

New Life: The Wretched One

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 February 2011

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 0 0] Well, here in our morning services, we've been going through for the past few months the book of Romans, and we're looking at Romans 7.

It's very helpful if you take your pew Bibles and look at page 943. I'll be going through that a bit. And I want to welcome visitors who are here and family and friends of the newly baptized as well.

It's a great privilege to be part of that and to see this sign of God's inward grace in our lives through Jesus Christ, pointing to this hope we have in Him and the fact that we are united with Him as we place our faith in Him.

And this passage here has a lot to do with baptism. I'll talk a little bit about it at the end. But it is a passage that's really illuminating because what it does is it reveals our hearts.

It reveals things that are hidden from many people. It reveals what's in our minds. And it brings to light into... It reveals light into dark places as well.

[1 : 1 1] Because what it does is it shows sin in sharp relief. You can't go away from this passage and not see the reality of sin and its powers.

And it's very, very personal. What you're seeing here is Paul opening his heart and his mind to you and I as we read here. We're seeing something that's a reality in his life.

Paul is talking about his own experience. But it is also the experience of humanity throughout the ages. It's the experience of our condition, our spiritual condition.

It's about what dwells in us. It's about what influences us. And it's about what our struggles and desires are. It's very important. It is the inside story of not only Paul but really the whole world.

Now this is a recap which I think is very important for us. It's helpful for us to go back a few chapters and see where we've come from to get to this point. Because if you remember back in chapter 5 we heard that you will definitely be saved by Jesus as you place your faith in him.

[2 : 2 5] And baptism speaks to us about that. It's a statement of faith that we saw today that these children will one day place their faith in Jesus Christ. that they will know peace and we know peace with God.

We know God. His love has been poured out on us. This is the good news. And then in chapter 5 verse 12 Paul teaches about the kingdom of Adam.

It's a curious term. But what it means is that there is this kingdom where sin and death reign. Everyone is subject to sin.

Everyone dies. But then in verse 15 of chapter 5 we hear that Jesus has established a new kingdom when he rose from the dead.

And this is a kingdom that is characterized by life. By righteousness. By God's grace. And it overcomes the sin and death that are reigning in the kingdom of Adam.

[3 : 25] Now the fact of the matter is the old kingdom of Adam remains. And we see that in our world around us. We see sin and death everywhere. But in 6.1 through 7.6 those chapters which were the last three sermons that you heard in the Sundays Sunday mornings.

We see how God brings Christians from that kingdom of Adam into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And very simply God does it by uniting people to Jesus Christ.

So as we are united to Jesus he brings us into that new kingdom. And that brings us to today's passage. Because what we learn here is that there is an overlap of those two kingdoms when you become a Christian.

Imagine that the kingdom of Adam is a circle and the realm of Jesus is another circle. So you've got two circles. There's an overlap where those two circles are over top of each other. And this is an overlap in which you are a Christian brought into the kingdom of Jesus.

But you are not fully freed from Adam's kingdom because you still sin. You still die. Christians are looking forward to the day when Jesus will come again and give us a new resurrection body where we are fully freed from the kingdom of Adam.

[4 : 48] And the result of that overlap for Christians is that we struggle against sin in our life. And that's what we see in this chapter.

As a follower of Jesus things are not all as you want them to be. You know how Jesus had freed you from sin's rule. How he gives you a new life. And how he will glorify you in heaven.

You also know that sin drags you down. And is also reality in your life. You might be here in church this morning and looking at people around you and thinking they don't struggle with sin.

They look like they have it all together. The people next to me. But they are struggling. I remember back I went to a university. A large university in the United States.

And every spring a group of traveling preachers would come and they would speak. And they were a very odd brand of Christianity that they brought with them. They were very entertaining.

[5 : 48] They drew hundreds of people because they would say the most outlandish, politically incorrect things they could. And they had a strange view of human sin. They said that when they became Christians shortly after they stopped sinning.

It was all done with sin. And my hope in those times of hearing them speak about that was that we could have a very candid interview with their spouses. And hear what the real inside story was.

Because surely what Paul is telling us is that we continue to be burdened by sin. And this passage is very helpful for us because it tells us about the deep seriousness of that sin.

