

Romans 11:18

Bearing or Borne

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It might be good, loved ones, to remember why we began to study this book when we came together as a church. You remember we sensed that God was guiding us to study a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome in 57 AD because we felt that that letter, which is known as the letter to the Romans, explained most clearly God's dealings with us men and woman down through the centuries. In fact that book of Romans is often called by theologians the only theological treatise in the Bible because it sets forth in such detail God's explanation of why we are alive, and why he has dealt with us as he has. So that's really why we started to study this book. We've often joked about how the years have gone by as we've studied it. You remember I once said my wife calculated that I would be 50 or something by the time we got to the end of it and at that time I was 36. I'm 46 now, and all of you are 10 years older, and we've at last reached chapter 11 – which in many ways has been the most exciting chapter!

But one of the things that I would like to share with you is that, just as we have often joked about how Josh Columb was born in chapter 5, or one of the other children was born in chapter 8, or someone was married in chapter 9, and just as that has given to us great stability as a body that was committed to operating in the very volatile atmosphere of the university campus, so I would point out to you, loved ones, that God's word will give us stability during these last days. And we need to see that: that as the society around us becomes more and more chaotic and as it becomes increasingly difficult to know who to trust, or more and more difficult to keep your intellectual or spiritual feet, this word of God will abide forever. And this dear word will enable us to keep our intellectual and spiritual feet.

Loved one, this dear book sets forth truth in the right perspective; it sets forth an understanding of life in the right proportions. And we need to see, repeatedly, that this book will keep us stable as the days get worse. And without getting all upset about the things that happened here in the Twin Cities, let's see that it's really a foretaste of the chaos – forget the persecution stuff – that's fun – that's the stuff that drives you into Jesus. But the chaos -- not knowing what is right and not being sure what to believe and not having any basis for making judgments – that will get worse and worse, it really will. And it will be more and more difficult for our children and our children's children to know even right from wrong.

Now loved ones, God's himself has told us that as that increasingly happens, this dear book will keep us stable. So I would encourage you to do what I intend to do which is, until I die, to study and respect and do my best to live by the words of this book. This will keep us sane as the world gets more and more insane. Now, with that introduction, I'd remind you that we are still in this exciting chapter, which I intend to pursue whatever happens! So, Romans 11 and we're at verse 18 loved ones and we believe God knew what he was about when he guided us to study this book and that he has things to say to us.

Romans 11:18 runs like this; "Do not boast over the branches" and that we dealt with two weeks ago. "If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you." Now that's what we're studying today and I believe God has some important truths to get over to us

about that.

The temporal meaning of the word, in other words the meaning that God was trying to get over to the church in Rome – and that's the meaning of "the temporal word" – was this: in the early church there were believing Jews and believing Gentiles and God was saying through Paul, "You who are Gentiles, don't lord it over the Jews – the believing Jews – because actually they are part of the original root that supports you. And remember it's the root that supports you not you supporting the root. So that's what Paul was saying. Now what is the eternal meaning; that is, what is the meaning that God has for us in the church in Minneapolis? I think you'll find it if you answer the question what is the root that supports us? You remember two weeks ago we said that it was Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob -- we said it was the patriarchs; those men who first established, clearly, the way we human beings were meant to live. We were meant to live as they did – by faith. By faith that our Maker had put each one of us in this room, here in this world, to do a certain task for him and if we concentrated on that, he would provide all our needs that we came across as we went through life. That's living by faith.

Now that's expressed very forcibly in an incident that took place in Abraham's life near the beginning. He had just won a war against the enemies of the King of Sodom. Maybe you'd look at what happened in Genesis 14:21 and the King of Sodom was grateful to Abraham and wanted him to share the spoils and some of the victory. "And the king of Sodom said to Abram 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.'" So the king of Sodom said "I want the prisoners, but you take the goods for yourself." "But Abram said to the king of Sodom 'I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'" That's faith, you see; that's living by faith.

