

TGFJ
(Pre-Thanksgiving message)

Romans 7:14-25

Key Verse: 7:24-25a

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Who likes weekends? Has anyone heard the saying “TGIF?” It stands for “Thank God it’s Friday!” And people put an ! at the end because they’re so happy that Friday has come for that means it’s the end of the work week and they can now enjoy their free time. Well I’d like to start another saying “TGFJ” and I hope we can have the same passion for it as we do for “TGIF.” “TGFJ” stands for “Thank God for Jesus!” This was Paul’s exclamation and my hope is that after today’s message you too will say TGFJ.

If you remember in last week’s passage, Paul told us that the law aroused his sinful passions. (7:5) He didn’t even know what coveting was but as soon as the law told him not to covet, all of a sudden he found himself coveting everything he saw. (7:8) When the new iPhone5 came out, I wanted one, and also an ipad and an ipad mini and throw in a mac book air as well. Some would call that effective marketing, the Bible calls it coveting. Actually coveting is when you want what someone else has. For example, after we finished remodeling the 2nd floor of the Bible house I found myself coveting the beautiful hardwood floors and granite countertops, of like King David who coveted Bathsheba. People might think, well if the law does this to us then the law must be bad right? Not so. The reason is because sin was already in us, the law just made us aware of it. So we can’t blame the law. Then what’s the problem? Take a look at verse 14. “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” In this verse we see that the law is spiritual but man is not and Paul describes himself as unspiritual sold as slave to sin. Some people think that when Paul wrote this he was talking about his life before he became a Christian because how can his life be described in this terrible manner. However one of the first things we notice about this chapter is that Paul is writing it in the present tense. In these 11 verses Paul mentions I, my, me, myself, 40 times. This means that Paul was struggling with these things as he wrote the book of Romans. Most likely Paul wrote it while he was on his third missionary journey around the year 57 A.D. which was about 22 years after he had accepted Jesus as his Savior. So Paul wasn’t a rookie Christian, he was well seasoned veteran with 22 years of experience and yet he still felt as if he was a slave that had been sold to his master: sin. How long have you been a Christian?

Why would Paul talk like this, especially after chapter 6 when he said that we can choose who our master is? The answer is because it was his reality, take a look at verse 15. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” What Paul is describing here is his present conflict living as a Christian at the same time while

sin dwelling in him trying to control his daily life. This is because temptation doesn't go away for sin continues to seek what it considers its property even after you become a Christian. After the fall of man in Genesis 3 sin entered into the world and it didn't remain idle. In chapter 4, God pointed to the power of sin that was inside Cain and God described sin as a creature that was waiting by his door and that it was seeking an opportunity to control him. God counseled him to master sin by doing what is right. And what was Cain's response? He went out and killed his only brother. (Gen 4) Cain succumbed to sin's desire and the results were terrible. This is the result every time because sin deceives us (7:11) for its destination is ALWAYS death. Sin is like a train heading off a cliff – nothing good can come of it – but the people riding it will never tell you where it's going – they will lie and tell you routes along the way – but its final destination is always spiritual or physical death.

Paul continues in verse 16. “And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.” How many of you have experienced this phenomenon where you do something that you didn't want to do? In doing this you are actually agreeing that the law is good. And this is the point that Paul is making, so he says, “What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary.” So having God's command is good and necessary. So just as God counseled Cain to do what is right, God's word counsels us to do what is right. To do this, requires spiritual struggle for us not to give in to sin. And it's through this struggle that we learn how to depend upon Jesus. For if we give up our struggle with sin, we will become like a dead fish floating down stream.

Take a look at verses 17-20. “As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.”¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” What Paul is describing here is what life is like living by a set of rules. When we look at life, if we are left to ourselves we screw things up that's just the nature of sin. If we leave a bunch of little kids alone it won't be long before there is trouble. Just ask anyone who has kids. So we realize that we need rules to live by, so God gave us rules- the Ten Commandments. But even though we have them, still we can't live by them. Paul says, “For I know the law but still can't keep it because the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions. I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't *do* it. Because I decide to do good, but I don't *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.” There is a saying, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” So many people have had good intentions but they can never carry them out because of the intense power of sin that is dwelling within them.

Over the course of struggling with sin, Paul grasped this spiritual secret that men are both good and evil. For mankind was created in the image of God, but according to v18, nothing good lives in us because we have inherited our sinful nature. Therefore each of us has two possibilities, either we can grow holy through God's word or we can degenerate into an animal living according to our sinful desires. God desire is to restore his children to the image of Christ. Being born again takes only a moment of faith, but becoming Christ-like is a life-long process. This takes determination and persistence. But here is Paul's dilemma, can we read verses 21-24. "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me."²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law;²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Finally here is the honest, true state of a person who sincerely loves God. Paul has stripped away all the pretty pictures for a realistic view of a sincere lover of God. Paul is caught in the middle of a spiritual war. There is a war going on in his heart. For Paul loves God and delights in God's word. It brings him joy and peace and healing and yet sin and Satan is right there attacking him trying to take those things away from him. And for us this can be so maddening because it wasn't our original intention. For example, so many times I start out the day with a desire to do good and all of a sudden one little thing happens and it triggers sin in me. Like someone cuts me off in traffic and I go into a fit of road rage. Or I will want to show my wife my love but I criticize her instead. Or I want to sit down and meditate on God's word and write a testimony, but I don't because I get distracted by something else. For I really do delight in God's word, but I am so weak to carry out what I want to do. Or I when I wake up I want to live for God that day only to see a billboard, or picture, or woman and it triggers lust in my heart. Or I see Alex or Jason's new iPhone and I would like to have it. Do these types of things happen to you or is it just me? Am I the only sinful one here?

Do you want to do good but can't carry it out? How many people made a new year's resolution? How have you done with it? Do you even remember it? Every year people make new years resolutions and only about 8% of them actually keep their resolutions. Why are the statistics so low? It's because we can't change ourselves very easily. How frustrating is this? When we live like this it is like torture- there is no joy in living like this. Martin Luther was a good example of this. He lived in constant fear because he had desire to do good but was too weak to carry it out. Because of this he lived in a state of constant condemnation and went to confession often to confess his sins. But he went so often that he began to be a burden on the other monks. After he finished his confession he would walk out of the room only to come right back in confessing that he had been away from confession too long. Of course I'm exaggerating but who would sign up for a life like this? Could this be the life that God wants us to live?

No one wants to be like this that is why Paul cried out in verses 24-25. Can we read these verses together. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” Paul cries out as one who has a civil war going on inside his soul. I have said many times I’ve experienced this inner turmoil. I used to live a certain kind of sinful life, one that involved sex, drugs and rock and roll, and I enjoyed that life. But after I began to study the Bible, I really loved God’s word. It was then a war began in my heart. It was the war for my soul. It was the war of the worlds, between the spiritual world and the sinful world. But I thought that I could have the best of both worlds. I thought that I could enjoy my sin as well as God’s word. Soon I realized that I couldn’t because each was in conflict with the other. When I was enjoying sin, the guilt was overwhelming and when I was enjoying God, I was thinking about sin. It was agony because I couldn’t enjoy either life style. I could totally understand Paul who cried, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” I was in utter despair due to my powerlessness to sin and my fallen nature. So when I read this passage I was sooooo thankful because of the grace of God who delivered me from this despair through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only solution for our sin problem. When we commit sin, we are filled with a sense of guilt and condemnation, but thanks to Jesus we are saved from God’s judgment and death when we put our faith in him and don’t try to live keeping a set of rules. There is a divide here, there are those who can keep the law and those who can’t. Actually no one can keep the law but there are those who think they are keeping the law because they are doing all the right things and not the bad things however the danger is that they become proud because they keep the law and look down on those who can’t keep the law as weak. So there is this dividing line on one side you have the proud and on the other you have the weak but they are all sinners before God. And we have Jesus who sets us free from it.

What I find so encouraging about this passage is the fact that a great servant of God like Paul, who was well experienced in his walk with God, if he experienced this, then I am not alone. Sometimes I thought that I was the only one who experienced this but Paul, and probably many other people, have experienced this as well. Because I wondered if I’m a Christian, then why am I tempted if Christ is in me? Spurgeon once said, “We sometimes fear that it will conquer us, and then we cry unto the Lord, “Let not any iniquity have dominion over me. This is His comforting answer: “Sin shall not have dominion over you. ” It may assail you and even wound you, but it shall never establish sovereignty over you.” And that’s because Jesus sets us free. If we look to Christ, we have a deliverer. However Paul leaves us with this at the end of verse 25 “So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” We have to understand that as long as we live on earth, sin desires to have us, if we let it. We have to be conscious that we live in the midst of a spiritual war and in order to survive, we have to fix our eyes on Jesus. James Jesus’ brother said, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-

mindful.” (James 4:7-8) Let’s thank God for Jesus, who rescues us from the attack of sin.
TGFJ!

Righteousness by Faith