

Sons Of The Covenant

Acts 3:24- 4:4 NIV

Last Sunday, during the message concerning the Prodigal Son and squandered inheritance, Roger Williams asked who we thought we were most like in the story: the father, the older brother, or the younger, who had squandered his inheritance? During the message, he told us that it was possible to hate and love at the same time: you can hate pigs, but love bacon. If you were not here last Sunday, ask him about that.

In the last three verses of Acts chapter 3, Peter reminds his brothers, who had just witnessed the healing of a cripple, that they had an inheritance: promises made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, their ancestors, and confirmed by the prophets from generation to generation.

A quick review of chapter 3:

- ❖ A cripple beggar is healed at the temple gate;
- ❖ He accompanied Peter and John into the temple;
- ❖ His shouting and praising God drew a crowd;
- ❖ Peter used the opportunity to preach Jesus.

During his message, Peter drops some important names that would get the attention of the listeners: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and the prophets that followed Samuel, and then linked Jesus, the

servant that God had glorified and raised up, with all these familiar names.

Even though Peter's brothers, the ones hearing this message, had acted in ignorance and asked that a murderer be released instead of the Author of Life, they still needed to repent; they were guilty of murder none the less.

God had predicted that all this would happen. Luke writes:

²⁴ “Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ (Genesis 22:18; 26:4) ²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:24-26)

Before I read the next four verses, I want to tell you and read to you part of Samuel's story and make a comparison.

Samuel's mother's name was Hannah, one of two wives of Elkanah. And for years she was barren. She prayed for a son, whom she offered back to the Lord. This son was Samuel.

The priest at that time was Eli. His two sons were also priests, but they were wicked

men who treated the Lord's offering with contempt.

²² Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ²³ So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. ²⁴ No, my sons; the report I hear spreading among the LORD's people is not good. ²⁵ If one person sins against another, God^(d) may mediate for the offender; but if anyone sins against the LORD, who will intercede for them?” His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death.

²⁶ And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people. (1 Samuel 2:22-26)

The priesthood in Jesus day was also corrupt. The High Priests in the first century were entitled to great power, influence and privilege. During the Roman occupation of Palestine, one could become a High Priest through bribery or political intrigue or back room deals with military officials.

Samuel and Jesus grew up in a similar religious atmosphere. Yet, even surrounded with religious corruption, scripture records the integrity of both:

²⁶ And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people. (1 Samuel 2:22-26) Luke writes about Jesus:

⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

This verse in Luke about Jesus follows the time when Jesus, at the age of twelve, stayed behind in Jerusalem, and for three days, listened to the teachers and asked them questions.

I just think that it is interesting that the Holy Spirit would include Samuel in the list of names mentioned in Peter's second recorded sermon to his brothers. If you read on in 1 Samuel, you learn that Eli's descendents lose the privilege of the Priesthood.

I wonder how well Peter's listeners remembered the story of Samuel and Eli? Would the warning just mentioned in Moses prophesy ring a bell?

In verses 22 and 23 prior to our text mentions being 'cut off':

²² For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.' (Acts 3:22-23)

In our day of easy believism and drive-thru window religion, you hear some people say that a loving God wouldn't send anyone

to Hell; He would never 'cut anyone off'. I don't know what Bible they are using, but that is not what the ones I use record.

Some think that they can bargain or barter with God; that his word is negotiable when they should be very thankful that it is not.

The sons of the covenant were guilty of murder. There are two Greek words translated 'covenant'. One is where two equal parties negotiate a deal. The other, which is the one used here, is a contract of unequal parties. God, who is greater than man, made the rules and conditions. Man may agree or disagree, but has no voice in drawing up the terms.

He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'

Be thankful sons of the covenant that God did what he said that he would do, and that there were no 'ifs' in the contract that depended on human's keeping their end of the deal concerning this particular blessing. In His wisdom, God knew that if mankind was going to make it, the covenant would have to be one where God alone would make the terms of the pardon. So, be thankful sons of the covenant that God brought this blessing on you. Repent then, and turn from you wicked ways.

What do you think would happen if you walked into Wal-Mart or someplace where a large number of people would be and shouted, "Repent! Repent and turn from your wicked ways!"

Any number of things could happen. You might even get some takers. Some might repent. And some might respond like the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees. Beginning in chapter 4, we read:

¹ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. (Acts 4:1-4)

Repent and turn to God, you Wal-Martians! You who have internet and e-mail may have seen some of the pictures circulated as to what shows up from time to time at Wal-Mart.

When in a public place and something happens to draw a crowd, you get what you get. You don't get to screen or pick and choose who shows up.

Apparently, there was quite a crowd and Peter and John were both speaking. Before either could finish, the religious police attempt to take control of the situation.

Remember back when John the Baptizer came on the scene preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? He drew crowds. Luke writes in chapter 3 of his Gospel:

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

¹³ “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” (Luke 3:7-14; also Matthew 3:7-10)

Matthew informs us that the Pharisees and the Sadducees heard this same ‘brood of viper’ speech.

Did the religious police show up to repent and turn from their wicked ways? No? Then, why did they come?

They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. (Acts 4:2)

As they were speaking-they didn’t politely wait until they were finished.

In my mind’s eye, I see the priests pushing their way through the crowd, knocking people out of the way to get to Peter and John. Remember Quick-draw McGraw and Bobalouie? “We’ll do the teachin’ around here, and don’t you forget it!” Who do these two uneducated fishermen think they are, anyway? We are the priests; we teach the people!

I see the healed man still dancing. The temple guards are right there with the priests getting control of this unruly situation. “There will be no dancing in the Temple, and don’t you forget it!”

The Sadducees are not far behind. Peter and John preaching the resurrection of Jesus would have been offensive to this political/religious group. They didn’t believe in angels or spirits, and that the soul died with the body. And, you know what is coming next. That is why they were sad, you see.

“There will be no preachin’ about a resurrection around here...”

So, Peter and John, and possibly even the healed man, spent the night in jail as a result of their shenanigans. Preachin’ and dancin’ in the temple...indeed.

You have shouted in Wal-mart and have yourself an audience. What are you going to tell them? You shouted, “Repent and turn from your wicked ways!” So, what next? Security is on the way, so you only have a few minutes. If you do the brood of viper speech, you made need security to call 911 on your behalf.

Maybe something like this...we all have one thing in common. We all have an inheritance coming our way, good or bad. Maybe reminding people in your own words that we are all spiritual beings having a human experience. The good inheritance that we have in common can only be found by turning to God.

For example:

A man had a super collection of arrowheads. He enjoyed hunting for them, trading them with friends. He had built a display for them in his office and enjoyed talking about them. They were to be passed on to his children.

Someone broke to his office and stole his collection. The arrowheads and all the work gone; destroyed. The inheritance to be passed on- gone.

Down through the years he had given away many of the arrowheads he had collected as gifts. Some of his friends heard

that his arrowheads were gone, and they returned what he had given to them.

Now all he had to pass on is what he had given away. Isn't that how God's inheritance works?

Remember one of the questions the crowd asked John the Baptists when told them to, **“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance?”**

¹¹ John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

Sons and daughters of the covenant... we are indeed spiritual beings having a human experience. Be thankful that God kept his promise to Abraham and gave this blessing through his servant Jesus, making the way for all to repent and turn from our wicked ways. And, by the way, concerning our inheritance, the only thing that we really get to keep is what we give away.