

## Deliverance From This Body

Romans 7:24a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I wonder if you have ever felt this way, "I wish I could be really real all the time." Maybe after some conversation with a friend you've got back to your room and you have thought, "Well, why did I say that?" Now there is something that just hurt them or it was some big talk that was just big talk, wasn't really you at all. You wished, "Oh I wish I had been honest all the time. I wished I just wasn't such a miserable hypocrite." It just makes you feel sick, doesn't it?

It just makes you feel you're putting on a show for people, maybe putting on a religious show for the people in the Christian group that you are with. And even maybe putting on a different show for the people that you work with and putting on another show for the people that you spend your leisure time with, and you just get so fed up with it. So much so that you just at times almost feel like crying and wished, "I wish I could be real. I wish I could be a real person all the time. I wish I could be just what I am all the time. Instead I'm playing all these roles and pretending to be all these people for all kinds of reasons." Loved ones, I don't know that there's one of us here this morning who has not felt like that sometime and maybe still feel like that a thousand times.

Of course we're all encouraged to think that everybody does that. That's the way life is and we see the Watergate situation or we see the Rockefeller gifts and we kind of use that to reinforce ourselves that everybody is like that. Even all the public figures are like that and probably all the other people that I know are like that. Yet somehow deep down we still feel that it can be different from that, don't we?

Somehow deep down we feel yeah, but whatever everybody else does, I feel it would be a great relief to me personally, if I could just be me and if I didn't have to keep putting on a show for people. Really it is putting on a show, isn't it? I mean you find yourself drawn out to do it every time, maybe more especially with authority figures but really you find yourself doing it all the time. You find yourself wanting to say what they would want you to say or on the other hand, wanting to say what they wouldn't want you to say, but either way you're not being yourself, you're not being real.

Somehow deep down you feel, "Surely, it's possible to have a world with people in it who are themselves. Surely, it's possible for us to act with one another in such a way that we don't all have to go home into our little room and put our head in our hand and be sorry for what bluffers we are and what hypocrites we are and what schizophrenics we are."

Paul used that, a really lurid phrase to describe that experience. In the first century, certain murderers were condemned to just what is almost the most repulsive punishment any of us here can probably imagine. The body of the victim that they had murdered was tied around them and they were forced to walk over the next 12, 24, 36, 48 months with the dead body of their victim hanging around them. Can you imagine the stench of that in their nostrils breathing it in over those two or three or four years? That was often called 'the body of death.'

That's what Paul says he feels this hypocrisy is like that he experiences in his own life. He says, "I am wretched. Who can deliver me from this body of death that hangs around me?" You must admit, loved ones, it does often seem like just a body of death. You just can't get clear of it. I mean you

want to say, "That's not me that was doing all that boasting. That's not me that was talking big, that's not me that pretended that I knew more about science or more about math or more about automobiles or more about sewing or more about something else than I really do. That's not me. It's not me."

Yet it is you and it seems to be a body of death that just clings around you day after day after day. Then you wonder, "Who on earth is going to deliver me from that?" That's what this verse is, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" [Romans 7:24]

You know how it works. You feel your friend is trying to get one over on you or somebody in work is trying to get one over on you. You feel in some way they're trying to use their peer position. So you find that old squalid, petty resentment rising up inside you. You feel it towards them and outside you're trying to carry on, "Yeah, would you type this for me, John?", or, "Would you do this?" But you're trying to carry on as if you feel nothing but friendship towards them but inside you feel this petty squalid resentment against them.

You go back home and you know it's wrong and you say, "That's wrong, that's wrong. Even if they are trying to get one over me, even if they're trying to use my position, it's wrong for me to feel that." So you go back and you resolve, "I am not going to let that destroy our relationship. I am going to overcome that. I am not going to feel that. I am going to love them. I don't care if they're putting a knife in my back. I am going to love them."

You go back and you see their face and that face prompts all those feelings and they rise up inside you. You begin to misinterpret their words and they're saying something utterly innocent and you're saying, "Yeah, yeah. You see, they're trying to do it. They're trying to take your seat from underneath. That's it."

Then you read a psychology book on paranoia and you wonder, "Oh, am I going?" You do your best to overcome it. You say, "This is stupid, this is stupid, this isn't it, this isn't it." Yet the thing inside you rises and wriggles and moves and just destroys your relationship and you know fine well that you're just being hypocritical.

