

Communion weekend- The Grace of God's Glorious Inheritance

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[0 : 00] 11, and the second half of verse 16, therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.

On Friday evening, we considered, albeit briefly, the restoring grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He graciously, mercifully, lovingly, tenderly, if publicly, restores Peter, who had denied him three times.

And he restores him not only to his fellowship, but also to his service. The restoring grace of God is amazing.

It transcends all that we could imagine. The devil is always wanting to tell us that we're a waste of space, that what we have done and what we have thought make us unfit for God.

[1 : 10] And all the while in His Word, God is saying, Do you not know that I'm rich in mercy, I'm full of grace? You can come to me in your brokenness and failure and know that I will readily restore you.

Last evening, we considered the tender sympathy of Jesus Christ in becoming like us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, taking to Himself that sanctified humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

He understands from within what it is to be human. He knows our humanity not by observation, but by experience.

And being human, He was subject to temptation. There was no landing ground for Satan to probe in his life. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.

But He nonetheless experienced the pain of holy humanity being confronted with vile temptations. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 4 puts it daringly when he says, He was tempted in every respect as we are.

[2 : 24] I almost don't want to think about that. In every respect, yes. And He is able because He never gave in for one moment mentally, far less personally and physically.

He never succumbed to any temptation to lie, to deceive, to cheat, to steal, to do anything. Because He never succumbed, He is able to help us and to bring to us the tender help of holy, sanctified humanity.

And this morning, we considered a little the costly humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He was willing out of love for us to lay down His life for us.

He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for the many. And that took Him to Calvary's cross. He was willing to go to the uttermost, to experience the abandonment of God, that we might never be eternally shut out from God, but restored to God.

And this evening, by way, I hope, of rounding off the weekend, I want to think with you about the glorious inheritance that God has prepared and provided for those who are united to Jesus Christ.

[3 : 44] The coming of Christ, His joining humanity to His deity, taking that union to the cross, was all for a purpose, not simply to rescue us from a lost eternity, but ultimately to bring us into the nearer presence of God.

And so the writer says, Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city. If I were to ask you the question tonight, what do you think is the greatest hindrance in your Christian life?

If you are a Christian, what do you think is the greatest hindrance in your life, the greatest hindrance to your growth as a Christian, to your development, to your maturity, to your growing up in Christ?

What's the greatest hindrance you consider to be in your life? John Owen, the great 17th century English Puritan, wrote words that I've never forgotten since I first encountered them. He said, Let me say it again.

[5 : 08] Our greatest hindrance in the Christian life is not our lack of effort, but our lack of acquaintedness with our privileges. Owen was persuaded that the reason why Christians struggle as they do, as we do, and why we are often so sluggish in our Christian walk, and why our obedience can be so halting and inconstant, is because we don't really grasp the richness of what God has done for us in Christ.

If you were to see Bill Gates, still I think one of the two richest men in the world, walking through the streets of Aberdeen in rags, begging for crumbs of food and a little change, you would think, What's wrong with the man?

He's got 50 billion dollars in his account. What's he doing? Living like this. That's what Owen is saying.

Our greatest hindrance in the Christian life is not our lack of effort, it's a lack of acquaintedness with our privileges, our lack of a grasp of all that God has given to us in Jesus Christ.

Because in giving us his Son, Jesus Christ, God has given us everything. He's got nothing more to give us. When someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ, they receive everything God has to give.

[6 : 36] He doesn't give them a little bit here, and then if they go on a little bit more, a little bit more of that. No, he gives them everything at once, simultaneously, synchronously.

We receive all things. Why? Because we receive Jesus Christ. And in Jesus Christ, there is fullness. Every blessing that God has to give us in this life and in the life to come is found in Jesus Christ.

That's why we don't look for second blessings, third blessings, fourth blessings. We look to explore the depths, the infinite depths that are the God-man Jesus Christ.

Soren Kierkegaard, the very renowned 19th century Danish philosopher, theologian, once wrote that life is 70,000 fathoms deep.

Now, I'm a decent swimmer, and with a decent dive, I can probably get to about six fathoms.

Kierkegaard says life is 70,000 fathoms deep.

[7 : 41] He wanted to make the point that life is rich. It's profound, far profounder than we can imagine. But Jesus Christ isn't 70,000 fathoms deep.

