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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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The Last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 9:15-22

On November 12, 1877, hundreds of spectators pushed their way into a courtroom in lower Manhattan. They were desperate to witness the most sensational court trial of the year, and especially eager to learn the secrets of the richest man the United States of America had ever seen. The trial over the last will and testament of Cornelius Vanderbilt was about to begin.

Shortly before noon, the crowd parted to allow in William H. Vanderbilt, the Commodore's eldest son, along with his legal team. He was totally confident of the favorable outcome he felt he deserved—95% of the estate, so designated by the LAST WILL and TESTAMENT of his father. That will was opposed by his sister, Mary Vanderbilt La Bau, who was seeking to have their father's estate divided equally among all the remaining ten descendants.

The sum being fought over was utterly staggering and sensational... \$100 million!!! If the railroad tycoon's entire assets had been sold at market value at the time of his death in January of that year, he would have taken in 1 out of every 20 dollars in circulation in the entire nation of the United States!! By contrast, if Bill Gates's fortune of \$58 billion were cashed in for market value in 2008, he would have taken in only 1 out of every \$139 in circulation.

The trial dragged on for two years, two months and four days. In the end, the Commodore's wishes were honored, the Last Will and Testament was upheld, and son William won. But he did double the shares of the estate of his nine siblings. The money did them little lasting good... one of his sons, Corneil, used his inheritance to pay off some debts, but he was soon in debt again, and committed suicide five years after his father died.

In actuality, though most of us are well aware of the concept of a LAST WILL and TESTAMENT, and find the concept of receiving some surprise wealth from a dead relative alluring, 91.9% of Americans will never receive ANY INHERITANCE MONEY AT ALL!! And the number is increasing!

It's probably just as well... inheritance battles are notoriously destructive and ugly. And as I mentioned, the money usually doesn't do you any good.

In our text today, however, we get to look at the concept of an infinitely better LAST WILL and TESTAMENT... that of Jesus Christ

Friends, as we come to Hebrews 9:15-22, we are allowed by the Holy Spirit to sit at the reading of the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. We get to stare through the homely black letters on the pages of our Bibles and discern His will for us... what He wants to give us

And yet, this will is unlike any that has ever been read; for the one who made it, who died to give it to us, is ALIVE FOREVERMORE... how then can we receive what rightfully belongs to him

And this passage speaks of both a WILL and a COVENANT... in fact the commentators and translators go back and forth as to which it is... is this a WILL (sometimes called a “testament”?) It seems so, since the middle of the text is addressing the basic facts of a will which requires that someone dies in order for it to take effect; but it then goes on to speak of the blood of the covenant... and the sprinkling of the blood to purify from sin and to work forgiveness of sin...

So this morning we will have the opportunity to unravel all this... to learn the nature of the last will and testament of Jesus Christ, and to determine what we stand to inherit... and to marvel again at the infinitely HIGH COST which Jesus was willing to pay to ensure that we would receive our inheritance... the cost of His own precious blood

If you are a Christian, you are immeasurably wealthier than you can possibly imagine... wealthy by inheritance, wealthy by being an heir of Jesus Christ

I. Christ the Mediator of a New Covenant (vs. 15)

A. “For This Reason”: That the Inheritance May be Guaranteed

1. God’s deepest desire: to give us an eternal inheritance
2. The Mosaic covenant could not do it
3. In fact, anything dependent on our obedience could never be “guaranteed”
4. God wanted to guarantee this inheritance

Romans 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring

5. Only by a NEW COVENANT could God achieve what He wanted to achieve... to make absolutely CERTAIN our inheritance

B. Christ is the Mediator

1. Mediator is one who stands between two parties and communicates the covenant

2. For the Old Covenant, Moses was the mediator... He ALONE was invited up the sacred mountain, Mt. Sinai, to receive the commands and promises of the Old Covenant

Galatians 3:19 The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator

3. Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant: standing between God and man to bring us a covenant we do not deserve

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

4. Job yearned for such a mediator to stand between Him and God and represent Him... Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant that saves us

Job 9:32-34 "[God] is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. ³³ If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, ³⁴ someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.

