

40th Anniversary of the E.P.C. 2001: Our Heritage

Exodus 6:6-8. v.8 "And I will bring you in unto the land ... and I will give it you for a heritage."

A heritage, or inheritance, is the estate, or possession, that passes from an ancestor to an heir. It is signed and sealed as a promise that it shall become the property of the heir named.

In this instance, the inheritance was the land of Canaan, and the heirs were the people of God. It was a very rich and wonderful land - a land beyond the thoughts and imaginations of a people in captivity and slavery, yet God set His name and seal on this promise. "I will give it to you. I am the Lord."

Some looked no further than the possession of the fertile land. Israel of today fights with a great intensity to possess this land. But the true heirs of the heritage saw it as more than just a land.

They saw first, that they could never enter that land unless the Lord freed them from bondage and led them into it. Secondly, they could never possess the land from all their enemies in their own strength. They could never govern this heritage unless they had a King to rule over them. Only the Lord could do this. Their heritage of promise and hope was a land and a kingdom. It was not only of earthly wealth and prosperity, it was foremost a spiritual kingdom where God's laws, His word, and His church would possess the heritage of promise.

In Psalm 119:111,112. David said, "Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever." "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always." 2 Peter 1:4. Peter said, "Whereby are given unto us, exceeding great and precious promises that by these ye may be partakers of the divine nature." Deut.29:29. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

From those early times, God has constantly renewed this heritage to His people from generation to generation. Forty years ago it was marvelously given to us and our children. Let us tell you about it. Our generation grew up in a time when many churches who had held to this heritage (or truth) had departed from it, because Liberalism, which cast doubt on the authority of the Bible, had taken hold. Arminianism was the prevailing teaching in Evangelical churches. It pleased God to grant to some people, in different churches and different places, hearts desirous of searching out the truth; and at the same time, in His providence, to raise up men who would revive and publish Puritan and Reformed books. You will read about this in our Church History.

Ten years ago, in his address at the 30th. Anniversary, Peter (Carins) said, "When it comes to the Fortieth Anniversary, I would like to think that the people here then will be reminded that the Lord visited us older members in a very wonderful way. By His Word and Spirit, He opened the Scriptures to us to reveal His Sovereignty and irresistible grace in salvation. He showed to us the covenant blessings of the household of faith and the family of God, establishing the visible aspect of His church again in the land." And here we are ten years later, to be reminded again.

We will never forget the night just 40 years ago, that our church was constituted. People travelled from all over the state and filled Chalmers Hall. Travelling home, we talked over the wonderful events. The euphoria lasted for days. This was the beginning of a new era. This church with its Confessional standards and historic acts and ministers' vows, had a sure foundation. We had the truth of the Reformation, revived in our time - surely it promised a wonderful time of revival and reformation.

Forty years on, after many trials, attacks of Satan, people coming and going, our numbers are not much different from that night in Chalmers Hall. One might ask, "What went wrong?"

However, because it was Christ's work - His church - it didn't "go wrong" or fail. It was assailed in the most subtle ways, but the promise that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it", has proved it to be a true church. Those refining experiences have strengthened the foundations and confirmed that Reformed faith, and God has carried out His purposes for this church. Granted there have been mistakes and bitter learning experiences, but also consolidation. The church, though small like Gideon's army, has had to trust entirely on the Lord, and He has sustained us and built us up; and whatever has been achieved - to Him be all the glory.

As a Church we may seem very small, but we are not to "despise the day of small things". It pleases God to work through weak and despised things, and we can look back over forty years and remember many wonderful things God has done; most particularly in the hearts and lives of all of us gathered here today. And the History records our development and the work and witness of the EPC, especially the establishment of congregations in other states. Some of the witness was through submissions to Governments etc, distribution of literature, a radio broadcast and evangelistic missions. Certainly we never foresaw such means of opportunity as we now have with the Internet, the opportunities for minister training, and invitations to other countries.

For ourselves, Winnaleah is our sphere and it has been a great privilege to be associated with this church since its very beginnings. Less than three years after all the "high hopes", we experienced a schism. A schism is a most grievous thing sometimes called a rending of the Body of Christ - and this was heart-rending.

It brought separation from our closest friends and family members, so soon after all the hopes for the future of our new Church. It also placed heavy burdens on the few who were left. It affected the children very much.

Other of our churches have suffered these breaks, too. We mention it so that the later generation will know that what we have and hold dear, has been costly; and will learn from past events, and resolve to do all you can to preserve and strengthen this Church - which if it is a true church - is the "œground and pillar of the truth"œ.

So there was a time when we were very few indeed, but the Lord, as promised in Mark 10:29,30, gave us many brethren in other places and we could feel part of the whole church family - able to relate to other congregations. We could rejoice with them in their blessings, and sympathise in their trials.

They in turn, encouraged and helped us, especially the Launceston Pastor and elders. This should be so for us today - to feel part of the whole - to uphold and support the other congregations in true fellowship and practical help when needed.

So we carried on, and there was the joyful healing of the schism after fifteen years; and the call of pastor Burley. He actually began as a student at Winnaleah. We "œsent him out"œ. It was therefore fitting that he be called here and he has been a faithful preacher of the word for 23 years. We have been fed and nourished and another generation has grown up. The Lord has blessed the families with many children, when so often churches these days, have few, if any children or young folk.

Winnaleah also had input into the calling of two other ministers. Pastor Coleborn spent much time here as a student, and Pastor Connors was a Deacon in this church when he was called to the ministry. We have Elders David Peters and Alex Carins following their fathers in this office. And now, we have called Mr Shand, who grew up in Pastor Burley's Rockhampton congregation, to succeed Pastor Burley. Surely we should praise God for His keeping and preserving and building up this congregation.

The concept of a school and the eventual fulfillment of what seemed a dream, has been a tremendous act of faith - and God has so wonderfully supplied all the needs and protected this venture over more than ten years. There are young folk now going out into further education or the workforce, and, we trust, well equipped for what lies ahead.

Which brings us to our special message to you, the younger generation, who are to carry on after we have finished our course. This EPC is not "œour church"œ or "œyour church"œ - it is Christ's church - His body of believers, His people. It is our highest calling and privilege to be part of it, to serve the Lord and walk in His ways with Him all our lives. As Covenant children, you have certain responsibilities.

It is not enough to simply believe what you have been taught, to know the Confession and the Catechism, to accept purity of worship and Presbyterian church government, important as they are. But every one who is a true Christian will be one who is renewed in heart and mind by the Holy Spirit and have a personal relationship with Christ; and to have a firm commitment and resolve to serve Him and follow Him throughout the whole of your lives. To live for Him and in His will is the only real living, and the only source of true happiness.

On this 40th Anniversary, it is our prayer that the next generation will take that heritage of true testimony that was once delivered to the saints and renewed to your own "œfathers in the faith"œ. Hold it as precious, with conviction of heart and mind - own it, believe it, live it, with Christ to rule over it, and it will be a blessing to you all your lives. So, we the founding generation, can safely leave the work and witness of the EPC in your hands.

Peter and Allison Carins
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