

THE FLESH
Message 3
Genesis 32:24-29

Passage: Romans 8:1-17.

Text: Romans 7:18 "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells..."

Romans 8:8 "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Intro: One of the most important matters when an army goes to battle with another is to know the enemy. We, as Christians, have more than one enemy. We battle the world, the flesh and the devil. We have some understanding of the devil. We have some understanding of the world, but hardly any of the flesh. The flesh is the enemy within and enemies within are harder to battle than the enemy without.

I have defined the term 'world' in our subject as the sum total of those who are lost and that which they bring about. It is the flesh as the total of the lost. I view as the flesh that which we call the sin nature, or the self life, the big "I".

I mentioned in the last message that I think a distinction can be made between a worldly Christian and a fleshly Christian. The worldly Christian seeks acceptance with the world and the church. The worldly Christian wants both worlds. External identity is a big thing. Clothes, jewelry, hair, houses, vehicles etc.. The worldly Christian says by his or her life to the world, "Look at me."

The fleshly Christian seeks the approval of Christians. He is not concerned with acceptance by the world. As a matter of fact, he might entirely shun the world in order to be approved by Christians. He says to the Christian, "Look at me."

God's desire is to bring both the worldly Christian and the fleshly Christian to the point where only one thing matters and that is: How can I draw the attention of others to God? And there is one thing that can do that: simply living a godly life. Simply doing right for the Lord's honor and glory. When we are consumed with pleasing God and drawing attention to him or when we are pleased when others draw attention to God, then we are 'spiritual' Christians.

So this morning, we want to look at the origin and works of the flesh in the OT. We begin with Adam and Eve.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEMONSTRATIONS

A. In The Old Testament

1. Adam and Eve

In Genesis 3, we have the birth of that which we call 'the flesh' or the 'sin nature' or the 'self life'. In Genesis 2:16-17 we have God's original command to Adam with regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were permitted by God to eat of every other tree He had made. Only one tree they could not eat of.

Let me speak to the children here for a moment. Sometimes you want to do something and you have a great desire to do it, but Mom and Dad say "No". And then you think, "They never let me do anything." The truth is there are all kinds of things they will let you do, but only a few certain things they say 'no' to. It is the devil that whispers in our ear, "They never let you do anything." So, the next time this happens, say to yourself, "Where is this coming from, God or the devil?" And then you will realize whom you are listening to.

Well, in Genesis 3:6 we have a record of Adam and Eve's disobedience (read). They disobeyed God and disobedience is rebellion. Rebellion, on the other hand, is as the sin of witchcraft. It is very bad, and that which this disobedience brought into being is that which has troubled all mankind ever since that day. Verse 6 says that Eve saw that the tree was good for food, it was pleasant to the eyes and desirable to make one wise.

We have here three major areas affected, and these are what 1 John 2:16 calls the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. And when Adam and Eve gave in to the forbidden fruit, something happened to mankind. A change happened to them. They inherited something

they were not created with and they have passed it down to mankind.

I want you to look at verse 7 and notice this change (read). When Adam and Eve sinned, something happened to them. Scripture tells us their eyes were opened. Now that is not talking about their physical eyes because in verse 6 it says Eve saw that the tree was good for food. It is talking about their spiritual eyes. Something happened inside. Some people say, "What do you mean by a sin nature. I do not find it anywhere in the Bible." Well, right here it is. Their eyes were opened. Now that a change took place in Adam and Eve is evident from the fact that their eyes were opened, and from the fact that they immediately had a conscience of nakedness. The fact of that shame of nakedness being present even today indicates that this event did not only happen to Adam and Eve, but to all mankind. The same thing that happened to Adam and Eve continues to happen in every person born. It is nothing less than that which we call the flesh, or the sin nature or the self life.

When Adam and Eve's eyes were opened and they recognized the shame of nakedness in public, they immediately set about covering their bodies. They were right in that their bodies needed covering. That is still true today. But they were wrong in trying to cover themselves. What we have here is a picture of a works salvation. When God asked Adam where he was, it was not that He had suddenly run out of His omniscience. He wanted Adam to discover himself.

Now the fact that Adam and Eve now needed to cover their bodies was verified by God when He made a covering for them. But the difference between the coverings Adam and Eve made and the one God provided is that one was made of vegetation and the other of skin. One was bloodless, and the other cost blood. It cost life, and pictured the life of Christ, whose blood would be shed for Adam and Eve and all mankind.

So let me put in a wee word here. Now that we are upon the summer season, and people use heat as an excuse to undress publicly, let me put out a word of caution here. Summer heat is no excuse to expose too much skin. That excess exposure of skin is the pleasure of sin which only lasts for a season. I am speaking to both men and women. God covered them both. God's solution was to cover them with something that was much more lasting than fig leaves. There's a message for us. So here's a word for this summer.

