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That Which is Born of Flesh is Flesh – Thoughts for the New Year

January 6, 2019

Sermon Text: John 3:5-7

Scripture Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

Matthew Thompson is the head pastor of Jubilee Church in Boston, the largest church in New England. During his final sermon of 2018 he took, as he describes it, a “literal leap of faith” on a mini-trampoline as he was preaching, but landed flat on his face. Literally.

“I brought up a trampoline to demonstrate that you need the power of God to help you get OVER IT!!!” he said. He claimed that the Lord gave him the title “I’m over it” to show that at some point in our lives we need help from God.

This wasn’t the first stunt of its kind he has done. He has preached on

treadmills, jumped in and out of baptismal, and even had a giant trampoline the size of the stage before.

“I use all types of methods to communicate the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” he said, adding that Jesus walked on water and did a lot of other things to communicate the gospel...”.

“He added, ‘whatever held you back in 2018, you’re over it. With God’s help you can overcome anything.’”

[From article by Caleb Parks, Fox News]

Now as ridiculous as this example is, it very clearly illustrates a chief way that pastors and churches and professing Christians go absolutely wrong and end up creating their own towers of Babel that are sinful, fleshly, unconverted synagogues of Satan, as the Bible calls them.

Frankenstein's monster, often referred to as "Frankenstein", is a fictional

character who first appeared in Mary Shelley's 1818 novel Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus. Shelley's title thus compares the monster's creator, Victor Frankenstein, to the mythological character Prometheus, who fashioned humans out of clay and gave them fire.

In Shelley's Gothic story, Victor Frankenstein builds the creature in his laboratory through an ambiguous method consisting of chemistry and alchemy.

Shelley describes the monster as 8-foot-tall (2.4 m), hideously ugly, but sensitive and emotional. The monster attempts to fit into human society but is shunned, which leads him to seek revenge against Frankenstein.

This morning is the first Sunday in the new year and as we begin it I wanted to take time to consider a fundamental, vital and very much disregarded principle of our life in Christ. This theme is very revealing as to how often Christians go wrong in what they call “Christian work,” and it is also very encouraging to those who are genuinely following Christ and being oppressed for doing so.

Listen to these Scriptures and see if you understand the common thread in them all, then we will go back through them and state some of the main

points. It is my conclusion that many if not most people today who profess to be Christians have been taught that they can indeed “build Christ’s church” through their own flesh and efforts. As you see, this is entirely wrong and it is largely why we have so much sin and corruption in local churches and Christian entities today:

Joh 3:5-7 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Mat 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Gal 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. (2) Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

1Co 1:18-31 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the

power of God. (19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (20) Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

(21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. (22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

(25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (26) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. (27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

(30) And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Gal 4:28-31 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, **are children of promise.** (29) **But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.** (30) But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Alright then, let's move in for a closer look:

Joh 3:5-7 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

This is the plain, clear statement of what we are trying to see this morning. *Man can only birth man. No human being can create a new creation born of the Spirit of God.* Just as Christ was

born by the Holy Spirit of a virgin, so it is with the new birth through faith in Christ. Man cannot create a new child of God. And yet, this new creation is the very thing that must happen if we are ever to see Christ's kingdom and know Him.

The history of the visible, earthly Christian church is largely that of human beings working to do what they cannot do. This is why Rome is the classic religion of man's doing and why it is anti-Christ. It is a fleshly masterpiece. Everything it is and everything it does is of man, not of the Spirit. You do this and you do that. You get baptized in water by man's hands and you are justified. You go to a man and you confess sins and that man pronounces you forgiven. You eat literal bread and drink literal earthly wine made by man, served by man, blessed by man, and you become a partaker in Christ. The priesthood is of man's doing. The worship is of man's design.

And fleshly, unconverted human beings *love it so*. But none of it is of Christ. None of it is the creation of the Spirit of God.

Now, that is Rome. But what of so many local Protestant and evangelical churches? Think about this very carefully. How many are the product of the flesh? That is what this pastor in

Boston uses to build the "church" – his own flesh, his own doings. And unconverted, unsaved people flock to it.

Do you understand this? Do you see that there is *nothing* we can do to create new creations in Christ? You see this as a foundational principle of Paul's ministry:

1Co 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And again:

1Co 3:4-6 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? (5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

How do you plant and water? The seed

is the Word of God, the gospel. The water is also the Word of God preached once again (Remember how George Whitefield used the method, “preach and return”). But who gives the seed “birth”? God. And only God. Anything else created by man is a spiritual Frankenstein.

Listen again:

Mat 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In spite of Rome’s claim that Peter is the foundation of the church, Christ plainly announced that HE would build His church. Only Christ can build it. Only He can add those “spiritual stones” to His true temple, who YOU are if you are in Christ.

