

Romans 8:11-17

The flu outbreak has captured the attention of the world this week. It affected the travel plans of students at Edmonton Christian School who thought they would be in Quebec right now. It has a tighter hold on our thoughts than earthquakes, wars and famines even though those events have taken many more lives.

The thing about the flu is the possibility that it could make **me** sick, that I might get too close to someone who just came back from Mexico and that I could even die. The flu, travelling invisibly, anonymously, leaves us feeling vulnerable. And it reminds us all how much we do not want to die.

We avoid thinking about death as much as we can for as long as we can. But all the juicers and vitamins and exercises in the world won't change the undeniable fact.

Unless Jesus returns first, death will come to every one of us. By way of disease, or accident, "natural causes" or violence, we will all die.

One day we will die.

Around the world there are people who don't need reminders about death.

Tony Campolo says that, "In Harari, Africa, a truck drives through every morning at 6 to pick up the children that die each night and burn them. One day you're going to die. They're going to drop you in a hole and throw dirt in your face, and go back inside and eat potato salad. When you're born you're the only one to cry. What are you going to do so that when you die you are happy and everyone else is crying? <http://richdrama.com/NewsBlog/2005/02/tony-campolo.html>

If we have never given our own death any serious thought, Paul's great promise here won't do much for us. But if we have, it might just grab hold of us.

The condition...

"If you are living and walking and hoping and obeying by the Spirit of God, then don't be afraid of death for Jesus' sake, because

"...He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you".

We will rise again, just like Jesus did.

That is why the Bible calls Jesus, "the firstborn from the dead".

Jesus is first, we follow.

God's goal is not your soul. Not to bring our souls to heaven.

Read the Bible.

God has a bigger and better dream for us. We will get to that near the end of the message today.

First, let's follow Paul.

He says that we are debtors...

Did you notice Paul interrupts himself?

Listen,

"Therefore, we are debtors, but not to the sinful nature, to live according to it... (we can fill in what follows....)

We are debtors **to the Spirit of God**, to live according to the Spirit.

Remember Fred Flintstone? And Wilma? And remember when Fred had promised to take Wilma to a dance but then his Water Buffalo lodge buddy, Joe Rockhead called to remind him about the bowling tournament?

There would be two little Fred angels, one on each shoulder, one with a halo saying, "Fred, you know how much Wilma has been looking forward to the dance!" The other angel had a pitchfork and said, "The guys are counting on you Fred!"

It's easy to think of our sinful nature and the Spirit of God like that.

The Bible says that the situation is more desperate. The Bible says the "bad angel" is our own self. We're not neutral, being pulled in two directions. Rather, "sins r us".

We would ditch Wilma and go bowling every time.

Our sinful nature, or "our flesh" lives in us. When we live according to it, we avoid God and blame each other for what we do wrong.

Living by our sinful nature always means death.

Paul sets it up so it is easy to remember:

"Live by flesh, death.

By the Spirit, death to flesh, live".

The good news is that we are not debtors to our sinful nature. We don't have to continue in that old, fearful, guilty way of life. We are debtors to the Spirit of God.

Our debt to the Spirit is for work done in the past, before we even knew that we were loved.

Do you love Jesus?

The Spirit did that in your past before you realized it.

The Spirit's work in us is **on-going** in the present.

The Spirit is leading us into truth.

The Spirit is giving us life.

The Spirit is comforting us in sorrow.

The Spirit is giving us peace.

The Spirit is warning us of the danger of sin.

The Spirit is growing obedience in us.

The Spirit is renovating us from the inside out.

Our debt to the Spirit of God is an on-going debt of thankfulness for work past, and present and future, when God will give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit.

Debts of thankfulness are obligations that we repay creatively, and joyfully, every chance we get.

In the next verse Paul has a little word play going on.

In Greek the word for son is 'huios', the word for adoption is 'huiotesia'.

So Paul says, we are sons, with the spirit of sonship. We could also say, "we are adoptees, with the spirit of adoption".

We do not relate to God like a slave to the master, obeying out of fear of punishment, or fear of being sent away, or fear of not being fed.

We are adopted children of God through Christ Jesus and we are given the Spirit of those who know they are home. The Spirit “testifies” with our spirits that we are children of God.