But then we're going to go on to see how it gives us courage in our battle against that sin as well. So let's look at the first section of 7 through 13.

Paul teaches here about the true colors of sin. Last week if you look up to verse 6 we saw that we are released from the law.

[6 : 53] It's an interesting thing. And we serve the new law of the spirit. And so the question that a questioner asks here in verse 7 is, you know, does this mean that law is sin?

Are we released from the law just as we are released from sin's power? Paul says absolutely not. And he says it really clearly throughout chapter 7.

So if you look at verse 12 you see that he says that the law is holy and righteous and it's good as well. In verse 14 he says here that the law is spiritual.

And then he goes on in verse 22. If you have to quick turn the page there to see that I delight in the law of God. It is the law of God. And what he's saying there is if God said something was right, if it was right to worship God alone in the Old Testament, it is always right to worship him alone.

If it was wrong to murder in the Old Testament, it is always wrong to do that. The law reveals God's moral law. But the law also reveals the depth of sin in our lives.

[8 : 09] And Paul experiences that sin through law in verse 7 if you look at it. He says, you know, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

For I would have not known what it is to covet if the law had not said, you shall not covet. And that's because to covet is to desire what is forbidden.

Wanting what God has said you should not have or you cannot have. This is really the sin, the root of all sin. And Paul is speaking here in solidarity with Adam and the people of God and all people throughout the ages.

Because if you remember, and this is unmistakable that we have to think about Genesis here, the law of God in Eden was what? You shall not eat.

You shall not eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. And it was a blessing. This was something that gave life to Adam and Eve. It gave life as part of God's creation.

[9 : 14] If Adam kept the commandment, he would have had life. He would have kept it. This was God's desire. But we know, of course, that Adam ate that forbidden fruit.

And death came into the world. And that's why Paul goes on to say in a couple of verses that the very commandment that promised life to me has proved to be death. And why is that?

It's because for the first time in the history of the world, you see there in Eden a clash of desire. So Adam believes that what I want and desire is not what God wants.

And that's what will bring me happiness. Not what God wants, but what I want. And in this way, what he does is he cuts himself off from the giver of life. And Adam, rather than God, becomes the law for Adam.

That's why Paul says in verse 7 that the law reveals to him really the full seriousness of sin, of his desiring what he can't or shouldn't have. He realizes here that it is rebelling against God himself, just as Adam realized it.

[10 : 20] It is displacing God's specific commandment with Paul's own desire, just like Adam did. And what Paul realizes is that my desires say I will never be content.

I know a better way of life. But this is what leads to death, not life. And there is a terrible weight to this wrongdoing that Paul realizes.

And he knows the law can't save him from it. In fact, it gets a bit worse, much worse. In his experience and in the people of the Bible, sin is so powerful that it uses the good commandment for its own purposes.

So if you look at the beginning of 8, verse 8, in the beginning of verse 11, we have this phrase where sin seizes an opportunity. And he seizes an opportunity through commandment to produce all different kinds of covetousness and to deceive and kill.

What seems to be happening here is that the law excites the sin within that person. And the old sinful self more and more gets hostile to God because it can't meet God's just requirements.

[11 : 36] The law can't save. It can only condemn at that part. And this is where it's very, very relevant to us today as we're sitting here in church at the 11 o'clock service because he is telling each of us that sin is far more powerful than we can imagine.

It's not just a set of wrongdoings or some abstract thing that we sort of may joke about. It is a force of rebellion that leads us away from God and worse, it leads us against God.

And therefore my sin and your sin are far worse than we can imagine. That's what the end of verse 13 tells us. Through the commandment, sin is shown to be sinful beyond measure.

And that is the bad news. Now the power of the gospel that we've been hearing about shines its glorious light here. And it would be intolerable in a sense to hear this without that good news.

Because the blessing of Jesus Christ is that Paul and you and I look at sin in the context of trusting Jesus. And when we see sin in all of its awfulness in our lives, we can also see more fully how Jesus took on himself a far greater weight of sin on the cross than we can imagine.

[13 : 05] As we look at the depth of sin, we are looking at the depth and power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The depth of Jesus' love for helpless sinners is far deeper than that great sin that is revealed to us.

