

The Grassiness of Flesh – First Peter 1:23-25

I. Introduction:

- A. In concluding chapter one of *I Peter*, the Holy Spirit blends together three subjects: the new birth, the eternal Word of God and the weakness of human flesh.
1. In order to fully understand any one of these, we must understand to some degree the other two.
 2. Why do we need to be **born again**? In part, because of the corruption of sin.
 3. Why do we need to be born again **right now**? Because of the weakness of the flesh. It is dying.
 4. Where do we learn about **regeneration** and our need of the **new birth**? In God's Word.
 5. What are the **characteristics** of **God's Word**? Among other things it is eternal.
- B. Since we must start somewhere, I've chosen to begin at the lowest point: our weakness and need.
1. *"For all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass.*
 2. *The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away..."* Therefore ye must be born again.
 3. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Ye must be born again."*
- C. In meditating on **verse 24**, I asked myself, *"What might I use to illustrate human weakness?"*
1. Peter employs a **simile** when he say, *"All flesh is AS grass."*
 2. If I wasn't lead of the Holy Spirit as Peter was, what would I use to illustrate human weakness?
 3. Have you ever said that something was **as weak as water**?
 - a. That might be a good illustration of weakness.
 - b. Watered down, or weakened tea, coffee or juice, is usually hard for me to drink.
 - c. Water certainly has no form or shape of its own until it is frozen. It evaporates and disappears.
 - d. Water is sometimes a vapor, *"that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."*
 - e. And mixing our metaphors and similes, *"What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."*
 4. Weakness might be described with water.
 5. Or how about a cooked 8 inch spaghetti noodle?
- D. But water and noodles are not living things.
1. Is there anything living which we might use to illustrate weakness?
 2. A **butterfly** came to my mind. How fragile and delicate. How easily crushed and killed.
 - a. I killed hundreds of them during that part of my childhood when I collected and mounted butterflies.
 - b. But despite their outward weakness, butterflies and moths are still here in this world after 6,000 years of kids with nets and birds with beaks.
 3. Then I thought of newborn babies as illustrations of human weakness.
 - a. Not considering their lungs, particularly in the middle of night, babies are pretty helpless.
 - b. But they do grow into 200 pound muscular men and super-moms.
 - c. Maybe they are not the best illustration.
- E. Why did Peter choose to describe the weakness of human flesh by pointing to grass?
1. Not only did the Spirit lead him, but he was taught by the *"Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever."*
 2. There are at least a dozen Old Testament scriptures which use grass to speak of human weakness.
 3. The best known passage is found in **Isaiah 40**.
 - a. Isaiah asked God, *"What would you like me to say to Israel in preparation for the coming of the Lord?"*
 - b. God said, Cry out: *"All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field:*
 - c. *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."*
 4. You'll have a hard time convincing me that these words were not in Peter's heart as he was penning his letter to the saints in Cappadocia and Asia.
 5. It sounds like Peter is quoting the Old Testament.

II. What was Isaiah thinking when he spoke of grass? What was Peter thinking?

- A. In my study I learned that people in Peter's day looked at grass differently than we do.
1. For instance, no one had front yards with manicured lawns of lush green grass.
 2. No one had underground sprinkler systems or even hoses and oscillating sprinklers.
 3. Grass was simply a free-growing ground cover.
 4. It was the food for countless animals, domesticated and wild. It was fodder not turf.
 5. The Jews never sowed the seeds of grass; they didn't try to make it grow where it didn't grow naturally.
 6. And they didn't try to keep it alive by watering and deliberately fertilizing.
- B. I read in two sources that there are, or were, 243 species of grasses which grow in the area of Israel.
1. It reminds us that there is a great deal of variety, and yet it is still generally called "*grass.*"
 2. In this country some areas use Bermuda grass, or Buffalo, Fescue, Kentucky Blue Grass or Rye grass
 3. But most of us don't know the difference and don't really care. It is just grass.
 4. Similarly, in humanity there is a great deal of variety, but when the skin is stripped off, we're all the same.
 - a. And by the way, one of my resources actually defined "*flesh*" as what lies beneath the skin.
 - b. It even spoke of stripping away that skin to find the flesh.
 - c. The flesh of some people may be very muscular, but in the end all flesh is as dying grass.
- C. The Jews never cut grass for hay; they rarely stored or dried grass for future use.
1. They either found natural grass for their sheep, or they didn't, and their flocks suffered.
 2. In the spring, after the rains, the grass was plentiful, but once summer came, the leafy parts of the grass and their flowers died back, and the roots and rhizomes under the ground kind of hibernated
 3. And the Bible speaks several times of the grass which naturally sprang up on the flat roofs of their houses.
 4. For example, **Isaiah** sent a message to **Hezekiah** in which he said, the wicked "*were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass of the house tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up.*"
 5. That is like the seed which fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth, but then quickly died.
- D. **James** paints a picture which the Jews new very well.
1. **James 1:9** – "*Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:*
 - a. *But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.*
 - b. *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.*"
 2. **Moses** praises God in **Psalms 90** saying, "*Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*
 - a. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*
 - b. *Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.*
 - c. *For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.*
 - d. *Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.*
 - e. *In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.*"
 3. **David** says in **Psalms 103**: "*Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*
 - a. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*
 - b. *For as for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.*
 - c. *For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place there shall know it no more.*
 - d. *But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him...*"
 4. This is the sort of thing which came to mind when the ancient Hebrew thought about grass.

