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DON'T TRASH YOUR INHERITANCE

Today's Text: Ezekiel Chap. 21

Extracts:

Therefore, thus says the Lord God: “Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that *your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear...*, you shall be taken in hand. Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord God: “Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him” [Ezek. 21: 24-27]

The House of Lords, now about 700 years old, is the upper house of the British parliament.¹ Its members are non-elected. They consist mainly of peers appointed for life terms and about 92 hereditary peers that have the right to pass membership from one generation to another. The hereditary peers come from the lineage of dukes and earls created by the monarch. Last week, the House of Commons voted to call for a fully elected upper house. In a swift reaction, the Lords voted 361-121 against making their House an elected body.

It is to be expected that the hereditary peers will resist any attempt to limit their privileges. Although critical questions have been raised by Britons about the true place of royal privileges in a Western democracy, unsavoury developments around the monarchy in recent times may have triggered the new development. For example, the moral authority and ethical conduct of its members has been the subject of media reports and public debates. In other words, some royal family members have trashed their inheritance and opened it to public disregard.

Some privileges have been passed on to you by virtue of your birth, sex, social status or membership of the body of Christ. What have you done with them? Do you intend to bequeath to your successors a better heritage than you have received? Have you trashed it already? What can you do to restore your inheritance? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

¹ Story based on Canada Press, “British peers argue against making House of Lords elected body,” www.canada.com, Thursday, March 15 2007.

1. Inheritance comes with a price!

My primary school teacher used to tell us the story of how Queen Elizabeth II of Britain inherited the throne. In February 1952, the then 26-year-old princess was on a visit to Kenya, East Africa. One day, she was climbing up a tree house when the death of her father, King George VI, was announced. So, the young lady who had climbed up the tree as a princess descended as a queen.

What qualified Elizabeth to that inheritance? As her father's first-born child, she was the heir-apparent. So, she obtained it by birth. It passed on from father to child as *of right*. Every one of us has received one form of inheritance or the other. It may have been by birth, such as royalty or wealth. It may have been acquired. For example, African traditional rulers confer chieftaincy titles on some politicians when they are about to contest national elections! However, acquired peerages or chieftaincies are only hereditary if they can be passed from one generation to the next.

In general, inheritance has little or nothing to do with our own effort but *largely* by the grace of our predecessors. For example, it was immaterial whether Princess Elizabeth was the least naturally endowed for leadership among her father's children. She became queen by virtue of being first-born. Yet, having accepted the privilege to inherit her father's throne, she was expected to perform excellently. Therein lies the challenge of inheritance. It comes with a price. You can add value to or diminish its worth before bequeathing it to others. That is, you can enhance or trash your inheritance.

In general, we can do any of the following to our heritage:

a) *We may inherit little but bequeath much*

Our predecessors may have left little or nothing for us but we have bequeathed much to our successors. For example, your parents may only have been able to give you secondary education but you have sent your children to college (university). You may have come from a poor home but you have now built wealth (legitimately or otherwise).

A good example was King David of Israel. He was the last born of the eight sons of Jesse, a sheep rearer. God chose him to succeed Saul as king [1 Sam. 16: 10- 12]. A teenager and shepherd boy, he worked his way up through pain and suffering, exile and hardship for the better part of twelve years. Even when he was crowned king at the age of thirty, he did not attain to the position of king of all Israel until after another seven-and-a-half years [2 Sam. 5: 4-5]. Soon after establishing his throne, he purposed to build the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. However, God sent Prophet Nathan to inform David that it was his successor that would do that. For putting God first, the Lord blessed David when He promised him, "Your

house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” [2 Sam. 7: 16]. The little shepherd boy who had inherited little or nothing had bequeathed much.

b) *We may inherit much but pass on less*

Sometimes, our predecessors may have left us enormous power, wealth and influence which we fritter away in no time. Some people are born rich but die poor. At independence, some African countries were on the verge of economic advancement. However, the generation of politicians who took over stole their countries’ wealth and holed it away in safe vaults in Europe and America. In no time, their countries became poorer than they were at independence. At corporate levels, we have heard of CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) who had inherited powerful companies and brought them tumbling down some years later. In the church, some pastors have inherited a flourishing ministry only to flounder and lose vitality over time. *Underlying such developments is unethical or immoral conduct by inheritors.*

Let us continue with David’s example. Since God had not allowed him to build the temple, he had left for his successor, Solomon, the following above and beyond his own special treasure of gold and silver: “Three thousand talents of gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses” [1 Chron. 29: 3-5]. In other words, Solomon was already wealthy on the day he inherited his father’s throne. In answer to his prayer, God promised Solomon “both riches and honour, so that there shall be none like (him) among the kings all (his) days.” The blessing was hinged on his walking in God’s ways, “to keep (His) statutes and (His) commandments, as (his) father David walked” [1 Kgs 3: 13-14]. Solomon started well but fell along the way. He fell into idol worship and married over 700 wives who turned his heart away from God [1 Kgs 11: 1-6]. In reaction to his sins, God left only the tribe of Judah to Solomon’s successor, Rehoboam, “for the sake of (his) father David,” and gave the rest of the kingdom to Solomon’s former servant, Jeroboam [1 Kgs 11:9-13; 12: 1-24]. Solomon’s inheritance became smaller by the time he passed it on to his son largely because of sin. He had trashed his inheritance.

c) *We may inherit much and pass on nothing*

A worse situation occurs when we inherit much and pass on *nothing*. For example, some people are known to have inherited thriving businesses from their parents only to declare them bankrupt a few years later. Most of the powerful monarchies in Europe in the Middle Ages have either become extinct (as in France) or ceremonial (as in the Netherlands and

England) because they had become anachronistic. However, a close look at those cases suggests poor management, corruption or wickedness.

