

## S. Kent Brown: Inheritance

Brothers and Sisters, I would like to thank Virginia for coming today, for consenting to be our convener. She has bailed me out several times and this may not be the last, we'll see. But she's been very helpful. Thank you.

Okay, this is show and tell for a couple of minutes. This is a book written by a friend named PHEME PERKINS. It's a commentary on the epistle to the Ephesians. You don't have to buy this; I'm only holding it up here as an illustration. It is in paperback; it consists of 160 pages for \$15 on Amazon. This is the book PHEME PERKINS – P H E M E PERKINS. She doesn't believe that Mark wrote Ephesians, by the way, so this is the book by our friend Julie Smith on the Gospel According to Mark. It is \$30. Wow! That's a lot of money for a book. Yes it is. This consists of almost a thousand pages, \$30 hardback. Do the math. How much per page? How much per page? This one is almost ten cents per page, for a paperback. This one for a hardback, nice print, exceptionally good layout, is three cents per page. And if you take the discount – the five dollar discount, it's 2.5 cents a page for exceptional quality work. So, in the old cities they say, *very cheap, very, very cheap*. But it's not cheap; it's *inexpensive*. Okay. To inheritance.

A life worth living was measured in antiquity by one's inheritance almost always from one's father. The size of the inheritance was based on the answer to several relevant questions. Am I the oldest in the family? Or do I fit somewhere else? Does my father own a big farm or a small one? Does he have a lot of sheep and cattle? How much of his property specifically, his land will be coming my way? Can I stand to live around my brothers, especially my oldest brother?

All biblical stories of inheritance begin with Abraham. We hear the Lord's almost shouted directive: *Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from my father's house unto a land that I will show thee*. The key word is *land*. Land became one of the underpinning elements of the Abrahamic covenant in addition to posterity and priesthood. The future aspect of that covenant was that *in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*. In fact, the Lord had been in the mix all along. Beginning with Abraham and continuing through the Joseph stories in the latter half of the Book of Genesis and ending with the Moses and Joshua narratives, the Lord had been in charge of the covenant with them even when his people were away from the land of Canaan.

In this way he chose to make the covenant with the descendants of Abraham effectively making them his children. We run into a language like from Leviticus: *is not Jehovah your father who created you and made you and established you?* From Exodus: *thus saith the Lord Israel is my son, even my firstborn*.

When we reach the New Testament era, we run headlong into two parables of Jesus that brings him to the world of ancient inheritance laws. The one has to do with the Prodigal Son. From this

parable and some other ancient sources we learned it was possible for a child, a male child to take a part of the inheritance that was due to him before the death of his father. We read: *the younger son said to his father, father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me and he divided unto the two sons his living or his property.*

The second has to do with the wicked husbandman who had leased the vineyard from an absentee landlord. This parable is more important for our purposes because of how it was interpreted. When the landlord sent a representative to collect the rent, the husbandman beat him and sent him away empty. Sadly, the renters mistreated a series of agents sent by the landlord, beating some and even killing more than one. These men were not just angling over the produce from the vineyard, but to take over the property itself through hostile actions, actions not unknown in earlier days.

In reality, the point of Jesus' story about the renters tipped the world of inheritance upside down. Instead of husbandmen attempting to seize property that belonged to another, the parable really had to do with the kingdom of God which as Matthew quotes Jesus: *shall be taken from you husbandman and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* Hence, although Jesus' sketch rested on the matter of ancient heirship, his message carried a spiritual aim that bore upon those who at first enjoyed access to God's kingdom but because of their treatment of his agents lost their access to an inheritance therein. Jesus had effectively lifted the question of an inheritance from the terrestrial world into the celestial. In fact, certain passages in the Old Testament come very close to this sordid concept. For example, the very last verse in the Book of Daniel reads: *but go your way til tthe end and you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of days.*

In an intriguing shift, the Septuagint reading of the last expression brings the allotted place or inheritance into the heavenly world: *you shall rest and stand in your glory at the end of days.* That is one's real inheritance lies in heaven and not on the earth. A piece of ground paired with a flock of sheep and goats does not constitute a person's important inheritance. Rather, that choice heritage consists of a place by God's side.