They're not meeting you as you really are, you join the sensitivity group, and it's the same with sensitivity group. You join all kinds of groups to try to be real with people but you have to confess that deep down inside you, there are all kinds of feelings that you do not express to them. Indeed that you are ashamed to express because you know they shouldn't exist.

Of course most of us, I am afraid, in our churches, were taught to answer that question a certain way. "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" We were taught to answer, "The grace, that's what will deliver us from this body of death." Nobody else can. When we die, when we go into the grave and we get to heaven, then we will be delivered from this hypocrisy. That's it. Until then, all we can do is fight against evil as much as we can and try to be as good as we can. But that fight is on our hands for the rest of our lives.

I think most of us have been encouraged to feel that. But you just cannot get rid of that double mindedness. You can't get rid of that hypocrisy. You can never come to a place where you're transparent. It's almost as if the more hopeless we become in the idea that we'll ever be transparent, the more we talk in our popular psychology books about transparency. We all say, "Oh yeah, yeah I want to be a transparent person", but deep down we feel, "Oh, I am never going to be a

transparent person."

We've been encouraged to believe that that you can't do anything about. That's a fight of faith. That's what we are all committed to. We're all committed to trying to increase the good in us and trying to decrease the bad, until we die. Now, dear ones, what I have to push you to see is that that is not the answer that God himself gave.

I am afraid many of us have committed ourselves unnecessarily to a defeated life of schizophrenic behavior, to a defeated life of hypocrisy, to a defeated life of trying to keep undercover what's inside hoping that nobody will be able to hypnotize us otherwise we'll see what we're really like.

We've committed ourselves to that kind of fear because it is a fear, isn't it? The fear, that's part of what makes you insecure. We wonder, "Oh if anybody sees us as we really are, oh they never have anything to do with us." That's what causes all inferiority, isn't it? We feel how you had a put up with us, brother puts up with us or our father puts up with us or our teacher because they don't really know us as we are and so we quake inside that somebody might sometime see us as we really are.

We've committed to ourselves to that kind of eternal fear that anybody will ever see what's inside. Because we feel that's the last verse of chapter 7 and it isn't. That is not the last verse of chapter 7 and yet numbers of you have said to me in the past, "Now, pastor, isn't it true? I mean all right, you can have victory but let's face it, even Paul said Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

Loved ones, the chapter does not end there. Now will you look at it so that you make sure because who knows what I am saying to you and maybe it's an Irish Bible. It's Romans 7, dear ones, and the question runs like this.

Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" That's verse 24 and Romans 7:25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now loved ones, that's the first half of the last verse in the chapter. You know time is moving this morning and probably all I can share with you is that that is not the end of the chapter.

"Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" That is not the kind of life that we're condemned to. The end of the chapter is, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord", and I think some of you may say, "Oh, yeah pastor, but we all know what that is "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord" that means we try and try to be transparent. We try and try to be honest and we fail. We keep on being dishonest and we keep on being filled with anger and irritability and resentment. But because God has worked out his wrath on Jesus instead of us, he doesn't treat us as the guilty one. That's why we say thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

No loved ones, the victory and what God means when he prompted Paul to say that is shown clearly if you look back at Romans 6, because Paul talks in terms not of being delivered from condemnation or from guilt but being delivered from something deeper than that.

Romans 6:7, "He who has died is freed from sin." So we're freed from sin not freed from guilt or condemnation but freed from sin. If you look then down at Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace." Paul is talking about deliverance from those inside things that destroy our lives.

Isn't what we need? We rise under the resentment that boils inside us and we rise under the bad temper and our irritability and our sarcastic feelings. Then we come and ask, "You know, can you do something about this?" And so often we've heard the answer, "Well, you know God has forgiven you." We all feel like saying, "Well, we know he has forgiven us but what we need is deliverance." These things are still spoiling our lives. They're still spoiling the lives of our friends. What we need is deliverance. We don't need indulgence or more forgiveness. We want deliverance from these things.

Loved ones, that's what Paul talks about. He says, "Who shall deliver me from this body of sin?" Brothers and sisters, it is possible to be delivered from those things. It is possible to become a transparent person. It is possible to be delivered from the things inside that destroy our lives. It really is and it's possible in Jesus. It's through his death.