Tom Wright says that it is hard to describe how the Spirit “testifies” with our spirits. He says, “It is however, a common Christian experience that while many of the thoughts in our mind seem to come from the ordinary flow of consciousness within us, sometimes we find other thoughts, which seem to come from somewhere else, hinting gently but powerfully at God’s love, at our calling to holiness, at particular tasks to which we must give energy and attention. A key part of Christian discipleship is to recognize that voice, and to nurture the facility of listening to it. It is, or may well be, the voice of God’s own spirit. And one of the primary things the Spirit says is that we are God’s children”. (Paul for Everyone – Romans p.146)

By the Spirit we are at ease with God, unafraid of God, glad to be with God, we cry out, “Abba”, or “Dad, Daddy!” as Jesus did.

A few weeks back I saw a hint of what this looks like. Josh Seinen and the music team were warming up, when Jenn came in with Jordan. Jordan is their adopted son. I’ve never seen a little guy so excited to see his Dad. He was jumping up and down, peeking between cracks in chairs, just to get a glimpse of Josh. (here’s what I mean...)

So maybe when you young parents snuggle with your little ones, you might remember that you are acting out what it is like for God with us.

Now here is where we get to the best part. If we are children of God then we are heirs. Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

But heirs of what?

What is our inheritance?

A quarter section of heavenly cloud?

A mansion on a street paved with gold?

We're going to take a quick flyover of the Bible, but I hope it will be enough to see what we are promised here.

In the beginning, God makes a home in a hostile universe. It is a place for people and creatures to live together with God. Adam and Eve are in the garden with God.

Our sin destroyed that good place. But ever since, God has been working for a place where he might be at home with his people.

He washes the world clean with the flood and starts over with a few. That does not last.

He calls one old man and his old wife and makes a new start with them. Listen: Genesis 15 "...the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, "

That promise echoes through the rest of the Bible.

You can hear it in Exodus "See I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared." (Exodus 23:20) ( "To your descendants I give this land,) (We are co-heirs with Christ!)

God brought the people into the land, but the people didn't want him.

The people end up in exile, but the prophets always talk about a homecoming, a return from exile, like these words from Isaiah:

<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare  
a feast of rich food for all peoples,  
a banquet of aged wine—  
the best of meats and the finest of wines.

<sup>7</sup> On this mountain he will destroy  
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,  
the sheet that covers all nations;

<sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears

from all faces;

he will remove the disgrace of his people

from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken. ("To your descendants I give this land), (We are co-heirs with Christ!)

And the songs of the Bible sing and hope about an inheritance.

In Psalm 2, the promise made to the Messiah is widened,

<sup>8</sup> Ask of me,

and I will make **the nations** your inheritance,

**the ends of the earth** your possession. ("To your descendants I give this land,) (We are co-heirs with Christ!)

We hear echoes in Psalm 37 about an inheritance....

<sup>11</sup> But the meek will inherit the land  
and enjoy great peace.

<sup>18</sup> The days of the blameless are known to the LORD,  
and their inheritance will endure forever. (To your descendants I give this  
land) (We are co-heirs with Christ!)

Now listen to Paul in Romans 4, and notice what he does with the  
promise to Abraham,

<sup>13</sup>It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the  
promise that he would be **heir of the world**, (literally 'cosmos') but through the  
righteousness that comes by faith." ("To your descendants I give this land,) (We  
are co-heirs with Christ!)

God's promises are bigger and better than saved souls in heaven. He will  
raise us to life so that we may receive the inheritance he longs to give us. The  
Messiah and his people are children of God, heirs to the whole world, the whole  
universe, the entire creation made new.

To Romans 8, where we finish this morning, "we are heirs of God, co-heirs  
with Christ. With Christ we have as **our inheritance** the new heavens and the  
new earth. This earth renewed, this earth re-made, the same, with rocks and  
trees and skies and seas and music and art and construction and yellow labs and  
friendship in Christ across every culture, tribe and tongue.

What is it like to have such a grand inheritance?

What will it be like to walk around this week?

How will we see the cosmos this week?

How deep the Father's love, how powerful our Saviour's grace!

There is that thing called suffering, we will get to that next week.

The Lord is gracious to you,

The Lord is gracious to me,

And all God's people said, Amen.

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