

Message to Gateway Christian Fellowship. 9th September. René Schlotjes

No digital overheads or infra red pointers today. I have been aptly described, recently, by a lesser known yet profound philosopher as an “analog man”. I’m a technological dinosaur. I’m also reading out of the King James Bible because this is the Bible my parents gave me and I know where to find the verses in it.

While this pulpit isn’t a confessional or an opportunity for self deprecation, I feel very unworthy to give this message today. If John the Baptist, who lived a life of self-denial and penitence in the wilderness didn’t feel worthy to undo the shoe-laces of The Lord, Isaiah exclaimed that he “was undone, a man of unclean lips”, and The Apostle John fell down as dead before The Lord in his fulness on the Isle of Patmos, then I am certainly not a worthy vessel. I am a poor sufferer. When I get under pressure the old nature races back. I am so fragile at times.

However this is not the way that GOD sees me.

I love my parents dearly. I lost my father 23 years ago and miss him very much. There have been many instances I would have liked to talk things over with him. It’s only in the past few years that I’ve shared with my wife, Esme, that when I was born I inherited a fatal condition from my parents. They probably didn’t really know it but in any case it wasn’t their fault. They also inherited it from their parents who in turn inherited it from their ancestors. Before you point any fingers at me the facts are that you are all in the same position because we all have the common ancestor from whom this condition sprang. All of us at birth were “found” in the “First Adam”, the one who took himself and his wife out of fellowship with God. It’s in our DNA to be out of fellowship with God as opposed to the fellowship that Jesus spoke about in John 17:3 when he prayed that “this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”. Therefore Adam, and those found in him, is an existence of death. “Knowing” and “Fellowship” are inextricably linked. This is why we need to be “born again” through Christ Jesus, into life eternal, into fellowship, into knowing with God.

This idea of being “found” in an ancestor isn’t unusual in the scriptures. Hebrews 7:9 tells us that Levi, who was yet 2 generations from birth, paid Tithes to Melchizedek “in Abraham”.

Even though my parents are sincere and devout believers, there was no way I could inherit eternal life from them. So when I was born again, 35 years ago, God gave me the faith and I received the power of His eternal life. As far as God is concerned I was then “found” in Jesus the “Last Adam” and conformed into his image. I shall go into this growing and already grown into the fulness, in Gods mind, later. I will say at this point that this is a knowledge (knowing) of God as opposed to a scholastic knowledge about God.

So there are two natures. The one that’s eternal life in Christ, the Last Adam, and the one that was found in the First Adam that’s already dead because of the work of the cross of calvary.

The apostle Paul talked about the vexations of the warring of the dead nature and I must confess that I am confused as to whether or not it is dead when I, lets say for example, along with most New Zealanders sitting on the couch, love to hate Wallaby Quade Cooper. I’m sure his mother loves him but there wont be many other New Zealanders who do. Or if

someone steals from me and my family. My attitudes are those of that old but familiar dead nature.

The Bible says in Romans 1;20 that we understand the invisible things of God, from creation, by those things that are made. From creation itself. So in order to understand how this works I'll give an example from nature.

About six weeks ago in mid July, I pruned a friend's plum tree in order to bring the fruiting wood within picking reach rather than leaving the fruit to the birds. Plums are deciduous plants which means they drop their leaves in the Autumn and burst into bloom and then bud into leaf in the spring. I took the pruned branches and twigs and stacked them out of the way in a corner of the garden ready for the next green waste dump run. Two weeks ago I noticed these severed branches bursting into bud and last week some of them had even begun springing into leaf. Now we know that the branch is severed. Is it effectively dead? The answer is yes. If I had severed the roots of the entire tree and pulled it from the ground and left it there in the garden, it would have sprung into bloom and bud just like the branches but it would surely be cut-off and dead even though, for a couple of weeks, there were signs of life. It's the same with us in God's sight. We are 'in Christ' and "dead to sin" even though there appears to be evidence, plenty in my case, of the old nature of the first Adam.

