

INHERITANCE

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

Sometime ago, the online issue of *Forbes* magazine carried the story of a family feud in one of the richest families in America. The Pritzker family of Chicago owns the Hyatt hotel chain. They also own many other businesses, including cruise lines, railroads, and banks.

The story is about how 18-year-old Liesel Pritzker sued her father and other family members. Because of their less-than-ideal management while she was a minor, at least as Liesel claims, her inheritance has been greatly reduced. She is claiming that they mis-managed her trust fund causing a loss of more than \$1 billion. She sued for \$5 billion dollars in punitive damages. Of course, that amount of \$1 billion is only a portion of her trust.

One billion dollars! Poor Liesel! Some of us would like to have her problems. She didn't have to lift a finger to earn this money. It's just there, the multiple billions left, earning interest, and waiting for her to collect it. Don't you just weep for her? Perhaps we should.

I know for a solid fact that my daughters will never be in that situation! We are far from billionaires or millionaires. We are proud "thousandaires" who are doing our best to spend our daughter's inheritance!

The thing that saddens me about this story is one factor I have seen demonstrated time and time again: No amount of money is worth being alienated from your family. It is sad to think that Ms. Pritzker didn't trust her own father to protect her inheritance for her. Of course, her quote, "It's not about family, it's about business and getting my due" doesn't really help anything either.

Unfortunately, it's not just Ms. Pritzker. I have seen more than one family torn apart by jealousy or craving or bitterness at the death of a loved one...not from the grief of the loss, but from the greed of fighting over the will! Families estranged, relationships destroyed over the family teakettle.

I would hope that Sue and I HAVE and WILL leave an important inheritance to our daughters: they are all strong, intelligent, independent women who are making their own way in the world. While not a billion dollars, I sincerely hope that this inheritance will serve them well.

So, what would you do if you knew you had an enormous inheritance waiting for you? Would it make a difference in how you live while you wait to receive it? Keep that thought in mind as we turn to today's words from Paul.

One thing we know for sure about the apostle Paul; he was known for a sort of single-

minded enthusiasm. He was extraordinarily enthusiastic when he wrote the passage from Ephesians which we heard read a few moments ago.

In our Bibles, this passage is broken down into nice, neat paragraphs with proper punctuation. In the original Greek version, however, it is a 220-word run-on sentence written by a man who was so excited that he didn't even stop long enough to throw in a comma.

It's an English teacher's nightmare! What was Paul so excited about? He was excited about our inheritance as believers in Jesus.

Listen to the extravagant language Paul used in this passage. He says that God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ," and that He has "lavished" on us the "riches of God's grace." And if that's not enough, we have been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of an even greater inheritance waiting for us in heaven.

Extraordinary! To Paul this was exciting stuff--stuff he was willing to give his life to declare. I wonder if it's that exciting to us. Why should it matter to us--that we have an inheritance in heaven?

There are real-world answers to that rhetorical question. As a matter of fact, some are quite critical to us as we navigate through our daily lives.

In the first place, it matters to you if you've ever been forced to make a hard choice about right and wrong. Sometimes you and I are forced to make difficult decisions, ethical decisions, that require us to choose a path that is temporarily more painful, but ultimately more rewarding. Sometimes "doing the right thing" is not popular, smart, or even safe.

However, this is what following Jesus is all about. It's living a life of integrity, faithfulness and love--and that's not always easy.

I personally believe that it is critical to recognize that! We are living in challenging times when human compassion even common courtesy seems to have gleefully discarded. Referring to refugees as "vermin" and thinking of human beings, the children of our Creator God as somehow "less" has become not only tolerated, but acceptable.

Discarding Jesus' mandate on how we are to treat the least of these while proclaiming to live by Christian virtues. Rejecting our charge as co-creators of the world in favor of exploiting it's every resource at any cost. How do we respond? THESE are hard choices! It means that when the time comes, we must stand up.

There have been followers of Jesus though the ages who have stood up to injustice,

stood up to intolerance, stood up to violence, stood up to oppression and all they had going for them was the Master whispering in their ear, “As you love me, Paul. As you love me, George. As you love me, Andrea.” They had their Master’s love and the promise of an imperishable inheritance.

Paul was writing to people who were being persecuted for their faith. Paul himself was imprisoned twice while preaching in Ephesus. He knew what it meant to choose between conformity and commitment, and he knew how difficult that choice would be for each of us.

