

to do good, evil is right there with me.

*"This law at work" – meaning here, the principle, rather than the Law of Moses, v.22.*

22-23 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.

*"Another law" – the "law of sin" working through the sin, or flesh, nature seeks to draw us away from following the leading of the Spirit and "God's law".*

24 What a wretched man I am! Who will

rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

*"Rescue me from this body" – fallible humanness.*

25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

*"Who delivers me through Jesus Christ" – resolves his wanting to do good, wanting to follow the law as a good Jew, but being unable to do so. Looking ahead to Romans 8, it is as though he has been describing his journey, brought up as a good Jew practising the Pharisee tradition, and finding it a struggle – then having an encounter with Jesus and coming into freedom in his new identity.*

**REFLECTION** In a dozen verses Paul racks up many more than a dozen expressions of 'doing': what he does, or avoids doing. In a way he is telling the story of his journey, from 'trying hard' at formal religion as a zealous Jew, to being born again in an extraordinary experience involving a vivid and blinding vision. His whole way of looking at sin and avoiding it had to change, a thought he develops in chapter 8.

Here he teaches the reasons for needing the change. We see ourselves in his descriptions of struggle, because sin is always an influence pulling us off course, like the weighting of a ten-pin bowl or the unpredictable camber of a winding country road. For us, our regular church attendance with the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes are "the good I want to do" of v.19, leaving us with a sense of failure. Paul almost gives up, before mentioning the truth that changes everything. It's not what I do, but what Jesus has done that I could never do! Knowing Jesus, rather than knowing about Him, gives us a new nature and a new empowering to live for Him.

Having it impressed on us that we are sinners, makes it all too likely that we will live up to the description! Knowing that Jesus has paid our debt, and counted us as debt-free in Him, sets us up, not to fail, but succeed in following His way. We still need to make the right choices, but somehow they come a lot easier when we have the relationship which sets us free.

**QUESTION** *If the starting point for becoming free from sin's grip is what God has already done, what is our part?*

**PRAYER** Father, as we come to You in Jesus, we are reminded that Your eternal purpose is our salvation, and Your desire is to free us from the sin that entangles. And You want us to live free from the guilt that prevents us growing in You, and which gets in the way of the relationship You long to enjoy with us.

Jesus, You have come to give us abundance in life. Thank You for reminding us that it does not come as a result of our 'doings' but as the result of what You have done, and our being free to receive it. Amen.

The Living Word, on Wednesday for the following week – [www.thelivingword.uk](http://www.thelivingword.uk)

See also

[www.glowweobley.com](http://www.glowweobley.com) – join others in the latest suggested prayers for our community  
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# The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, July 5, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **July 5**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: **Finding freedom and rest in the Lord**

Zechariah 9:9-12 – God's promise of freedom for those that are His

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 – The burden imposed by Jesus is light

Romans 7:14-25 – Delivered through Jesus from the law of sin

and also Psalm 145:8-14

## Zechariah 9:9-12 – God's promise of freedom for those that are His

**The Messiah will come proclaiming peace in a new just rule for all**

9 Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

*"Your king comes" – many sayings in chapters 9-14 apply to Jesus, like this one and His entry into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:5, John 12:15.*

*"Riding on a donkey" – riding on a humble animal signified coming in peace, unlike the military conquests of Assyria, Babylonia and Persia.*

10 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth.

*"Take away the chariots" – an end to Israel's need for instruments of war.*

*"From Ephraim... from Jerusalem" – ending the historic conflict between the northern kingdom of Israel and Judah.*

*"From sea to sea" – or universally.*

11 As for you, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

*"Prisoners from the waterless pit" – dry cisterns were used to keep prisoners.*

*"Because of the blood of My covenant" – underlining the covenant commitments, sealed in blood sacrifices: between God and Abraham, then Moses, Genesis 15:1-10, Exodus 24:4-8.*

12 Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

*"Return... prisoners of hope" – the remaining Jewish exiles in Babylon to be blessed in returning.*

### Psalm 145:8-14

8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

9 The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.

10 All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you.

11-12 They tell of the glory of Your kingdom and speak of Your might, so that all people may know

of Your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of Your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures through all generations.

The Lord is trustworthy in all He promises and faithful in all He does.

14 The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

**REFLECTION** Many of Zechariah's words, especially in these later chapters, are applied in the gospels to Jesus. This one finds fulfilment in Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem on a donkey.