It doesn't mean not taking your salary no -- it doesn't mean refusing to take your salary. But it means seeing that the guys that pay you, or the people that are your bosses, or the people on whom you depend for your income are only God's secondary, intermediary instruments. The money actually comes from your Maker. Your welfare does not depend on whether this company survives the recession or fails, but that it is your Maker that is being faithful to you. That if you do what he has given you to do here on earth with all your heart and concentrate on that, your Maker will continue by hook or by crook to make sure that you have what you need for food, shelter, and clothing. That's living by faith, loved ones.

You can see what it produces: it produces in you a real freedom from those people who pay you your money. It produces a real freedom, too, from grabbing at everything you can on the way through. There's something inside each one of us that says "You dumb guy you were offered spoils from a victory that you yourself won – you deserve it – you have a right to it." And it's very interesting that something inside our own lives fades or feels cheap expressing that kind of "Take it! You've a right to it – take all you can get!" It's interesting – there is something inside our conscience that makes us feel that isn't best – it isn't the most generous, it isn't the most magnanimous. And it's interesting how we often are elevated and elated by someone showing the other attitude; showing the attitude "No take it – I don't need it."

So loved ones living by faith that God is really the one who will supply all your needs if you will simply concentrate on doing what he's put you here on earth to do – living that way frees you as it freed Abraham. Now that is completely opposite, of course, to the way most of our forefathers started to live as far back as the Garden of Eden. If you'd like to look at it its Genesis 3:6 and

this was the attitude that has ruled the world really since it began. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.”

What that says in an abbreviated form is that we men and women found ourselves in this world with plenty of gold in the ground, and plenty of oil and plenty of trees and crops and grain and water and we said to ourselves, “Forget that business of our Maker’s sending us here to do a certain job” and we began to pay lip service to that idea and cynically to say “Maybe he did and maybe he didn’t, but it’s up to me to grab all I can to provide for myself; if I don’t provide for myself who will? Forget that business that I was sent here to do a certain job in the world; my job is to keep myself alive while all the others are trying to keep themselves alive too.” Loved ones, that’s living by sight and most of us actually know the moment in our lives when we chose to live that way, rather than by faith – we know it.

Many of us had silly little ideas in school –we wanted to drive fire engines or that kind of stuff; or many of us just wanted to write poetry all day -- so we had silly ideas. But there were also many of us who had real interests; we really did feel that “Boy, I’m interested in that – I’d really like to do that.” And that carried on for awhile until, as we like to say, the hard realities of life hit us. Really what hit us was fear, and we switched over from that living by faith idea that God had actually given us some ability and some insight that nobody else had, and we began to live by sight and say “Forget that stuff; I’d better go for some job that will provide the money that I need.” You probably remember that time in your own life. And don’t many of us watch “All Creatures Great and Small” about the Yorkshire Veterinarian and we us look at guys like that who seem to enjoy their jobs – he liked animals and he became a Veterinarian and that’s what he did: whatever money it brings or doesn’t bring, that’s what he did. And many of us look at times at people like that and think “That’s really the way to live and I wish I could, but I have my payments and my commitments” so we’re caught – we’re caught.

You might wonder – “I can see how easy it is to live by sight and I can see how hard it is to live by faith. I can certainly see that when the company pays me my salary, it’s very hard not to want to please the company above everything else. And it’s certainly very hard for me, as I try to please the company day by day, not to become a slave to that company and actually to be more afraid of offending that company than of offending anybody else”. Until eventually that company becomes my god and begins to rule my life. Some of us can say the same about friends. We say “I’m very dependent on my friends; it’s my friends that make me happy; it’s my friends that support me and that reinforce me. The worst thing in the world would be to lose my friends.” Until eventually we come to that point where we begin to see that our friends are not simply our support and reinforcement, but they gradually become our gods and they gradually begin to rule our lives.

