

Sermon for April 6, 2014 – Lent 5

Romans 8:11-19 (NKJV)

Theme: The Spirit raised you to. . .

- 1) *live as God's adopted children on earth.*
- 2) *live as joint heirs with Christ in eternity*

¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

Popular philosophy tells us to follow our hearts, do whatever feels right, and let our desires be our guide in life. This, the world says, will bring about happiness and joy.

The idea of pursuing whatever our heart desires sounds good – but is it really? Consider the warning God gives us in Scripture: *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*ⁱ He also says: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"*ⁱⁱ

Always following your heart – no matter how “right” it seems – will inevitably steer you wrong. God calls Christians to follow something else: the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every believer and has raised us to live a new life. Let us consider the impact this Gospel truth has on our lives under the theme: **The Spirit raised you to. . .** 1) *live as God's adopted children on earth and* 2) *live as joint heirs with Christ in eternity.*

Part One: The Spirit raised you to live as God's adopted children on earth.

Our sermon text comes from a section of Paul's letter to the Romans which encourages us to live in step with the new spirit that God created in us through the Gospel. Paul acknowledges that we all have a sinful nature (the “flesh”) which often leads us to do the sinful things that we, as Christians, do not want to do. We sin without even thinking about it. “Oh, how wicked we are, who will save us?” Jesus will! As we learned last Sunday, He suffered the full punishment our sins had earned. Because He did this, the devil can no longer accuse us of sin before God. We are free and forgiven. More than that, He has awakened in us a new spirit – a new desire - to serve God and live for him. This new attitude is the work of the Holy Spirit himself who makes the heart of every Christian his home, as our sermon text states:

¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Before you and I were brought to faith, we were dead in sin – as spiritually dead as the bones Ezekiel saw in his vision.ⁱⁱⁱ Before the Holy Spirit breathed spiritual life in us through the message of the Gospel, we had no knowledge of God or power to serve him, as the Scriptures say: *And you . . . were dead in trespasses*

and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.^{iv}

We were dead in sin, but the same Spirit who did the impossible in raising Jesus to life after he suffered and died on the cross, also did the impossible in us: He raised us to spiritual life through the Gospel – giving us knowledge of God and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Along with the faith God has awakened in our hearts through the Gospel, he has also given us a new spirit that desires to serve the LORD as his dearly loved children – for this is exactly who we are in Christ. The Holy Spirit himself reassures us of this fact, as St. Paul says in our text:

¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

Through baptism, we, who were once orphaned in the world, abused and beaten in slavery to the devil, have been adopted by God. He loved us with such a great love that He willingly delivered his own Son up to suffering and death to save us.^v What are you worth to God? Look at the cross, and there you will see the value God placed on your soul. All who call on Jesus in faith are children of God. You can call God your beloved “Abba” (or “Daddy”) and run to him just as dearly loved children can run to their earthly fathers in trust.

Because the Holy Spirit has raised us to this wonderful life: *we are debtors*. We owe God everything: our life and salvation. We owe it to God to live to his glory – not, to earn the spiritual life he has freely given to us, but in response to it. We owe it to God *not to live according to the flesh.* ¹³ *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

But the world and our sinful flesh tell us: “Don’t deny your cravings – you are only hurting yourself. You have every right to be mad and get angry when someone infringes on your rights. You are perfectly justified in gossiping about other people: they are the ones who acted so foolishly. You owe it to yourself to buy the luxuries you always desired: to use the money you worked so hard for the way you want. You owe it to yourself to pursue whatever dream or desire you have. Who has the right to tell you any differently? No one.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, those who live by such a philosophy show that they do not have the Spirit of God in them. They are still dead in their sins - pursuing the desires of the flesh. And if you live according to the flesh, you will die. There are no “ifs,” “maybes” or “buts” about it – if you follow the flesh instead of God’s Spirit, you will die: you will be eternally separated from your God and all his goodness forever in hell.

Do you see why the world’s seductive philosophy of “doing what you want” is so dangerous? Living in such a way separates you from God. You owe yourself nothing. You owe your God everything!

But, you might say, I sometimes find myself sinning even though I don’t want to. Does this mean I am lost forever? No. We are saved by God’s grace, and not by what we do. As long as we live on this earth we will sin. The difference is, however, that we will not pursue sin. Those who are led by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body. How? Through repentance and trust in Christ for forgiveness. They remember every morning that they are God’s children and prayerfully ask for the Holy Spirit’s help to live as God’s children. Sure, they will fall. It is inevitable – just like it is inevitable that a toddler learning to walk will stumble. But the Spirit is present to pick us up when we do fall, comfort us with the Gospel and encourage us in our pursuit to walk in the path of righteousness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you have an obligation: not to satisfy the cravings of your sinful flesh, but to pursue all the good things God desires for you. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has raised you to spiritual life, to live as God's adopted children on this earth. True, living as God's children on this earth will be difficult – seeing that the devil and world will relentlessly attack us, causing us a lot of misery in order to tempt us to give up and give in to our fleshly desires. But take heart: the LORD will strengthen you for the fight. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has raised you to live as a joint heir with Christ in eternity.

Part Two: The Spirit raised you to live as joint heirs with Christ in eternity

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Jesus told his disciples: *you will be hated by all for My name's sake.*^{vi} And: *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*"^{vii} Yes, the devil and the world hate us for our association with Christ. They do everything to make our lives miserable. They tempt and accuse. They entice and slander. They cause us suffering and pain. Jesus is their enemy, so we suffer with Christ on this earth. We give up everything, take up our cross and follow him, because this is what discipleship is. Sure, our sinful flesh does not want to do this. It fights against the idea of giving up everything for Christ, but the Christian is led by the Spirit. He sees the great salvation Jesus won for Him. He looks forward to the room in God's house, an inheritance of eternal glory and honor with Jesus, that Christ is even now preparing for us in heaven. The Christian holds on to God's promises, confessing with St. Paul:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Think about what this means: all the ridicule we face, all the things we give up, all the luxuries we forgo and time we offer to serve Christ in thankful love, all them are not worth comparing with the glory God is preparing for us. The glory of heaven is nothing we could even begin to earn. It is a wonderful gift of our Father's love. It would be like me being so pleased with my child doing his chore of clearing the table that I buy him a genuine Ferrari. The point is that future glory God promises his believers is not something we can earn. It is a reward of his gracious love, for when the Spirit raised us to spiritual life through the Gospel, He also raised us to be joint heirs with Christ in all eternity. We share in his suffering now, and we will most certainly share in his glory then.

And so we, together with all creation, wait in eager expectation *for the revealing of the sons of God.* We look forward to the day Christ will come in all his glory to raise the dead and Christians will be revealed for who they are: God's dearly loved children and heirs of heaven. It is for this purpose the Holy Spirit has raised us to spiritual life, and it is because of this promise that we live our lives as God's dearly loved children on this earth – not satisfying our selfish cravings, but willingly denying ourselves of every sinful pleasure out of thankful love to our Savior.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*^{viii} Amen.

ⁱ Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 NKJV

ⁱⁱ Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV

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- iii Cf. Ezekiel 37:1-14
iv Ephesians 2:1-3 NKJV
v Cf. Romans 8:32
vi Luke 21:17 NKJV
vii John 16:33 NKJV
viii 1 John 3:1-2 NIV84