So, here in Genesis 3 we have the birth of all we call the flesh. Here we have the beginning of the sin nature. Here we have the beginning of the self life. From then on our story has been this:

We had a little party - again
This afternoon at three. - again
'Twas very small, three friends in all,
Just I, myself, and me. - again
Myself ate all the sandwiches, - again
While I drank the tea; - again
'Twas also I who ate the pie, - again
And passed the cake to me. - again

2. Cain and Abel

Well, Adam and Eve had their first child and they called him Cain. And then they had another child and they called him Abel (read 4:1-2). But these were two very different sons (read 4:3-5). No doubt, Adam had instructed these boys in the proper sacrifices to bring to the Lord. But Cain sacrificed vegetables, a bloodless sacrifice. That is our problem to this very day. We want to offer bloodless sacrifices. Adam and Eve covered themselves with leaves, not skins. That was a bloodless picture. But God provided skins for them, something that cost blood. These bloodless sacrifices speak of works salvation. People try to come to God on their own terms, not His.

Well, Abel obeyed and brought a blood sacrifice and God was pleased with him. You see, without faith it is impossible to please God. So Hebrews

11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead yet speaks." In Cain we have a picture of the flesh and a works salvation. In Abel, we have the picture of faith, and salvation by grace. Since sin in the Garden of Eden, these have been the two options of life.

Now look at Genesis 4:6-8 (read). Here we have the first son of the flesh and the first son of faith, and the son of the flesh persecuted to death the son of faith. The flesh will always seek to destroy the life of faith. I tell you it happens by those who profess themselves to be believers. Cain sacrificed. Do you think he said, "I don't believe in God?" Of course not. He sacrificed, and surely not to himself.

Now you may well ask, "Why did these sacrifices need to be blood sacrifices? Why would God not be happy with Cain's sacrifice?" The sacrifices in the OT always pointed forward to the death of Christ. It was the devil who always pointed away from the death of Christ. Cain listened to the devil and Abel to God.

You see, this blood speaks of the blood of Christ that the promised Messiah would shed for all mankind. And this blood would be spilt on the cross. And the cross and the blood speak of death. And Abel's sacrifice acknowledge Christ's death on his behalf, when He died on the cross of Calvary. Cain's sacrifice completely missed the point of a sacrifice.

And the life of faith is that which crosses me out and exalts Christ. Maxwell says on page 47 of Crowded to Christ, "Now the Cross, (that which puts me to death) when embraced by the believer, is heavy only to the life of nature, to the life of the flesh, to life outside the will of God. The Cross is that on which nature dies; it kills off that to which it seems heavy."

3. Abraham

Let me yet mention briefly Abraham though we have spoken of him earlier (read Gen. 11:27-32). Abraham grew up in ungodly Ur, but Abraham was a godly man (read 12:1-5). But Abraham had no children and this caused a crisis in his life (read 15:1-6). Well, God promised, but nothing happened. And when nothing happened, after some time Abraham began to think fleshly and after thinking fleshly he resorted to fleshly means (read 16:1-4).

Well, this son of the flesh was destined to be a problem (read 16:11-12). So Galatians 4:22-22 says, "For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise..." Then in verse 29 he says, "But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now."

To this very day this world suffers from Abraham's fleshly actions. This proves the Scriptures true when it says that the flesh CANNOT please God. Oh how many times we as Christians resort to the flesh, but Jesus said the flesh profits NOTHING, not even one thing!

Now come with me to Genesis 17 (read 1-8). Abraham has had his fling in the flesh. Now he is ninety nine and all hope, as far as the flesh is concerned regarding having a son is cut off. As far as the flesh is concerned, the possibilities of ever having a son are past. And then when all hope is past, Abraham is reduced to faith, contrary to the flesh. He is past age and so is Sarah. Romans 4:19-21 then says, "And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform."

Maxwell well says here, "Finally, when ninety years old and nine, with his own vital powers withered and decayed, 'under hopeless circumstances, he hopefully believed.' With every door in nature closed, Abraham was shut up to faith. Out of this very despair a superhuman hope was born for a supernatural son." Then he writes, "Faith works better when there is no natural hope. If there be but a straw for sight to cling to, then faith finds difficulty. George Mueller says, 'Remember it is the very time for faith to work when sight ceases'" (Crowded to Christ, pg. 20).