And many of us would agree that it’s very hard to live by the faith that it’s really our Maker behind the company that is giving us the money. That it’s really our Maker behind our friends that is giving the reinforcement to us and the love. Many of us will wonder how Abraham did it. How did he do it? If all the people of that day were living like this king of Sodom, how did Abraham ever overcome that desire and that temptation to live by sight – by dependence on the things and the circumstances around him? Because he didn’t do it himself; because Abraham didn’t do it himself, that’s it.

I’ll show you the secret, loved ones; it’s one of those most difficult verses in the Bible that we’ve looked at before, it’s John 8:56 and its Jesus that is speaking: “Your father Abraham rejoiced

that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad. The Jews then said to him 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' In other words when you want to think of any human being on this earth who has lived by faith, the one you have no quarrel about is this Jesus. He really did live believing that his Maker had sent him here to do a job. And he really did concentrate on that job day after day, hour after hour and he really did live independent of the people who were able to kill him and arrest him – he did! He lived independent of any desire for his own comfort or for getting things from the world or from those around him. He really did live absolutely dependent that his Father would give him what he needed. And do you see what he says? He said "before Abraham was, I am." In other words, Jesus is eternal. And even though he appeared to live 2000 years after Abraham, and even though the Jews of that day said "this man isn't even 50 years of age and yet he says he knows Abraham" this Jesus existed in that timeless life that Einstein pointed to as the real explanation of reality.

Love ones; Jesus was actually alive when Abraham was alive here on earth. Jesus and the Christ Spirit exist across the centuries, and eternally live by faith in the Creator who is above space and time. And eternally lives therefore, as a Spirit above the limitations of space and time and above even the provisions of space and time. He is the root which supports us, because he is the root that enabled Abraham to exercise faith. Let me show you the verse that points to that. It's Galatians 2:20 and it's so startling -- that

the translators mistranslated it – and it's Paul speaking: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

You can see that the first part of the verse is easy for those of us who have been together here for years. He is saying that "I, and all my old self that has been enslaved and dependent on people and things for what I needed – that has all been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me." Then here's the part that is mistranslated, "and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith" and the translators were so baffled by the next word in Greek that they just translated as normal; "I live by faith in the Son of God." Actually the Greek words are "Pistei tou Huiou tou Theou" and it means "by the faith of the Son of God." It's "Pistei" which is faith, and it's "tou Huiou" which is "of the Son." What Paul was saying was, "Christ lives in me and this life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God being exercised in me. Christ lives inside me and exercises his own faith in my Father and in the fact that my God has put me here to do a job in this world and will provide all that I need if I will concentrate on doing it."

But loved ones, it's Christ himself, in Paul, exercising that faith and that's how Abraham was able to exercise that faith; because Christ lived not only during Abraham's time, but you remember he prays a remarkable prayer to his Father. He says "Restore to me the glory which I had with Thee before the world was created." Loved ones, I know it's deep stuff: but Jesus was before the creation of the world and before the creation of Adam or any of our forefathers. That Spirit of Jesus has been eternally in the world, continually exercising faith in God and that is the root that supports us.

In other words; you don't exercise faith yourself. Abraham didn't -- Abraham isn't the root that supports us. The root that supports us is this eternal Christ that exercised faith through Abraham. Many of you say "Oh Pastor, I know I should live that way; I know I should exercise that kind of faith, but I can't." Well, I know you can't – and you're not asked to. What you are asked to do

is to do what that dear one says in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” “And then I will exercise my faith in the fact that my Father has put you here to do a certain job and that he will make all provision for you. I will exercise that faith through you, if you will let me live in you and if you will be willing to live the life that I want you to live.” Love ones, that’s it; it’s the root that supports us. That why I thought the title of the sermon should be “Bearing or Born”, because some of us walk bearing Christ. “Christopher” is “Christosphero” in Latin and it can mean either one who is bearing Christ, or one whom Christ bears and some of us walk as if we’re bearing Christ instead of being born by Christ and loved ones -- you know that. You know there comes at times inside you a rising up that you can’t explain. You know there will come moments when you find yourself startled by your apparent faith. You’ve felt a lightness and a liberty --- it can come on spring mornings when you get outside and you catch the spirit of the birds and you catch the spirit of the effortlessness of the life of nature. There’s something that rises in you, for a moment, and you almost feel “Yeah – that is life.” And then you sink back down into yourself.