But ultimately this life isn’t our focus, and earthly pleasures aren’t our goal. Can we remember that? It’s not “who has the most toys wins!”

Instead, we have an eternal inheritance in which we place our hopes. That is the first reason our eternal inheritance is important. This world may not be very hospitable if we truly follow the Master.

Our future inheritance is also important because we need to have something permanent and imperishable to hold on to in this world of constant change and decay. Let’s face it--we live in a fast-changing, often uncomfortable world. And change is not always our friend.

Author and evangelist Anne Graham Lotz’ house was broken into a few years ago. The robbers took almost everything of value. The night after the break-in, Ms. Lotz lay awake as fears assailed her from every side. Just as her valuable possessions had been taken, she began to contemplate all the other precious things in her life that she could lose.

Just as her anxiety reached a fever pitch, she recalled these words from I Peter 1:4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade--kept in heaven for you . . .” Did you catch that? We have an inheritance that *cannot be taken from us*.

Anne Graham Lotz sat down and made an alphabetical list of the eternal blessings that cannot be taken away from us. Listen to the items on her list and notice her clever use of the letters of the alphabet. She wrote:

*I am: **A**ccepted by God / **B**eloved by God / **C**hosen by God / **D**elivered by God / **E**nlightened by God / **F**orgiven by God*

*I have: **G**race of God / **H**ope for the future / **I**nheritance in heaven / **J**ustification / **K**nowledge of God / **L**ove / **M**ercy of God / **N**earness to God / **O**neness with God / **P**eace / **Q**uickening of the Spirit*

*I am: **R**edeemed / **S**ealed with the Holy Spirit / **T**reasured by God / **U**nited with other believers / **V**alidated as an authentic child of God*

*I have: His **Wisdom** And one day I will be: **Exalted with Him!***

What an incredible way of saying that in this fast-changing world we have one thing upon which we can absolutely count--an inheritance from God.

At some point in our lives, many of us start to feel like we are losing more than we are gaining. We experience the loss of friendships, jobs, health and strength, new ambitions, respect or status.

Where do we find hope for tomorrow? In the realization that we can never lose the grace and mercy and love of God. And someday--when we see Christ face to face--we will experience the awesome fullness of God in all His glory, and that glory will never end! That is God's promise that is sealed in the life of every believer.

The most important thing to know? This grand inheritance is ours for the taking; all you must do is accept it. This inheritance already has our name on it. All we must do is claim it.

In the summer of 1961 the Leningrad Ballet was returning to Russia from a triumphant tour of the West. The plane that was to take them back home was ready to board at the Paris airport when suddenly one of the group, a dancer named Rudolf Nureyev, leapt into the arms of two surprised French inspectors.

The inspectors told Nureyev he would have to do two things. He must first sign a request for safe asylum, and then he must spend five minutes alone in a room deciding if this was really what he wanted to do.

Nureyev sat down in that bare room, facing two doors. One, they told him, led back to the boarding area, and if he decided to return, he could slip through the door quietly, unobserved. No one need know he had momentarily tried to escape. The other door would lead him into the inspector's office.

Nureyev sat there, thinking furiously. One door meant home, friends, and his beloved. It was a predictable and safe life, easy compared to most of his compatriots. The other door meant a strange land, perhaps hardships, but also liberty. When the time was up, Rudolf Nureyev rose to his feet, strode to the door, and stepped into freedom.

You and I are confronted with a similar decision, not once, but time and time again. Behind one door, we have an inheritance awaiting us. An inheritance we did nothing to earn it.

So, in a sense I guess we are a little like poor Liesel Pritzker with her multibillion-dollar trust.

Except for this: Our inheritance cannot be taken from us, spent or mismanaged. It is imperishable and without end. All we must do is walk through an open door and claim it. The door to which I refer is Christ. Making that decision to walk through means we, too, may have to choose between friends, a predictable and safe life, easy compared to most of those around us and facing a strange land, perhaps hardships, but also eternity.

The bad news is that these doors can sometimes be hidden in the choices we make at work, at home, with family and strangers, but make no mistake, the doors are there, the decision is ours to make:

Slip back into the everyday world where no one will notice you've been missing, or walk through the other door, the Christ door, and claim your inheritance.

Know this; when we walk through that door, everything He has will be ours.