

Our Incredible, Immortal Inheritance

From Groaning Into Glory Part I
Romans 8:16-18

Introduction

“Berti” Adams was seventy-one years old when she died in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Easter Sunday, 1976. The coroner’s report read, “Cause of Death –Malnutrition”. One police officer, who inspected her apartment, declared it to be a veritable pig pen. There was trash, stench . . . old clothing . . . not much furniture. Berti had begged for food at her neighbors’ back doors and had purchased all her clothing from the Salvation Army. From all outward appearances, she was a penniless, forgotten, unwanted woman by a family who no longer cared.

As officials sifted through her pile of rubble and belongings to find identification and connection to her family, two keys were found. These two keys led officials to safety deposit boxes at two different local banks. What they found was almost unbelievable.

At one bank, they found in her container, more than seven hundred AT&T stock certificates, financial securities and bonds, not to mention a stack of cash amounting to nearly 200,000 dollars. That is just what you need to finish Christmas shopping, right?!

At the second bank, they opened her container and discovered no certificates or bonds – just stacks of cash – 600,000 dollars to be exact. CBS radio reported that the estate would be inherited by a distant niece and nephew, neither of whom dreamed they would be the heirs of a million dollar windfall.¹

Can you imagine the phone call to that nephew?

“Your Aunt Berti’s died . . . the one who never took a bath . . . the one you hoped wouldn’t show up at Thanksgiving . . . she died and left you and your sister all her wealth.”

“Her what?”

“Her wealth . . . we have completed our investigation and she has left you and your sister an inheritance of just over one million dollars.”

Misers may be strange people, but they make wonderful ancestors! Imagine being an heir or an heiress to a fortune!

The Believer’s Incredible, Immortal Inheritance

The apostle Paul reveals the believer to be that and more. He announces in Romans, chapter 8, verses 16 through 17a,

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, . . .

Imagine that – we are the recipients of the inheritance of God through Christ! Christ died, leaving us in His will, but then rose again, able now, to deliver the benefits of His family’s inheritance to all who believe.

And just what have we inherited?

The believer inherits everything of God

1. First, believers inherit everything of God.

In verse 17a, Paul writes that we are,

. . . heirs of God . . .

This Greek expression can be understood in two ways – as a subjective genitive or an objective genitive. So:

- If Paul is using a subjective genitive, he is saying that we are, “heirs of God,” meaning, “we inherit everything that God owns” – which is a lot!
- If Paul, in saying that we are “heirs of God,” is placing God as the object of the genitive, then the meaning is, “we inherit God” – that is, our inheritance is God Himself!

The truth is, both interpretations would be correct, thus we really do not have to decide. Both interpretations are substantiated in scripture.

Boaz, for example, transferred the benefits of his family’s wealth to Ruth when they were married. As a result, she no longer went out to the fields to glean, but instead owned the fields and all their produce. In the same way, the benefits of the wealth of God’s family are transferred to us, the bride of Christ.

The value of an inheritance is determined by the worth of the one who bequeaths it, right?

If you were my heir, and I died tomorrow, you would inherit a mortgage, a stack of bills, and a pickup truck with a leaky radiator, as well as three thousand books. It is all yours . . . enjoy!

One writer wrote tongue-in-cheek, “I owe much, I possess nothing . . . I give the rest to the poor.”

Consider this – God owes nothing, He possesses everything, and He gives everything away to His children! The Christian’s inheritance comes from God, the Creator of everything, the Sustainer of everything, and the Owner of everything.

That is the subjective side of this inheritance; there is the objective side as well. God is not only the source and the supplier of the inheritance, He is the prize of the inheritance.

John, on the island of Patmos, as recorded in Revelation, chapter 21, verse 3,

. . . heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,”

David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 73, verses 25 through 26,

Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

We not only inherit everything that belongs to God, but we inherit God!

David said, in Psalm, chapter 16, verse 11b,

. . . in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand are pleasures forever.

Now, Paul also writes, in verse 17a, that we are,

. . . fellow heirs with Christ . . .

This does not make us little christs or little gods who are equal in deity to Christ; equally divine. He simply means “that we will receive, by our joint inheritance with the Son of God, all the blessings and grandeur that the Father has given the Son.”ⁱⁱ

This is a wonderful thought, which is far different from the Roman idea of adoption and inheritance.

In the Roman family, the adopted son received the family fortune – all of it! It could be shared with siblings, but the Roman father had the right to decide. Even if the other children received some of the inheritance, it would be divided.

In the Jewish family, the first born received a double portion, while siblings received a lesser portion by splitting the remainder.

In our own culture, the inheritance would probably be shared equally with all the children.

