

Hebrews 9:15-21
Good Friday *Midday*
April 3, 2026

From Hebrews, the 9th chapter:

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a [testament] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Dear friends in Christ,

We heard these words last night... but, in taking in all the contemplation of Christ's arrest in the garden, his sham trials, his flogging, crucifixion, and death... what we recall from last night may suddenly seem a long ways away.

As we think on the history of deep darkness covering the earth in this solemn hour, and as we all have heard the Scriptural accounts of our Lord's suffering, crucifixion, and death, it's understandable that we would desire to sit in the shadows and reflect on the great weight of it all... Judas' betrayal, the disciples' denial, our sin, Christ's forsaken shame. This dark day is certainly a day on which to hear the Law proclaimed in its full severity, as Peter cried most *bluntly* at Pentecost: "This Jesus whom you crucified is God and Lord."

The Scriptures declare that, when the crowds saw Jesus breathe his last, and when they recognized they had put to death an innocent man – the centurion even confessing that this man “was the Son of God” – they all went home beating their breasts. It’s understandable that, in this hour, we would also focus on our own *regret* for what our sins have caused.

But, is that really the purpose of Good Friday? Did Christ go to the cross that we might **regret** his going to the cross? Do we really do well lamenting our part – not in true repentance – but in a sense of having a ‘pity party’ for this Jesus?

Do we actually find *merit* in denouncing ourselves? Is there need to continue preaching the Law that we might satisfy our thirst for piety? Who among us can sit this day (and later this evening) through the solemnity of the liturgy, can sing the hymns that convict us, can listen to our Lord’s words from the cross... and still be stubbornly impenitent and in need of hearing *more* Law? Who of us can smugly sit in this ‘funeral of sorts’ and not feel the weight of one’s own sin – the guilt and shame of your transgressions: drunkenness, immoral deviance, your anger, your greed and envy, love of money, laziness, your anxieties, your lovelessness toward your neighbor, your selfishness, hard-heartedness, unwillingness to forgive, unwillingness to admit fault and seek forgiveness, disobedience toward your parents or the government in authority over you, impatience toward your child or employee at your service,

your cowardice in confessing Christ's doctrine before loved ones, your unwillingness to live daily in that doctrine, your wavering interest of His service to you in Word and Sacrament... honestly, who of us can sit here and not know one's own guilt in such things and repent of your part in Christ's death? Does the Law need to be further preached?

Instead, even in this gloomy hour, *especially* in this gloomy hour, the light of Christ and His gospel shines bright and illuminates and warms our lifeless hearts. And it does so when it reminds us of the psalm that Jesus quoted in His parable of the tenants, which he told during Holy Week, that parable in which the Father sent His Son into the vineyard, red with the blood of his own servants, and the Son was mistreated, hated, killed. And, Jesus cites the psalm, "The stone the builders have rejected has become the cornerstone. *This is the Lord's doing*, and it is marvelous in our sight."

The **penitent one** (you who know your sin and confess it) must always be reminded that, as much as your sins *were* borne by Jesus on the cross, your sins did not kill Jesus. Your sins did not force Christ to hang on that cross. They did not keep him there. *His love for you did*. His determination to put away your sin brought him there; His desire for your salvation kept him there. His desire to share with you the spoils of His victory in the resurrection... *this* is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our sight! If you do not believe that you can **celebrate** the Lord's death, that it would be improper to have joy in

your heart this solemn day, then what of the hymn we sang just last night: “The death of Jesus Christ our Lord, we *celebrate* with one accord. It is our comfort in distress; our heart’s sweet joy and happiness.” Friends, not only *may* the Christian leave with a thankful heart this day, but if one is to be a Christian he *will* leave with a thankful heart this day, for He will be thankful that this all – suffering, passion, crucifixion, resurrection – it all is the *Lord’s* doing! Our sins did not force him to do what He did not desire; He *could* have left us in our sin and left us to our condemnation. But, this dark day and its brilliant result is the culmination of the Lord’s plan, for when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son... to redeem those under the law. He sent His Son, that He might *hand over* His Son, that whoever believes in *Him* might not perish but have eternal life. It is the Lord God Almighty who was willing to see this spotless One’s death as a substitute for your own. It was the God of heaven and earth who was willing to forsake His only begotten for the likes of us. And thus, this dark day is a day full of the light of the Gospel.

And, that this is the Lord’s doing is taught for us through one word, a word we meditated upon a lot last night: *Testament*.

“Testament” refers not simply to a compilation of books; but those compilations of books proclaim the news of God’s testament – His promise. But, “testament” means not just a promise, but a final, everlasting promise of inheritance, sealed by a death. The writer to the Hebrews states,

For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a [testament] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Fellow sinner, though you were and are still a sinner, Christ made a promise of inheritance to you... He said, "This is my body; this cup *is the new testament* in my blood, for the forgiveness of your sins." And he said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." He promised that the one born of water and the Spirit would enter the kingdom of God. He promised that sins of the penitent, forgiven on earth, would stand forgiven before God in heaven. These were His promises to you... this eternal life is the inheritance of which He desired to make you partakers... but such final will and testament cannot be sealed without the death of the one who made it, "for a testament takes effect only at death." But once the death takes place, the testament is sealed *immediately* and valid *forever*.

And so Jesus willingly went to his death, that he might be (the Scriptures say), "the mediator of a new covenant/testament, so that those who are called **may receive** the promised eternal inheritance."

... so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. You, Christian, were called... you were

washed, you were justified, you are being sanctified in this inheritance.

Indeed, baptism is your entrance into the inheritance... it's your inclusion in the covenant Christ has with His Church. As Paul writes, by **baptismal** adoption you were made sons, "and if sons, then heirs"... heirs of a great inheritance sealed by the testament. And, is not **the Lord's Supper** the *meal* of the new testament in Christ's blood as it is poured out for you for *the forgiveness of sins*? That's the point of the testament, is it not – to forgive sins? As we heard last night, the writer to the Hebrews rightly explains:

*"Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**"*

Jesus' testament with you is all about the forgiveness of sins. The sacraments are all about the forgiveness of sins. They are not theological concepts, but gifts from the testator. If you do not have the testament sealed at the cross, the sacramental gifts of the testament are of no use to you! And, if you do not have the sacramental gifts, the promise of the testament sealed at the cross cannot be apprehended by you. The sacramental gifts need the cross; the cross needs the sacramental gifts. For this is the testament of Jesus. His promise to you is an inheritance of forgiveness and eternal life, a testament sealed at the cross, given ('poured out') in

the sacraments. And, in joy of that relationship, St. John can say of the blood and water that ran from Jesus' side: "He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you also may believe." Believe what? *The testament.*

And that means this dark, gloomy, weighty day is a *Good Friday*, a day of solemn but godly joy. For, as true as it is that the weight of our sin deserves to separate us eternally from God, He desired to provide a new covenant for you... a new agreement as Father and children, a new unity of fellowship... *founded* on Christ, *foreshadowed* of Old, *promised* in Christ's will and testament, *sealed* in His blood and by His death, to be delivered through His sacraments.

And, that means only one question remains: is the testament trustworthy? Is it *true*? It might be factually sealed and valid with His death, but does it *mean* anything? Does it carry any weight, that it might actually *be given* in sacramental gifts? It all depends on a promised *resurrection*? So, can its promises actually *be* implemented?

You see, I may write a final will and testament that promises my heirs a great fortune, indeed the whole world. And I may seal that testament with my own death. But, when it comes time to determine my **worth**, my **merit** in promising such riches, in making such a testament, if I am found to be a fraud, the testament is worth nothing.

So, the question is... is the testament Jesus sealed for you *worth* anything? – it may be *sealed* by Jesus' death, but its worth was built upon Jesus' promise to overcome death – everything hinges on that... and now our eyes see his lifeless frame taken from a cross to be placed into a tomb. Is this what he meant when he said, "It is finished?" Is that the fullness of what the Psalmist meant when saying, "This is the Lord's doing"? Where's the evidence that Jesus' testament is *worth* anything? Defeat seems certain. The testament's worth seems empty; its seal seems all for naught.

Moreover, Pontius Pilate had his own seal of authority, a literal stamp, a physical seal... and regarding his handling of this Jesus, Pilate had his own will, his own final, lasting promise. And when the body of this Jesus was laid in the grave, the Scriptures say, the guards "made the tomb secure by sealing the stone." That is to say, Pilate placed his seal of authority, his sealed testament and promise of Jesus' permanent burial, on the rock that covered the tomb, a very physical and literal stamp and seal set squarely on the rock, which prohibited anyone from moving that rock... and he set the guard.

So friends, whose seal proves authoritative? – that of Pilate, or that of Jesus? Pilate's seal promises the Jews and all scoffers a will in which Jesus remains buried. Jesus' testament, sealed by His blood, promises to build His Church for life beyond the grave. One will must be rendered null and void; the other must be found trustworthy.

In three short days, hasten to the tomb, friends; for the prevailing testament, and your eternity, rests with the evidence ... not merely of the stone rolled away, but of the living flesh-and-blood body of the One who having risen from the grave, has become the capstone of His Church... *This* is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our sight!

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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April 3, 2026