

JESUS IS LORD pt. 3 Romans 8

Many times in our lives, we come to the conclusion that we need something more, that the sum of our life is not adding up right...

Like the day when Charlie Brown stopped at the psychiatric help stand to talk with Lucy. He confesses, "My trouble is I never know if I'm doing the right thing. I need to have someone around who can tell me when I'm doing the right thing." Lucy says, "Okay. You're doing the right thing. That'll be five cents, please!" Charlie Brown walks away with a smile on his face.

In a few minutes, he returns with a frown. "Back already?" asks Lucy. "What happened?" Charlie Brown says, "I was wrong. It didn't help. You need more in life than just having

someone around to tell you when you're doing the right thing." Lucy says, "Now you've really learned something! That'll be another five cents please."

Water Won't Quench The Fire, William G. Carter, CSS

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We have come to the eighth chapter of Romans in this sermon series on this letter, and this is a natural pause in his writing. It seems that in the eighth chapter, Paul is no longer looking back on his life in the valley of the past but is firmly standing on the mountaintop of the present within the abundant life of the Spirit of God. In the next chapters till the end of the letter, Paul looks to the future and writes about hope, but let us stand today with Paul on the mountaintop and enjoy the view.

First, when I have gone mountain climbing as a young man, when I get to the top I always looked down at the

climb I just made. So let's review a bit of the vocabulary in Romans. Paul writes in the first seven chapters that there is a God who created all things, including humans and called them good. Humanity lived in a good and solid relationship as Creator and creature. However, one day we as creatures decided that we wanted something more, that we wanted to be like God and so we no longer trusted God, no longer believed, no longer relied upon God for life. We grasped for the Divine and ended up making our own gods as a poor substitute for our Creator.

This idolatry, Paul says, is the essence of sin. Sin is separation from God, because we chose gods of our own making rather than live in relationship with the Creator. Once humanity chose sin, or to live apart from God, we

could no longer choose God. We have no other choices but to worship the gods we make for ourselves. Paul says even when God gave the Law to Moses; it became a tool of sin, separating us further from God, because we made the Law into a god. The Israelites twisted the Law for their own purposes and used it not to love others and God but to raise themselves above everyone else. Some Christians do the same thing with the Bible; they twist the Scriptures for their own purposes, and glorify and worship the Bible as their god and idol.

Another phrase that Paul uses is "the life of the flesh". You know it as the survival of the fittest; those who have the gold make the rules, do to your neighbor before they do the same to you, I have more than you, I know more than you,

you are nothing compared to me...you know that kind of life and those sayings that come out the heart of a person living for themselves. Now Paul also says that we can do nothing to free ourselves from this life of sin, it warps our reality so much that everything we try to do good and loving and kind becomes self-serving, pushes others down, and causes people to live in debt to us.

So with this knowledge of the definitions of Paul's vocabulary, do you understand what Paul is saying here in the eighth chapter about the life of the flesh and sin? The life of the flesh is a life stuck in the tar of sin, you can't free yourself from it, it is a death trap like the La Brea tar pits. The rewards of this life are all you get if you live a life separate from God. It is a life like grass, it is here today with

green, beauty, and wonderful colors but tomorrow it is brown and dead and only fit for kindling for some else's fire... so eat, drink, and be merry, buy and use all the toys you can get today, for tomorrow may never come.

But interspersed in Romans is Paul's argument that Jesus came to change our relationship with God. That even though humanity rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, and even though every human being eventually becomes mired in sin, Jesus did not. Jesus chose to live in relationship with God, to trust and rely upon God, and to show others how to live life in a new reality, a new kingdom, free from sin, free from the life of the flesh and survival of the fittest, and free from death. Finally, Jesus chose to die to destroy sin, to take our broken relationship with God and

destroy it completely by putting it to death, so that we now have a choice: to live in apart from God and in the flesh, or live the abundant life that Jesus talked about and exemplified through the Holy Spirit.

God so loved humanity that He gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him, who believes in the life that Jesus taught and demonstrated, believes that we can be free from sin because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, to that person who believes, God will give eternal and abundant life joined to God in love.

