

**“A New World”**

July 16, 2017

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Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

## MOVING TO A NEW WORLD

I have a friend who has a vacation home in Mexico. He spends several months at that home every year. And when he’s in Mexico, he seems more relaxed.

As he puts it,  
“There’s a whole different vibe down here.”

I know what he means.

I look forward to seeing new places.  
Every place has a new vibe, a new feel.  
And it changes us.

Going to a new place enables us to break out of our routine and feel re-freshed.  
That’s why they call it vacation, right?

But, some people become so enamored with the places that they visit, they want to go live there permanently.

Those of us who are HGTV junkies have watched House Hunters, the international version.  
Average Americans leave the cold northeast or midwest to live in some exotic tropical destination. They’ve had enough of the cold and the rat race.

Now they’re going to live their dream vacation all year long.  
I watch that and wonder, “How in the world do they do that?  
I’ve been to some of those places.

They are nice places to visit ... but I’m not sure I would want to live there.  
Deciding to live in a radically different place full time is a drastic decision.  
Something big has to happen in our life before we do something like this.

What would cause you to risk culture shock and move?

What would make you go to a whole new world?

Our ancestors came to this land because they were looking for religious and political freedom.  
Immigrants often come to our country because they hope to find financial freedom.

All came to our country looking for a new life.

They were so desperate for a new life that they were willing to leave the old life behind in order to come.

But, if we like the life we have,  
we're not going to move.

I like being in Florida.

I like not having winter.  
I like the laid back lifestyle.

I don't want to move.

Something big would have to happen before I would think differently.

## THE BUCKET LIST

This past week I watched a movie about two men who had something big happen in their life.

Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman were in a movie entitled The Bucket List.

Sadly, both men were given a bad diagnosis.  
They were terminally ill.

The character played by Nicholson was a wealthy man, but he had no family, at least no family with whom he was on speaking terms. He lived his whole life making money, but now he realized it was (as he put it) "dead money".

The character played by Freeman was a mechanic.  
He was very smart, and he wanted to go to college, but life got in the way.  
He got married, had a child, then another child  
... and spent the next 40 years working under the hood of a car.

But, illness brought these two very different men together in the hospital.

And they came to a common realization.  
There was much that they wanted to do before they died.

So they made up a “bucket list,” a list of things they wanted to do before they kicked the bucket.

Since Nicholson’s character was wealthy they were able to do whatever they wanted to do ...

go skydiving, race hot rods, climb the highest mountain.

This was the fun part of the movie.

In their situation, a lot of the restrictions of life just don’t seem to matter any more.

It was a lot easier to throw caution to the wind.

But, in true Hollywood fashion, they finally realize that there was “no place like home”, and they return to make amends with the people that they had left and failed.

When the character played by Morgan Freeman dies, Nicholson speaks at his funeral.

And he says in effect that through their common struggle with impending death, he had learned about the true meaning of life.

He had lived more in those few weeks than he had all of his life.

## FLESH VERSUS SPIRIT

The struggle to live a meaningful life is not reserved for the end of our life. According to Paul, it is a struggle that all of us face right now.

We are in a battle, a struggle for our soul.

And in this struggle we have two choices.

We can embrace what Paul calls “life in the flesh”

... that is life lived according to the ways of the world.

Or we can live life in the Spirit

... that is life lived in light of God’s grace as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Life in the flesh leads to death in every sense of the word.

In fact, Paul wrote in chapter 6 that the wages of sin are death.

He said that sin has infiltrated every area of our life.  
Sin has corrupted our politics, our family and even our religion.

And Even when we know the right thing to do, even when we know the law,  
we continue to do the wrong thing.

We live in a world that is so filled with sin that people can even do the  
wrong thing and justify it in the name of faith.

## PAUL'S STRUGGLE

Last week we learned that Paul wasn't just being critical of the sins of  
"other people."

The apostle saw the same battle being waged in his own life.  
And sin was winning.

Paul wasn't playing the game of "ain't it awful" that so many of us play.  
You know what I mean.

We say,  
"What's our world coming to?"  
And then we give a litany of political and religious leaders who are missing  
the mark.

But, often we leave ourselves out of the equation when we make these crit-  
icisms.

We forget what Jesus told us.  
Better not judge. We want to remove the speck in our brother's eye, but  
we just might have a log in our own eye!

Paul didn't fall for that.  
When Paul took a hard look at his own life, he saw the unvarnished truth.  
Even after his dramatic conversion and years of preaching the gospel, he  
was still failing to do the right thing.

So what was Paul's response to this terrible discovery?

Did he blame it on somebody else?  
Did he resort to "what aboutism"?

Have you heard that phrase, “what aboutism”?

It’s a public relations ploy.

When somebody accuses you of misbehavior,  
you point to the misbehavior of someone else and say,

“But, what about them?”

“What aboutism ... we hear it every day!”

Paul didn’t do any of that.

Even though Paul is writing a letter, you can practically hear the anguish in his voice as he writes,

“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Sin is a serious personal matter for Paul.

But, this anguished question marks a turning point.

In response to this self-accusing question, Paul praises God.

This gives us a hint of the good news to follow in our lesson for today.

He writes, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

## FORGIVENESS BREAKS THROUGH

How can Paul say that?

In the previous sentence he is so grieved by his hypocrisy he feels like he’s dead in sin.