And we see more powerfully the tremendous gift that new life is that Jesus gives to us. That's why Paul says back in chapter 5, verse 15, if many died through Adam's sin, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by that grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

And when we baptize, we are preaching in that baptism about the abundant grace of Jesus Christ for us and for these children who are baptized.

But this brings us to the paradox of the Christian life in chapter 7. Look at verse 14. There's a shift that happens at this point. He turns from the past tense of his life, Paul does, in 7 through 13, and he now writes in the present tense from here to the end of the chapter.

And that has caused all kinds of problems and turmoil for very good and godly commentators. And lots of problems for the person who's trying to prepare a sermon in a busy week.

[14 : 32] Because, you know, many variations of interpretations are out there all around whether this is Paul's pre-Christian life or his present Christian experience and many variations of one and the other.

And that's because there's difficulties here, isn't there? If this is about Paul as a Christian united to Jesus, who's been freed to serve Jesus, how can he say in verse 14 at the end, I am of the flesh and sold under sin?

Wasn't he released? Or how can he say in 24 and 25, 25 at the very, very end of our chapter, I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

How could that be? But then again, how can Paul, the non-Christian, say, if you look up to 22 at the beginning, how can a non-Christian say, I delight in the law of God in my inner being?

How can a non-Christian say in verse 24, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of death, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[15 : 45] Well, the answer would seem to be that there are two realities. And this is probably the best that I could find. First and wonderfully, when we trust in Jesus Christ, God gives us a new identity.

We are a new person in Christ. We are united to Jesus. He gives us a heart and mind that loves what he loves and desires what he commands. And this is the person that Paul is when he says, I, me, I am this person, that who he really is, is in Jesus.

But there's a second reality in every Christian, and that is that sin still resides in our mortal bodies. Jim Packer put it this way.

He said that the indwelling sin is Paul's troublesome inmate while he remains in the body. And I think it's a marvelous way of putting it. We experience serving that law of sin.

We experience that inmate of that who is troublesome. And that's why sin, or repentance, is a normal part of our Christian life.

[16 : 52] The turning away from sin that we talked about in baptism. That's why we confess our sins together on Sundays. It's why we actually said this morning that we're miserable offenders.

Even though we don't feel miserable, when we think about our sin and who we are in Jesus, there is a frustration that comes in that. It's why we are continually needing to experience God freeing us in our bodies from sin's power.

Now this doesn't mean that our body is bad. It is good, created by God, and He will finally free us, free our bodies in the resurrection. We will have a new body that's glorified.

It's what we long for. But as we wait for that day, we experience a frustration. Sin is actively working to influence and rule us.

And I think in a way, that experience of frustration is not unlike what the people in Egypt experienced in the last two weeks. Because Mubarak, in an incredible thing, incredible turn of events, said, I am going to step down.

[18 : 06] Now the problem is, it's going to be in September. And there was this incredible frustration. Why was there a frustration among the people that really boiled over?

It is because they knew that his time was numbered. And they wanted him out now. They knew he would be troublesome in that time before he stepped down.

All kinds of mischief could be done. And they had this glorious sense of what it would be to be free from a dictator. So there's this frustration that boiled over. And in a way, it is the same with us because the days are numbered for sin, for this mortal body where sin dwells.

We will be freed one day from the body that is prone to sin. Now the difference in that illustration is that things happen quickly in Egypt, 18 days. And the Christian struggle is for our life until Jesus comes again.

And so there is a frustration. And you see that in Paul as he says in verse 15, I don't understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

[19 : 16] And the good thing in the frustration is the I, who Paul truly is, the one who belongs to Christ and is united with him. That's the one who delights in the law of God in his inner being.

Paul has the new life in Christ, yet many times he doesn't carry that out, that heart's desire. And when this happens, he is saying, there's a foreign element in my new life.

It's sin dwelling in me. And it's sin that he is responsible for. He's not trying to say, you know, the devil made me do it with that sin thing that has nothing to do with me. No, he knows it is him.

And he wishes that it could be other. He says in verse 17, you know, at the end, it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. The one who knows Christ. That's not doing that work.

