

Romans 7:15-25a The Beautiful Exclamation
Matthew 11:25-30
July 5, 2026

Sometimes, set next to the demands of daily life; with all its activity; its hardships and difficulties and pain; but also with its beauty and joy and wonder; the spiritual life seems irrelevant.

The claim made by religious faith, that the most important component of a healthy life is a relation to God, and that the most important component of that relation is grace apprehended by faith, is consigned to the back burner of life, if not discarded altogether.

And yet the world's life, and lives of countless individuals in it, are not improved by this abandonment. There is a general distress all around. It is not clear, anyway, that human unbelief is capable of making life outside a relation to God meaningful, except in an intermediate, counterfeit sort of way, let alone even a possible reality.

It is wise for us to take care lest we either ignore God's place at the center of life, or become so obsessively devoted that we take God's place in the order of things. Our texts have given us a reminder.

From Romans we consider once again Paul's wrestling match with the standard human experience regarding the moral quest, the moral struggle. Keep in mind that Paul is not speaking about a singular aspect of the struggle, or even saying that the moral way of

understanding the struggle is the only way, but he is speaking in a general way that takes in the full range of issues involved.

He complains about being able to will the good but not the ability to do it. He complains about the desire to avoid the wrong while doing it anyway. Who has not felt the pinch that he articulates so powerfully?

"So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

Is this really the great human struggle in the world? Is not the meeting of daily human needs more pressing? There are supposedly eight billion people on the planet, all of whom have to eat today, and sleep, and take shelter with their closest relations. Can we really, must we really spend precious time and resources pursuing a resolution to the spiritual struggle? Is life as we claim it is?

Obviously, people nowadays do not ordinarily speak this way, not even the most notable Christian preachers. But underneath the surface in this superficial society, does it communicate the reality at the heart of human life?

Jesus also speaks. One of the interesting aspects of modern culture, which is feisty and judgmental and opinionated and hyper-rhetorical, is that for all that, few (I would have earlier said, “none”) criticize Jesus, who is highly regarded and revered even among those who do not believe in him and do not share the theology of the Christian faith.

His compassion, his courage, his willingness to sacrifice, to be merciful to the poor and powerless; and stern and demanding to the powerful and wealthy, yet still proclaim their salvation, continues to inspire people even these 2,000 years later.

He came along at a time before modern technology changed the way life is experienced and lived, before republics replaced monarchies, before the legal demise of polygamy and slavery, before universal suffrage, and he didn’t speak to these things. There was a stable social and political situation under which all the people lived, he does not seem to have challenged its validity.

The result is an awareness of a certain burdensome anxiety in earthly life, one that transcends the historical period or geographical location. It, like sin, is universal and inescapable, that is, we all live in this situation, no matter how differently our lives are from other people.

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,” turns out to a part of the human condition. It means that in addition to a foundational guilt, expressed by

Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans, there is a general fatigue or weariness that just comes along with all the other features of life. I am sure this experience has weighed upon everyone here. We should not be surprised when we feel it ourselves.

One of the ways our theology expresses the meaning of salvation . . . is rest. It is meant to be built into the fabric of our daily lives by the intervention of the Sabbath rest, a stilling of the inner conflict, rest for the soul as well as the body.

Whether it is from experiences in life over which we had no power, in the moral struggle as expressed by Paul, or health issues in the shadow of mortality, or the sense of smallness in a vast universe, we all find ourselves involved in a contradiction that weighs us down. We are unable to achieve our own release from these circumstances.

The gospel message for us today is that God is near and is willing to lift the burdens and work in us the miracle of *rest*. That is why Jesus said, “come to me, all who are weary and burdened . . . *and I will give you rest.*”

It comes to us miraculously without always changing the actual demand or the nature of the burden per se, but by changing the affect, no longer weighing us down, relieving the stress, making bearable the unbearable, dare I say even making life beautiful.

It is the part of life that involves the direct experience of God's presence and redeeming love. For this miracle we marvel, and give thanks. Sometimes there is a spontaneous combustion to our praise.

Here, on this Sunday morning among the hottest weather days of the year, on an Independence Day weekend; on which there was a great big celebrity wedding in Madison Square Garden, in a World Cup year, on a Communion Sunday, we confess our faith again;

and seek these moments where from somewhere deep inside us rises up a beautiful exclamation, like the one from Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans; we ask with him the challenging question; Who will rescue us from this body of death? and hear the answer, which doesn't answer the mechanical way in which it happens, or talk about the substance of it in any way, but just breaks forth with words of gratitude to the one who rescues;

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell 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 I do not do the good I want to do, but 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.

21 So I find this law at work: Although 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 me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:2-30

5 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."