This is exactly what the New Testament stands in the matter of inheritance. How much its authors took their clues from the Old Testament is a matter for study. We pick up first that in the New Testament, inheritance rests on the ground of a filial relationship to God. Such a concept lies behind the language that we find in the New Testament. What is distinctive in his testament is the insistence of adoption in preference to natural, physical descent from Abraham. Such a concept was at home in certain ancient societies although not in the Old Testament laws of an inheritance. So we come upon the adoption of a foreigner as an heir. According to Jesus' teachings many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer

darkness. This prospect is dreary and deep for those who claim Abraham as their founding ancestor.

As a matter of fact, much earlier, John the Baptist had sent up a bright, warning flare when he declared to his hearers that they should think not to say within yourselves we have Abraham to our father for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (*unclear?00:11:37*) to have that such children of Abraham become sons and daughters by adoption through faith just as Abraham became God's chosen one because of his faith.

These principles of adoption and faith accompanied by God's spirit undergird much of what the Apostle Paul's teachings. For example, we do not read far into his majestic letter to the Romans before we run into these words: *that the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you. He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit* so it's both terrestrial (*unclear?*) and eventual celestial (*unclear?*) and what would be the result simply stated? As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Indeed he have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, father.

Knowing now that a literal descent from Abraham counts for nothing, what does? And how do we know it? Paul answered by asking: *what saith the scriptures?* Citing the language of Genesis in the Septuagint, he then answered back: *Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.* That is, being an heir of God does not depend on being a descendant but on merit, something that we do, like exercising faith. But wait a minute, someone else is involved. That person is Christ.

In a struggle with those who are teaching another gospel to church members in Galatia, Paul made it abundantly clear that heirship does not come through the Mosaic law. Neither does it come from physical descent through Abraham nor for gentiles by accepting the law as a path to heaven. Rather, as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, so they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham, not those (*unclear?*) the Mosaic law. (00:14:24)

Additionally, as if to make the point more forcefully, Paul wrote that they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. There is more. Discussing heavenly inheritances, Paul seized on the singular term, *seed*, or offspring that appears in the Lord's repeated promises to Abraham in the Book of Genesis. For instance, after Abraham reached the territory of Shechem on his way from Ur of Chaldees, the Lord appeared to him and promised that: *unto thy seed will I give this land.* Again, after the near sacrifice of Isaac, the Lord uttered words that are repeated throughout scripture: *in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* To be sure, this seed, or offspring, represented the unborn generations who would make up Abraham's family. But for Paul who sought to make a point about Christ's role in securing our everlasting inheritances, the singular noun points us to Christ. Paul, therefore, turned his considerable skills to say, now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring – okay so far – then came his main point, it

does not say: *and to offspring (iza?unclear?)* referring to many, or referring to one, *and to your offspring*, which is Isaac.

Out of his work first we must understand that if the eternal inheritance be of the Law of Moses, it is no more a promise but God giveth to Abraham by promise. With a slightly different touch Paul wrote that: *ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free and if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.* Let us quickly add that just as it is possible to become an heir of God through faith, so it is possible to lose that heirship and its associated, eternal blessings.

The Old Testament sets the bar and hints at the serious consequences of such a loss. The classic case involves Reuben, Jacob's oldest son who because of incest lost his right of primogeniture and astonishingly, his right to inherit two-thirds of his father's estate, not just a mere double portion (*unclear 00:17:33?*).

On the positive side, others spoke or wrote about the heavenly blessings that come to the faithful from being heirs of the kingdom to sharing with one's spouse the status of being heirs together of the grace of life, from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, to possessing an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away reserving heaven for you, also from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter.