I could go into the graphic nature of the way many envision the end of a hen's life when they finish laying eggs and are taken in one hand with an axe in the other to the chopping block. In those few moments afterwards, is the fowl dead even though it's adrenalin and involuntary nervous impulses keep it racing around the yard? As a hobby farmer, this is not something that I could ever do. My neighbor and I recently even considered very expensive euthanasia from a vet when our half dozen fowls came to end of their egg laying. A friend took us out of our vexatious misery when he took the fowls away.

Jesus cried from the cross some 2000 years ago that "IT IS FINISHED". The nature of the first Adam was severed in the mind of the Eternal God that day, for us, many centuries before we were born, even though it most often appears live and well.

We have a very good friend who struggles with this. She's a fine, upstanding and conscientious person who doesn't think she's "wicked" and by society's standards she is absolutely correct. However, if all that God can acknowledge with anyone is the first Adam because the revelation and the deposit of faith in and the life of Jesus, the redeemer, isn't there, then even the most ardent efforts at righteousness are still self-righteous and seen as nothing more than "filthy rags" by God. That's the case for all of us. I feel that the effort taken to engineer self-righteousness and good works is in itself an act of rebellion and indicates a deep down lack of humility. It's nothing but a fig leaf covering of a spiritual nakedness and shame.

I often think of the monk who, in his penitence, built a rock stairway from the Byzantine Monastery at the base of what most consider to be Mount Sinai to the top. It took me almost two hours to walk it so it would have taken this man many years to complete the path. If it was self-imposed penitence then it was a virtually useless spiritual exercise.

The Law shows the Holy Nature of God. It outlines the expectations that God had of human kind but knew ahead of time we wouldn't be able to live up to. Furthermore, the mere following of rules doesn't lead to the fellowship that God wants. Consider your own households and families. What kind of fellowship is possible with a stern and autocratic disciplinarian? Because Jesus has the nature of God, He is able to correctly discern the Law, correctly fellowship with God and so fulfill the real expectations of the Law. To be found in Him is to share in this otherwise impossible state.

In ancient Greece, wealthy families had a servant, called a Pedagogue, whose task it was to guide the children to school. In the over all scheme of things, the function of the Law is as a guide to show us our need to be born again of the nature of the Last Adam. We don't need to take many steps towards God before He will embrace us. It's just a matter of turning the heart, confessing and receiving the seed of that nature of the Last Adam.

Years ago, our family hosted an Argentinean exchange student whose father was a retired judge from the military junta Galtieri regime years when tens of thousands of people had just disappeared. He can remember his older brother and sister getting police escort to school each day. This was for safety reasons as opposed to guidance and teaching.

The Law has proved to be corruptible. It's an inadequate tool. Even the good things of the Law are contaminated by the rebellious nature of the First Adam. It seems all too easy to weave ill-intent into it's fabric.

In this country we use an adversarial system of law where there is a winner and a loser. It's wide open to corruption because the capacity to put a compelling case, with clever and beguiling speech making, becomes the defining factor to the outcome. Off course the cleverer the debater and the more celebrated their track record, the more exorbitant their fees are. The financial cost can be ruinous. While it's supposed to be one of the best legal systems in the world, there's a built-in equality flaw right there and that's why so many of us, sensing the opportunity for injustice, barrack so stridently for the underdog. This isn't the same set of virtues that Jesus expounded on the Mount of Beatitudes is it. Grace seeks to lift people up. It's a more win/win approach. The law can't mediate morality and our personal experience is that it can be seriously dishonorable.

We live in a strange politically correct (P.C.) orbit of insecurity and prejudice. Like our father Abraham, we look for a city whose maker is God.

Have you ever felt sadness, discouragement or even disillusionment with the people of God who seem somehow to have re-aligned, if not corrupted, the testament of God's grace.

Temperance isn't necessarily a "proof" of the nature of the Last Adam, neither is the appearance of "blessings" or even some sort of outward righteousness. The baubles of wealth don't prove anything in particular, spiritually, because anyone can achieve them by following basic natural principles such as sowing and reaping.

Any group of people can pool their resources and build the "biggest church building in the district", as some are keen to do. Any one can bend their attention to the gathering of "label" clothes, flash cars and any manner of success and status symbols. This doesn't place anyone higher up the ladder of God's blessing and favor but it does impress some

and even draws a pseudo edification. It's a clarion call with a strange voice that trips the pilgrim back to "dead works" because it's doctrine is instituted by the "flesh".