Loved ones, that’s Jesus’ Spirit who is in each one of us trying to begin to live inside you, and that Spirit will rise up and grow strong in you if you will yield to it. Now, I’m not saying all of us are children of God; not all of us are Christians – I know some of us are moving towards that. But all of us – and here’s the amazing thing – all of us, whether we think we’re there and have “arrived” or not – all of us experience that moving; that little wriggling of Jesus’ Spirit inside us trying to lift us up with it to exercise faith in God and live in freedom. And that’s what this verse means: it is not you that support the root but the root that supports you. In other words; you can go to a casino, or you can go shopping on a sale day – it would be the same – you can go anywhere where there is a tremendous acquisitive drive and you know there’s that power of wanting: “If I could only get more of this.” That acquisitiveness that almost takes hold of people and turns them into animals – that kind of thing: now that’s a life – that’s a life and it has a power in it. But do you see that there is another life that is just as powerful that has always flowed through the centuries. There is this eternal Christ with his life and his Spirit that is continually here on earth, exercising faith. And he’s been trying continually to do it in you, and will do it, and will lift you up with him if you will let him.

And that’s it, you know -- it would be so good if you saw that the battle isn’t faith – actually it isn’t. Some of you say “Oh I wish I had so and so’s faith.” Well the battle isn’t faith, because the faith is exercised by Jesus’ Spirit within you. The battle is simply: are you willing to do what God put you here to do? Are you willing just to do what God put you here to do and let him take care of the rest -- if you are, there’ll begin to rise up within you, from Jesus, a spirit of faith that God has put you here for a certain purpose, that he will make provision for you through this recession and he will made adequate provision for you until he’s able to take you to himself.

Now loved ones, there is a way to live there that is free, really. So I do encourage you, however much or little you know about God; realize that that little “lifting” inside you is a sign that Jesus; this eternal Christ, this Son of God, is in fact squirming to lift you up with himself, and will do it if you will let him.

Actually it’s very interesting: to be lost and to go to hell you have to try hard – that’s right! That’s really true; we don’t think of it, you know, but actually to be lost and to go to hell: to miss the life of freedom that God has for you, you have to try hard – you have to work at it really hard. I’d ask you to stop working at it!

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, it does make sense to us, because when we look at the world untouched by our oil spills or unspoiled by our exploitation, we see it is beautiful. Lord, we can see the free way the birds fly from tree to tree. We can see how little squirrels seem to be so free and light. We can see the way the fish seem to be at home in their environment. Lord Jesus we can see, even in little children's eyes some of that faith-life that you yourself Lord Jesus, lived, in the most threatening circumstances in the world.

And Father, we do see that there is something within us that answers to all of that; there's something within us that yearns for that – not just for the escapism – but that senses that that is the right way to live. We thank you, Lord Jesus that your Spirit is moving inside us. And we have sensed you trying to free us from these things before. Lord we see that all we have to do, actually, is go with that. Instead of going with the external tide that surrounds us at times in our businesses and our offices and our homes, to simply going with this internal stream that we sense flowing within us from time to time, and to simply respond to it. And when the opportunity comes, to say the same as Abraham, "I don't want a sandal thong, I don't want a thing from you, lest you say that you have made me rich, because my Father alone will make me rich and will keep me as wealthy as I need to be.

Lord we thank you. Thank you that we can begin to live this way this very moment, and be freed from the cares and the anxieties and the domination of our own wills. Lord Jesus we would ask you to come in. We would say whatever way you want to live; whatever you want us to do with our lives, here we are. We have no better ideas of our own. Lord we're willing to do what you've put us here to do.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now, and evermore. Amen.