

The Last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ

sermonaudio.com

Bitter Fruit

By Bob Vincent

Bible Text: Hebrews 9:15-22, Genesis 15
Preached on: Sunday, November 3, 2019

Robert Benn Vincent
80 Hickory Hill Drive
Boyce, LA 71409

Website: www.rbvincent.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rbvincent

Lord, please help me not to trust in memory, not to trust in natural skill but, Lord, to trust in you, for you, Lord, alone can make the word that we have heard read profitable to us, and we plead with you in the name and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ that you would send your word forth this morning into our hearts that we may be changed by it, transformed by it, not only learning some new things but, Lord, having our heart shaped by the Holy Spirit through the power of the word of God because, Lord, everything must yield to your word, every knee must bow, every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, even Satan and all the hosts of hell whom we banish from this place by the authority of that precious blood that was shed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this morning I want to talk to you about “The Last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ,” and this is part of a larger series that’s centered in Hebrews 12 and it has to do with the bitter fruit that is there when people turn away from the Lord. Last Lord’s Day, we wanted to examine the proposition of the truth of the fact that we are right with God by his beautiful covenant, and two weeks ago, we examined the proposition that a Christian can never lose salvation. A true Christian can never finally and fully fall away but will always persevere not because of their willpower and strength, but because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today, I want to focus again on the concept of what we began on last week and that is, the covenant. Notice, if we will, in verse 16,

Hebrews 9:16, “In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it.” Now it’s interesting that word translated “will” is a word that really can be translated “covenant,” and it takes us to the very heart of the issue that we raised at the end of the sermon last Lord’s Day, and that is when the Hebrew rabbis, who were not only fluent in the Hebrew but fluent also in classical Greek, set out to try to make sure that the Jewish people who had been in exile for many years, because not all the Jewish people returned to their homeland when Cyrus the Great issued that decree that allowed them to return to Jerusalem, many Jews discovered they would prosper living particularly in the empire of the Greeks and the Romans, and so Greek became the language of the known world. You know, one of the mistakes in that otherwise extremely accurate film, *The Passion of the Christ*, is that they have the Roman soldiers speaking Latin, but Roman soldiers didn’t speak Latin in the bulk of the empire, what they spoke was Greek, because Greek was the language of the known world. So about 200 years before Christ, the Jewish rabbis, realizing that their own people could no longer understand biblical Hebrew, set about to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek and we call that work the Septuagint because it is by tradition that 70 scholars set about to do it, and there are remnants of that still around today that have been found.

Now, the rabbis had a problem when they came to the Hebrew word for covenant. That word—and I’m going to use a couple of foreign words this morning—is bereith, בְּרִית and we have that. There’s a Jewish organization called Sons of the Covenant, B’nai B’rith, and that’s what it is, sons of the covenant. That’s what it means in Hebrew.

How did they translate the word bereith, בְּרִית? Well, they had a choice. There were two words that they could have used and for that, I want us to look for a moment at the Gospel of Luke 22, because we’re going to find in Luke 22 both of those Greek words. And here we have it, if we look at Luke 22:29, that’s page 1637,

Jesus says there in verse 29, “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me.” The word translated “confer” there is the verbal form of the word that we read in Hebrews 9. The word in Hebrews 9 is diatheke, διαθήκη. I’ll say it again, diatheke, διαθήκη. Now, I expect all the young disciples to remember this because your brains work better than old disciples like me. Believe it or not, you can learn things, diatheke, διαθήκη, better than we old folks can.

Diatheke, Διαθήκη, and that was one choice that they had. They also had a choice with suntheke, συνθήκη. So here they are: two Greek words, suntheke, συνθήκη and diatheke, διαθήκη.

Now, suntheke, συνθήκη was the normal word for making a covenant, and if you look up to the top of page 1637, you will find that that word is found in its verbal form. Judas goes to see the high priest and the leaders of the Jewish people who wanted to get rid of Jesus, and in verse 5, it says, “They were delighted and agreed to give him money.” The word translated “agreed” is the verbal form of that word suntheke, συνθήκη.

So, here we have an example in one chapter of the two Greek words that the Jewish rabbis could have used to translate that old Hebrew word bereith, בָּרִית. Those are the only three foreign words I’m using today: bereith, בָּרִית, diatheke, διαθήκη and suntheke, συνθήκη.

