

“Reading God’s Will”

Romans Wasn’t Read in a Day – part #7

Romans 8:12-27

[title slide] *Welcome, prayer.*

Occasionally a story about a strange inheritance will make the news. In 2019, British millionaire Karl Lagerfeld left his entire 150 million pound fortune to his cat Choupette. In the same article, I discovered other wealthy heirs, including a dog in New York, a feng shui master in Asia, and 70 random people from a phone book in Lisbon, Portugal.¹ Imagine getting that phone call one day!

The word “will” has several definitions. It can mean a desire or request, like “Thy will be done.” It is also an expression of the future, as in, “I will eat ice cream today.” And of course, a legal will is a document whereby the assets of a deceased person are distributed.

Inheritances are popular themes in movies. Luke and Leia inherit their Force powers in “Star Wars”. Inigo Montoya inherits his father’s sword in “The Princess Bride”. Rodney Copperbottom has his grandfather’s eyes and his grandmother’s nose – literally, because he’s a robot (from the movie “Robots”).

I’ve received a few gifts from family and friends’ estates. Nothing that elevated me to a royal title or helped me buy a castle, but I am grateful for those who thought to care for me even as they passed away.

[questions] Let’s start with two questions this morning. First, what is something you inherited, or would like to inherit? No wrong answers here, so use your imagination. [Pause for answers.] Second, what is something that you would give away in your will? [Pause again for answers.]

I believe, in each of us there is a longing for a Rags to Riches story, to go from a Pauper to Prince. We wish we were secretly related to royalty, heirs to a great treasure. It turns out, the Bible tells us, in Christ, we are heirs to the greatest treasure ever.

[title slide] Today we are going to talk about God’s will. In one sense, we are expected to do God’s will, that is, follow God’s commands. However, I also want us to think about reading God’s will. What if God’s will was an actual, legal

¹ <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/thesauce/weird-world-5-of-the-most-shocking-inheritance-stories-ever-heard/>

document? What would you receive? Spoiler alert, God’s doesn’t have a castle or a sports car for you. It’s much better than that.

[scripture v.12-13] The Apostle Paul says, in Christ, we do have an inheritance. The question is whether or not we claim it. Paul starts this section by saying we have an obligation, but not to sin. (Romans 8:12) We are obligated to the Holy Spirit, who is kind of like the executor of God’s estate.

[scripture v.14-15] The Spirit testifies what is in God’s will for us. For example, we have not inherited a spirit of fear, but the Spirit of sonship. (Romans 8:15) By the Spirit, our spirits can cry to God, “Abba, Father.”

The context of this statement is important. In Biblical times, the oldest son received the largest share of the estate when his father died. Claiming us as God’s “sons” doesn’t mean women are excluded. That’s why some translations use the word “children.” However not all “children” inherently have rights to the family fortune. So think of it more as “firstborn.” We all have firstborn rights to God’s kingdom if we trust in Jesus.

[scripture v.16-17] Paul says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:17) Christians inherit everything Jesus inherited from his heavenly Father. At first glance, that sounds amazing. But this inheritance is complicated. Paul says, “we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:17)

It’s easy to desire the blessings of God. Who doesn’t want love, joy, and peace, to name a few? Jesus even said, “The meek will inherit the earth. The peacemakers will be called the children (sons) of God.” (Matthew 5:5,9) I’m OK with that. But suffering? How do we inherit that? Do we even want to?

[scripture Romans 5:2-4] Remember Inigo’s tag line? “You killed my father. Prepare to die.” OK, his thirst for vengeance wasn’t very Christ-like, but his suffering was the result of his deep love for his father. It is what made him pursue sword fighting. As Christians, we know also that God can use our suffering for a purpose, giving us empathy and compassion for others. Elsewhere in Romans, Paul says, “And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Romans 5:2-4)

[scripture Phil 3:10] Maybe it’s OK to inherit the suffering that Jesus did. We are commanded to carry our cross, to deny ourselves, to lose our lives so we can find them. Jesus doesn’t want us to just accept the easy parts of faith. He wants us to have the whole package. Even Paul admitted, in Philippians 3:10, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to Him in His death...” A disciple of Christ is meant to follow in his footsteps. That is truly part of our inheritance.

