

“Rescue: Me”

Scripture: Romans 7:15-25a

Graphic: sin, rescue ring, rescue trucks

Key Verses: 24b Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Theme: The law of God and the law of Sin compete in each of us for domination. We find ourselves confused and lost because we do what we KNOW we don't want to. Only Jesus is the One who is able to rescue us, praise be to God.

1) Introduction

- a) There aren't many passages in the New Testament that are more confusing and yet telling for our lives than the ones we will read today.
- b) We just started, last week, to take some deeper looks at parts of Paul's letter to the Romans. And we talked about the advantage God gives us when we are set free from Sin because of our faith in Jesus Christ...and that advantage is sanctification (being ever transformed into the image of God through the power and leading of the Holy Spirit).
- c) But wouldn't it be great if we were all fully sanctified...perfected in love because of Jesus in our lives?
- d) What we know, and what Paul knows about himself and all those around him, is that we continue to experience Sin in our lives, **EVEN THOUGH** we are born again children of God.
- e) Just a warning to us, I'm going to talk about Sin again this morning.
- f) But today, it's from that Sin that we will celebrate the rescue that is available to us in Jesus Christ...
- g) Turn with me today to Romans chapter 7, starting in verse 15...
- h) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

a) Read verse 15-16

- i) Right off the bat, we begin to wonder if Paul is talking about himself in this passage, or if he is talking about someone else?

- ii) It's hard to imagine that the Apostle Paul would be writing about himself due to the fact that we KNOW he was a slave to God, and therefore, not a slave to sin anymore. I mean, this guy was ready to be stoned, beaten, jailed, punished, and even die to witness to his FAITH in Jesus Christ.
- iii) More likely, Paul is writing about someone who is either not yet a born-again believer, or from the perspective of someone who is but has reverted into sinful behavior patterns.
- iv) And it's from those conditions that one would need rescue...and Paul clearly does not expect any believer (or any person for that matter) to remain in a state of needing rescue from slavery to sin once they accept Jesus as their Savior.
- v) So what's he saying here...?
- vi) For those who find themselves as slaves to sin, the world is a pretty confusing place.
- vii) First of all, God has created us to respond to His grace. Second, Jesus sent His Holy Spirit. And that, thirdly, grace is available to us, even before we KNOW it.
- viii) The Holy Spirit works in our lives to draw us to God...to have us obey God, like we talked about last week.
- ix) And when we are slaves to sin, having no choice but to do that which is sinful, and yet have the Holy Spirit all the time working on us to get us to do that which God would desire, we are, like, torn in two!
- x) We had a fabulous and sweaty competition at Tent Camp last week called Tug-of-War...we had, like, 14 people on a side, and there was pulling and straining and slipping. But what's amazing is, there's very little movement of the rope either way once the war begins...and it stays in the middle until one team gets the strength and footholds to win by pulling the rope over the line.
- xi) This is exactly what it can feel like when we're Christians struggling with sin.

- xii) We have a sense of what we should be doing...of what is right. But our bodies – our flesh nature – knows only that it wants to be a slave to sin...there is no choice! There's this tug-of-war going on in my life!
- xiii) And in verse 16, Paul talks about the fact that those who are slaves to sin, both those who are Christians and those who are under the law - those who find themselves knowing what is right, but doing that which is wrong, Paul says, we must come to the conclusion that the law is good because it tells me exactly what is right and wrong, and how to have resolution to my sin.
- xiv) Basically, without the law, I wouldn't know that I am doing something wrong, because I'm currently so driven by the sin nature in me, that I'm blinded to what God wants.
- xv) But the Law points me to a realization that there is such a thing as right and wrong. And so for people caught in sin...the Law can begin to work in them to point out their errors. We can look at the Ten Commandments and begin to see where we are sinning. Unfortunately, the Law can't be followed perfectly and fails.
- xvi) How much better is it to be freed from that! For those who are in Christ, who are slaves to God and His righteousness, the law is meaningless, because we are following Christ. We are freed from the purpose of the Law, as far as, and as long as, we are following Christ and are slaves to righteousness. And when we do, things like the ten Commandments become silly. If I'm a slave to righteousness, I don't cheat on my wife. If I'm a slave to God, I don't murder, to steal, or lie.
- xvii) So Paul is laying out three states of being, and addressing the second two. The first status are those who are slaves to sin, who aren't saved, and who could care less about the law or God. These are pagans, who don't see God. God's grace is still available to them, they just don't care.
- xviii) The second group are those who are either aware of God's Law and try to live under it, or those who have accepted Christ, but who are not following Christ. Either way, they are slaves to sin and have to rely on the Law to tell them what is right and what is wrong.
- xix) This really is the group that Paul is addressing here.

- xx) Finally, there are those who are freed from slavery to sin, because of Jesus Christ, and who are actively following Christ.
- xxi) Now, all of the people in any of the groups have a propensity to Sin. The difference is, the first group doesn't care and doesn't really know it's sin. The second group, to which Paul is writing, knows about Sin but is choosing to try to go it on there own without Christ. And the third group is relying on Christ for salvation, sanctification, and a right relationship to God.

b) Read verses 17-20

- i) The Sin, which dwells in this person that Paul is talking about (who, remember, is in category #2), is responsible (7:17), for him doing what he doesn't want to do!
- ii) Slightly restating the same point (and we find a good deal of repetition in this passage!), the person would say that goodness must not lie in his "flesh" because he is able to will to do what is right but cannot actually do it (7:18). In his mind, he knows what is right – the Holy Spirit has SOME influence on this person.
- iii) He is always willing the good but doing the bad (7:19).
- iv) And so he concludes that if he does not will to do what is evil but in fact does it, then it must be not himself but Sin that does evil (7:20).
- v) This is so confusing, right? Paul's saying that the reality in our lives sometimes is that even though we want to do the right thing – the thing that we decide in our minds to do in our quiet moments or the action we decide to do when we are praying and get a word from the Lord – we end up, in the heat of the moment, or in a moment that we have our guard down, end up doing something completely different!
- vi) So frustrating, right? What to do...
- vii) Verse 21...

c) Read verse 21-23

- i) Sin is always present to intrude its own will whenever he attempts to exert his own (7:21). There are two agents at work in this person. Back to the tug-of-war! One, which he identifies as himself, desires to do what is

right; the other is Sin, which works through its accomplice, the flesh, to do what is wrong.