4. Jacob

Let me take us now to a man who was extremely fleshly, but who learned to trust God by faith. His name is Jacob. Abraham's son of faith was Isaac. Isaac married Rebekkah and by her had twins, Jacob and Esau. Now when Jacob and Esau were born, Esau was born first, but Isaac clutched to his heal. So his name has been variously given as to clutch or heal catcher, or supplanter. The name supplanter is a nuance of the word 'to take by the heal' to overtake' (NBD pg. 545).

Now it was traditional for the oldest son to inherit the birthright and blessing, and this rightfully belonged to Esau. But you will remember the story how Jacob bought this birthright with some soup. Later Esau regretted it and tried to regain it but it was too late. Jacob, the supplanted had beaten him out of it.

Then, when Isaac was about to die, you will remember the story, he sent Esua out to get some deer meet and make him his favorite venison meal and then he would give Esau the family blessing. But Rebekah heard it and quickly had Jacob kill a goat and take the blessing from Esau as well (You might wish to read 27:1-41 for yourself later).

You see, a supplanting, fleshly son, and a manipulating mother can manage a lot of things

together. Se Rebekah knew of Esau's hatred and she sent Jacob away. Well, Esau was a worldly man and married worldly women and this greatly distressed Isaac and Rebekah and they sent him to their relatives so that he would take a wife from them. And thus, Jacob and Esau were separated for a long time.

Jacob went to Laban, his mother's brother, and married two of his daughters. His father-in-law Laban was a man after the flesh as well, and Laban could outdo Jacob in being sneaky. But in the midst of all Jacob's fleshliness, there ran in him a streak of faith, a streak that would later grow into a stream and bring great glory to God. And through this streak of faith, God blessed Jacob until his family was big and his herds were large.

Jacob and Laban's relationship were strained at best, because Laban was a man who took advantage of others wherever he could and he took advantage of Jacob. And so the day came when God spoke to Jacob (read 31:11-13). For Jacob, it was time to go home. But there is a problem he left behind that has never been taken care of. Esau is still alive back at home.

So Jacob has a problem. It is when we have problems as Christians, that we want to follow the ways of the flesh. Bible schools try to get students, using all kinds of fleshly means. Bible camps and Christian organizations try to put out glitzy pamphlets using worldly methods. Musicians take worldly stances on the CD jacket picture. All kinds of appeals are made to the flesh to bring about godly means.

How will Jacob resolve his problem of meeting Esau, who has planned to kill him? Well, he resorts to the flesh, the method he understands so well (read 32:3-8 and 13-23). In short, his method is, "You go up front. He won't kill you. Bring him a present. And by the time he gets to me, maybe his wrath will have been overcome."

Jacob always had a plan. And now, after his fleshly plans are well laid, now he wants to pray and commit his fleshly plans to God (read 32:9-12). In 32:24, God finally has Jacob alone. And there, in the night, he will conquer Jacob's fleshly mind and unbelief. I agree with Ryrrie's comment on verse 24 that the man that wrestled with Jacob was the preincarnate Christ, and also that Jacob's wrestling pictures agonizing prayer. You see, the fleshly Christian has to be reduced until he is all alone and has one recourse; to pray until God steps in. With Jacob, this took all night. Such is God's way with fleshly Christians.

I was reading Wesley Dewel's classic on prevailing prayer. He said this about our present subject: "All our goal setting, effective management techniques, and computerized administration will accomplish little unless empowered by mighty prevailing prayer" (22). A little later he says, "God's cause creeps forward timidly and slowly when there are more organizers than agonizers, more workers than prevailing prayer warriors" (23).

Now let us read 24-28 (read). Let me interpret the Lord's words here, "Jacob, treacherous Jacob. Heal catcher. Supplanter. You have agonized in prayer until you have prevailed. You have prevailed with God. You will no longer be called a supplanter. From now on you will be known as 'Israel', you will be known as a prince with God."

Listen to another man of the flesh, Dr. A. B. Simpson, whose fleshliness was reduced until he became a man of faith, "I look back with unutterable gratitude to the lonely and sorrowful night when mistaken in many things and imperfect in all, and not knowing but that it would be death in the most literal sense before the morning light, my heart's first full consecration was made, and with unreserved surrender I first could say:

Jesus, I my cross have taken,

All to leave and follow Thee,
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
Thou, from hence, my all shalt be"

(Crowded to Christ, pg. 65).

So Jacob, supplanter, heal catcher, and sneak learned to manage, manipulate and plan. He was slippery. Someone said you would not have wanted to buy a used car from him. He was a man of the flesh. But one day God hemmed him in on every side and left but one door of escape, the door of faith. And in the wee hours of the morning he finally prevailed with God and became a man of faith and now he was a prince with God.

