TITLE: HERITAGE

TEXT: Exodus 12:1-14 & 24-27; Deuteronomy 4:9

INTRODUCTION: This weekend we are celebrating covered Bridge festival in Madison County. This celebration, centered on our covered bridges, focuses on a part of our counties heritage.

 Just why is all this focus on our counties heritage, symbolized by our covered bridges, so important that we have an annual festivity to celebrate them?

 Why are bridges, built well over 100 years ago, so important to us today?

 Is it simply because they give us an excuse to hold an event that brings a lot of people into the community to spend their money?

 Or so that we can go up and circle the town square and eat all the low fat and non-carb food that is offered during the festival at the various booths?

 For some I think that these may be the primary reasons for the celebration but I don’t think that was the original intent of the festival.

 Originally, I believe the primary reason for the festival was that there were some historically minded people in the community that found that there was a part of our heritage, our covered bridges, that were starting to erode and decay and where in danger of disappearing because there were not sufficient funds in the county coffers to keep them up or repair them.

 A festival to commemorate this part of our counties heritage was a way to bring about an awareness of the condition of the bridges and a way to fund their restoration!

 A way to preserve and protect the heritage passed down to us! And the Bridge Festival has proven successful to that end. The counties bridges have been repaired and preserved!

 ( At least the ones that haven’t be burned down by arsonists)

This morning I want to talk about the importance of heritage.

**her·i·tage *n.* 1. Property that is or can be inherited; an inheritance. 2. Something that is passed down from preceding generations; a tradition. 3. The status acquired by a person through birth; a birthright: *a heritage of affluence and social position.***

In the context of our message this morning heritage is: **Something that is passed down from preceding generations; a tradition.**

 Scripture talks a lot about the importance of heritage, the importance of traditions passed down from one generation to the next!

The importance of passing things or noteworthy events down from one generation to another.

 Listen to what God has to say to His people that He is about to deliver from their bondage and slavery to Egypt in the time of Moses just before He strikes Egypt with the tenth plague that will finally get Pharaoh to release Gods people. Just before the death angel goes throughout the land and strikes down all the firstborn in Egypt .

**Exodus 12:1–14 & 24-27 (NIV)**

**1The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt,****2“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.****3Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.****4If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.****5The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.****6Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.**

**7Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.****8That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.**

**9Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts.****10Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.**

**11This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’S Passover.**

**12“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.**

**14“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.**

**.....24“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.****25When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony.****26And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’****27then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.**

Here we see Gods purpose for preserving ones heritage!

 As a tool to keep us mindful of past meaningful and important events! To keep us mindful of them and preserve them by our passing them on to subsequent generations by making traditions of them and passing them on!

In this case, to pass on from one generation to the next, how God delivered His people with a mighty outstretched arm!

 God used heritage as a tool to keep His people mindful of Himself! Traditions were established that would be passed on from one generation to the next so that the next generation would always know what God had done in the previous generation.

Using tradition to pass on ones heritage from one generation to the next can be a very powerful tool in preserving ones heritage.

The Jewish faith is an excellent example of this!

 One thing that the Jewish faith has is a good handle on the importance and value of tradition to preserve heritage!

Especially where God is concerned! An orthodox Jewish family today still celebrates the Passover celebration in much the same detail as they have for centuries! It is a 7 day celebration where every night as they gather together to eat the evening meal the Father or Grandfather will read a special part of the Passover oratory. On that 7th day they will eat the meal of lamb roasted over fire prepared with bitter herbs. To symbolize the meal that their ancestors ate in haste when God delivered them from Pharaoh and the bondage and oppression of Egypt.

The Jewish faith is rich in these kinds of traditions to help preserve their heritage! And it has worked very well for them!

 History illustrates that in times of difficulty people choose what is truly important to them. "In the late 1930s, Jews in Europe had very little to pass along, other than their personal values. Hitler was on the rise, prejudice and hatred of the Jews were rampant. In that atmosphere of oppression, Jews feared for their lives -- and with good cause. As Adolph Hitler rose to power and started to persecute the Jews, the Jews of Europe soon found that they had lost all their personal wealth. While Jews then had all their material wealth taken away, they had something far more precious: a lifetime of tradition and values. Sensing doom, they reduced those values to writing and shared those writings with their children -- as ethical wills".

 One thing that Hitler couldn’t take from them was their heritage! Even thru the holocaust, when they lost everything of material value--their business, their homes, their bank accounts, everything of material worth… In many cases even loosing their freedom to the Nazi concentration camps and many loosing their very lives in those camps…. their history, their identity as a people was preserved through remembering and passing on their heritage!