What did Zechariah, a post-exile prophet, bring to people of his time? Looking back to the history of rivalry and war between the northern kingdom of Israel (sometimes called Gilead) and the southern kingdom of Jerusalem and Judah, his message is about freedom and hope for broken people who have known a lot of restriction. Today, this tells us that God wants us to be free, enjoying a relationship with Him without emotional and spiritual baggage getting in the way. And it delivers a broad hint that God is always working for our freedom. Invariably with Him there is partnership – the mention of covenant in v.11 reminds us of this – so there is a part that we do, to match and work with what He is doing in our lives.

**QUESTION** *What does the thought mean to you, that God is always working for our freedom (vv.11-12)?*

### Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 – The burden imposed by Jesus is light

#### **Recognising who Jesus is and accepting his rule is a revelation**

16 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others:

17 " 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

*"We played the pipe.... we sang a dirge" – many found joy in Jesus' ministry, and earlier had responded to John the Baptist's call to repentance. But some were hard-hearted and unmoved.*

18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

19 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

*"Neither eating nor drinking" – John's wilderness life, and Jesus' sharing meals, were both criticised.*

*"Wisdom is proved right" – God's purpose was fulfilled in John's and Jesus' different ministries.*

25-26 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. Yes, Father, for this is what You were pleased to do.

*"Hidden... from the wise and learned" – the kingdom of God is more revealed than learned. Over-emphasis on cerebral understanding, the Pharisees' weakness, is a barrier to the revelation by the Holy Spirit which needs child-like openness.*

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.

*"Committed to Me" – Jesus' authority (1) as entrusted to Him by the Father, (2) through association as One related to the Father, and (3) recognised by those to whom Jesus chose to reveal Himself as the way to God, John 10:14-15, John 14:6-7.*

28 "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

*"Weary and burdened" – by rules and observances the Pharisees insisted on, Matthew 23:2-4.*

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.

*"Take My yoke" – different and restful. Living Jesus' way brings His peace.*

30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

*"My burden is light" – Jesus' yoke does restrain and guide, but with the 'power assistance' of the Holy Spirit it becomes intuitive, not a struggle.*

**REFLECTION** Jesus, heralded by John the Baptist, came to give His people salvation. Salvation, deliverance and healing are three translations of the same word and they are all forms of freedom. Some who encountered Him were eager to accept Him, and to embrace all that He brought. But many were suspicious: John's stern challenge to change didn't reach their hearts and neither did Jesus' Good News of the kingdom. They didn't know they needed freedom – the tragedy of the religious mindset. Jesus consistently confronted the legalistic way the Pharisees and teachers of the law presented righteousness. "That's not the burden I'm putting on you, " He told them. "My burden is light, and being led by Me is easy." Mankind finds a list of propositions, to be learned and practised, easier to grasp than working on a relationship. That's like trying to react to other drivers while thumbing through the highway code – not the acquired intuition of an advanced driver. The life of the Spirit, which Jesus introduced, moves 'commandments' into an intuitive following of His way, helped by the gentle coaching of His Spirit. The emphases of recent decades, away from rigid orders of service and recitation, to freer forms of worship, reinforce the lifting of the load of obligation and enjoying the lighter burden which Jesus spoke about.

**QUESTION** *Jesus' words to all who are burdened, "Come to Me...", have been interpreted many different ways, from buying favour through a medieval indulgence, to losing ourselves in charismatic worship. What does Jesus actually want from us when He says, "Come to Me..."?*

### Romans 7:14-25 – Delivered through Jesus from the law of sin

#### **The pull of the old flesh nature is like a war going on in the mind**

14-15 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.

*"The law is spiritual" – given by God, it exposed sin.*

*"I am unspiritual... a slave to sin" – Paul is contrasting "the old way of the written code" with the freedom of "the new way of the Spirit", Romans 7:6. Before teaching on the freedom of the "Spirit who gives life", Romans 8:2, he explains the struggle of the old way.*

16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

*"I agree that the law is good" – as a Jew and a Pharisee Paul wants to obey the law perfectly, v22.*

17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

*"No longer I myself" – conflict between the sinful nature and the new, regenerated nature of the Spirit-empowered life "in Christ Jesus", Romans 8:1*

• **For further study:** read Romans 8:1-13,

*Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10.*

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.

*"Good...does not dwell in...my sinful nature" – the problem is the flesh, the selfish part of us. The believer in Jesus, regenerated and open to the Holy Spirit, is in a lifelong process of sanctification (being made holy) by the Holy Spirit who influences our flesh, helped by our good choices.*

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.

*"The evil I do not want to do" – Paul is not excusing attitudes and actions independent from God but explaining that flawed human nature wants to pursue its own sinful course.*

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