It's sin. No longer I, but sin that dwells within me at the end of verse 20. And then at the end of verse 23, he says he's a captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members, my body parts.

[20 : 17] Now, that's why in verse 24, as we get to the end of our chapter, Paul says, wretched man that I am. He says, who will deliver me from the body of death?

Where sin dwells. This isn't a cry of despair. It's a cry of frustration. I want to get rid of this sin, just like Egypt wanted to get rid of Mubarak. I want him gone now.

I want sin out. It is not consistent with who I am in Jesus Christ. Who will deliver me, he says. And we know this in our own lives.

We sin through our tiredness, in our anger, in our not trusting Jesus because we can't see him. These are all things that have to do with our mortal body.

This is the overlap of Adam's kingdom of sin and death on Jesus' kingdom of life and grace. That's what brings frustration. Who will deliver me?

[21 : 15] And the answer is absolutely marvelous. And it's the thing that I hope that you take away from this passage. and that his response to the struggle and to the frustration is to fly to Jesus Christ.

That's why he says in verse 25, Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. You see, he is overwhelmingly thankful within that struggle.

His is a life of gratitude. How can that be? It's because he knows that sin's days are numbered. One day, Jesus will give Paul and each of you who trust in Jesus a new body that will never sin but only glorify God.

That body's not going to die or decay or be prone to sin. You will only bless God. You will only bless every person you see in your body. And that's the context of the struggle that we hear about at the end of the verse that summarizes our struggle.

My true self, I myself, serve the law of God with my mind but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. And I want to close by thinking about that deep sense of thanksgiving that we have in Jesus Christ as we struggle against sin.

[22 : 35] I want to close by looking at verse 8, I mean, the next chapter, chapter 8, verse 1. Because there, it says, that now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And that is such a wonderful thing for Christians to hear because we tend to condemn ourselves. We hear Satan condemn us as well.

And it's because we struggle with sin in our mortal bodies. But the gospel says that even as you and I struggle with sin, Jesus loves us. He delights in us.

Even in our sin, he enjoys us each day. That's what grace is. And it's because he gives to us a righteousness that isn't ours. He gives us Jesus' righteousness.

But not only that, the Holy Spirit dwells in you and I, even as sin continues to dwell in our bodies. And that is, in fact, why there is a struggle in you.

[23 : 35] It is the presence of the Holy Spirit battling against our sin. And sin doesn't go without a fight. And so like Paul, we are deeply thankful that we struggle against sin in Christ who is Lord, in the one who has conquered sin.

And that's the great source of our courage in the Christian life. Do you remember in the baptism service, we prayed for the children. And we're praying for ourselves in this too.

And we said this, always confess the faith of Christ crucified and bravely fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil.

Those are all the expressions of sin, the power of sin in our world. And to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant until your life's end.

That tells us very wisely that we will always have this struggle. It is to our life's end. But in it, we are called by God to be a faithful soldier.

[24 : 35] And we know that we can be faithful because we fight that war under Christ's banner as people who belong to him. Our identity is him. And we fight that fight under his great authority so that his hold on us is eternal.

It's much deeper than the grip of sin can ever have on us. He is our, we are hidden in Christ. We belong to him. And as we go from this sermon, it tells something to us if we are complacent.

If we think sin is not a big deal, we're not really dealing it with in our lives, the law says sin dwells in you. It's a very serious thing. And it actually calls us to go to Jesus, to know that your identity is in him, in him alone.

And sin is completely inconsistent with who Jesus is and who you are in him. And to know Jesus, to know his grace in your life is to fight against sin that is in your life as well.

God gives you grace as you understand your identity in Christ. Now for those who are despairing in their struggle against sin, again, this passage tells us that you, your identity is in Jesus.

[26 : 00] His delight is in you even as you struggle against sin, even as you feel as though you are a failure in it. God does not condemn. Jesus delights in you.

God pours his love out on you in Jesus Christ every day. And we know the promise that he who has begun a good work will complete it in the end. That his grip on you is eternal.

Far more powerful than any hold that sin can have on you. And it's seeing and knowing that grace that encourages you, strengthens you to be God's faithful servant until your lives end.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.