And what's of interest to us is the way in which God refers to himself in these chapters. As he states that he'll set his people free from slavery and bring them to Canaan, the Promised Land, over and over God says that he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

[ 8 : 22 ] So if God is said to be the God of someone, it means that God has entered into a covenant with whoever he is the God of.

And Paul is plugging into that line of thought here in Ephesians 1 verse 3. When he calls God the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, he's saying that the Father has entered into covenant with the Son, and that the agreement they reached along with the Holy Spirit is the covenant of redemption.

That the Father gave the Son a people to be his bride. That the Son said he would come to earth to die for those people whom the Father had given him.

The Holy Spirit would fully equip the Son so that he would perfectly carry out everything that was agreed, and that he would make the salvation that the Father planned, and the Son achieved real in people's experience.

So when Paul is calling God the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, he's reminding us that Jesus' salvation is Jesus' covenant, Jesus' diatheke, Jesus' will.

[ 9 : 46 ] A will that was drawn up in eternity under the terms of the covenant of redemption. And then as we unpack this idea of Jesus' salvation, salvation being Jesus' will and the Lord's Supper, a multi-sensory reading of our elder brother's will, there's a second matter we need to understand.

Jesus' will is spelt out in the Bible. So this will that was planned in eternity is spelt out in the Bible.

Now for a number of years, the Crookes family have been fans of the American writer John Grisham, and maybe some of you like his books.

And the first John Grisham book we all read together on a holiday in Florida was called The Testament. Now I'm not telling you much about the book's storyline, except that all the action is the fallout from a reading of a will, hence the title, The Testament.

And this will contains some very big surprises to everyone who thought they would benefit from it. But there are no surprises at all when, as far as Jesus' will is concerned. In fact, we know exactly what's in it, because he's spelt it out the terms of his will in the Bible.

[ 11 : 19 ] And in Ephesians 1, 3 to 14, the passage we just read a moment or two ago, Paul specifies the headline benefits, if you like, that we, the beneficiaries of Jesus, will receive.

Look at what they are. The first one is that we are loved by God. Thought about that last night. We're loved by God because we were chosen before the foundation of the world, that in love he predestined us.

We're adopted as God's sons into his family in order that we might inherit everything that Jesus promised in his will.

We've been redeemed on the basis of Jesus' death, so that we're no longer under the tyrannical oppression of Satan, but we've been brought out of that kingdom of darkness, and we're now part of Jesus' kingdom, where he rules over us as our gracious, kind, good king.

We've been forgiven. In him we have forgiveness. We've been forgiven. Jesus was punished in our place.

[ 12 : 38 ] All the sins that we've committed in the past, all the sins that we will commit today, all the sins that we will commit in the future, have been dealt with.

They've been pardoned. There's no condemnation for us anymore. We've been forgiven. We've been given direction in life, with all wisdom and understanding God has made known to us what he's doing in this world and in our lives.

We know what God is doing in this world. We think our world's in chaos, and it isn't chaos. We sometimes think our lives are in chaos, but we know what God is doing in our will.

In everything he does, God is glorifying his son, and he's making us more like Jesus. And he's made known to us.

Our lives have direction. They're not aimless. We don't have to guess who we are and what we're here for. We know they're there in Jesus' will to us.

[ 13 : 47 ] We've experienced salvation because the Holy Spirit has worked in our lives. He's enabled us to believe in Jesus as we heard about him presented to us in the gospel.

Another benefit of this will, we've been given assurance of salvation. The Holy Spirit is God's seal. His presence in our lives authenticates the reality of our salvation, that we will be a preserved people, as we thought about last night, and God will keep us to the end and take us to heaven, not by the skin of our teeth, but with exceeding great joy.

And we have hope in this hopeless world, in this world of despair. We as Christians have hope.

The Holy Spirit is the first installment of heaven. And by giving us his son as a down payment, a deposit of heaven, God is guaranteeing us that the rest will definitely come.