Yes there's a joy in creating and prospering, and we should use our God given talents and chase our God given dreams but there's a fine line that the proud and rebellious heart of the First Adam is not capable of discerning and there-in lies the danger; that the road will lead back to a version of legalism.

Consider Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for our sakes became poor, dying two deaths (the first in taking on the form of sinful man and the second on the cross of calvary). He only had a robe for which the roman soldiers cast lots. He was poor by the worlds standards. Yet he was in the will of God and is blessed and favored above all.

Consider our father Abraham, into whose roots we are grafted. In his time he was one of the wealthiest men on the planet. He eschewed a life of contentment in buildings and cities but rather lived in tents which is symbolic of where his heart was. He wasn't enchanted by the grand but temporal things of this world. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Abraham eschewed the things of the world because he looked and longed for a city whose maker is God. This should be our attitude as well.

How divinely appointed that Our Lord would suffer outside the gates of the city and bear the shunning and rejection of it's citizenry and systems. Surely he took his place with the outcasts, the lepers, and thereby embraces with those of us who earnestly look for the city whose maker is God. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13; 12 and 13).

In these cities, these man-made societies, even the people of God grasp at Grace for themselves yet met out a sort of medieval town-square judgement with blunt force and gossip. If we are grafted in with faithful Abraham then it becomes impossible to find contentment in earthly fleshpots and infantile and indeed worldly church systems with their glitter. Some are now even set up as sort of business franchises and give a percentage of the tithe to some umbrella oversight.

The Law and Grace have been corrupted by the fallen nature of the first Adam. Remember that the first recorded murder was in the second generation. Man fell from perfection to murder inside two generations. Surely Man is incapable of discerning the knowledge of good and evil after the wisdom of God. This is something for the "fulness of times" when it's actually Gods Spirit within discerning such things.

About 30 years ago now, during a period of sun and surf therapy in Gisborne, I was walking along Midway Beach early one evening. I haven't had many encounters like this but this particular evening I saw the Lord Jesus Christ come walking across a gently rolling ,parched, hillside and walk past at very close quarters. I was a spectator. There were people following, as a disciple would, but not beside him. I was struck and still am to this day at his absolute loneliness. It was so overwhelming that I didn't even really see the path or the hillside. For a while I thought it was the via Dolorosa but there was no cross, no crown of thorns and it was in the countryside so it can't have been in or near Jerusalem and so I realized that this was the way it was for him when he walked the earth among us. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but I the son of man have nowhere to

lay his head” Matt 8;20. Jesus is the loneliest, by far, that I have ever met. The adrenalin of the experience stayed with me many days but his overwhelming sense of loneliness still affects me to this day.

Jesus was misunderstood by all around him, even by his beautiful, gentle mother who hid his strange sayings in her heart. After ministering to the sapping multitudes with all their needs and in his tiredness, Jesus often retired to the desolate places to commune with God, the only one who did understand him. I understand that the Psalms are correctly understood as poetry and song but I also sense something deeper there. I sense the Holy Spirit communing with itself. I sense deep calling to deep. The yearnings of the gentle Holy Spirit discerning itself across the centuries. I feel that there would have been something very familiar and eternal in the Psalms for Jesus. If you wish to know something of the heart and supplications of our dear Savior in these lonely hours, when we in our fleshly weakness can do no more than sleep, I’m sure you’ll find them in the Psalms. Psalm 63 for example. What a blessing it is that Neil reads a psalm every time he starts a meeting.

Coming back to the “growing into” and “already grown into the fulness” in Gods mind. We human beings live our lives on a linear plane, We can remember our past. We experience the present and we can imagine our future. We are the only living creatures that can effectively imagine and then speak our futures into existence. It’s different to an instinct such as the phenomenon of migration that we witness in nature. It’s a birthright that we are all given. For instance, Have you ever seen a dairy cow enroll in a university course or a sheep dog take up a mechanics apprenticeship? or a Guinea pig take up opera singing?. (Mind you there could be exceptions to that rule as I have seen sea gulls take up garbage collection and lately on TV there have been short documentaries on energy savvy pukekos.)