[resurrection] Of course, being a Christian is not all suffering. There are other benefits this world can’t touch. In fact, there are things we inherit that creation is “groaning for.” (Romans 8:22) The primary one is resurrection. We are a people longing to be liberated from bondage to sin and death. (Romans 8:21)

Admittedly, it’s hard to be patient for these things to be fulfilled in our lives. The greatest hope of a Christian is that this life is not all there is. Our bodies will someday be resurrected, and we will stand with the risen Lord Jesus and know him completely.

[scripture Romans 8:24-25] This is our inheritance in Christ Jesus. No, the resurrection hasn’t happened yet, but we claim it. Paul says, “Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:24-25)

[father and daughter] Also, because of Christ, we can call God “Abba.” That’s the Aramaic word for “Dad.” Can you imagine having that close of a relationship with God Almighty, so close you can call him, “Dad”? That is an expression of hope, hope in the living God. The funny thing about God’s will is, God is not dead. We have these blessings here and now, because of Christ’s sacrifice. It is very much a “living will,” and by grace, we are written in as heirs, if we trust in Christ.

[prayer] There is one other blessing Paul points out, one of my favorites. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” (Romans 8:26) Have you ever wanted to pray, but you couldn’t find the words? The great news is, the Holy Spirit himself is interceding for us with words inexpressible, sighs deeper than words. That’s an amazing blessing.

So we see, there are some blessings in faith we receive here and now, and others we hope for but haven’t received just yet. There are blessings of love, forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. There is also the burden of compassion and empathy, the frustration we feel because we know God’s will but God’s will is not yet completely done on earth. We experience suffering because of our faith in Jesus. This is all part of God’s will for us.

[title slide] Stop and think about some of the things you wanted to inherit earlier. How many of those are valuable in the kingdom of heaven? The only things we get to take from this life are our relationships in Christ and the values we practiced. That’s it. If we are hoping for anything else, those earthly treasures are just going to end up in someone else’s hands.

So ask yourself, “Am I a child of God? Do I claim the inheritance God has for me?” If you’re not sure, there is a simple way to be written into God’s will. Trust Jesus. That’s it. Turn your life over to him. God knows you. God loves you exactly as you are. That’s good news. However, there is better news: God wants you for his family.

What will we do with this amazing treasure? Will we get excited about God’s promises and blessings? Do we know the privilege we have that the Spirit intercedes for us? Do we cry to God, “Abba! Father! Dad!”? Do we live like we are co-heirs with Christ?

One way we show that we do is by living for God’s kingdom here and now. God has an inheritance for us. We also have an inheritance to give away. For example, it is part of our Christian duty to encourage estate planning. Each of us has an obligation to our families and to God’s Church, even after we are gone.

Take for example the amazing gift Grace United Methodist Church received a few years ago from the Simmermans. None of us were their children. Yet, we did not say no to their gift. We used that gift to maintain our building and our ministry. Memorial gifts are very much a part of supporting our ministries.

God has blessed each one of us, financially and with the gift of eternal life in Christ. Will we simply hoard those gifts? Or will we claim this amazing inheritance and live up to the Name above all names?

I’m reminded of a scene in Charles Dicken’s Christmas carol, near the end of the story. Scrooge is with the ghost of Christmas future, who leads him to the

cemetery. By this time, Scrooge realizes he has spent his entire life pursuing wealth at the expense of his relationships. When the ghost reveals the tombstone, he laughs and says, "Scrooge, you're the richest man in the cemetery!" I pray that none of us ever live like that.

Remember the inheritance you have in Christ, and let it spill over into your words, actions, generosity and compassion for others.

Let's pray.

Memory Verse: Romans 8:16-17

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children...heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..."

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you created a will? What have you (or would you) leave to someone else?
2. What things do we inherit in Jesus? How do we receive some of those blessings in this life?
3. What is the greatest hope that the Apostle Paul is waiting for? Do you share his eagerness?
4. How does it help to know that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us?
5. How can you live so that others may know the life they can find in Christ?
6. How will you bless the Body of Christ (the Church) after God calls you home?