The miracle of the Jewish faith is that they have survived as a people even after almost 2000 years of being persecuted, scattered and dispersed among the nations!

How have they survived? By being faithful to remember and pass on their heritage from one generation to the next!

We have seen, just the opposite, happen in the Christian West, particularly in the United States! More and more we are neglecting our Christian heritage and it is showing up in a big way in our culture.

Many in our nation today don’t even believe that we have a Christian heritage as a nation!

Why? Because we have all been negligent in the area of passing down our Godly heritage to the generation behind us!

**Deuteronomy 4:9 (NIV) 9Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.**

In a lot of areas we have let our Christian heritage slip from our hearts and have not passed them on to our children!

I ran across a story that I believe illustrates what has happened in America with regards to the passing down of our heritage…

A devout Christian who had a cat used to spend several minutes each day at prayer and meditation in his bedroom. He read a portion of Scripture and a devotional book, followed by a period of silent meditation and prayer. As time went on his prayers became longer and more intense.

 He came to cherish this quiet time in his bedroom, but his cat came to like it, too. She would cozy up to him, purr loudly, and rub her furry body against him. This interrupted the man's prayer time, so he put a collar around the cat's neck and tied her to the bedpost whenever he wanted to be undisturbed while at prayer. This didn't seem to upset the cat, and it meant that the man could meditate without interruption.

 Over the years, the daughter of this devout Christian had noted how much his devotional time had meant to him. When she began to establish some routines and patterns with her own family, she decided she should do as her father had done. Dutifully she, too, tied her cat to the bedpost and then proceeded to her devotions. But time moved faster in her generation and she couldn't spend as much time at prayer as did her father.

 The day came when her son grew up and wanted to make sure that he preserved some of the family traditions which had meant so much to his mother and his grandfather. But the pace of life had quickened all the more and there simply was no time for such elaborate devotional proceedings. So he eliminated the time for meditation, Bible reading, and prayer. But in order to carry on the religious tradition, each day while he was dressing he tied the family cat to the bedpost.

Folks, as far as our national heritage is concerned we have reduced it to tying the cat to the bedpost!

 In the last 40 years we have managed but all to erase this nation’s Godly heritage from the minds and hearts of its people and that fact is revealed in the direction that we have taken as a nation over the last 40 years!

 Just look what has happened nationally in just the past 40 years!

 We have demanded that God be removed from our classrooms and places of public education!

 The theory of Evolution is being taught to our children but we dare not mention the fact of creation!

 That the Ten Commandments are too offensive to have displayed in our Court Houses and Government buildings!

 We have actually legalized and even encouraged the killing of our most innocent citizenry, our unborn children!

 Sodomy laws have been declared unconstitutional by our federal courts!

Today we are in a national debate as whether to grant marital rights to 2 people of the same sex!

We have justices on our highest court in the land legislating one ungodly decree after another with no great outcry from our people that they have overstepped their constitutional bounds!

And what is their most often used justification for all these ungodly decrees?

 Well that is what the founding fathers would have wanted! That is what they believed! That what they are propagating is the original intent of our founders!

Many would have us believe that men such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and George Mason and most of the rest of our founding Father’s were a bunch of atheists and Deists and what we see today is what they intended for America!

 What a lie that finds its origin straight in the pits of hell itself!

Our founding Father’s where overwhelmingly Christians and most were evangelical Christians at that!

George Washington said this in his farewell address at the end of his presidency:

 “Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds…reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can be maintained in exclusion of religious principle.”

 Washington actually warned here that to remove religious principles from education would be to loose national morality!

How prophetic has his words turned out to be!

 Founding Father James Madison who is considered to be the chief architect of the Constitution once said this:

“ We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.”

 Isn’t it ironic that that which the chief architect of the constitution considered to be the most crucial aspect of American constitutional government, The Ten Commandment, the current Supreme Court has now declared to be unconstitutional?

 Founding Father John Adams once said this:

“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion… Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people…It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

 Adams believed that the constitution would work only for a people who would use internal restraints and internal controls---for people who would use the Word of God as their standard. We have moved away from that as a nation, and clearly the constitution, apart from religious principles is not working the way that it should! The way that it once did!

Conceder a statement made by Thomas Jefferson:

“And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis--- a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that His justice cannot sleep forever.”

How in the world did we get from where these men were in their thinking about God and Government to where we are today in our thinking as a nation about God and Government?