The time has so gone that it just isn't fair to subject you to the whole message so I finish here at this point. It is in Jesus that this takes place. It is in his death. There is an experience of his death that you can have that enables God to deliver you from all that hypocrisy. There is a sense in which you can identify yourself with Jesus in his death that enables God, your Creator, to deliver you from resentment and self-pity and from that double life. It is possible, loved ones, and a number of us have entered into it and we know it's possible.

There are a number of us here who were at the end of our tether and we felt just like Paul and we said, "Wretched man/wretched woman that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death? It's impossible." And we try to do it through ourselves and we try by discipline and by more prayer and by more self denial and it was impossible. The more we tried, the worse we got. It was like sinking sand. It was like quicksand.

We struggled to get out and the more we struggled, the deeper we went into it and there are many of us here in the body who did that for years. I did it for 13 years and there are many of us here who have done it for just as long and we thought there was no hope. There was no hope, and then God lit up for us what he did in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, we were delivered from this, and that's really about all the time to say. It's like saying to you, "Listen to the next installment if you're here for the first time today."

I think I have to say that because I love you enough to want you back to the dorms for lunch and I think we need to be faithful to one another. Dear ones, do you see that the end of the chapter is not 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?' The best that Christianity can do for you is not forgiveness. The best that God has done in Jesus is not to enable you to get to heaven. There is a greater than that.

It is possible to become a transparent person. It is possible through a mighty work of God in your heart to become what you appear to be on the outside. I mean have you ever thought what that would be like? I remember someone said to me, "Could you have your heart", [they didn't mean the blood pump on the inside of me, they meant my innermost feelings and thoughts], "Could you have the inside of you projected on a movie theater screen for everybody to see?"

No, no, no problem with that. No I couldn't. No. Better get another movie. Oh, could you have that? Yet wouldn't it be beautiful to be able to say that? I mean think of all the freedom from fear that somebody would find you out. Think of all the freedom that you'd experience. Think of how spontaneous you could be because most of us live about a 15th of our lives as far as our own

abilities are concerned, we're so busy trying to make sure that nobody sees our slip showing and nobody sees that there's something that isn't quite nice about us and so we're holding back on all fronts.

Many of us who are writers, many of us who play instruments, many of us who sing, many of us who speak, many of us who have gifts of friendship are holding back all the time, about 75% of our own ability because we're afraid they'll see the thing inside that nobody knows about it. Do you see the spontaneity that would come into your life if you at last had nothing inside to hide? Now, loved ones, it's possible to come to that. It's possible to come to that.

In case there are some who can't come next Sunday, there is a little book that I wrote. It's not a great book but it's a tract 'Free to live.' You should read that or you should read Andrew Murray's 'Absolute Surrender' or you should read Watchman Nee's 'The Normal Christian Life.' They're all available down in the bookshop downstairs. Those references are for someone here who is going to be traveling and won't be back next Sunday. You should read and believe that it's possible. You can get cassettes from the library on this same deliverance. Or just write to us here and we'll send you them wherever you are. I hope most of you can come back next Sunday, come back later. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that Romans 7:24 is not the end of the road. Lord, thank you. Thank you that we do not have to drag around this body of death for the rest of our life. Thank you Father that it is possible to be delivered into transparency. Thank you Father that it's possible for us at last to be what we really are and it's possible to be so purified and so transformed by our death with Jesus that your Holy Spirit can enable us to be what we are. Thank you, Father.

Thank you that we don't need to wait until heaven to be real. Thank you that we can live a life of reality and honesty here on earth. O Father, I know that many brothers and sisters here long for that and Father I would trust you that by your Holy Spirit now that we've grasped the possibility. We've can that you would show us how to come into that, even during this coming week -- even Father if all you do is make us more and more fed up with ourselves, more and more tired of ourselves, even if all you do is bring us into continual situations with our roommates where we become more and more frustrated. Father, we would trust you this coming week to lead us closer into this deliverance and we thank you that it's possible, Father. Thank you that we don't need to be people who hide all our lives. Thank you. Thank you Father.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of your Holy Spirit lead us into this truth. Amen.