You see, the good news is that God does not look upon you as a waste of life, a desert filled with dry bones, but as God's beloved child, if only we accept the living water God offers us through Christ.

It's like the story of a man on a train going across the desert in Arizona. He was the only person in the train car who had not pulled down the window shades to keep out the glare of the hot sun on the parched earth. In contrast to the other passengers, he kept looking out his window, and seemed actually to enjoy the dismal scene.

After a while the curious man seated across the aisle, asked, "Sir, what do you see in that wasteland that makes you smile?"

"Oh," he replied, "I'm in the irrigation business, and I was thinking if we could only get water to this land that the desert would become a garden." Robert E. Coleman, *Evangelism: Behold the Harvest!*

God smiles at you today, because he sees us like that desert, resplendent with trees, grass, animals and growing

things...all God has to do is add water. The water that only Jesus offers, the life with God that only Jesus gives, once you have accepted that water of life, you can never be a desert again. Once you've accepted God's gracious gift of a new life, a new reality, a life free from sin, you can never return to the life of the flesh...for now you have the Spirit of God within you. You are free from the tar pits, free from that whole life of survival of the fittest and love of self, free from death that ends in nothing. Jesus Christ has set you free!

This is Paul's gospel message, and it is the message that we continue to echo throughout the ages in the Church! This is the fire of truth that cannot be put out by persecution, people calling us misinformed or religious freaks, even people coming to destroy our house and taking everything

we own. Even when the Christians faced the lions or crucifixion or sawn in two because of the freedom Christ gives to all, these martyrs of the faith held fast to their love of God and especially the indisputable fact that God loved them through death and beyond to everlasting life. "...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What does this mean to you and me today living in Redlands, CA and the 21st century? We all have lived a life of the flesh, even though we may have grown up in the

arms of the church all our lives, we have not loved our neighbors, our family, or fellow human beings...we have all been stuck in the miry tar pits of sin, far from God. We all have this tendency to lift ourselves above others, even people who exhibit extreme humility, we can twist it into selfishness and look at me, look at me...you know? This god of self, this idol of our own making, may look like a Christian, talk like a Christian, go to church and try to live a good life, but no matter how much lipstick you put on a pig, we are all sinners. We know well the life of the flesh... especially when we try to deny it.

Many here, and those reading in print or hearing this sermon online are still stuck in the tar pits of sin thinking that God loves you, you just have to believe in that love...give to the church, read your Bible, pray before meals,

and then go and live your own life worshiping the idols you made and carry around with you...especially the big golden calf of selfishness. But that isn't the good news of the apostle Paul...it is a life still warped and twisted by sin.

We must give up sin, give up flesh or selfishness, die to our self and be set free by the blood of Jesus Christ! What does that phrase the "blood of Jesus Christ" mean? I know it sounds icky, and many people talk about it like some magic oil that we rub on to be saved, but truly the blood of Jesus refers to the choice that Jesus made to destroy sin once and for all, to put it to death, and give us an opportunity to live a life joined in relationship with God our Father, our Creator, who loves us way more than we can ever love our own children. Being set free by the blood of Jesus means that you choose a life lived in the Kingdom of God and not the

kingdom of the flesh and sin apart from God...this choice is only given to us freely through Christ's atoning death. Being set free means to choose to live your life according to the Spirit, and the Spirit will set you apart from the rest of humanity because you are growing in hope, growing in life, growing in the knowledge and love of Jesus.

Even if you don't know what to say to God, there is no magic sinners' prayer or words to say, the Spirit intercedes for us and prays in words too deep for language, because our lives are an inward groaning...we cry out like Charlie Brown that we are looking for something more than just having someone tell you what is right and wrong.

Christ's invitation is to come to the table of grace, heed the groaning within you, you have a choice right now because of the cross, to turn from sin and choose a life of

the Spirit. Come and lay down your burdens, lay down the idols you have made, even your own self at the foot of the cross, and you will find Jesus here waiting for you with a big smile, and wrapping His loving arms around you, you will hear him say, "Welcome home."