He is 70,000 fathoms to the nth power deep. There is an infinitude in Jesus Christ. And one of the concerns of the writer to the Hebrews is to help these struggling believers a little to grasp something of the grandeur, the depth, the length, the breadth, and the height of what God has given to them and prepared for them through Jesus Christ.

And so he writes, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Two things I want to consider with you tonight.

Two things that the writer to the Hebrews wanted to impress on the struggling, fearful, in danger of turning back from Christ, Christian believers.

He wants them, first of all, to know what God thinks of those who persevere in their faith. And secondly, he wants them to know what God has prepared for those who persevere in their faith.

[9 : 10] Number one, he wants them to know what God thinks of those who persevere in their faith. And then number two, he wants them to know what God has prepared for those who persevere in their faith.

So number one, God is not ashamed to be called their God. He's thinking of these heroes of the faith he's been mentioning from Abel through Noah onto Abraham, and he'll go on to Moses and others besides.

And he says, you know, God is not ashamed to be called their God. Now that's remarkable in itself, isn't it? These were men who had failed God. Think of Abraham. He failed God dismally at times, almost placing his wife Sarah in the most morally of compromising situations to save his own skin. Moses was a man who committed murder. And you think, well, did God not have every cause to be ashamed to be called their God?

No. Well, the reason, of course, is because these men and women had fled to God for mercy. They had embraced the God who had reached down to them in covenant love.

[10 : 47] But the point I want to note with you this evening is the very interesting use of language that the writer has here. God is not ashamed to be called their God.

Now, many commentators think this is a figure of speech called litotes. That is to say, what he's really saying is God is proud to be called their God.

And that's possible, although I'm not sure there's much in the way of litotes in the Greek language. It's possible that could be the meaning God is proud to be called your God.

But actually, I think we should read it as we find it. God is not ashamed to be called their God. You see, these Hebrew Christians were living in a world that looked down on them, that despised them, that thought they were the offscouring of the world.

They're followers of a Jesus who was crucified. And crucifixion was the unthinkable execration for a Jew. They're followers of Jesus, of Nazareth.

[11 : 51] They're to be pitied. They're to be excluded. They're to be marginalized. And the Roman Empire, beyond the Jewish context, looked on Christians with utter disdain.

Probably around this time, Nero was the emperor in Rome. And often what he would do would be to find Christians, tie them to posts, cover them in tar, and set them ablaze to light the thoroughfares of Rome.

And what the writer is saying, this world is ashamed of you, but God is not ashamed of you. You belong to His Son, Jesus Christ. And because of that, you are precious in His sight.

It's the same idea that Paul quotes in Romans chapter 1, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation.

Now, he could be saying, I'm proud of the gospel. But I think actually, he's saying exactly this. I'm not ashamed of it. The world's ashamed of the gospel. A crucified redeemer?

[13 : 08] Get a life. Get a life. God become man? A virgin birth? A bodily resurrection? Pull the other one.

The world was ashamed of the gospel. To the Jews, it was a stumbling block. To the Greek world, it was folly, foolishness. And Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

Why? It's the power of God for salvation. Why would I be ashamed of something which has brought me the salvation of God? And a little earlier in chapter 2 in Hebrews, the writer writes something that I find, if I'm honest, difficult to read at times without being deeply moved.

In verse 11 of chapter 2, he writes, For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are one, that is why he, Jesus, is not ashamed to call them his brothers.

You see the pastoral note being struck here. These Hebrew Christians were marginalized. They were excluded.

[14 : 28] No one wanted to have anything to do with them. People were ashamed to be seen with them. And the writer says, Do you know what your Savior, Jesus Christ, says?

He's not ashamed to call you his brothers. I think that's one of the most remarkable verses in the whole Bible. The Son of God, before whom all heaven bows in breathless wonder and adoration, he is not ashamed to call the likes of me who have failed him, grieved him, dishonored him, not ashamed to call me his brother.

Do you see how rich pastoral encouragement theology gives? Our unacquaintedness with our privileges. We need to be acquainted with this.

That's what God thinks of me. That's what Jesus Christ thinks of me. Let the world think what it will. Let the world think what it will.

God is not ashamed to be called their God. And that's why we need day after day to reacquaint ourselves with our privileges.

[15 : 50] And the New Testament is replete with the privileges that belong to those who have come to Jesus Christ and been united to Him. We're told, for example, in Romans 8, 17, that we are joint heirs together with Jesus Christ of the glory of God.

Now, that's enough to spend a lifetime exploring, isn't it? Joint heirs together with Jesus Christ of the glory of God. Heirs together with Christ.