C. New Covenant

1. We have already had this unfolded to us in Hebrews 8, from the language of Jeremiah 31

Hebrews 8:8 "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

2. Remember the magnificent language of that New Covenant:

Hebrews 8:10-12 I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

3. Remember also the significance of the designator “New” from Jeremiah:

Hebrews 8:13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear

4. A covenant is a legally binding agreement between two or more persons
5. God has chosen to deal with the sinful human race through a series of covenants
6. Overall, though, when it comes to personal salvation, there has only ever been one covenant... the “eternal covenant” God the Father made with God the

Son... that God the Father would elect some from before the foundation of the world to be His own possession; that Christ would shed His blood for their sins; that the Holy Spirit would call them by sovereign grace into repentance and faith; and that, based on the perfect merits of Jesus Christ, they would be completely forgiven of their sins, made righteous in His sight by faith alone; that they would be adopted into His family

7. This is the ETERNAL COVENANT... the only one that has ever existed for the salvation of sinners

Hebrews 13:20 ...The God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...

D. Those Who Are Called

1. Christ is the mediator for “those who are called”
2. This “calling” is part of the eternal chain of salvation which begins with election from before the foundation of the world
3. We Christians are the “called”... called internally by the hidden and mysterious power of the Holy Spirit; called externally by the clear preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by a human messenger... we are the called
4. God has determined that those who are the “called” would absolutely receive the PROMISED ETERNAL INHERITANCE

E. The Promised Eternal Inheritance

1. Inheritance is the giving of what belongs to the one making the will
2. It involves the precious commodities of that person’s life... what they labored for and poured their life into; what is of immense worth and value
3. God has willed to give us an inheritance
 - a. From the beginning of creation, God gave to Adam and Eve the inheritance of the earth... through His lavish generosity, He bestowed the Garden of Eden as a starting place... and intended that man go forth and claim the rest of the world

“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; rule over it

- b. Tragically, in Adam, the human race sinned our inheritance away; we were immediately evicted from the Garden of Eden, and a cherubim was placed at the entrance to the Garden to keep us from going back and eating from the tree of life and living forever

- c. Later, God called Abraham to be His friend, and He made him a magnificent promise:

Genesis 13:14-17 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷ Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

- d. In the course of time, God redeemed a nation for Himself, the Jews, and brought them out of Egypt into the Promised Land; He spoke of it plainly as their "inheritance"

Leviticus 20:24 "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations.

- e. Tragically, however, AGAIN the people sinned and God evicted them from their inheritance

4. The inheritance spoken of here is a "PROMISED ETERNAL inheritance"

- a. "promised" = God has spoken a promise concerning it; His own glory is on the line; His truthfulness and character are in the balance; if God does not fulfill this promise, He has lied to us; BUT GOD CANNOT LIE
- b. "eternal" = it is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade; it will be ours forever and ever; no moth and rust can ever destroy; no thief can ever break in and steal; it will be glorious and infinitely satisfying forever
- c. "inheritance" = it will be bequeathed to us by the last will and testament of Jesus Christ

5. What IS this "promised eternal inheritance"?

- a. Harkening back to the promise God made to Abraham:

Romans 4:13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

- i) "heir of the world"... we will inherit the world itself

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

- ii) Deeper though, we stand to inherit the most valuable thing of all: God Himself

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

iii) So... it's BOTH possession AND relationships

Revelation 21:7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

6. How is it Christ's to Give??

a. God the Father has made Christ the "heir of all things"

Hebrews 1:2 his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been committed to me by my Father.

b. All things in heaven and on earth have been given to Christ

i) This is the significance of the scene in Revelation 5

ii) A scroll in the right hand of God who was seated on the throne of the universe

iii) An angel cries out saying

"Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

iv) No one is found worthy to take it or open its seals

v) But then Jesus Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the lamb slain for our sins comes forward

vi) He TAKES THE SCROLL... the universe is Christ's by right... and He can give it to whomever He chooses

c. We are HEIRS WITH HIM... He died, but He lives again to take what is rightfully His... so we are CO-HEIRS with Jesus

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

II. Christ's Death Required for Our Inheritance (vs. 15-17)

Hebrews 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

A. The First Covenant: Sinai

1. That covenant could NEVER give us the promised eternal inheritance
2. All it ever did was define sin, warn us against sin, and then condemn us for the sins we committed
3. We were in bondage to sin... unable to free ourselves
4. The Law stood opposed to us... we could NOT free ourselves from its condemnation

B. Sins Committed Under the First Covenant

1. Think of the Ten Commandments... we have violated every one
2. Christ told us that it's not enough not to murder... if we are angry in our hearts toward another, we are in danger of the fire of hell
3. Christ told us it's not enough not to commit adultery... if we look lustfully at another person, we have already committed adultery in our hearts
4. The Ten Commandments forbade coveting... who of us can say we have never coveted anything that belonged to our neighbor
5. Jesus summed up the Law... the First Covenant:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength

Love your neighbor as yourself

6. We are GUILTY!!! These sins stood opposed to us and prevented us from receiving any kind of inheritance at all
7. If a wealthy man has a wicked son; and that son commits murder; if the son is arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison without parole, even if the wealthy man dies and desires to leave his entire estate to his son, the son will not be free to live in that mansion, or drive that Mercedes, or fly in that private jet
8. How much more were we UNABLE to receive any inheritance at all because the sins we committed under the Law of Moses stood against us and threatened us with ETERNITY IN HELL
9. Having violated the Law of God, we stood under its DEATH PENALTY

Ezekiel 18:4 the soul who sins shall die.

C. Christ's Death a Ransom

1. The author uses a powerful concept... a “ransom to set us free”
2. The word is sometimes translated “redemption”... a central concept in the Bible
3. It means the deliverance of the transgressors from all the evils that their sins had subjected to... the deliverance worked by the payment of a PRICE
4. Christ’s death here is seen to be a necessary part of our ransom... it was the price that justice demanded in order for us to be freed from the death penalty that hung over our heads

D. The Logic of the Last Will and Testament

Hebrews 9:16-17 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, ¹⁷ because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living.

1. The Author now reaches for a concept familiar to all of us... the idea of a WILL
 - a. Key idea: is the author speaking of a WILL or a COVENANT?
 - b. Well, from verses 16-17 it seems definitely to be a WILL, but from verses 18-22, the language is perfectly suited to the COVENANT made under Moses
 - c. The central idea of the WILL has to do with the DEATH of the man who made it
 - d. The central idea of the COVENANT has to do with the BLOOD needed to be shed to ratify the covenant
 - e. BOTH are really in view here!!
 - f. But first the WILL
2. A “Last will and testament” is the legal determination of a man’s intentions concerning what he will have done with his possessions after his death
3. It is the will of a DEAD PERSON concerning his valuables
4. Necessary in every generation and every nation: without it you root up the foundation of industry and diligence in the world; who would ever labor for material benefits if he may not dispose of them as he sees fit unto his loved ones?
5. Central to the author’s point here: the DEATH of the one who makes the will is essential to the whole thing

6. The WILL is “in force” or legally binding only once the death of the one who made it can be proved
7. Author’s point: only by the DEATH of Jesus Christ can we come into our inheritance

E. The “Last Will and Testament” concept is an ANALOGY

1. Like all spiritual analogies, it is not a PERFECT one... there are some significant disconnects with the reality in Christ
2. Four points of contact
 - a. The will is enacted only on the DEATH of the one who made the will

So, Christ DIED that we might receive the promised eternal inheritance

- b. The will disperses GOODS to the heirs...

So, by Christ’s death, we come into our inheritance: a new universe in which to live, and an eternal relationship with the King—Almighty God

- c. The will LEGALLY disperses these goods to the heirs... they are really legally bestowed to the heirs
- d. The will chooses the TIME and CIRCUMSTANCES by which the heirs will come into their full inheritance
 - i) When the heirs are still minors... children... they do not receive their inheritance until a certain time
 - ii) So we are the heirs, called by His grace, and we have not fully come into our inheritance
 - iii) Instead, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our final inheritance

Ephesians 1:13-14 Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

3. Some major differences too
 - a. In an ordinary will, when the one who made it is DEAD, he ceases to have an possession of the inheritance... the mansion and the estate passes on to the heirs; the former owner is removed simply because he is now DEAD

BUT CHRIST rose from the dead on the third day, and everything He bequeaths to us HE STILL OWNS... these are all STILL HIS THINGS... the universe is His, and so also the relationship to the FATHER

So we are called

Romans 8:17 heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

By giving to us His inheritance, He doesn't impoverish Himself of a single benefit of them... they are all STILL HIS

- b. In human wills, the estate has to be DIVIDED UP; it is obvious that no two heirs can share a priceless heirloom of jewelry, or equal ownership of a mansion, or equal ownership of an Italian sports car

BUT in our case, THE WHOLE INHERITANCE is enjoyed BY EVERY HEIR

God Himself is the ultimate inheritance, and every heir receives equal access to and enjoyment of that infinite inheritance

III. Christ's Blood Required for Our Forgiveness (vs. 18-22)

Hebrews 9:18-22 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. ¹⁹ When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. ²⁰ He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." ²¹ In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. ²² In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