Then there’s the eternal God. Lets anchor an arch at the beginning of our life and hoop it over to the end of our life. We understand that God knows the end from the beginning. Lets then hoop that arch back under our linear line to the beginning of our life because God knows the beginning from the end. But hang on a minute; when did our life start? We know that when our bodies die that that isn’t the end of life for us, it’s simply a veil we pass through into another form of life. Sometimes there’s a sense that there was something before this life even if it was just a foreknowledge of us. So that makes it hard to actually anchor or determine the size of Gods circle.

We also know that God is intimately concerned with our cares and interests, with our health and that of our loved ones. God numbers the hair of each and every one of us and at the same time watches over his vast and complex creation. He knows when a sparrow, insignificant to us, falls. Within all this God has his own purposes for us and others that He is constantly bringing into fruition.

So the shape of this multi-dimensional God pivots from many points fanning out into a shape that is really more like a ball than a single dimensional circle or section and given His eternal purposes for such an innumerable host of us, and over many millennium, then this is a very large ball the limits of which we ourselves can’t define.

Within that ball exists the Knowledge of God or to put it another way God’s Knowledge. (as opposed to an intellectual knowledge about God.) Into this most Holy and Awesome of places we are sometimes given a glimpse.

I still remember some things about my own personal born again experience as if they happened yesterday. I was by myself in a country house this particular Friday evening in mid-September 1977 and having come to the end of myself, I found the sinners prayer somewhere in my Bible and prayed it and then went to bed. I woke up changed. I knew I'd been touched and cleansed at the very centre of my being. It wouldn't be possible, however, to even get the most skilled of surgeons to exactly pin-point where that centre is. This is a spiritual place.

One of the very clear memories I have was that of being in a familiar place spiritually on an "eternal" timeline. I couldn't and still can't clearly explain that knowledge but 3 or 4 years ago I read a couple of verses in the Book of Job and my heart leaped and still does at the familiar sense of it. After Job's friends have finished giving their well intentioned but human insight and advice, God addresses him out of God's whirlwind and asks among other things "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth.... when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Job 38;7 When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy was a knowledge that somehow rang in my heart and memory and seemed even more real than the life I live. The sense of it would be like a reacquaintance with a childhood home or a favorite childhood toy after many years. When Esme and I returned to New Zealand after almost 3 years in the northern hemisphere, I remember seeing, again, the southern night sky through the airline window. I hadn't missed it or even thought about it until I saw that familiar sky again. It was that sort of sense or knowledge and it wasn't an experience that I went looking for or constructed in my mind.

Hebrews 12:1 and 2 exhorts us to "Run the race...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" What was the joy that was set before Jesus? I'm sure that as a Rabbi, as well as The Son of God, Jesus would have intimately known the following passage of Psalm. It would have been deep calling to deep, the Holy Spirit communicating with and discerning Itself across the centuries.

Psalm 139; 13 to 16

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb
I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them

Many have said that this particular passage describes the wonder of the embryo growing in the womb and on one level that is correct. With our understanding of the scriptures, I'm certain that while on the surface we find the treasure of gold dust, mine further and under the surface there one will find gold nuggets. This passage to me is another example of how we get to understand the invisible things of God, from creation, by those things that are made (Romans 1:20). It's a gold nugget, a glimpse into the Knowledge of God.

There is no doubt that Jesus saw from afar off the much yearned for Body of Christ. The scriptures have talked about The Christ and his Body from Genesis onwards, and tells us of their existence at the dawning of time, well before the fall, before the foundations of the

earth (Job 38;7). In order for the Body of Christ to appear their Older Brother needed to appear and give Himself, being sown into the earth of humanity, and bringing forth the “much fruit”, His Body in it’s fulness. (John 12:24). This is the Joy that was set before him. That He would set the process by which the Body of Christ would be conceived, grow into His fulness and set in motion God’s redemptive plan for His creation.

Going back to Psalm 139: 13 to 16. The Mind of God did see / sees, the substance of the Body of Christ when it was as yet unperfect (incomplete) and being made in secret in the lowest parts of the earth (fallen man). In His book all the members of his Body were /are written and were / are being fashioned when as yet there were /are none of them walking on the earth, transfigured into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Let me encourage you to read the (above) verses of Psalm 15 and 16 backwards from end to beginning considering the knowledge within like the arch of Gods knowledge that loops from the end back to the beginning.