So we have hope of heaven in this hopeless world. those are all the amazing benefits that we will receive in terms of Jesus' will.

[ 15 : 07 ] We don't have to guess what's in Jesus' will because Jesus has spelt it out for us in the Bible. Then as we unpack this idea of salvation being Jesus' will and the Lord's Supper as a multi-sensory reading of his will, we need to consider a third thing.

Jesus' will was activated by his death. That's a bit obvious, but let's remind ourselves that it was activated by his death. For many years, I knew what was in my Father's will.

because he had told me what was in his will. However, the terms of his will only came into play when he died. And that's the same with Jesus' will.

All the amazing spiritual benefits of Ephesians 1, 3 to 14 were not activated until Jesus died. The writer of the Hebrews makes this point in Hebrews 9, 16 and 17.

Here's what he said. It isn't rocket science. He said, In the case of a will, it's necessary to prove the death of the one who made it because a will is in force only when someone has died.

[ 16 : 28 ] It never takes effect when the one who made it is living. That's obvious. We understand that. And Jesus was aware of this too. And that's why when he instituted the Lord's Supper, he talked about the new covenant in his blood.

He realized that it was his death which would unlock all the benefits of his will. Now, when someone we know dies, we try to remember all the good things that that person has done.

we try to remember all the kind words that person has said and all the noble qualities of that person's character. But when it comes to remembering Jesus, Jesus wants us to focus on something else.

Now, the things that Jesus did were amazing. The words that Jesus spoke were profound and life-changing. But Jesus wants us to focus when we remember him on something else.

he wants us to remember his death. It's not that Jesus is very morbid, you know, with a gothic-like fixation with death and dying.

[ 17 : 43 ] As his behavior in the Garden of Gethsemane indicates, in his perfect humanity, the prospect of death was something that filled him with dread. But Jesus wants us to remember his death because he knows that it activates all the amazing benefits he wants to lavish on us in terms

of his will.

Then there's another thing as we unpack this idea of salvation being Jesus' will and the Lord's Supper, a multi-sensory reading of his will. Jesus' will is read to us by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' will is read to us by the Holy Spirit. the reason I knew what was in my Father's will was because I was an executor of his will. And when he died, one of my responsibilities was to let all the beneficiaries of his will know the terms of my Father's will and what they had got under the terms of my Father's will.

And the Holy Spirit is the executor of Jesus' will. And that means one of his roles is to tell us who are the beneficiaries of Jesus' will what benefits come our way because Jesus has died.

Now, you probably don't need me to remind you that the primary way in which the Holy Spirit reads Jesus' will to us is in the Bible. As we hear the Bible being read and preached, as we read the Bible with others or as we read the Bible by ourselves, the Holy Spirit informs us of what the benefits of salvation look like.

[ 19 : 30 ] However, there's another way in which the Spirit communicates us to us the terms of Jesus' will. And that's in the sacraments.

The sacraments are pictures of salvation, visual aids. they help us to see in the spiritual sense as well as in the physical sense what God has done for us.

And the sacraments and in particular the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Supper engages all of our five senses, doesn't it? At the Lord's Supper we not only hear about and see God's salvation, but as we eat the bread and drink the wine that points to Jesus' death, we also engage our sense of touch and taste and smell.

So in the Lord's Supper the Holy Spirit is giving us a multi-sensory approach as he reads God, Jesus' will to us.

By our five senses he communicates to us the amazing benefits of Jesus' salvation that were activated by his death on the cross. And then there's one more thing I think I want to draw your attention to as we unpack this idea of salvation being Jesus' will and the Lord's Supper being this multi-sensory reading of his will.

[ 21 : 01 ] And it says the benefits of Jesus' will are to be enjoyed now. The benefits of Jesus' will are to be enjoyed now. This is a mild spoiler alert.

The storyline of John Grisham's The Testament is about the torturous process of implementing the terms of the will that was read at the start of the book.