When Israel asked the prophet Samuel for a king, God asked him to anoint Saul one [1 Sam. 9: 17]. The handsome young man had gone in search of his father's lost donkeys but instead found a kingdom! But what did he do with it? In spite of several warnings, Saul persisted in disobeying the word of God. So, Samuel said to him, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandments of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. *For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now, your kingdom shall not continue.* The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart... to be commander over His people" [1 Sam. 13: 13-14]. Saul lost his inheritance because he had trashed it by disobedience. He had nothing to pass on to his descendants.

From the forgoing, we see *a close correlation between sin and loss of inheritance.* Let us examine the situation in Israel in the days of the prophet Ezekiel.

2. The prince of Israel trashes his inheritance

On the verge of entering the Promised land after leaving Egypt, God told the children of Israel, "I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers-Abraham, Isaac and Jacob- to give to them *and their descendants after them*" [Deut. 1: 8]. Their ability to hold on to the inheritance depended on their obedience. If they remained faithful to God, they would possess their inheritance forever [Is. 60: 21]. However, if they sinned, they would lose it [2 Kgs 21: 12-15; Ps. 79: 1].

In Chapter 21 of the book of Ezekiel, "prince of Israel" is used figuratively of the people of Israel. For example, God called David "a prince" among the people [Ezek. 34: 24]. So, the prince represented "a holy people to the Lord" whom He had chosen out of love and in keeping with His promise to their ancestors to deliver their descendants out of bondage in Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey. In return, they were expected to keep God's "commandments," "statutes" and "judgments." Obedience would attract God's blessings on to "a thousand generations" but those who hated Him would be destroyed [Deut. 7: 6-10].

The book of Ezekiel focuses mainly on the prince in exile on account of wickedness and disobedience. In this chapter, God said to him, "Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, ... remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same... I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer" [Ezek. 21: 25-27]. The prince had inherited much but passed on nothing. He had trashed his inheritance on account of sin.

Having trashed his inheritance, see what then began to happen to the land of Israel:

- The Gentile king of Babylon had the audacity to come to Jerusalem, the city of God, “to use divination” to mislead the people [vv. 21-23]. That is the equivalent of Osama Bin Laden coming to Washington, DC and taking pictures of the White House unchallenged! In deed, “because of Mount Zion which is desolate ... the foxes (are) walking about on it” [Lam. 5: 18].
- The Lord had prepared a sword of death and destruction against His people and all the princes of Israel. The sword would be directed at Rabbah of the Ammonites, to Judah and “into fortified Jerusalem” [Ezek. 21: 3-11; 20]. The Ammonites had become vicariously liable by divining lies and seeing “false visions” for the children of Israel, thus misleading them to persist in sin and disobedience [v. 29].
- The prince would be *overthrown and his throne given to the one “whose right it is”* [v. 27]. Recall that God had promised David that his throne would last forever [2 Sam. 7: 16]. Since none of his human descendants could maintain the royal inheritance forever, the rightful owner referred to here is none other than Jesus the Son of God who would come in flesh thousands of years later to inherit the throne of “His father David” [Lk 1: 32].

The prince of Israel sinned and did not obey God’s commandments. As a result, he lost his inheritance to Gentile kings and invaders. That is the price to pay for trashing one’s inheritance for whoever defiles God’s statutes God will also diminish [Ezek. 5: 11].

3. Conclusion: Set your own inheritance in Christ Jesus

Believers are “a *chosen* generation, a *royal* priesthood (and) a *holy* nation” [1 Pet. 1: 9]. In Christ Jesus, they have obtained inheritance [Eph. 1: 11], the rightful claimant to the throne of David that will last forever. Examine the *emphasized* words carefully and then you will understand the nature of your inheritance:

- You are chosen by Christ for, as He told His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you (to) bear fruit... that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” [Jn 15: 16].
- You are royal by faith in Jesus, the Son of David, because those who have accepted Him or believe in His name have the right to become children of God [Jn 1: 12]. As a prince or princess of God, you are a joint-heir with Christ in His Father’s kingdom [Rom. 8: 17].
- You are holy on account of the blood of Jesus shared on the cross because your righteousness is like filthy rags before God [Heb. 9: 15; Is. 64: 6]. Therefore, you are saved by grace, not by your effort or works [Eph. 2: 8].

Clearly, the only way to maintain your inheritance in God is to remain in spirit *at all times*. Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit, that is, life and peace [**Rom. 8: 5, 6**]. To do otherwise is to trash your inheritance.

So, dear prince or princess of God, examine your circumstances right now. What are you doing to add value to your position in your family or place of work or church? What legacy are you leaving for your children? What do you like to be remembered by when you retire or die? Where would you like to spend your eternity if you were to die this moment?

Don't trash your inheritance

For further reading

“My birthright is not for sale!” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 3,
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