A. The First Covenant Required Blood

1. The blood of animals was foundation to the ratification of the Sinai Covenant
2. The bulk of Exodus 25-40 is the establishment of the animals sacrificial system in the Tabernacle
3. The whole book of Leviticus lays out clear prescriptions for animal sacrifice
4. The blood of the covenant was used for two symbolic purposes
 - a. Purification
 - b. Pardon

B. Addressing Some Difficulties (John Owen)

1. The blood which Moses took was the blood of calves and goats; but there is no mention of goats or their blood in the story of Moses
2. He took water, scarlet wool, and hyssop to sprinkle the blood; but there is no mention of those in the story of Moses
3. It says he sprinkled the BOOK in particular, and this is nowhere alluded to in the text
4. It says that he sprinkled ALL THE PEOPLE, but there is no way that every single person could be sprinkled
5. It says that he spoke the words, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God commanded you to keep”... but these are not the exact words Moses spoke
6. It says that Moses sprinkled the tabernacle with blood and all the vessels of it, but at the time of the making and solemn confirmation of the covenant, the tabernacle was not yet erected, nor any of its vessels crafted

C. Answering These Difficulties

1. First, it is perfectly clear to us that the Book of Hebrews is inerrant Scripture, perfect in every way... by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this book has been completely guarded from error; it clearly displays the greatness of Christ and is indispensable in describing 1) His ministry as our High Priest; 2) the symbolic nature of the Old Covenant generally, and its animal sacrificial system in particular
2. Secondly, it is also clear that the Book of Hebrews, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, is able to give us information about the Old Covenant era that is NOT FOUND in the pages of the Old Testament itself; this does happen from time to time; for example, James 5 tells us that Elijah prayed earnestly that it would not rain... this prayer is NOWHERE RECORDED in the pages of the Old Testament; thus a New Testament writer can tell us new things that we would have no other way of knowing; thus, when Hebrews 9 tells us ADDITIONAL INFORMATION about the sprinkling with the blood, we must just accept it as true... not a contradiction, but extra information

D. Deeper Issue: Old Covenant Established by Blood... New Covenant Also by Blood

1. The Author talks about the establishment of the Old Covenant in Moses' day
2. He discusses the sprinkling of the blood on
 - a. The scroll
 - b. All the people

c. The Tabernacle

d. Everything used in its ceremonies

3. The idea is that everything connected with humanity is **DEFILED** and needs **CLEANSING**
4. Secondly, that the blood of the sacrifices is sufficient to **CLEANSE** all these defiled things **AND** to **ESTABLISH** a binding covenant with the people
5. The “blood of the covenant” is a binding oath between the two parties
6. **SO ALSO** the Blood of Jesus is required to establish the New Covenant
7. In this way, it is more than merely a “last will and testament”... for no blood is required for that, merely the **DEATH** of the one who makes it
8. But this covenant requires **BLOOD**
9. Why???

E. Final Principle: Without the Shedding of Blood, There is No Forgiveness

1. This is a lasting spiritual principle... blood must be shed for the sinner to be forgiven
2. From the very beginning of time, God linked together sin and death
3. Therefore, when Adam and Eve sinned, they needed to be clothed because they were naked
4. God shed the blood of an animal to clothe them... in this way He immediately linked the shedding of blood with forgiveness
5. At the Passover, God linked blood with deliverance from death
6. With the Law of Moses, God clearly established blood as given for atonement

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

7. The author to the Hebrews is clearly saying that the pouring out of the blood of the sacrifice is **ESSENTIAL TO OUR FORGIVENESS**
8. The idea of blood is not merely life, but life poured out unto death
9. Jesus Christ paid the blood penalty for our sins

10. Because of His blood, we have total forgiveness of sins, and are therefore able to become heirs with Him of the New Heavens and New Earth

IV. Applications

A. Come to Christ

B. Understand this text

1. Without the death of Christ, NO INHERITANCE
2. Without the blood of Christ, NO FORGIVENESS

Making it positive

3. Because of the death of Christ, you have a STUNNING INHERITANCE
4. Because Christ shed His blood, you have TOTAL FORGIVENESS

C. Understand Your Inheritance... and Live Accordingly

1. What is your inheritance? God Himself; a place at God's table; a place in God's city; a portion of God's world
2. How shall we then live?
 - a. As people free from present concerns
 - b. As people of DEEP THANKSGIVING
 - c. As people free to serve others and advance His kingdom
 - d. As people not threatened if there are more and more HEIRS
 - e. John Newton's illustration

Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!"