That is not the idea in this verse, however. Through the infinite power and lavish grace of Christ, every believer gets it all! You do not inherit one-tenth or one-millionth of heaven, you inherit it all – heaven belongs to you! You do not inherit a fraction of God – God belongs entirely to you! You do not inherit a portion of Christ’s rule and reign – you inherit it all!

When Paul announced that we are the “heirs of God,” he meant that we inherit not only the things of God, but God Himself.

Let me give you four more things the believer inherits as the heir of God and co-heir with Christ.

The believer inherits heaven

2. I mentioned it earlier, but let me say again, the believer inherits heaven.

You might say, “Yeah I already know that – I’m going to heaven.”

What does that mean? If I asked you to write one paragraph on what you will do in heaven, what would you say? “I will:

- worship God;
- sing;

- play harps and fly around;
- talk to Abraham and Isaac;
- ask Jesus all those tough questions;
- spend time with all our relatives and friends.”

How long are you going to talk to your relatives? How long are you going to talk to Abraham? How long are you going to sing? What if you are not musically inclined? I would prefer that you not sing in heaven!

The truth is, we hardly know anything about heaven.

Heaven is so indescribable that most of what we know about heaven is what is not there – no pain, no death, no mourning, no sadness, no separation. These are all negative ideas, no doubt because we cannot fully comprehend the positive things [that will occur throughout eternity].ⁱⁱⁱ

That is why Paul, who had been given a personal vision of heaven, wrote to the Corinthian believers, in I Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 9,

. . . Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

In other words, you will not be able to comprehend it; it is impossible to fully describe. We talk about Christmas gifts; Christmas surprises – heaven is one huge surprise!

I will tell you though, there are several myths about heaven. One is that there is no more time.

A popular hymn speaks of that moment “when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more.”

Certainly the heavenly city receives its light from the glory of God (Revelation 21:23), and will never experience darkness or night (“. . . there will be no night there . . .” Revelation 21:25). However, this does not mean that heaven will be a place where time is unknown, or where things will not be done one after another. In fact, the events of heaven recorded in the book of Revelation require a sequence of events – one happening after another.

We read, in Revelation, chapter 21, verses 24 and 26, that “. . . the kings of the earth . . . will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it [heaven].” That indicates events and pageantry like we have never seen.

Furthermore, we are told, in Revelation, chapter 22, verse 2, that the tree of life has “twelve kinds of

fruit, yielding its fruit every month”. There are monthly cycles without the moon, where the tree of life will produce a crop of twelve fruits each month, which implies the existence of a year.

The idea of spending eternity sitting around talking contradicts the idea of eternal service to God. What we do know from Revelation is that music is prominent! We can only imagine that both musical and artistic activities will be accomplished and performed to the glory of God.

Leadership and responsibility exists in the new heaven and earth, as seen in John’s description of nations and rulers walking in the light of the Lamb in Revelation, chapter 21.

Wayne Grudem, a wonderful theologian, writes, *People may [serve God] by working at the whole range of investigation and development of the creation by technological, creative, and inventive means, thus exhibiting the full extent of the excellent creation in the image of God. Moreover, since God is infinite and we can never exhaust his greatness, and since we are finite creatures who will never equal God’s knowledge, we may expect that for all eternity we will be able to go on learning more about God and about his relationship to his creation. In this way we will actually be able to continually increase in the knowledge of God.*^{iv}

Let me say it again – as it relates to your incredible, immortal inheritance of heaven,

. . . Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

The believer inherits the throne and rule of Christ

3. Thirdly, the believer is heir to the throne and rule of Christ.

Paul reminded Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 12, that they would reign with Christ.

What does that mean? While we are not given a full explanation, we are told that our authority will extend to exacting judgment along with Christ. It is an amazing thought that the believer will actually be given the right and ability to judge at the end of the world, but that is exactly what the Bible teaches.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in I Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 2 and 3,

... do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we will judge angels? ...

Peter wrote, in II Peter, chapter 2, verse 4, that rebellious angels have been committed to “pits of darkness reserved for judgment”.

Jude adds, in Jude, verse 6, that rebellious angels or demons have been kept by God “for the judgments of the great day”.

We are not told how, but we are told that we will be involved with Christ, seated on thrones as judges, which is implied in Revelation 20. We will be judging the unbelieving world and pronouncing judgment on the evil of the demonic world – one demon at a time.

We will judge the world; we will judge the angelic world, both demonic and holy.

Can you imagine that righteous day? Can you imagine that awesome responsibility and high calling to support, defend, and extend the righteous judgment of God upon all of humanity who refused to acknowledge their creator God?

You, the heir of God, will speak for the justice and holiness of God!

So, we will inherit heaven and the throne of rule and responsibility with Christ. We do not have time to delve into the following points, but let me at least give them to you.

The believer inherits a transformed earth

4. The believer also inherits a transformed earth, as we are told in I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 19 through 22.