Now, if we look at that verbal form of suntheke, συνθήκη, in verse 5, you get the picture of what’s going on. What’s going on is Judas said, “You want to be able to catch Jesus without a crowd going on around him, because I know you’re afraid of the crowd? I will betray him to you for,” and guess what they did? They negotiated. That’s that word in Greek. They negotiated. They began as equal parties, in a sense, negotiating the price.

Well, you go to the used car lot and the man tells you, “This car was driven by a retired schoolteacher who only drove back and forth to school, back and forth to the grocery store, and back and

forth to church, and all within the city limits of Texarkana. And this car is worth \$5,000.”

But what he didn't tell you was that car was actually used by her teenage nephews who enjoyed drag racing, and they drove that thing almost to the ground, but nothing that a little sawdust in the transmission wouldn't cover up. And, so, you begin to say, “You know, I don't think that Mrs. So-and-so owned that car.”

“Oh yes, here's the paperwork.”

“Well, I've seen that car outside of Texarkana racing down the roads and actually outrunning the troopers.” So, finally, they go back and forth. They are entering into a contract, a covenant. They are negotiating, “I'll give you \$800 for it.”

“Make it \$1,200,” says the guy.

“Okay. We've got a deal.”

Now that's what Judas and the high priestly party of the Jewish people and their helpers were doing. They were negotiating, *suntheke*, *συνθήκη*, it is the idea that we discuss what we're going to do and how we're going to do it, and how much. So, they come up with a price.

Does any young disciple remember the price that Judas betrayed Jesus for? It was 3 times 10 pieces of silver, 30 pieces of silver. Think of a person selling his soul for 30 pieces of silver.

Now when it comes to salvation, turning over to the bottom of the page, he says in verse 29, “I confer on you a kingdom,” literally, “I covenant with you a kingdom, just as my Father covenanted with me.” It really ought to be translated that way because it's the verbal form of that word *diatheke*, *διαθήκη*.

“I covenant with you a kingdom, just as my Father covenanted with me.” When did the Father covenant with the Son that kingdom? In eternity. That is God's eternal covenant with himself, because we have one true and living God who eternally exists in

three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and in that covenant each of the three persons agreed to the terms.

Now here's a big word for only adults. We may distinguish between what God is in and of himself, eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit, absolutely equal. And theologians call that the **Ontological Trinity**. That's a \$25 word that means what God is in and of himself, apart from creation. But in that covenant in eternity, the Father assumes one role, the Son assumes another role, and the Holy Spirit assumes yet another role. And we call that the **Economical Trinity**.

Those are just big words but, I'm going to put this, God willing, on the internet this afternoon and you can listen to it again, because it's profitable to understand this because it helps us understand something. When we think of God as he is in himself, apart from his creation: The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are absolutely equal, and everything you can say about the Father, you can say about the Son, and you can say about the Holy Spirit.

But in the work of redemption—that's that covenant relationship that God enters into in order to save you and me—they are not equal, because the Son assumes in this plan of salvation a subordinate position to the Father. That's why he can say, "The Father is greater than I" (John 13:48), even though he can say, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30).

So, in the work of bringing salvation, this covenant that was made in eternity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: In carrying that out, the Father is head over the Son (1 Corinthians 11:3), and the Son takes on the form of a servant, and the Holy Spirit comes as a servant as well. His purpose in the work of salvation is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:14). So, we may say in the plan of salvation: The Father is the executor, the Son is the one who makes it all possible by dying in our place, and the Holy Spirit is purchased by the Son for you and me. So, we

may speak of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father, through the Son to you and me, and that he was purchased for us.

Now, that's kind of a rabbit trail but I think it's an important rabbit trail because there are a lot of people, especially in this neck of the woods, including especially Louisiana, who do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, and they get all confused.

Is the Son equal to the Father? Yes, in eternity as God is in himself, but in carrying out our salvation, the Son of God submits himself to the Father's will, and that's being referred to here, in verse 29 of Luke 22, "I covenant with you a kingdom, just as my Father covenanted a kingdom with me."

Now, that particular word is a word that in classical Greek, as we saw in Hebrews 9, refers to a last will and testament. How does all that work out?

We want to turn to the book of Genesis for a moment, Genesis 15, and we're going to spend a little time there. We're also going to keep our fingers there, because we have one other verse to look at, or one other passage to look at. Genesis 15 and that's page 21.

"I covenant with you a kingdom, just as my Father covenanted with me." And if we look here at Genesis 15:8, page 21, I'm going to read that verse, we're going to keep our hands in that passage and turn over to Jeremiah for a moment to understand something.

"On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram. " Now, if you want to understand what's going to happen in the passage as we read it—I want you to keep your hand there and turn with me over to Jeremiah 34 and here's what we have, page 1,234, and this will help us understand what is going on in Genesis 15, and I pray that God will enable me by the work of his Holy Spirit to tie all of this together for everybody here, including the young disciples.

Now look at Jeremiah 34:18, page 1,234. We're only going to read this for a moment with a brief explanation. It's during the time that Jerusalem is being threatened by the Babylonians and they were

scared, the people were, and they entered into a covenant to release people according to the law of Leviticus.

Do you know the law of Leviticus and of Deuteronomy prescribes forgiveness of debts, prescribes the release of bondage to Jewish people, no longer to be slaves, and under that old economic system, everybody got a fresh start every 50 years, because they returned to their ancestral home without any debt and got a fresh start. So, if the people of God in the Old Testament had followed those laws, they would have never had generational poverty, because people would always get a fresh start every 50 years.

So, they didn't do that. Why did they not do it? Because following God's word is hard and will cost you things. But when they got scared, what did they do? "O Lord, we'll do it! We'll do what you said we should do!" And this is how they did it.

In verse 18, "The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me," so what they did was, "Lord, we promise we're going to let all those slaves"—these are Jewish slaves—"go free, just as you ordained in the law."

And here's how they did it: "I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces." Do you understand what they did? They didn't just say, "Lord, we're going to obey you. Lord, if you just get me out of this mess, I promise you."

No, they put in place an old ritual: They took a calf, and they cut it in half, and they put one half here and one half there, and they walked between the pieces, okay? So, they said, "Lord, we really mean business now. If you get me out of this, I'm going to start tithing. Lord, if you get me out of this, I'm going to become a preacher." I think I told you the story of a dear friend of mine who said, "Lord, if you get me out of this German prison camp, I promise to be a preacher." He was a wonderful man and a dear friend, but he had never been called to preach.

Verse 19, “The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.”

Now do you understand a little bit as we go back to Genesis 15, page 21, of what we’re about to read? There is a ritual in the ancient Near East where when people were going to make a very solemn promise and enter into a covenant, they did something, and in verse 18 of Genesis 15: “On that day the LORD made a covenant,” a bereith, בְּרִית, which the rabbis translated as “diatheke, διαθήκη,” which means “a last will and testament.”

Now, how does this work out? Well, let’s look. If you get this in context, and we’re going to pick it up in verse 8, but I’m going to give you the background. The background of this is that Abraham has been told by God, “I am your exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1), and he says to God, “God, what can you possibly give me because the one thing I want in life I don’t have, and that is a child?” (Genesis 15:2-3) And so God tells him that he’s going to give him as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, and he said in verse 5, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Verse 6, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Now, Abraham believed God’s promises, but he wants a little more.

Have you ever thought about the Lord’s Supper as being a little more?

In the Lord’s Supper, it’s God’s way in a physical, tangible way, something you can touch, something you can taste, something you can smell of God’s word. And so, Abram says, “Now, Lord,” in verse 8, “O Sovereign LORD, how shall I know that I will gain possession of it?” He said, “Lord, please give me something

physical. Lord, please give me something that I can see and smell and taste and touch.”

And then God says to him in verse 9, “So the LORD said to him, ‘Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.’ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.”

Now, I want you to see what’s happened. He has cut in half these animals, one half of the animal here, one half of the animal over here. He’s done that, back and forth, and then he’s shooing away the birds of prey.

Have you ever, when you traveled, do you ever see vultures circling around or even hawks circling around? What are they doing that for? Because their sense of smell is incredible, and they also have a hawk eye. So, they want to eat, and birds of the air can detect things. So, Abram has to shoo them away.

Now verse 12: “As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him . . .” Look at that, what a verse! “Know for certain”—know for certain—“that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated 400 years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

Know for certain.

Now notice verse 17, “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.”

Think about it for a moment. A smoking firepot and a torch passed between the pieces. What is that? It is that God himself is revealing himself in the form of a smoking firepot and a torch. This is what you might call a theophany, an appearance of God.

Now, let's get it for a moment. Do you see what God is doing? God is saying, "Know for certain," and what does God do?