The Holy Spirit gave the apostle John an unction of this when he wrote in his first epistle, chapter 3;2. Beloved, now are we the Sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as He is.

Psalm 139:17 and 18. How precious also are thy thoughts to me, O God !. How great is the sum of them ! If I should count them they are more in number than the sand: when I awake I am still with thee.

We, as humans, are very clever. It’s our birthright. We are able to x-ray the length of an embryo’s bone and pretty much determine the date of birth from that. We can send camera’s round the human body through arteries. Esme and I have a young family friend who is a brilliant British physics student. Probably a Doctor of Physics by now. His field of study is that of “Quarks”. A quark, as I understand it, is the smallest measurable element in any atom. It’s smaller than an electron within the atom and Jonathan studies them. He says that the same quark can simultaneously appear in two places at once. Even in two separate countries at once. I don’t know how they can determine it and it’s obviously very clever. I suppose at some point this knowledge will help in crossing some technology gap.

Recently modern science stood up to God in it’s pride and stiff-necked rebellion and yet inadvertently acknowledged God’s existence when they sent atoms hurtling through a billion dollar tunnel circuit under some Swiss city and collided them together to find “The God Particle”

These days we can go to the internet on our cell phones and in an instant gather information on pretty much anything. The Bible foretold that there would be an explosion of knowledge and it has been allowed by God but that doesn’t mean we can fathom the mind and eternal purposes of God with such tools or with our intellect.

Today, as has always been the case, any knowledge of God is revealed to us by God. And God’s purposes, though hidden from rebellious mankind, continue on inexorably. They are exclusively bound up in The Lord Jesus Christ and the many Sons (both male and female) that He will bring to glory and then onwards from there.

A few days before Jesus was crucified, The Holy Spirit, discerning the future, prompted Jesus to pray for unity of that great number, spread across the centuries, that make up his

most Holy Body. In John 17 : 20 and 21, Jesus prayed Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all may be ONE, as thou Father art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be ONE in US; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Have you ever found yourself listening to the sound of the many voices in a crowd but no one in particular? To me, whether excited, hushed or somewhere in between, the sound is remarkably similar to that of moving water. Even falling snow has a sound, to me, reminiscent to that of a very hushed crowd settling in for a concert piece.

As a teenager I spent many weekends with school friends in the Tararua Ranges in behind Palmerston North. We had built a bush hut with "Punga" logs slightly uphill of a creek that feed into the city's town water storage dam. There was no noise pollution, only the sound of the wild life around us, perhaps the wind and the constant babbling of the stream. Certainly from the quietness of the hut, I often imagined the sound of many voices in the sound of the creek.

Let me encourage you to take the time to listen, with a quiet soul, to the sound of a river or a stream and see if this is so.

How beautifully exquisite that in scripture "The Word", either spoken or written, and Water are so often inextricably linked.

John 7; 37 and 38. In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

In the first chapter of Revelations it is recorded that the Apostle John was on the Island of Patmos because of his testimony of Jesus Christ, and being in the Spirit on the Lords day he saw Christ in his fulness . Scarcely able to contain it, he heard along with the vision the voice of Our Lord revealed in His Fulness and it was the voice as the sound of many waters.

It's significant that this is recorded as happening on The Lords Day. This is symbolic of the coming of His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, something that we and the whole of creation yearn for. In that The Lords voice was as the sound of many waters, it's clear that the voice of our Lord included those of all the members of His Body, all motivated by the mind of Christ, as he is the Head, and all with Rivers of Living water flowing from the centre of their beings speaking forth the word of life. What a wonderful time that will be in God's redemptive plan.

Brothers and Sisters, He knows you even as you have been known. The old nature is dead regardless of appearances and it should be reckoned that way. His great and eternal purposes won't be thwarted. The whole of creation will be set free into the glorious liberty of the children of God, even those who shouted for joy at the dawn of time when the morning stars sang together. In the mind and knowledge of God, our great creator, this has already happened.

There's a wonderful old hymn that I'd love you to sing with me. Rock of Ages.