

Sermon 7-26-26
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost. Text: Romans 7:18-25; 8:1-39

Spirit and Flesh — Part 3

In order to understand Yahweh's purposes for Christians on this earth, we have to start with what a human being is. Scripture reveals that we are spirit beings joined to a physical body. And that joining is so seamless that we aren't able to tell the difference between the two until the death of the physical body. At a wake you'll see a body, but there's no life in that body. The spirit has been separated. The person's spirit is now disembodied until the resurrection of the dead, when it will be reincarnated.

And yes. Christians believe in reincarnation. But the big difference between us and Hinduism is that we know that reincarnation can only happen once. Our spirits will never be reincarnated as anything other than a human being. Our spirits will never be reincarnated as some other person. Joined to our new, immortal, indestructible and deathless human bodies in the resurrection of the dead, we won't look the same. Nevertheless, to God, to ourselves and to all others in the final Kingdom of God we will be recognizable as the human incarnated in our mother's womb. (And wouldn't you want a better looking body anyway?)

Now, Scripture also reveals that a fateful decision was made by the first two humans Yahweh created. They were deceived into grasping at equality with God by the Serpent spirit being who had already committed that sin. By grasping at equality with God, Adam became his own god, required to define good and evil for himself and then acting on his decisions. It was the same for Eve. In so doing, they both forsook the Image of God with which they would have reflected their Creator's intrinsic goodness — His righteousness. Also, they both forsook the protection from evil that they would have had in the Image of God. Therefore, they became subject to all the consequences and judgments that breaking faith with Yahweh brings. And they passed all that judgment on to us, their descendants.

We consider any number of Yahweh's judgments against us to be a normal part of human life. However, having to work in order to eat is not normal. It's a judgment. Having to wear clothing is a judgment. Having to work in order to get protection from the elements is a judgment. Aging is a judgment. Natural disasters that have occurred from the great flood onward are a judgment. The fact that all humans can be subject to physical suffering is a judgment. None of this was meant to be. In the resurrection, on the new earth, all such judgments will finally disappear for those who are in Christ. But for now, we are all subject to such judgments because of Original Sin.

Now, the worst judgment of humanity on account of Original Sin is what Scripture calls the Second Death. In the resurrection of the dead all who Jesus refuses to acknowledge as belonging to Him will be separated forever from Yahweh — the God they didn't want. This is the Second Death. And since Yahweh is the only source of all righteousness, to be cast out of His presence will mean a complete loss of righteousness. All those cast out will become as evil as the rebel angel they followed unknowingly, or knowingly, in life. Apart from

Yahweh they will exist in complete evil. The only benefit — if you can call it that — will be that they will never again have a God telling them what to do. They will be their own gods forever.

Scripture tells us that human beings are the apex of Yahweh's creation. We know this primarily because Yahweh Himself became one of us in order to save us. He has rescued no angel in this way. So, since we are the apex, Yahweh has not been content to let the Serpent steal us all away into the outer darkness. This is why Yahweh, the Son, became incarnate of the Virgin Mary. (By the way, since yesterday was July 25th, Merry Christmas in July!) Anyway, as one of us, the God/Man, Jesus faced off against the ancient Serpent for us. Despite the multiple deceptive temptations Satan used to get Jesus to grasp equality with God — the cross being the most severe temptation — Jesus successfully resisted Satan unto death — even death on a cross. And so Jesus has restored access to the Image of God to all those who put their faith in Him.

This means that all those in Messiah Jesus will be restored to the Image of God in both spirit and body. However, the full restoration will not occur until the Day of Jesus Christ and the resurrection from the dead. That's when all human bodies will be resurrected and changed. Until then, there is only a partial restoration. And Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:10-11, "10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

By grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, indwells the believer and causes our human spirits to be born again of God. This is the great Good News of the Gospel — that those who have sinned and deserve nothing except eternal exile from Yahweh — these same people have been set on the path to full restoration of the Image of God through the gracious forgiveness of their sins in Jesus Christ.

However, as Paul told us, even though the spirits of believers are alive in Christ, the bodies of believers are still dead because of sin. This makes for the difficult situation Paul described in Romans 7:18-24, "18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Paul's triumphant answer is found in Romans 7:25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And it's immediately followed by an important summary analysis. "So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." And this is the problem for every Christian. Our spirits and minds are alive in Christ, but the sinful nature still clings to our physical bodies. Only in the resurrection will Christians finally receive bodies entirely free from the sinful nature — bodies restored to the Image of God.

In the meantime, however, by Jesus' obedient sacrifice on the cross, He has fulfilled for us the righteous requirement of God's Law that sin must be punished. Therefore, Paul strongly asserts in Romans 8:1-2, "1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who

are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” This is the tremendous Good News of the Holy Gospel.

As we saw last week, the Apostle gave all of us this advice in Romans 8:13, “. . . if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” And if we pursue this course, then something else sticks out. We’re being led by the Spirit of God. Then, as it says in Romans 8:14, “. . . all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” This means that those who put to death the deeds of the body demonstrate by doing so that they are children of God. And those who are children of God have a most glorious, yet humbling privilege. As we read in Romans 8:15, “. . . you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Abba is the Hebrew familiar word for father — “Daddy.”