We, as believers, will inherit a new heaven and a new earth, according to Revelation, chapter 21. We will inherit paradise – the earth as God first created it for Adam and Eve. And, the beauty of God’s creation will be ours to discover and explore; to travel through and learn from; to enjoy as a vehicle to connect with the creative genius of our great God.

Jesus Christ gave His followers the amazing promise in His very first recorded sermon, in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5, that they would inherit the earth.

Imagine that – we get earth too!

C. S. Lewis wrote, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither heaven or earth.”^v

I do not know how much real estate you own now, but it is nowhere near what it will be one day. In fact, why are you sweating so much to get more right now, when one day, you will have the title deed to the entire planet.

The believer inherits temporary trouble

5. Believers have inherited temporary trouble as well.

Look at Romans, chapter 8, verse 17b.

... if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

The word “if” can and should be translated “since”. Suffering in some way is a fact!

Paul says that we will also inherit temporary tribulation. Jesus said, as well, in John, chapter 16, verse 33b,

... In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

That is the kind of perspective that Paul seems to move to in the very next verse, verse 18, of Romans 8. In other words, in light of your inheritance, consider this . . .!

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

The word “compared” is a Greek word that refers to a system of measuring with weights and a scale. Paul said, “put all my troubles and trials on one side of the scale” – and Paul knew trouble, didn’t he? He was beaten, shipwrecked, abandoned, mistreated, misrepresented, criticized, maligned, abused, stoned to death, imprisoned . . . you name it. So, put all of that on one side of the scale and it is a feather compared to the coming glory!

Paul says, in other words, “I am convinced that no matter how painful and difficult life gets, it can’t compare to the glory that’s coming.”

Ray Stedman said it this way, “The hurts are gonna be followed by the hallelujahs.”

You are an heir of God.

Conclusion

A couple of days ago, I heard a Bible teacher tell a story. I wanted to tell it to you because I thought it was so funny and poignant.

A young man was visiting Amish country in Pennsylvania. He happened to see an old Amish

couple coming out of a store and walking to get into their horse drawn cart.

He ran over and said, "Hello. I'm sorry to bother you, but I've always wanted to meet an Amish couple."

The woman elbowed her husband in the ribs and said, "What did he say?"

The farmer looked at his hard of hearing wife and said, "He wanted to meet us."

The young man went on, "So, you farm nearby?"

"Yes," the man politely said, "we've been farming here all our lives."

His wife ribbed him again and said, "What did he say?"

"He wanted to know if we had a farm around here."

The young man asked, "Do you have children living nearby?"

"Yes," the man said, "We have seven sons and three daughters living near us . . . some of them living with us."

Before he could finish, his wife interrupted, "What'd he say?"

"He wanted to know if we had family around here."

Then the young man confessed, "I actually dated an Amish girl once, but she was so bossy and wanted to tell me what to do and never would let me make up my own mind."

Again, the wife interrupted and said, "What's he saying now?"

"He said he thinks he knows you."

I am going to have to work real hard to make that story fit into my sermon . . . but it was worth it.

What do you know, what do you think you know about your benefactor? What are you expecting out of your inheritance?

Can we even begin to grasp one corner of the tapestry of our eternal experience? It is an ocean of truth and we, like little children, stand at the edge with our little bucket and our little shovel in hopes of capturing some of it.

We will not capture it. For the most part, we will have to wait. In the meantime, however, oh that we would develop Paul's heavenly perspective regarding life on earth. Our temporary trouble cannot compare to our eternal treasure.

John Piper commented on this text,

Picture this life as a journey on your way to receive a spectacular inheritance. It will protect you from idolatry and make all your burdens lighter, and quiet all your murmurings.

John Newton put it this way,

Suppose a century ago a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate which he had just inherited. It was a vast and wealthy estate with a huge home complete with gardens and a staff of men and women to keep it all. But a mile away from the city his [carriage] broke down, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should be to think that, should we see him on that mile long walk, he would be ringing his hands, and blubbing out all the remaining mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken! [What shall I do . . . I have lost my old carriage?]"^{vi}

No matter the injury, the trial, the abandonment, the loss, the betrayal, the abuse, the ridicule, the illness, the suffering, the pain . . . glory is just around the corner. We are moving from the hurts of earth . . . to the hallelujah's of our incredible, immortal inheritance.

You are an heir of God and a fellow heir of Jesus Christ.

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ⁱ R. Kent Hughes, *1001 Great Stories & Quotes* (Tyndale Publishers, 1998), p. 359.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *Romans Volume One* (Moody Press, 1991), p. 445.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Boice, *Romans Volume 2* (Baker, 1992), p. 862.

^{iv} Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 1162.

^v Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories* (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 415.

^{vi} Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, in The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 108.