- ii) The next verses, 7:22-23, are the crux of the entire passage. The speaker here refers to two “Laws,” which at first seems to confuse matters significantly. However, J. Louis Martyn has provided an exegetical key that unlocks this interpretive door (“Nomos plus genitive noun in Paul: The history of God’s law,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, eds. J.T. Fitzgerald, T.H. Olbricht, and L.M. White [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 575-87).
- iii) Martyn argues persuasively that the “law of Sin” that holds the speaker’s body captive (7:23) is not really a separate law but rather is simply the law (referred to in 7:22 as the “law of God”) as it is hijacked by Sin and used for its own evil purposes.
- iv) Look, God created the Law, gave it to Moses for the people of Israel, and put in motion His plan to save us from Sin. Did it work? No! Because Sin – Sin that entered the world because of US – Sin, hijacked the perfect Law that God created!
- v) Thus this person, of whom Paul is writing, experiences God’s good and holy law as something that enslaves and withholds life because it has been taken over by Sin. The point for Paul is that observing the law simply cannot break the hold of Sin; only in the death of Jesus is the power of Sin overcome.

d) Read verses 24-25a

- i) Paul gets real with us here! Look, he says, I’m a wretched man – a man that wants to do the things that God is asking me to do – things I read about in the Bible...things I learned in Sunday School...things the pastor preaches about...things that I feel the Holy Spirit leading me to do...
- ii) But all of that has been hijacked by Sin, and I find myself feeling guilty and dirty and like I’m wretched because I don’t!
- iii) This is deep emotion! And when I read this, I think Paul is remembering back to those days when he, himself, was a hater. When he persecuted Christians before he had his salvation encounter with Christ. He was remembering how wretched he felt...how guilty...how painful it was.

- iv) But...but...then he got rescued from the slavery to sin and got rescued to a life of following Christ, no matter what the cost.
- v) See, 'cause, when we get rescued, we don't just get rescued FROM something, but we also get rescued TO something. Remember the miners that got rescued from the Chilean mine last year? The men in the mine got rescued FROM the mine shaft. But they didn't just leave them at the mouth of the mine when they came up. They went home to their families...they went to do things that they wanted to do...they realized that life was precious and fragile...
- vi) Or the stories of people being rescued from wells...usually children.
- vii) Or in Minot, North Dakota, where people are clinging to trees in their neighborhoods, or sitting on their rooftops waiting to be rescued.
- viii) It's not like the rescuers just drop them on the bank and say, "Have a nice day!" They get rescued and then taken to people that can love them and care for them...
- ix) Paul says, "Who will rescue me from the body of death?" Who will rescue me from myself, basically?! ...from doing the things I don't want to do and know that I shouldn't? ...from being hijacked by the Sin nature in me?

3) Application

- a) Rescue. That's what Paul — what we — are looking for.
- b) Good intentions won't rescue us.
- c) More education, more money, more discipline, more time, more second chances. None of this will rescue us.
- d) Jesus Christ is our only Rescuer. Costly for him, because he died in the "rescue" process. But that's what makes it grace.
- e) That's why Paul's startling discovery as he ponders this riddle before him is, that through Jesus Christ the rescue has already taken place.
- f) It's our business now to live as though it were true.

- g) It's like, there's no point staying in the coal mine when the rescue has been accomplished. No point staying at the bottom of a well. No point in clinging to a tree in the middle of a raging river.
- h) No point clinging to an old resentment. No point refusing to forgive. No point cheating, lusting, fighting, carping, harping, stealing, lying — any of these things. It's not who we are in Christ!
- i) Does this mean we become perfect? Not quite. We're forgiven, not flawless. And Paul knows that there is always a war going on between the flesh and the spirit.
- j) So, "Why do I do the bad I don't want to do, and don't do the good I do want to do?" Because of the power of Sin that is activated when I "serve" the "flesh."
- k) But when I remember who I am, and when I serve "the law of the mind," then I know what it means to be "rescued" and to live the way God wants me to.

4) Conclusion

- a) Tomorrow is Independence Day – when we celebrate the fact that the people who would become the United States of America declared independence from Great Britain, because of taxes and freedom of religion, mostly.
- b) It's also a day to remember all the soldiers who have given their lives to keep this nation free. And we hope it's always that way.
- c) But in the midst of all that, there is One who died to set us free eternally and allow us to choose eternal life with God. There is One who has gone into battle with evil and sin and come out victorious so we could be rescued from it.
- d) That One is Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God that through Him, we are rescued from sin and set free to building His Kingdom.
- e) Holy Communion is the acknowledgement of our need for rescue from sin to life. John Wesley knew that Communion is the place where the road of sin and evil and the road of righteousness meet here and now.
- f) You CAN take the path that leads to salvation and sanctification, even though it sometimes appears that Sin and Evil are the only way.

- g) Stay strong in the Lord, sisters and brothers. Shine the light of Jesus for those who are struggling. And take the rescue that Jesus offers.
- h) Do that which the Lord wants you to do because he rescued you for it.
- i) Come and give thanks to God for that rescue...
- j) Let's pray...