

CLOTHED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH

Romans 8:1-17

INTRO: This Corona Virus thing is almost surreal. Who would have thought just a week or two ago we would be in this situation? And the decision – “Do we cancel or don’t we cancel?” was infinitely worse than any 4-inch snow on a wintery, January dawn – “CANCEL? DON’T CANCEL?

OK, DON’T CANCEL.

BUT WHAT IF JUNIOR HAS A WRECK ON THE WAY TO CHURCH? YOU KNOW HE’S ONLY 16 AND JUST GOT HIS LICENSE ON MONDAY OF LAST WEEK!

AND WHAT IF JEWEL BREAKS A HIP IN THE PARKING LOT AFTER NEGOTIATING THE BLOWING SNOW ON THE WAY HERE?!”

I mean that’s the quandary pastors and church leaders struggle through every snow storm. Cancelling church is no easy matter. It’s waaaaaaay too important. So, on Friday we deliberated most of afternoon and early evening and it’s even more difficult because this particular situation is so unknown. There are no manuals for it. It’s frustration at its most intense.

Forty-one years ago, on the 28th of this month I faced a similar frustration, and fear, only it was more localized than this global pandemic we are facing. It was the partial meltdown of Reactor #2 at Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Station near Middletown, PA.

I’m in the library at MCCC and friend comes in

Kathy and Kent were at Messiah College – 13 miles west of TMI

Carolyn and family were about 9 miles east.

I couldn’t get there. I was scared. I was frustrated.

Know what else is frustrating? Being a Christian is very frustrating . . . without Jesus. Let me read our text and then I’ll explain. (Read Romans 8:1-17)

If you’ve read Romans before, and many of you have, you know that Romans 7 is a litany of frustration. It is the kind of frustration that happens when a person tries to be good without the help of power from on high – that is, the Holy Spirit. Paul finally blurts out, *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!* Romans 7:24-25. Frustration does not have to be an issue because . . .

Jesus has arrived!

- *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* And with those words in verse one begins one of the most powerful and hopeful chapters in the entire Bible. It begins with the promise that punishment is gone and ends with . . . *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* Romans 8:37 and nothing can . . . *separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 8:39. Jesus arrived and changed everything.
- The sacrifice of animals proscribed in the Law of Moses was only a temporary fix. Your sins were covered only about a year at a time and it just fell short. Humanity needed power from on high – and Jesus was just that and the Holy Spirit who came when Jesus returned to the Father is that power.
- So, frustration dissipates when we realize and apply the truth that the righteous life is not accomplished BY us but IN us – by Christ Jesus. We cannot do it alone. In fact, we cannot be righteous, at all, aside from Jesus.
- The law comes up short, but the obedience of Jesus takes us to the finish line. He is the once and for all sacrifice. No more yearly sin checkup. Jesus’s work on the Cross insured that our sin was covered. This brings about . . .

A completely new reality for the Christ Follower

- We have freedom in the Spirit. Paul tells us . . . *through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.* (v 2) The old bondage revealed by the law is replaced by a freedom to be a new creation.
- We have life in the Spirit. Christ Followers who . . . *do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* We are guided by the Spirit and not by the flesh. Our life is, in reality, different now. The Spirit is in the driver’s seat. Our desires are more and more superseded by the desires of the Spirit.

- We move from rebelling to pleasing. Verse 7 tells us the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God and cannot please God. (*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires*) This is simply because they don't want to. On the other hand, the one governed by the Spirit longs to please God. That's why Paul is so frustrated in Chapter 7. He knows what God wants, but he does what the flesh wants. The one who is hostile to God doesn't give a rip what God wants.
- It is a change of realms. Verse 9 says, *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.* We move from the realm of selfish self to the realm of Spirit guided self.
- A change of realms means Christ in you and life eternal. Listen to verse 10, *But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.* Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, physical death is still destiny of all people, but eternal life is the promise for the Christ Follower.
- Because Christ lives in us, we are fully alive in body and spirit. The promise is, the one who raise Jesus from the dead will do the same for his followers. We can't lose. That's why a novel virus holds no fear for us. That's why a funeral for a Christ Follower is a celebration in the midst of tear. Death is not the end.
- Death is the end for those who live by the flesh, but for those who live by the Spirit is life. Put to death the old self. We need to go with the new. I'm using an N. T. Wright devotional for Lent and he shared this the other day

"Those of us who now use computers take it for granted that they will have a large internal memory. This is stored on what is called a 'hard disk', as opposed to what we used to have, back in the 1980s, which was a 'floppy disk', which you had to put into the computer and take out again. They didn't hold much information, and you always had to be putting them in and taking them out. It was a nuisance. But you get quite attached to the machines you use a lot, and I remember trying to get a technician to fit a hard drive and disk into the old machine I had been using and wanted to carry on using.

Eventually, as we discussed it, he took a deep breath. 'What you need', he said, 'is not to add more bits onto this old machine. What you need is a new machine.'

That wasn't what I (or my bank manager) wanted to hear. But he was right. The new machine duly arrived, and I quickly realized it was, of course, what I had been needing for some time."

We've been needing a new life for some time too.

- And here's the pay-off – We get to be God's children! We are adopted with all the rights and privileges that come with it. What came to Paul's reader's minds as residents of Rome, was a mental picture of the adoption process in Greco-Roman culture. When a man who, not having an heir, or not happy with his heir, wanted to ensure he had a proper line of succession, he would adopt someone. Often it was a slave which really change things. A slave, with no rights at all, could become the heir of a family name and fortune and NOTHING could change it. It was as if he was a blood relative. For Paul's readers this was mind-blowing. For people who saw gods as fickle beings who were never satisfied and unapproachable, and freedom from sin and death as unattainable, this was joyful news.

Conclusion: So, that is what the Spirit provides, power from on high. A change of realms, and the promise of no condemnation. It's a lot to take in, even for those who have lived in it for years. But its true. Are you adopted? Are you living with power from on high? Amen.