

Title: An Eternal Covenant

Text: Eph. 3:4-6

Date: May 29, 2011 (Memorial Day Weekend)

Place: Decatur Church of God

Theme: Packed Bags

A couple of weeks ago I sat in the living room with our dear friend and Christian Brother, Norm Ward. As we talked about his health and what possible treatments are out there before him, he said to me, "I'm ready to go."

Some people might not understand what he meant but I did. Norm was saying that death is not a barrier to him but a station change on his eternal journey.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we stop to honor those in the military that have died. Many put their lives on the line for our freedoms and we cannot thank them enough. It is a small thing to take a few moments each year to honor them.

Would you join me in a moment of silence to pray for and remember our honored dead? (Pray silently)

In a similar way lets remember family members who have died. We have loved them, remember them, and seek to honor them as well.

Would you join me in a moment of silence to pray for and remember our loved ones? (Pray silently)

It may seem to you quite morbid to spend time this morning talking about death but it is spiritually appropriate that we do so. It is from the spiritual concept of "An Eternal Covenant" that we find our victory over death.

Death holds our attention. Whether we are talking about statesmen like Abraham Lincoln or John Kennedy, high-profile actors like Elizabeth Taylor or Heath Ledger, or sports figures like football great and broadcaster, Don Meredith, or Cleveland Indian

pitcher Bob Feller (who was also an Anderson College alumni), they catch our attention.

Why do you think we are so fascinated by death? What is it that scares us, manipulates us, and as a result, controls our destinies?

1. We are comfortable with what we know, and we do not know about death.
2. We don't want to be separated from our loved ones.
3. We want to make a difference and death could mess up our plans.
4. We are afraid of death and so we limit our participation in life to what is more safe and secure.

So...what are we going to do?

God helps us deal with death by helping us understand his plan for us. This plan, known in church circles as "last things" enables us to live with our bags packed. Paul says it best like this...

Philip. 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Throughout the summer it is my hope to explain why having packed bags is a good thing. For those who are fascinated by the contemporary focus on last things this should be a rewarding and interesting journey. My desire for us is a diminishing fear and a new challenge to live vibrantly for Christ.

Where does it start?

I. God has always had a plan: one plan for the salvation of all.

* One of the old TV shows that I really enjoyed was "The A-Team." Hannibal Smith led the team. Every week he would use

the same expression that I fully appreciate, "I just love it when a plan comes together."

John 1:45

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

- A. The Old Testament and the New Testament agree, the plan comes together in Jesus Christ.
- B. It is in Jesus that God ordained our redemption.

1 Peter 1:18-20

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

II. God's plan unfolded as a developing revelation to us.

What do I mean unfolded?

- A. God made a covenant (a binding agreement) with people from the very beginning with Adam and Eve.
- B. It was however, a fluid, changing, covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

- C. It was a covenant that God wanted us to understand.

Hebrews 1:1-2

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

* I have pastored this congregation for over ten years. During that time I have come to know you. Together, we have shared victories and defeats. I have celebrated with your joys and have prayed with you in your sorrows.

Something I cannot explain, after all these years are...the thermostats in the old part of our building. I am convinced that they do not really work and the temperature is controlled by a Gremlin that lives in the boiler room. He or she knows what would be comfortable and then proceeds to make it something different.

The covenant God makes with us is not something illusive like temperature control but promises that will bless our lives now and in the life to come (what we call, heaven).

Matthew 13:16-17

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

D. This is not a secret.

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

E. Here is the secret.

Ephes. 3:4-6

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members

together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

III. This is the plan of God.

- A. From the beginning, God planned to include Jews and Gentiles (everybody).
- B. God's covenant with Abraham.
 - a. Was not given to a Jew, nor was it given exclusively for Jews.
 - b. Israel did not begin to take shape until the time of Jacob, Abraham's grandson.

Genesis 12:3

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 17:4

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.

Romans 4:16

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

Romans 4:17

As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Galatians 3:26-29

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27] for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] If you

belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

IV. The plan of God includes you and me.

The new covenant was established at the first coming of Christ and it was established with the church – which is the fullness – of which Israel was only a type. Thus the new covenant includes every believer in Jesus Christ.

- A. The covenant was renewed under the Gospel.
- B. The covenant was fulfilled in Christ.
- C. The covenant was confirmed in Christ.
- D. The covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 10:14

Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Conclusion: As we live in the last days, it is vital that we recognize an eternal covenant that God has made with his people. The covenant is an eternal promise of everlasting life for those who have received Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Jew or non-Jew, we are God's if we have Jesus in our hearts.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE UNASHAMED

I am a member of the Fellowship of the Unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I will not look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.

My past is redeemed, my present is exciting, and my future is secure. I will no longer abide low living, sight-walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, dwarfed goals, and cheap grace.

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I do not have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live in Him, lean on Him, love through Him, and labor with Him.

My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions dear, my Guide reliable, and mission clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, deterred, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I will not give up, back up, let up, or shut up until I have preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ. I must go until He returns, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes.

For when He comes to get His own, He will have no problem recognizing me. You see, I am a member of the Fellowship of the Unashamed!