- E. But in our modern society we look at grass differently than the Jews.
1. Some of our neighbors their lawns to be surfaces of beauty, not utility.
 2. Some spend hundreds of dollars every year to make sure their grass looks as good as the Jones' grass.
 3. And they spend hundreds more buying mowers and trimmers.
 4. We don't want to be that one house on the block with an excessive number of dandelions, so we buy chemicals or spend hours every week digging up individual weeds.
 5. And every week we work up a sweat to make sure it doesn't get too long and scraggly.
 6. There are hundreds of small businesses which earn enough income in the summer months to go from year to year.
 7. Our perspective on grass may be different than Peter's, but the fact remains we have to go to some length to keep our grass from withering and dying.

III. Now, let's return to Peter's point

- A. *"For all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away..."*
1. I am going to take Peter's use of the word *"as,"* and his *"all,"* as permission to make a few additional applications which synchronize with the rest of the Bible.
 2. Grass is not a Biblical *"type"* of human flesh, but it is used as a *"simile."*
- B. No matter what the species, grass is outwardly short-lived.
1. Here in the northwest, and at this time of year – spring-time – the grass in our yards, and along the side of the highway or in the mountain meadow, is prospering.
 2. But in two or three months, without human intervention, it will appear to die, turn yellow or brown, and seemingly beg to be set on fire.
 3. How unlike many other kinds of plants.
 - a. While I was mowing my grass Monday, I had to duck under the crab apple tree in my front yard.
 - b. I remembered the scrawny stick I planted in that spot ten years ago, and what it has become.
 - c. On the other hand, my lawn has been in better shape than it is at the moment.
 4. As Peter tells us, grass is easily killed through neglect and mistreatment.
 5. And the point of so many of those scriptures is this: ***your life is fragile; you are eventually going to die.***
- C. Extending the simile, we might point out that grass draws its life out of the earth.
1. It is of the earth, earthy. *"That which is of the flesh is flesh; ye must be born again."*
 2. Grass may look to the sky and the sun for photogenesis, but it's not like the tall Douglas Fir or the Tamarack reaching up toward the Lord. It clings to the world, not the sky.
 3. And when the annual fires sweep across the plains, or the blazing sun withers the blades and flowers of the grass, there are still roots and rhizomes in the earth awaiting the snow and rain to bring them back to life.
 4. Can't we make application and say that grass, a picture of the flesh, is of the world and not of heaven?
 5. And by the way, *"the world passeth away, & the lusts thereof,"* & *"the fashion of the world passeth away."*
 6. In the short term grass lives in a world of uncertainty, but its ultimate destiny is destruction.
 7. Such is a picture of frail human lives. *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow."*
 8. *"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."*
- D. Even though grass is rooted in the world, and it draws much of its life out of the world, it also is dependent upon the constant blessing and general grace of God.
1. Despite being blistered and burned by the rays of the sun, grass depends on that sun to synthesize its food from water and carbon dioxide.
 2. And despite that wicked man's denial of God, he feeds on God's blessings every day & every minute of his life.
 3. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights."*

- E. Several of the scriptures which speak about the frailty of grass, put their comments in the context of the wicked
1. **Psalm 92:7** for example: *“When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.”*
 2. There are few directions a person can look without laying our eyes on the workers of iniquity.
 3. They are everywhere, just like grass. And they are a problem.
 4. Judy has several flower beds that she’d like to see filled with the blossoms she’s chosen and planted.
 5. But there is an on-going struggle with the invasive grass just outside those flower beds.
 6. Grass needs to be controlled or it will take over places it is not wanted.
 7. And lawn grass needs to be mowed.
- F. Thankfully, Jehovah is still God, and the Holy Spirit still keeps His hand on the wickedness of this world.
1. The ungodly can never go as far as they would like.
 2. It will soon become much worse than it is today, but the Lord is still in control.
 3. *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

IV. Conclusion

- A. Let’s remember Peter’s point: that the best and strongest of men are essentially as weak and fragile as grass.
1. And the very best characteristics of grass – and of our flesh – will one day be gone; burned up.
 2. Some people are filled with **learning** and some are considered **wise**, but we’ve seen what Alzheimers can do to that mind.
 3. Some people are **exceedingly strong**, and others are **beautiful**, but those things do not last very long.
 4. Some are **wealthy** in the world, but *“riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”*
 5. And then there is worldly **honor**.
 - a. The honor of being the best lawn on the block may only last a few weeks.
 - b. *“Man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish,”* or like the grass that withers.
- B. Peter’s point, as it was with the Lord Jesus and so many of the Lord’s prophets:
1. The point in mentioning the weakness of the flesh is to then direct souls to the eternal strength there is in the Lord.
 2. *“Ye must be born again,” “for all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man is as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*
 3. *But the word of the Lord enduring for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”*
 4. In the gospel can be found **eternal life**, eternal **honor**, eternal **beauty** before God – the best of the best.
 5. *“Ye must be born again.”*