

One of my favorite place in Lubbock is the Ranching Heritage Center. I love the old buildings being preserved there.

But when you think about it, it's a bit mind-boggling. Most of the buildings there are from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But that was SUCH a different world.

When I was young, one of my great-grandmothers was still alive. It blows my mind to think that most of the old buildings at the Ranching Heritage Center were built around the time she was born. And yet, the conditions of life in that era were **so primitive**. Light came from burning kerosene. If you wanted to iron your clothes you had to heat the iron on top of a wood stove. Woodworking had to be done with hand tools.

No TV or movies, no computers or internet, no airplanes, no automobiles. A completely different kind of existence. A very labor-intensive kind of existence. And it wasn't that long ago.

And I think to myself, "No thanks!" and "No way!" There's no way I'd want to live like that. I like my modern conveniences. I like technology. I like my creature comforts. I like modern entertainment. I like to be able to turn on the news and find out what's happening around the world. I like to be able to go online or go to the store and purchase the things I want. I like my movies, my TV shows, my cell phone apps. And judging from the lifestyle of those around me, I'm not alone.

And in scripture, there is a term for that kind of attitude. There's a term for this kind of mindset. Paul talks about it in the 8th chapter of Romans. In Romans ch8, Paul calls it "living according to the flesh."

We heard about being "in the flesh" last week in our reading from the first part of Romans 8. And Paul continues that theme in our lesson today. Which brings us to the quick question, "What does that mean? What is living according to the flesh?"

Well, let me tell you what it's not. It's not about sex. Sorry. That's an incorrect interpretation of Paul that you hear every now and then. Living according to the flesh is not synonymous with being ruled by your sexual drives.

Instead, living according to the flesh is much broader than that. And it's not just about your body. It's also about your mind. It's also about your will. It's also about your spirit. In other words, it's about your whole being. Living according to the flesh concerns the whole shebang, the whole package of being human.

Living according to the flesh is another way of saying, "having a worldly attitude." It's about letting the world set the priorities about what's important in life. It's about letting the standards of the world serve as the primary filters for making your decisions. It's being focused on things like power and possessions, comfort and convenience, expediency and empty-pleasures. The world tells us that these things are goals and ends in themselves.

But we know differently. We know that worldly pursuits by themselves are ultimately empty. We really do. When we're really honest with ourselves, we know that there's got to be more to life than endless acquisition of possessions, or experiences, or sexual conquests, or power. We might try to hide that fact from ourselves. We might be in denial. But at some level, we know it's true.

And because of that, there's a certain restlessness in human nature. We try to hide it by anesthetizing ourselves by abusing substances or by filling all our waking hours with TV, or social media, or surfing the web. But those things are like spiritual cotton candy. They give us empty fluffy calories. But they do not satisfy.

By contrast, Paul talks about living according to the Spirit. And this is not spirit, little 's.' This is Spirit, capital 'S,' as in God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit. It's not just about being spiritual. You can be spiritual in ways that follow the standards and dictates of the world. Living according to the Spirit is about living life on God's terms, not the world's. It's about following God's standards, and using God's filters in making decisions. Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.

It's not about saying the world is evil and God alone is good. The world is God's creation, and he proclaimed it good. But it does boil down to a fundamental question: Who's sitting in the driver's seat in your life? Is it the world? Or is it God?

And Paul tells us in no uncertain terms what the end result is: "If you live according to the flesh, you will die."<sup>1</sup>

Living according to the flesh is ultimately about self-absorption. And if you follow it to its logical conclusion, it leads to annihilation. You become so self-centered that you shrink down upon yourself. Sometimes you see this in a cartoon. Characters somehow start swallowing themselves. And they shrink down and eventually go "poof" and disappear. That's the logical outcome of self-absorption.

But, Paul says if you let God's Spirit put to death your worldly priorities, then, paradoxically, you will live.

Again, it's not that the world is bad. Paul is not saying that creation is evil. But the world has to take the back seat, and God has to take the driver's seat. That alone leads to true life. The Holy Spirit dwells within you. You become adopted as children of God. You become joint heirs of eternal life with Jesus Christ.

In fact, putting God in the driver's seat and putting the world in the back seat is actually good for the world as well. The world is not bad. It is just broken. Romans is suggesting that human beings in right relationship with God will lead eventually to the world being in right relationship with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:13

Actually, to talk about this, Paul gets very poetic.

"The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."<sup>2</sup>

Paul says that creation exists in "bondage to decay." We know that's true. For you engineering types and science types, it's the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics. Entropy increases. Things break down over time. Today your car is new. But in a few years, it'll be leaking oil. You may be young and spry today. But as you age, your body will slowly deteriorate and fall apart. It's the way of the universe.

But the good news is that new life awaits us. And new life awaits all of creation. God doesn't want to rescue us from the world. God wants to transform the world. And God wants to transform us.

Paul says, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."<sup>3</sup>

We groan. We're restless. Because we long for something better. We long for the redemption of our bodies. We have a foretaste, the first fruits of what that will be like in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We groan and we wait to experience the fullness of that resurrection ourselves.

What will that be like? One of the most poetic descriptions outside of scripture is found in the children's books, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by our fellow Anglican, C. S. Lewis.

Over the course of 7 books, a number of British children are transported back and forth from our world to the land of Narnia. There they encounter the Great Lion Aslan, who is the figure of Jesus Christ in that world. In the 7th and last book, titled *The Last Battle*, the children find themselves whisked away to Narnia during a railway accident. Eventually, the land of Narnia is destroyed. But Aslan takes them into a new land.

As they explore that land, they find that it contains a new and more perfect Narnia. It also contains a new and more perfect England. And in that new land, at the end of the book, they have another encounter with Aslan. C. S. Lewis writes,

Aslan turned to them and said: "You do not look so happy as I mean you to be."

Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often."

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:19

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:22

"No fear of that," said Aslan. "Have you not guessed?"  
Their hearts leaped, and a wild hope rose within them.

"There *was* a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead.

Now, when C.S. Lewis has Aslan say this, according to the world's standards, being dead is a bad thing. But this is not the case in Narnia. In fact Aslan continues by describing what being dead means, and what new life in God's kingdom means. He says,

The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

As Paul and as C. S. Lewis tell us poetically, God's adopted children have a grand and glorious future.

Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. And we ourselves will be transformed.

We experience a glimpse today. In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In the bread and wine from God's banquet table.

One day, we will experience it in all its fullness.

If we live according to the Spirit, one day we will begin "Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

And that is good news indeed.