In a negative vein, when Paul wrote about the faith that awaits sinners, he did not fill in the blanks about the potentially gruesome suffering that such people may face. Without any elaboration he wrote simply that they which do wicked things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. It as other New Testament sources that employed evocative language when touching on the eventual inheritance of the wicked, most of which speak of darkness in one way or another. It is Jesus who declares that the divine children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness for one, sadly, will hear but because of the darkness will not see, weeping and gnashing of teeth. The weeping and gnashing of teeth as an audio experience has no video, okay? We can't see the person who's weeping, just hear.

Two other passages present images of darkness. In the Book of Revelation the kingdom of the beast, after he is dethroned, is full of darkness where its inhabitants gnawed their tongues for pain and were full of sores. We come upon the expression *the mist of darkness that is to persist forever*, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle of Peter.

The tiny letter of Jude speaks menacingly about the everlasting chains and the vengeance of eternal fire coupled with blackness of darkness forever.

In its turn the Book of Revelation presents frightful details about future existence and leads us into the world of liquid sulfur often called brimstone in scripture. The usual expression is *fire and brimstone* that characterize a lake where the wicked will spend a tortured eternity not resting on the shore sipping cold lemonade, but actually sitting in the heated liquid. With them will be

prominent personalities such as the devil who is to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and should be tormented day and night forever. Others will join them including death and hell where from the unseen world who will be cast into the lake of fire a fate that represents the second death.

At this juncture it's important to explore the opposite, what it is like to receive an *inheritance* inside the celestial world. We have already reviewed the principles of adoption when Father adopts us as heavenly children. That is, as Paul wrote, *joint heirs with Christ*, enjoying the status we can address God as *Abba*, the equivalent of *Dad* and *Father*. Plainly, adoption of believers comes as a result of their full embrace of the gospel message. This change of status from outsider to accepted one is immediate and the accompanying blessings begin to flow in this life with a crescendo into the life to come at the end time. This circumstance was anticipated in part by Old Testament passages that speak of *inheritance* not as land or animals, but of ancient Israel as God's allotment. For example, God took strangers and eunuchs to himself as his own indicating his interest both in individuals and in non-Israelites. This is from Isaiah 56.

Eunuch's, of course, are those who can't have children. We read the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord to serve him, *then will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer an house of prayer for all people*. Furthermore, *thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths and take hold of my covenants, unto them will I give him mine house and within my walls a place and a name, an everlasting name that shall not be cut off*.

As we have already seen, the Septuagint reading of the last verse of the Book of Daniel promised the prophet that *you shall rest and stand in your glory at the end of the days*. When we turn again to the New Testament we come upon Paul's speech before King Agrippa wherein the apostle rehearsed the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to him on the road to Damascus. Speaking about the gentiles, the risen Christ declared that *now I send thee to them*. What was his purpose? *To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which was sanctified by his faith that is in me*. A heavenly sanctified inheritance, therefore, was available to all, including, especially, the gentiles to which we can say, hallelujah. What is more, as believers go into heaven, not as servants of God but as sons and daughters because of Christ, even Jews will enjoy the blessings of the Law of Moses neither to receive the adoption of sons and daughters before entering the next world. To them and to gentiles God has sent forth the spirit of his own Son into their hearts as a preparation.

At the end, those who are children then are now to become an heir of God through Christ. With this, the work of God to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man stands complete. Thank you.

So we still have a couple of minutes before we drag everybody up here so you can stare then down. Questions?

*Inheritance* is one of those sort of fancy, frilly things but I was thinking when Richard Draper claimed that *agape* trumps all, love trumps all, I was thinking you know with *inheritance* you might be able buy it and it's kind of like rock-paper-scissors, you know, depending on which one you smack into your hand. Well, if there are no questions, I think, if it's okay for Jeannie we can invite Alice up and our friend Eric is going to act as moderator and so we can give Julie's book its deserved attention.