“Church planting” therefore is not a biblical concept. The seed of God’s Word, the gospel, is what is planted by His servants, but we can never plant a “church.” A true church is the creation of God who gives life by His Spirit.

Gal 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. (2) Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3) Are you so

foolish? **Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**

Here again Paul returns to the very same theme because these Christians in Galatia had forgotten it. They had *begun by the Spirit*. Paul preached the gospel, they believed, and Christ by His Spirit regenerated them. There was no gimmickry. They weren’t saved by water baptism performed by men. The Spirit had come upon them through faith alone and they knew it.

But what had happened? The legalists came in and said “you have to be circumcised.” That meant “to be saved you have to do this and that.” Old Covenant stuff. And they bought into it. So they started *doing*.

The Christian church continues to be plagued by false teachers and false notions like this today. “Here is the secret to sanctification.” “The key to true Holiness.” “How to get more of the Spirit,” and on and on it goes. “The Secret to Victory Over Sin.” And these are all on an individual level. Add to them a host of other errors that apply to the church as a whole: “How to Take Your Church to a New Level of Commitment” and so on.

Let me encourage you, Christian. Take all those things and throw them in the garbage heap. The Spirit of Christ IS

in you. He IS leading you. You don't need some \$29.95 program. You simply need to follow His leading. Pray that He lead you and teach you. Immerse yourself in His Word and believe it. Then trust Him. Trust and Obey.

The next passage is longer so I will read it in portions and comment as we proceed:

1Co 1:18-31 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (20) Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

The gospel of Jesus Christ, the "word of the cross," is folly and nonsense to the unregenerate man. It is absolutely contrary to the thinking and paradigm of this world. Man thinks, in regard to religion, that it is by his own doings that he earns and has God's blessing.

YOU cannot change this! If you do "tweak" the gospel so that it is wisdom to the worldling, then you can be assured that it is no longer the gospel.

Think for example of this pastor and

his trampoline gimmick. What is he trying to do? He is trying to take the word of the Spirit and filter it in such a way that it will appeal to and make sense to everyone. That is why he has the biggest church in New England. But it is not the church of Jesus Christ! The people are HIS converts, not Christ's true flock. His gospel is a false gospel and that is why it appeals to the flesh. "It's me plus Jesus." That is what the Galatians were being taught and Paul told them they had become very foolish.

(21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. (22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

When the world demands signs or the world's "wisdom" from the church, we must not yield and give them either because the only way to do that is to change the gospel. Christ crucified is absolute folly to the unsaved man UNLESS Christ by His Spirit is calling him. Consider Jesus when confronted with this very kind of demand:

Mat 12:38-39 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." (39) But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

I hope these things are resulting in taking pressure off of all of us. I can guarantee you that if we were to consult some "church growth expert" on what we "need" to do here, then immediately he would start expounding all kinds of gimmicks and programs that will draw people. We must not do that. Our job is to plant and water by sharing the gospel when we have opportunity. The rest is up to the Lord and can ONLY be accomplished by His Spirit.

Paul continues:

(25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (26) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. (27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no

human being might boast in the presence of God.

This past week after having to deal with some extended family members who think we are fools, Verla and I were talking about how neither of us have any earthly family. Not really. Even when our parents were alive, none of them and none of our siblings accepted us. Considered us fools. Why? Because the gospel is folly to them. And then as I thought about this some more, I can see the reality of what these Scriptures are saying. *Why am I a Christian and the rest of my family of origin isn't? Why is Verla a Christian – the only Christian in her family? Why are YOU a Christian? Because of something people did? Or that you did? No. Because the Lord brought the seed of His Word to life in you. Because the Spirit of Christ in the Lord's election and free choice, visited us one day and gave us a new heart.*

(30) And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

And there is a WHOLE lot of boasting going on today in churches. "Look at these buildings. Look at what we have done. Look at how many people are here." And behind the scenes all kinds

of wickedness is flourishing.

Finally, here is a really powerful truth from Paul:

Gal 4:28-31 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, **are children of promise.** (29) **But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.** (30) But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Remember how Ishmael was born? By Sarah and Abraham's own doing. They set out to fulfill God's promise to Abraham. So Ishmael was born to a slave – Hagar. God however told Abraham that Ishmael would not be the son of promise. And sure enough in very old age, Sarah bore Isaac. Ishmael was not born according to or by the Spirit. Isaac was and as a result, Isaac is the promised son through whom the Son would come.

WE are not able to build Christ's church. And we must understand this. YOU cannot save your neighbor or your child or anyone else. You didn't save yourself! And we cannot build Christ's church. If this church is and is

to remain Christ's flock, then Christ must be the one to call people and create lambs from stone, cold hearts. We preach His Word. We follow Him and obey Him and speak for Him as opportunity presents itself. The rest is up to Him and only Him.