Not under heirs, but joint heirs. And I don't know how you expound that. I must have read that verse, Romans 8, 17, thousands of times, thousands of times.

I've got no idea what that means. I really don't. Joint heirs with Jesus Christ of the glory of God. It's unexpoundable.

But that's our inheritance. That's our privilege. That's what the gospel has brought us to. It's lifted us out of the mire and set our feet, Psalm 40, on a solid rock.

[17:04] It's enthroned as we'll be seated with Christ in the midst of the throne of God. And you think, these are Hebrew Christians and they're suffering and they're persecuted and they're reading this or they're hearing this and they're thinking, is this right?

Is this true of us? And you see what he's doing? He's taking the theology of truth and using it to minister pastoral encouragement and rich-hearted blessing to these believers.

It must be 40 years ago, almost, when I read a little book. I can think of the title. Add to Your Faith. And it had a line in it. It's the only line I remember. It's a great little book, but all I remember is this line. When it dawns on a young Christian that doctrine matters for life, it's a significant moment in their life.

You see, doctrine isn't simply there to be confessed and acknowledged and recited, though we should do that. We should regularly confess our faith and declare our heart and mind, soul and spirit confidence in the truths of God and His Word.

[18:34] But the truth is not there simply to be acknowledged and subscribed. It's there to be lived. It's there to be lived. That's why, if we had time, we could see that the way the New Testament principally seeks to encourage God's people is not by giving them exhortations.

Come on now, snap out of it. You can do better than that. The great way the New Testament, in fact, the whole Bible, seeks to lift up the hearts of God's people is to set before them the riches of their privileges in Jesus Christ.

Let me just mention one simple example, the preface to the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20. Earlier in chapter 19 of Exodus, the Lord says through Moses how he had come to this people and carried them on eagles' wings.

And then you have the beginning of chapter 20. I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Therefore, you shall have no other gods before me. It doesn't just start by saying, here are the commandments, you shall have no other gods before me. Don't make a graven image, don't take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. Honor the Sabbath day to keep it holy and so on.

[19:55] How does he begin? I am the Lord, your God. How did he become their God? By God's grace and mercy. By God stooping down to them in their lostness.

And I delivered you from the house of bondage. And that's the way the writer to the Hebrews is operating here. He's saying, God is not ashamed to be called your God.

You matter to him. You are his blood redeemed sons and daughters. He has given his son for you. Do you think having given his son for you he would now be ashamed of you?

And so he wants them to know what God thinks of those who persevere in their faith because the heroes of the faith throughout chapter 11 is not simply that they believed God, they did that, but that translated into action.

So when God says to Abraham, I want you to go, Abraham actually doesn't say go where, he just goes. You think, well that's pretty foolish. But it was enough for Abraham that God commanded it.

[21:10] God said, go, so I'm going to go. And the writer is saying, true faith perseveres, true faith doesn't turn back and see what God says of men and women who go on.

I think I could live the rest of my days in the good of this. He's not ashamed to be called my God. But then secondly, he wants them to know what God has prepared for those who persevere in their faith.

God is not ashamed to be called their God for, notice the connective here, for he has prepared for them a city. He has prepared for them a city.

He's spoken about that city back in verse 10 about Abraham who was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

Abraham didn't possess anything except a little plot of land, burial plot for his wife, Sarah, cave of Machpelah. But he understood that God was about something grander.

[22:28] You know, people focus far too much on the land of Israel or Palestine as if a little bit of Middle East real estate was what God was about. Paul understood Romans 4 is at verse 12, Abraham was the heir of the cosmos.

It wasn't simply heir of just a land. The land was typical of a cosmos, of a new creation. He was looking forward to a city with foundations whose architect and builder was God.

And so, the writer is saying, do you see what God has prepared for those who persevere in their faith? He has prepared a city. A city with foundations.

Not an evanescent city here today and gone tomorrow. But a city that will last. I wonder if you know the great Reformation hymn by Martin Luther, a safe stronghold or a mighty fortress as our God. The closing lines of the final verse read, and though they take our life, goods on our children, wife, yet as their profit small, these things shall vanish all, the city of God remaineth.

[23 : 55] You can take my life, but you can't take from me the city. The city of God. The city that He has prepared.

The writer to the Revelation, the Apostle John, so marvelously in his visions, depicts that city in all its spectacular grandeur.