God passes between the pieces. What does it mean to pass between the pieces of the slaughtered animal? What does it mean?

It means God is saying, keeping that Jeremiah passage in mind, "Let this be done to me if you fail to receive the blessings of my covenant."

I mean, God is saying that? Do you mean that God is calling a curse down on himself? Do you mean that God is saying, "Let me be condemned, let me be destroyed if that's what it takes to keep this covenant"?

Yes, that's what it means and, "On that day God made a covenant with Abraham" (Genesis 15:18).

He cut a covenant. That's the verb that's used with the Hebrew word *berith*, בְּרִית. He cut a covenant. Do you understand why that is so? Because in the ancient Near East, you cut an animal, you cut an animal in two, you walked between the pieces. If you were equals in the ancient world of treaties, people would walk between the pieces. One king with another king might say, "If I fail to live up to what I'm agreeing to, may this happen to me, what happens to these animals."

Now, I want you to think with me. The last will and testament of the Lord Jesus Christ is this: He died for us. Do you understand what that means that I just said?

You don't really understand it until you understand what happens in Genesis 15. The last will and testament is this: Almighty God himself, in the person of his Son, was—and this is not cussing—damned, because that's exactly what happens. God, when he

appears to Abram said, “May this happen to me if that’s what it takes for my covenant with you to be fulfilled.”

Now, do you understand the cross?

The cross is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal God himself, the eternal Son of the eternal God, who, without ceasing to be God in any sense whatsoever, became a real human being, just like you and me, except he never sinned. And in his humanity, made of infinite worth by his deity, the Lord Jesus Christ, in effect, in hanging on the cross, walks between the pieces, and he’s saying, “Let the curse that comes down on covenant-breakers come down on me.”

That’s what God does in the wilderness with Abram: “Let the curses that come on a covenant-breaker come on me.”

Do you mean that God cursed himself when he walked between those pieces in the form of a smoking firepot and a flaming torch?

Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying. God cursed himself. He called down on his own head the curses due for a covenant-breaker, and you understand that through that covenant, you and I are saved, because Abraham’s covenant is a covenant that was made in eternity between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and executed in time, so that the Lord Jesus Christ in hanging on the cross, hangs accursed, because the Scripture says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13).

So, I want you to understand something here, the purpose of this is that Abraham will know in his heart of hearts—and later his name is changed to Abraham—he will know in his heart of hearts, know for certain, that, “Every promise I’ve made to you will come true, and the reason you can know it is, I am cursing myself, calling down the curses of a covenant-breaker on my own head.”

And you know, that’s exactly what happened. In the year 30 AD on Good Friday, the Lord Jesus Christ hung on that cross, and what happened in the wilderness symbolically with the flaming torch

and the smoking firepot happens to him. He's cursed in order that as his body was broken on the cross, you see that you and I receive the blessing of the covenant.

Do you know what the beautiful thing about it is? Every curse and judgment of the Old Covenant came down on the head of the Lord Jesus Christ, and every blessing of the Old Testament, therefore, comes down on your head and my head: "For as many as may be the promises of God in Jesus Christ, they are yea and in him amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

So, we are people of a New Covenant, a New Covenant, a New Bereith, בְּרִית, not a negotiated covenant like Judas and the Jewish leaders, but a covenant that's imposed by a Sovereign, because you can never bargain with God. And the terms of that covenant are, what?

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and your family" (Acts 16:31). Those are the terms of the covenant: Repent and cast yourself on God's mercy in Jesus Christ, and the promise is he will never turn you away, because he's the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he's the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and because of Jesus, he's your God and your Father, and you receive only blessing.

As I think about it, I think about the cup. You know, the picture of a cup in the Old Testament is a picture that's mixed. Why did Jesus pray in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father, take this cup from me" (Mark 14:36)? Why? Because it was a cup that was full of the curses and judgments of the Old Testament.

"Take this cup from me," but the beautiful thing is, because the Lord Jesus Christ drank that cup on the cross down to its last bitter dregs—do you know what's left for you and me? Only the sweetness of the covenant. Only the blessings of the covenant. They're yours and they're mine because Almighty God walked between the pieces of the calves and said, "Let this be done to me." And it was.

May we pray.

Lord, bless us as we remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection until he comes again as we celebrate the Lord's Supper now. In Jesus' name. Amen.