Last week we also learned in Romans 8:17, “and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. . .” Everything that belongs to Jesus also belongs to those who have been saved by grace through faith in Him. They will be glorified with Him.

But there was one caveat in Romans 8:17, “. . . provided we suffer with him. . .” If you recall, last week we saw that there are two kinds of suffering that the Christian must endure. First is the suffering common to all citizens of this earth caused by the judgments of Yahweh against us.

However, we also saw Yahweh’s plan to recreate all things, so that on the Day when Christ’s people receive their resurrected, glorious, righteous bodies, all the judgments against the creation will be canceled. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. And by this great and glorious promise, Lord Holy Spirit creates powerful and gracious hope for righteous resurrection in all believers in Jesus.

Last week, we also discovered that while waiting for this great hope to be fulfilled, we have a powerful ally. It says in Romans 8:26, “. . . the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” Romans 8:27, “. . . the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Now, this week the apostle finishes his discourse on the first kind of suffering and turns to the second kind of suffering that Christians may endure. He begins by making an enormous statement in Romans 8:28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” All things? Does this mean that sickness, disaster and impoverishment can work for good? Apparently yes. Because anything and everything causes the believer to cling more tightly to the Daddy who will deliver him or her from the troubles of this life.

To back up this enormous and difficult claim, Paul points out that every true believer has a destiny appointed to them from before the foundation of the world. He writes in Romans 8:29-30, “29 For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

This means that if you have been brought to the knowledge of your tremendous need to have your life justified before Yahweh by the likes of Jesus and have been assured by faith of Jesus’ work to justify you — how He has declared you righteous before Father by His sacrifice — then this faith was planned for you long before you came into existence. And you have experienced the life changing power of Yahweh’s gracious purpose for you.

In whatever way it came to you, you know the power of Yahweh’s great love, His great longing for you, His great call to you through His proclaimed Word. You have also known

the humbling power of the forgiveness of your monstrous sin and rebellion that was won by the suffering of the Jesus who has greatly loved you since before the foundation of the world. You have been given the faith to understand that even now Jesus has justified your entire life before your Father by His great and perfectly obedient sacrifice. And it is by the power of God's great call upon your life, that you humbly look forward to a glory with Jesus that only He could win for you.

And so in another of the great encouraging verses of chapter 8, Paul wrote in Romans 8:31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" The answer to that is that Yahweh Himself is for us! Hallelujah! And the apostle fleshes this out with the series of rhetorical questions that follow. Romans 8:32-32, "32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." Yahweh has done and will do all this for us. He gave us Jesus His Son. He gave Him up for us sinners. And because Jesus succeeded in defeating sin death and the devil, in Jesus, Yahweh can give us all the glory He originally intended for human beings.

But all this victory and glory is followed by the reality of the situation the Christian still must face as long as this earth endures: suffering. It begins with a great rhetorical question in Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The answer to that is that nothing can. In eternity the love of Christ will prevail. But in this temporal realm there are plenty of things that will try to separate the Christian from the love of Christ. So, Paul lays out the list of the second kind of suffering. Romans 8:35, "... Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" The man who wrote these words was deeply acquainted with all these things as his testimony in 2Corinthians chapters 11 and 12 makes clear.

However, Paul was not destroyed by all that he suffered. Indeed, he expected the suffering. And to back it up, Paul quoted a verse from Psalm 44. This psalm complains about the defeat of Israel's armies even though Israel had been faithful to Yahweh. Psalm 44:17-22, "17 All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant. 18 Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way; 19 yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, 21 would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart. 22 Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Now, who would be most faithful to Yahweh other than the Christian who is regarded by Yahweh as one of His true children in Christ? Yet, throughout history, Christians all over the world have been persecuted and have suffered. Why is this? Why should being killed all the day long apply to Christians?

Jesus gave us some understanding of this when He spoke of Himself to Nicodemus in John 3:19, "19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." Now if this was true of Jesus, will it not be true of His disciples? As Jesus said in Matthew 10:24-25, "24 'A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they

have called the master of the house Beelzebul, [the name of a devil] how much more will they malign those of his household.” So Paul’s quote from Psalm 44 was and remains quite appropriate. Those without Jesus hate Jesus, the light. They love the darkness.

Nevertheless, Paul ends this chapter with a most encouraging confession of faith. Romans 8:37-39, “37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 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.”

This is a list of beings and powers that would attempt to separate the Christian from his or her relationship with Jesus through persecution. For suffering is a tool of the devil that always invites this question, “Is it worth it?” Is what I’m standing for worth the pain and agony? If Jesus Christ promises so much good, why is there all this trouble associated with Him? Paul’s personal answer was very powerful. Nothing can separate us from the Love of Christ. His answer is so powerful that this part of Romans 8 is one of the lessons that can be used in a Lutheran funeral service.

Taken in total, then, Romans 7 and 8 proclaim that God is real. And until you know Him, you’re just a lost wanderer on earth. Jesus is real! Until you know Him, you can think you know everything, but know nothing. Christ’s Church — the household of God — is real! Until you become God’s child, you’re an orphan on earth. This life is not the main event in life! And, until you understand that truth, you will be deceived by the big Lie. Therefore, blessed are they who have been called and justified to know the Truth. Blessed are those who look forward to being glorified with Jesus, the lover of their souls. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV.