

“Deliverance”

Life is full of struggles. Look around and you see evidence of that throughout the world. In Sudan the slaughter of Christians continues. Things seem to be heating up again between North and South Korea. China and India are fighting over their borders. And the list goes on.

There are other struggles too – political struggles – ideological struggles – racial struggles. Even the church is not immune – grappling over doctrine and practice – finances – elections and leadership.

And yet, those things can be kept at arm’s length – they are “out there” – removed from our day to day life (for the most part) – easy to ignore (if we so desire). Then there are the struggles we cannot ignore – the ones that hit closer to home – with our children or our spouse, with our health, with our job and our finances.

Now let’s take one step closer still – because there is a GREATER struggle that includes each and every one of us – from which no one is immune. It is a war that rages within us – and it is relentless, and personal, and painful.

Like all other struggles – this one too is fraught with propaganda, deception, and outright lies. But folks, on this matter, you MUST know the truth – and God speaks the truth to you today through His servant Paul.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome – St. Paul lays out some basic truths – telling us that, at the heart of our struggle – there are two competing “laws” at work. There is the “spiritual law” and the law that it at work “in my members.”

The “spiritual law” is God’s law, like the Ten Commandments. Paul also calls it the “law of my mind.” Through this law, God the Holy Spirit is at work in the Christian – enlightening him with God’s truth – leading him according to God’s Word – and sanctifying the Christian so that he desires to do what God wills.

The other “law” is the one that is at work in our flesh, in our sinful nature. This law wages war against “the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin,” Paul writes. The sinful flesh – addicted to, and following its evil desires – is at work in unbeliever, and Christian, alike.

These two laws wage war – and your life is the battleground. The Christian’s life is a constant struggle. On the one hand – you know God’s will for your life. You know what He says is good for you, and for your neighbor. You know that it is good to be gathered to our Lord and “gladly hear and learn” His Word. You know that it is good to lead a “sexually pure and decent life.” You know that it is good to be content with what God has given to you.

But on the other hand – your flesh is selfish and it wants what it WANTS – and you do what it wants! You despise God and His Word, you lust, you covet, and so forth. You do these things because it “feels good” – it satisfies the desires of your flesh – it fulfills the “law” of your sinful nature.

But you also know quite well what comes with such sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. They fill you with regret and shame – leaving you guilty. It’s a heavy burden to bear, knowing that God is not satisfied with your sin.

That, dearly beloved, is your daily struggle, isn’t it? Denying it will not make it go away. It’s a battle your whole life through – from womb to tomb.

So much for “good news,” right? Well, like a doctor who must first diagnose the problem – God must first cut you to the heart – and He does by laying out the cold, hard truth. Before there is any talk of remedy – you must first receive the diagnosis.

St. Paul summarizes it this way – “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” It’s no wonder we cry out, like Paul – “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

That’s a great question. So what’s the answer for those who are “heavy laden”? Where do you look for relief, for the cure?

The devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh will direct you inward – to yourself, and your own strength and abilities. But that’s just a placebo – worse, its poison! After all, look where your sinful flesh has gotten you so far.

And when you cry out that you are a “wretched man” and look outside yourself for deliverance – the three great enemies continue to deceive you – prescribing all kinds of remedies in the world (science, wealth, power) – but still, there is no relief.

The Gospel, the only “good news” for sinners – is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. God the Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel – directs you away from yourself to the only Savior from sin and it’s bondage. To those who “labor and are heavy laden” – the Holy Spirit gives you Jesus, who comes to you, “righteous and having salvation.”

The Holy Spirit gives you eyes of faith to see Jesus who humbly rides into town on a beast of burden – because Jesus, God’s own Son, comes to bear your burdens all the way to the cross. He comes to win the war, to speak peace, to rule over your life with His forgiveness. His blood shed “for you” – sets you, the prisoner, free from you sin – set free from its guilt and shame.

That same Jesus comes to you – who “daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment” – not to add to your burden, but to give you rest. Do not be deceived – for those who deny their sin, their unworthiness – those who look to “other gospels” and “false Christs” – are left to struggle with their sin and its burden.

That is not the life God desires for you. You were not created to live in bondage, but in the fullness of life that God created for you. That is why He sent His Son in days of old – to be born, to suffer and die – to redeem the world. And that’s why His Son comes to you today – to give rest to your soul.

Here is my washing of regeneration – which drowns the Old Adam with his sinful desires – so that the New Man may daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Here is my Body, my Blood – taking away the sin that continues to wage war and seeks to bind you – given, so that you, the New Man, may have rest for your soul.

Dearly beloved, God in His mercy gives His Son to you this very day – to deliver you from all guilt and shame – from present and eternal punishments – from death itself.

“Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – who delivers you today, and eternally – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.