He is so much a part of the ways of this world, life in the flesh that he seems to see no way out.

Where does this shout of praise come from?

It comes from the grace of God.

It comes from God’s forgiveness.

Yes, the world is going down the tubes.

And we’re all on that road to perdition together.

But, that’s not the only force at work in the world.

The Bible tells us that into the darkness came the light.

On a day when the sun refused to shine,  
on a day when it looked like evil had finally won,  
on a cross

... the light of forgiveness broke through.

And so Paul writes,  
“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

What none of us could do on our own, God in Christ has done for us.

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

And it is forgiveness that truly allows us to live a new world.  
It is forgiveness that brings us life instead of death.

## THE PORTAL OF DEATH

Henri Nouwen was a Roman Catholic priest and a psychiatrist.  
He wrote many books that have been highly regarded by Roman Catholics and Protestants.

He was a deeply spiritual person and yet, at the same time, he was quite aware of his own faults.

A while back I read an article that was prompted by a near death experience.  
He was hit by a car while jogging, and he thought that he was going to die.  
He said that he was amazingly calm and at peace during this experience.

But, there was one thing that he wanted to do more than anything else.  
He wanted to speak with those who had wronged him and say, “I forgive you.”  
And he wanted to speak with those whom he had wronged and ask for their forgiveness.

He didn't have this feeling out of a sense of impending judgment.  
At this time of crisis he had a transformative sense of God's unconditional love.

He wanted to forgive and be forgiven out of an unexpected sense of joy and contentment.

Through the gift of forgiveness, the “portal of death” as he called it, was not something to be feared but embraced as the road to a new life, a new world.

Deliverance from death called him to a new way of life.

And so it is with us.

The movie that I watched this week, *The Bucket List*, was, in many ways, a profoundly spiritual movie. It forced me to think about things that I would rather not consider.

Suppose the doctors told me that I only had six months to live?

What would I do?

Where would I go?

Who would I want to be with?

Could I die well or would the stress of dying bring out the worst in me?

We are all in the portal of death.

We might not want to admit it.

Most of us are afraid to go there.

So, in order to distract ourselves from our fears we fill our lives with all sorts of shiny baubles.

But, suppose that portal of death is different from what we expected?

Suppose in the portal of death we don't find condemnation but love and acceptance?

Suppose in the portal of death we find reconciliation and forgiveness?

Suppose Nouwen is right.

Suppose in the portal of death we experience a presence?

It is a presence that is at the same time human ... and also Divine?

That's what this passage promises.  
Notice what Paul wrote in verse 11,

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,  
he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also  
through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

I have come to believe that in order to really live we have to enter the portal  
of death.

We have to die to the old way of life.  
We don't do it not because we want to wear our righteousness on our  
sleeve like a badge of honor.

We give up the old way of life because, by the grace of God, we know un-  
conditional forgiveness.

In the portal of death we are given the opportunity to take our minds off of  
the concerns of the flesh and open our minds to the possibility of new life.

Paul wrote that though we are dead in sin, the Spirit of the risen Christ can  
fill us with life and peace.

This new life begins here and now,

but it's also a life that is eternal.

## RESETTING OUR MIND

This passage also gives us a practical way to make this eternal grace a re-  
ality in our lives.

Paul tells us that in order to live according to the Spirit we should set our  
minds on the things of the Spirit.

What does that mean?

It means setting our minds on God's grace and not on the evening news!  
It means setting our minds on the promises of God instead of our fears.

Now don't misunderstand.

I'm not saying we shouldn't be aware and involved in our world.

That's important for all of us.

But, we should place more emphasis on the promises of God in Christ. It is a reordering of our mental life.

When I was working as a counselor, we put a lot of emphasis on a form of psychotherapy called Rational Emotive Therapy.

Unlike other therapies that emphasize listening and the expression of feelings, this therapy encouraged folks to examine their mental life.

What do we say to ourselves when no one else is listening?

We all have a running conversation with ourselves and the content and assumptions of that conversation go largely unnoticed. But, according to Rational Emotive Therapy, those conversations have a big impact on how we feel and how we behave.

Suppose we interrupted that pattern with new thoughts?

Would that change our life?  
It could.

But, changing our thought patterns is really hard to do.

In order to correct crazy thought patterns we have to replace them with new more reasonable ways of thinking.

Today's lesson suggests that we have help with this.  
The Spirit enables us to think in a new way.

The Spirit enables us to be mindful of God's grace.  
The Spirit empowers us to make forgiveness a reality in our lives.

A political commentator used to have a segment on his TV show that he called the "no spin zone".

This was supposedly commentary that would not be shaped by political influence, political spin.

It seems to me that today's lesson offers us a new kind of zone, the "no condemnation zone".

God in Christ brings us to a place where the sins of the past and present can no longer shape us.

I urge you to try an experiment this week.

When you hear a discouraging word, when you feel like a failure, when you are tempted to strike out at others in fear just say this one sentence to yourself.

"In Jesus Christ, I am forgiven."

Keep saying it.

Let it soak in.

Let your mind absorb it.

I truly believe that if you do this long enough, you will enter a brand new world. It will change not only the way you think but also the way you act.

You may find that you want to live in this new world permanently.

It is a world controlled not by the sins of the flesh but by the power of the Spirit.

We call it the "the no condemnation zone".

Amen.