Could it be, that as a people, we have been negligent in the passing down of our Godly heritage and have allowed Satan to propagate his substitute through the message and religion of secular humanism!

 One of the ways that Satan has been able to do this is to convince us as Christians that politics is a dirty business and we should have no part in it! That politics and religion don’t mix!

We are in the mess that we are in today because, for the most part, we within the Church have bought into that lie!

 I think it was Winston Churchill that said….

 The only way that evil will prevail is when good people sit back and do nothing!

Because politics is, or can be, a dirty business is a reason why the Church should get involved! To come in with the power of the Word of God and the presence of Jesus Christ and try to clean it up!

Pattrick Henry once said:

 “It cannot be emphasized too often or too strongly that this great nation was founded, not by religionist, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ!”

John Jay, the original chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and one of the three men most responsible for the Constitution once declared:

 “Providence (God) has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty---as well as the privilege and interest—of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

In less then 30 days we will once again have a time of great national privilege and duty----the election of our national leadership!

As a Christian, it is not just our privilege to vote but it is part of our Christian duty to vote and to prefer and select Christians to represent and lead us!

This holds true for every public office in our land!

 One of the Baldwin brothers, Steven, recently received Christ into his life. Steven is an actor as are his brothers

.I like Stephen Baldwin’s method of encouraging people to vote… I think this method is especially applicable to Christians.

With regards to how to choose who to vote for in the ballot box he says: ask yourself who is most a person of faith as you define your faith as a Christian and see which person comes into your mind and then cast your vote for that person!

 I think that this is an excellent way for a Christian to make their choice in choosing any person to lead us in the affairs of Government! Keep up on what the candidates stand for, not so much where they stand on pocketbook issues, social economic issues but where they stand on moral issues, the issues that would be most important to Christ. Close your eyes and ask yourself which person is a person of faith, a person that represents the values that you hold dear as a Christian, and see which person comes into your mind and simply vote your conscience and not your pocketbook.

A person running for political office may have great sounding plans to make us prosperous as a nation and yet be on the wrong side of most all of the moral issues and if elected into office all those great sounding social and economic plans will amount to absolutely nothing! In fact they very well may just lead us deeper into the abyss or moral decline nationally and closer to the judgment of God!!

George Mason, the Father of our Bill of Rights once said some pretty sobering words:

“As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities.”

Mason had a right understanding about God here!

God has to punish sin if he is to remain just! His mercy and grace may withhold judgment for a season to give an opportunity for repentance but if that repentance doesn’t come then sin must be judged!

And since nations will not go into the next world of eternity, only individual people will, un-repented national sin must be judged and punished in this life! And God punishes national sins by national calamities!

He did with Sodom and Gommorah! He did with the Amalikites, He did with his own people Israel, and He will with us also if we don’t start to forsake and repent of our national sins! Sins such as the killing of our unborn children through legalized abortion and striving to grant civil rights to things the word of God says are sexual perversions and the sin of passing laws that remove God from the public domain!

Church, America does have a godly heritage! We just need to embrace the heritage that we have been given!

If you believe that God is sovereign over the nations of the world then you have to believe that it is God who has given us the form of government that we have! A true democracy! A nation governed by the people that comprise it! It is our privilege as well as our duty as a Christian to be involved and make our voice heard!

 I will share one last piece of our heritage with you this morning in this regard. This is from an early Church leader and evangelists, Charles Finney….

“The Church must take right ground in regards to politics.. Politics are a part of religion in such a country as this, and Christians must do their duty to the country as part of their duty to God…God will bless or curse this nation, according to the course Christians take in politics.”

If you are not registered to vote then I encourage you to go out and get registered this week to vote, and then when Nov. 2nd comes around go out and do your Christian duty and vote your Christian conscience! Ask yourself which person best represents your Christian values and beliefs and then cast your vote for that person!

 If you think that politics is too dirty of a business then do something to help clean it up by placing more of our people there!

If we feel like we have lost our country to the other side then we need to rise up and do what we can to take it back!

“Providence (God) has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty---as well as the privilege and interest—of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

 Not just people who for political gain call themselves a Christian but men and women who by their acts and the stands that they are willing to take prove themselves to be Christian!

Our heritage is rich in God! We just need to once again embrace the Godly heritage that has been handed down to us.

I want to close this morning with a song of challenge by Steve Green …Find us Faithful….

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone

And our children sift through all we’ve left behind

Will the clues that they discover and memories they uncover be a light that will lead them to the road that we each must find… the road that leads to Christ?

Will we be found faithful to have passed down our Godly heritage to those who follow us?