And the whole point in Revelation is not to say these are the physical dimensions of the city, how do you measure the infinite? But to say, do you see what a glorious prospect and inheritance God has prepared for His people?

He's prepared the city. We have an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away, 1 Peter chapter 1. We have an inheritance that will not die with us at death.

You see, the writer understands that the best thing he can do for these Hebrew Christians who are struggling and suffering and considering turning back from Christ, the best thing he can do is to say to them, behold your God and behold the privileges that your God has given to you in your union with Jesus Christ.

[25 : 26] You see, not only has the Lord Jesus Christ come to prepare for us a city, he has come to prepare us for that city.

You'll know these words in John 14, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me. He has prepared a city for us and prepared us for that city.

There is a city bright closed at its gates to sin. Nothing that defileth, nothing that defileth can enter in. How do I get to enter that city whose builder and maker is God?

By coming to Jesus Christ and to be washed clean, to be plunged into that fountain that God has filled for sin and uncleanness in the shed blood of His Son.

We have no fitness in ourselves to enter that city, but Jesus Christ and faith in Jesus Christ fits us for that city.

[26 : 40] Our greatest hindrance in the Christian life is not our lack of effort. No doubt we lack effort. I'm amazed at times at how sluggish and slow I can be to rise to the calling that every Christian has to live lives worthy of God.

That our great hindrance is not our lack of effort, it's our lack of acquaintedness with our privileges. Some years ago a very dear friend of mine, some of you will know his name, Eric Alexander, told me of an occasion when he had gone to London as a young Christian and had gone to hear Martin Lloyd Jones preach at Westminster Chapel.

Now some of you who are younger will be thinking, who is Martin Lloyd Jones? Well he was probably the greatest preacher of the 20th century, had a remarkable ministry first in Sandfields Aberavan at the end of the 1920s.

He was assistant physician to the king's physician at the time and he gave it up to be a preacher of the gospel. And then he went to Westminster Chapel in the late 1930s and for the next 30 years he had the most remarkable ministry.

And they went to hear the doctor, Eric Alexander and his friend, and at the end of the service, Eric's friend who knew Dr. Lloyd Jones said, well wait and talk to the doctor.

[28 : 09] And there was a queue of people, I mean there would be seven, eight hundred in the evening service at Westminster Chapel at least, and quite a number would be queuing up to talk to the doctor to thank him and maybe to ask him something or to bring greetings.

So they waited and waited and the queue got smaller and smaller. And Eric said to me, Ian, as we got nearer the doctor, I heard that he said the same thing to every person.

He just kept saying, go on, go on. And I thought to myself, is that all the great man's got to say? Here are these people, they've come to worship and they want to thank him for ministering God's word, they're looking for some words of encouragement, and all he says is two words, go on.

And then Eric said, you know, Ian, it suddenly dawned on me, what better thing could he say? he's saying, go on.

That's what God is saying to us through his word tonight, go on. Don't turn back. Don't abandon the Savior. See what God thinks of those who go on.

[29 : 29] See what God has prepared for those who go on. Maybe you're here tonight and life is hard for you. Joan and I were just talking in the car earlier today of people we know and life has been very hard to them.

They've known losses and unexpected dark sore providences and that could at times be overwhelming. And Satan comes and he comes into the folds of our experience and he says, you know, it's not worth a candle.

Just turn away. Just go back. My friends, go on. Go on. Be cheered by this.

Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call you his brothers. others. And be encouraged by this, that God is prepared for all who go on a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Go on. What a glorious inheritance God has provided in his Son, Jesus Christ. And here's the last thing I simply want to say.

[30 : 50] Jesus Christ himself is the inheritance. He is the gospel. He doesn't give us blessings, he gives us himself.

And that is why the most common description of a Christian in the New Testament is that they are in Christ.

In Christ, faith takes you into Christ. He himself is the temple of God. He is the city with foundations. He is the one in whom we are blessed with every spiritual blessing.

Jesus Christ is the gospel. Let us pray. Father, we thank you so much that you stooped down to where we are, that you might lift us up to where you are.

Guarant us the grace, we pray, to go on, perhaps bruised and battered, but one day to leave all of that behind and to enter your glory and to be seated with Jesus Christ on the throne of God.

[32 : 12] forgive us, Lord, that we lose sight of the vastness of our privileges. Help us, Holy Spirit, not just to see what our privileges are, but even now to taste something of their blessedness.

And we ask it in our Savior's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.