CONCL: So let us conclude this message. We have seen the birth of the flesh when Adam and Eve's eyes were opened and they covered themselves with fig leaves. The flesh, Scripture rightly says, profits nothing, not even one thing! So John says that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and we conclude, thus produces more flesh. And so Cain and Abel were born. And Cain was a man who lived after the flesh, and persecuted and ultimately killed Abel, who had learned to live by faith.

Abraham too, great man of faith that he became, was a man of flesh and produced fleshly offspring, a problem we live with to this very day. But Abraham too became a man of faith and then brought forth a son by faith, and thus many other children of faith, including all the believers of today.

But no one better pictures the flesh than Jacob, the weasel, the supplanter, the heal catcher. But God hemmed him in on every side and left him to spend a night alone with him in the desert, and there Jacob's fleshlyness was reduced to faith and he became a prince with God. Jacob met Esau, certain death had it not been for the birth of faith.

Maxwell, in the book Crowded to Christ writes, "Beloved reader, have you met your Esau? Has God been able to catch up with you? shut you in? hedge up your way? shut you up to faith?" Maybe you are a business man. How are your dealings? A bit hard? A bit shady? Maybe you are a managing, manipulating mother. Your child has to be pushed to the front. You have to manage things at home so they go

your way. Maybe you are in a position in the church. Are you a diplomat, a strategist. You know how to get things done your way?

Maxwell gives a rather detailed account of a layman, James McConkey, who learned in the school of circumstances the blessedness of being shut up to faith. He writes:

"In my early life, I entered into a partnership with a friend in the wholesale ice business. both of us were young men and we embarked all we had, and considerably more, in the business. As time passed on we met with many disappointments. For two seasons in succession our ice was swept away by winter freshets. Things had come to a serious pass. It seemed necessary that we should have ice in the winter of which I now speak. The weather became very cold. The ice formed and grew thicker and thicker, until it was fit to gather. I remember the joy that came into our hearts one afternoon when there came an order for thousands of tons of ice which would lift us entirely out from our financial stress. Not long before God had let me see the truth of committal. He showed me that it was His will that I should commit my business to Him and trust Him with it absolutely. As best I knew how I had done so. I never dreamed what testing was coming. And so I lay down that Saturday night in quietness. But, at midnithg there came an ominous sound - that of rain. By morning it was pouring in torrents. I looked out upon the river from my home upon the village hillside. Yellow streaks of water were creeping over the ice. I knew what that meant. The water was at flood state. That condition had swept away our ice twice before. By noon the strom was raging in all its violence. By afternoon I had come into a great spiritual crisis in my life.

That might seem strange - to come into a spiritual crisis over a seemingly trivial matter. But I have learned this: A matter may be seemingly trivial, butht ecrisis that turns upon a small matter may be a profound and far-reaching one in our lives. And so it was with me. For by mid-afternoon that day I had come face to face with a tremendous fact that down deep in my heart wa a spirit of rebellion against God. And that rebelliousness seemed to develop in a suggestion to my heart like this:

'You gave all to God. You say you are goint to trust God with your business. this is the way He requites you. Your

business will be swept away, and tomorrow you will come into a place of desparate financial stress.' And I found my heart growing bitter at the thought that God should take away my business when I wanted it only for legitimate puposes.

Then another voice seemed to speak, 'My child, did you mean it when you said you would trust me? Can you not trust Me in the dark as well as in the light? Would I do anything, or suffer anything to come into your life which will not work out for good for you?' And then came another voice: 'But it is hard. *Why* should not God spare your ice? *Why* should He take your business when it is clean and honest and you want to use it aright?' It was a very plausible sort of voice, and for the moment I did not detect the serpent his that was in it - in that word, 'Why.'

Still back and forth with ever-increasing intensity, waged one of the greatest spiritual battles of my life. At the end of two hours, by the grace of God, I was able to cry out, 'Take the business; take the ice; take everything; only give me the supreme blessing of an absolutely submitted will to Thee.' And then came peace.

The storm was still beating upon the earth and upon the ice. But it did not seem to make any difference whether it rained or ceased. Then and there I discivovered that the secret of anxious care is not in surroundings, but in the failure of allowing life and will to be wholly given up to Him amid all circumstances and surroundings.

That night I lay down to rest in perfect peace, but with the rain pouring torrents upon my field of ice, and with every prospect that my business would lie in wrick the next morning. But it did not. By midnight there came another sound, that of wind. by morning the bitterest blizzard of the year was upon us. By enening the mercury had fallen to zero point. And in a few days we were harvesting the finest ice we ever had. God did not want my ice. But He did want my yielded will, and my absolute trust in Him, and when that was settled, He gave back the ice; He blessed the business; and He led me on and out, until He guided me from it entirely, into the place He had for me from the beginning - that of a teacher of His Word."

