

Romans 7:14-25 'I will Give You Rest'

In the 1970's behavioral psychologists were studying how people learn. They often used laboratory rats as subjects. They ran rats through mazes offering various types of rewards and punishments. They placed buttons in rat's cages which released food pellets under various conditions. They studied the motivating effects of hunger and plenty. In one rather cruel experiment, researchers placed rats in an electrified cage in which various sections could be turned on or off by the researcher. Not surprisingly, the rats jumped away from the electrified portion and moved to a safe zone of the cage. But when the entire floor of the cage was electrified the rats exhibited an unexpected behavior. When they learned there was no safe zone to which to escape they simply lay down and allowed themselves to be shocked. When they learned that they were helpless they quit trying. They gave up. So profound was this state of hopelessness that even when safe zones were reinstated the rats did not look for them. They had given up their will for self-preservation.

Now rats are not people, obviously. But something very similar happens with people as well. People will work hard to get ahead and do what is right as long as they are rewarded for their labors. But when they work hard and try their best and still fail they finally give up, even when a way to escape opens up for them. This is the sort of helplessness St. Paul describes in the bible reading for this morning. St. Paul worked hard to keep the Law of God. He pursued the law throughout his life. He taught the demands of the law to others. He

aggressively persecuted Christians who, in his understanding, were living in disobedience to the law. Paul was passionate for the law. He knew that the Law of God is good, right and perfect and true. He believed that obedience to the Law was his salvation. We also know that God's law is good and right, perfect and true. God has imprinted His perfect law on our minds in the form of our conscience. He has inscribed His moral law on two tablets of stone as the 10 commandments. We recognize the wisdom, power, and perfection of God's law. When we disobey God's Law we experience the shock of a guilty conscience. No matter how hard we work to keep the law we find that we fail. We do our best but it's never good enough. We try hard but still we fail. Like the rat in the electrified cage we find there is no 'safe zone'. There is nothing we can do. We can't escape the Law. We can't keep the law. Finally, we give up. St. Paul wrote in Romans 7, "***I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.***" That is how Paul describes his frustration with the perfect law of God. He knows the law is good but he can't fulfill it. The constant shock of its accusations torture him. He comes to this conclusion, "***If I do what I do not want to do it is no longer I who do it but the sin which is living within me.***" Paul finally has to give up. He cannot keep the perfect law of God. He has to admit he is a poor miserable sinner.

The Bible declares that '***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***' There is not one of us who can keep the perfect law of God. There is none that is good. There is none that is righteous. We struggle against the temptation to sin but sometimes we feel so defeated and beat down that we just give in. And when we give in and give up, we give ourselves over to sin and its destructive effects

upon our soul.

When St. Paul recognized that he could not fulfill the requirements of God's perfect Law he cried out in desperation, ***'What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?'*** We find ourselves joining Paul in his pitiful cry. "Lord, what should I do? Where should I go? How can I face the sin that is constantly pressuring me? God answered St. Paul's desperation by opening his eyes to recognize God's grace. God showed Paul what Jesus Christ is all about. God sent His only begotten Son to bring relief through the undeserved mercy and grace and mercy completed by means of the cross. Jesus comes bringing hope to lives that are hopeless. Jesus comes bringing freedom to lives chained in the prison of sin. Jesus comes bringing life for those who face death. Jesus brings forgiveness of sin. Jesus brings life and salvation. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

God loves you. God did not create you to be imprisoned by the chains of sin and death. Many people mistakenly think that they are good people because they are able to keep up the appearance of goodness before others. But that's not the Christian faith. That is life of self-delusion that afflicts all who live under the law. Being a Christian is admitting our sinful condition, recognizing our helplessness and looking to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. It is when we give up faith in ourselves and put our faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior that we can rejoice with St. Paul and say, ***"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!"***

God sent His Son into the world to save us. Jesus came to fulfill the law that we cannot keep. Jesus came to pay the price of our sin with

His own life sacrificed on the cross. Our salvation is not tied to our obedience to the law, the opinions of other people, or our success in this world. Our salvation is a free gift which God has prepared in the promise of His Son before we were born. From the moment of the first sin God declared His plan to send His Son to pay for the sin of every sinner by the means of the cross. Throughout the ages God has declared that this salvation is a free gift of His grace. It is a gift that is received by faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot be earned or deserved. Salvation is God's free gift prepared for you. You receive this free gift of salvation by faith in Jesus, allowing Christ to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. We are saved by God's grace through faith and not by the works of the law.

We all can feel trapped in sin with nowhere to turn. We know what it's like to feel so helpless before the power of sin and its effects that we give ourselves over to its temptation. But there is a way out of helplessness. Jesus brings the free gift of forgiveness and salvation. When we admit our helplessness Christ's grace grows within us. Jesus is with you even in your darkest moments. Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you, even when you have forsaken Him. Jesus is there for you to forgive you and comfort you. Jesus died on the cross to save you. He comes to set you free.

Jesus said, "***Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.***" Jesus brings rest for your soul. There is peace in His name. Amen.