Those of you who have read it know that and you know the end story but those of you who haven't you think well how long will it be before the beneficiaries enjoy what was left to them?

Or did they ever enjoy what was left to them? You'll have to read the book and find out for yourselves I'm not telling you about it.

It's a good read. But there's that kind of tension there. But we don't have to wait ages to enjoy the benefits of Jesus' will.

[ 22 : 13 ] As soon as we place our trust in him we immediately start to enjoy them. And at the Lord's table today as we eat bread and drink wine as we feed upon Jesus by faith we enjoy the spiritual nourishment that this sacrament gives to us as Christians.

All of us but some of us in particular who have issues surrounding diabetes we know the experience of our blood sugar levels dropping and we become lethargic and listless and even if our sugar levels drop very low it's dangerous for us.

But then we eat something or drink something and almost at once our energy levels pick up again.

Perhaps as you come to the Lord's table today you're feeling a little bit spiritually flat and sluggish lethargic a bit listless spiritually your love for Jesus seems a wee bit lukewarm your obedience to Jesus it's a bit patchy your service for Jesus it's become a bit of a joyless chore forever and this all has affected your assurance of salvation it's a bit wobbly and shaky and maybe even the thought of not coming to the Lord's table has crossed your mind I want you to boot that last thought out of your thinking immediately if you are feeling like that the

Lord's table is the place that you really need to come to it's imperative that you come to today because being at the Lord's table is exactly what your spiritual flatness and sluggishness and listlessness and lethargy need because as the broken bread and the poured out wine remind you of what Jesus has done for you and as by faith you feed upon Christ's body and blood the Holy Spirit will immediately begin to boost your spiritual energy levels rekindling your love for Jesus

reenergizing your obedience to Jesus reigniting joy in your service to Jesus and renewing the stability of your relationship with Jesus your conscience will maybe say to you oh don't the devil will definitely say to you don't don't listen to either of them listen to what Jesus says as he invites those who are weary and burdened to come and enjoy rest because here at the

[ 25 : 58 ] Lord's table in Calvin's words you find medicine for your soul and solace for sinners you need to come you need to come and yes I know that the spiritual energy boost the spirit gives us when we come to the table even with it we don't love Jesus perfectly we don't serve Jesus perfectly we don't obey Jesus perfectly but one day we will one day we will because the Lord's supper has a shelf life it points forward to a time when time will be no more and we will gather at the ultimate salvation meal the marriage supper of the lamb but we're not in heaven yet some of us are closer than others but we're not in heaven yet so through the activity of the spirit as he makes

Jesus salvation real and personal to us as we feed upon Jesus by faith we can enjoy the benefits of the Lord's table and be strengthened in our resolve to love and serve and obey Jesus folks our circumstances are very different from that young woman who was heading to the celebration of the Lord's supper on that remote mountainside in 17th century Scotland we don't have to meet in secret none of us was stopped by the army from coming here our service isn't going to be broken up by the police none of us will be beaten up for being here and I'll probably not get arrested for preaching here today unless I preach a really bad sermon our circumstances are different but you know we're doing exactly the same as that young woman did and that congregation did all those centuries ago we're gathered around this table for a multi-sensory reading of our elder brother's will and along with the father and the holy spirit

Jesus our elder brother drew up his will in eternity his death that is symbolized by the broken bread and the poured out wine has activated the terms of his will through the preaching of the bible and in the sacrament the spirit communicates to us the benefits of Jesus will that we can enjoy immediately Jesus our elder brother has prepared this meal for us he's spread the bread and wine for us use your imaginations please he spread the bread and wine for us and by his spirit through his word he says to us everything is ready everything is ready come and enjoy and taste and see how good the lord is let's pray for a moment lord may your word in terms of your will dwell richly in our hearts so that we might grasp how wide and long and high and deep is your covenant love for us lord in a few moments as we come to your table a table that speaks loudly and clearly of how much you love us may we taste and see how good you are and we ask this in your name amen if you