Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

There are five people living in the Holtslag bubble. Mrs H and myself, Julia, Andrew, and David. And if you didn’t know Julia and Andrew and David, and they were to stand in front of the camera now and say that they are Holtslag children, that would sound believable. But are they *really* Holtslag children? And of course, those of you who know them will know that only one of them truly is a Holtslag child – Julia. And that is because living in this house is not enough to make a person a Holtslag child; a Holtslag child will also have Holtslag as their surname and Holtslag DNA. And that is not the case with two of those three. So the point is that there are certain things that make a person truly a Holtslag child.

Well, our Catechism Q/A is making a similar point. Earlier in the service we recited the beautiful words of Q/A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. But the fact is that just because a person recites Q/A 1 does not mean that what it says is true in relation to them; in fact, it may be that they do not have the comfort of belonging to Jesus. And given that belonging to Jesus is laid out as our *only* comfort in life and death, it follows then that we would want to know if we *truly* have this comfort.

And that is what Q/A 2 is all about. One Podcast I listen to every now and then is a news podcast. And one of the catch-lines of the host is: **Here’s what you need to know**. And in terms of living and dying in the joy of Q/A 1’s comfort, Q/A 2 says, Here’s what you need to know; here are the three things that you must know to live and die in the joy of the comfort of belonging to Jesus.

And as we consider our text in Romans we are going to see that the Catechism has accurately captured what the Bible teaches about the essentials of salvation. So let’s begin with a review of the context of these verses.

* If you wanted to summarize what the Book of Romans is about in two words, those words would be ‘**The Gospel**.’ In 1:16 we have those magnificent words: “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*.” And from that point on Paul basically lifts the diamond of the gospel up to the light and shows us its many beautiful, sparkling facets.
* And in **chapter 7**, Paul is coming to the end of a series of gospel answers to questions that his readers would have had in their minds. And the question he is answering is recorded in v7: “*What then shall we say? That the law is sin?*” And his gospel answer is, “*By no means*!” Absolutely not! In fact, the opposite is true, as he says in v12: “*The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good*.” And then he goes on to explain that the problem is that we humans have a sinful nature. And if you have ever seen a closeup of a **vacuum cleaner** at work, you will see how it sucks dirt that is trapped right down the bottom of the carpet pile right up to the top. And that’s how the law works with our sinful nature; it sucks sin right out of us; it creates *knowledge* of sin, it *stirs up or arouses* sinful passions, and it *exposes* our guilt in God’s eyes. That’s what the law does with a sinful nature.
* And in vv13-23 Paul laments the fact that even though he is a believer, there is still sin in his life; he still does what is wrong and struggles to do what is right. And this is because believers will not be totally free of sin until the next life.

Well, that brings us to vv24-25. And when we lament, if the words that came out of our mouths at that moment were written down, there would be an exclamation mark at the end – the dot with a line above it. And that happens here with Paul also; he says, “*Wretched man that I am!*” And then he asks the question: “*Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” And then we get the second exclamation mark statement: “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” And these two verses are Paul’s Exclamation of Deliverance. And as you look at Paul’s exclamation of deliverance, he is essentially saying, Here’s what you need to know: You need to know **THAT we need delivering**, **HOW we are delivered**, and **How the Delivered MUST LIVE**. And we are going to look at each of these in turn this afternoon:

1. So let’s start with v24 and see **THAT** we need delivering.
   1. And there are **three things** in this verse that make the need for deliverance very obvious. The first is how Paul describes himself at the beginning of the verse: “*Wretched man*.” And to be **wretched**, boys and girls, is to be miserable. Imagine being sick and guilty of a terrible wrong at the same time. Would you want to stay like that? No. You would want it dealt with. And so did Paul; he said, “**Who will deliver me?**” He didn’t want to stay wretched. So his question is the second thing in the verse that makes the need for deliverance obvious. And the third is why Paul was wretched, which is that he had a “***body of death***.” And we are going to explore what that means in the sermon but it is obviously not something good! Right? So Paul, because of his body of death, was wretched, and needed delivering.
      1. And so that we know that this is not just some problem that only Paul had, back in ch. 3 we have these words: “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” Who has sinned? All. Everyone. So what Paul is describing here in v24 is everyone’s problem – you, me, and everyone else; we are all wretched; needing deliverance from our body of death.
   2. So we need deliverance because we have a body of death. Well, **what is a body of death? Why do we have a body of death?** 
      1. Well, think back to God’s warning to Adam in the Garden of Eden about eating the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What did God say would happen to Adam if he ate it? He said, “*You will surely die*.” And Adam ate. And at that moment Adam received a sinful nature; a corrupt nature; a depraved nature; a darkened nature; a spiritually dead nature. Now, his natural inclination was always to sin. And, one day he would die.
      2. And what did the verse from Romans 3 that I just quoted a moment ago say, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” Your unbelief, your worship failures, your misuse of God’s name, your misuse of the Lord’s Day, your failure to obey and respect those in authority, your murder and hatred and anger, your adultery and lust, your stealing, your lies and lack of truth-telling, your envy and covetousness, your gluttony, your critical spirit, your gossiping, your off colour jokes, your frustration, your anxiety, your impatience, your lack of self-control, your unthankfulness, your lack of contentment, and your failures to perfectly do the opposite of all these things, all that is good and pure and true, and God honouring; all this and more is your and my sin; it is why we, like Adam, have a body of death.
      3. In **1 John 1:5** we read, “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*.” He cannot and He will not allow into heaven anyone who is even tainted with sin; what He will do instead is condemn such a one to the eternal agonies of hellfire. That is the clear and consistent teaching of the Bible; that is our chief problem.
   3. So, you would think then that if you walked into a church, anywhere in the world, this is the message that you would here. Yes? The reality is though that this just isn’t the case in much of the church today. In many churches, you would soon get the impression that Paul had it all wrong; that our chief problem is not sin, but a bad marriage or unemployment or social injustice; that we are not wretched but wonderful.
      1. And if you doubt what I say, I want to tell you about a recent article I read where the author listened to four sermons each from the nine biggest ‘evangelical’ churches in the US. And these are not your lunatic fringe, prosperity Gospel, crazily charismatic churches; these are self-proclaimed Bible-believing, gospel churches. The author even named the churches and provided links to and comprehensive notes on each of the sermons. He began with some positive observations but his main conclusions were overwhelmingly negative and they began with these two: First, “**the gospel is at best assumed; most of the time, it’s entirely absent**,” and second, “**repentance rarely comes across as something urgent and necessary; instead, it’s either optional or not worth mentioning at all**.” And he explained these conclusions in his article. And I share his words because they are so relevant to what we are talking about.
         1. In regards to the assumed or absent gospel, the author said, “In 36 sermons, the good news of Jesus’ Christ’s life, death, and resurrection was unclear 36 times. Often, some or all of these facets of the Christian gospel were left out.” ‘No Gospel’ was something he had to write down in his notes far too often. He said, elements of the gospel were mentioned but they were not clearly explained. It was unclear why we need Jesus to do anything for us. And in the one sermon that came closest to a clear presentation of the gospel, “neither God’s holy judgment, sin, nor repentance [were] mentioned. ” (Repeat)
         2. And in regards to the nearly total absence of repentance or the idea that it is urgent, he said, “Repentance was mentioned only a handful of times in the sermons I listened to … furthermore, the pastors of these churches rarely spoke like they were conscious that there were people in the building who were actively on their way to hell until they turned from their sins and trusted in Christ for salvation. Humans are never described as being in wilful rebellion against God, and so sinfulness is described as a neutral happenstance, something that ought to be corrected by this or that but need not be [given much attention].”
      2. Congregation, I hope that hearing that makes you want to weep. It’s just awful. And sadly, it is true of many churches all around the world. In the OT prophets we read of a time when God said to His people, Israel, “*Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me* … *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies*.” And if God took no delight in Israel’s empty worship back then, we can be sure He is disgusted with the empty worship of many churches today. So the fact that church services all around the world have been shut down is surely, in part, God’s judgment on empty worship. I am fully convinced that God has had enough of what is being said and done in His name, and what is not being said.
   4. Our chief problem is sin! “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” It is because of sin that Paul said, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” And this, congregation, is what people need to hear! This is what they need to know! They will only seek deliverance if they know what they need deliverance from! And now we have to bring this message in here:
      1. Do you know this about yourself? Do you know that you are wretched? That you have a body of death? That your sin piles up as a stench in God’s nostrils?
2. As our Catechism answer says, The first thing I need to know to live and die in the joy of the comfort of belonging to Jesus is How great my sin and misery are. But we can’t stop there! There is more that we need to know. So let’s turn our attention next to the first half of v25 and **HOW we are Delivered**. For there Paul answers his Who will deliver me? question by saying, “*But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord*.”
   1. And the first thing to note is that **we cannot deliver ourselves**. Think of a bunch of people slowly sinking into quicksand and one person on solid ground with heaps of ropes. The only person who can deliver in that scenario is the man with the ropes. And in the same way, because we all have a body of death and deserve condemnation, our only hope is that God would deliver us.
   2. And that’s the good news of the gospel, isn’t it! **John 3:16**: “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned*.” So God has provided a way of deliverance; a way that we can escape the condemnation that we deserve!
      1. What is that way? By believing in Jesus. And what is about Jesus that we must believe? Two things: The first has to do with **Who He is**; it is what we have seen in our Gospel of John studies – that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and the second has to do with **What He did**; and that is explained in **Romans** **5:8**: “*But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.”
      2. So putting it all together it adds up to what we read in **Romans 10:9**, “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that [He died for you and that] God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*.” And we could just as easily use the word delivered instead of saved.
      3. So we are delivered from our sins by faith in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection.
      4. And He is our only hope of salvation. **Acts 4:12** says about Jesus, “*There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*.”
   3. And to magnify Christ and His deliverance, I want to borrow the three parts of deliverance that James Montgomery Boice sets out in his commentary on this verse:
      1. The first is that Christ delivers us from sin’s **penalty**.
         1. And a penalty is a punishment. James Montgomery Boice illustrates this with this story: A young man who was the son of a close friend of Czar Nicholas was given the job of paying the soldiers from the Royal treasury in a border fortress. But the young man developed a taste for gambling and he began to dip into the treasury to pay his bills. Well, eventually he received a note saying that a royal auditor was visiting and to do an audit, and the young man did an audit himself and could see that he was in big trouble because he had stolen a lot of money. So he wrote at the bottom of the account book ‘a huge debt; who can pay?’ And the night before the auditor was due to arrive, the young man was so overcome with guilt that he decided to take his own life at midnight. But he actually fell asleep before midnight came. Well, who else should turn up late that night but Czar Nicholas himself. And he saw the light on in the office and he went in to see why the light was on and when he saw the sleeping young man, and the gun, and his note, he could tell what had happened, and he felt sorry for this young man, and what it would do to his friend, so he wrote something besides the note and left. Well, when the young man woke up, it was way past midnight and he picked up the gun and then noticed the addition to his note. So he put the gun down and read it. Now it said, “A huge debt; who can pay? Nicholas.” And once he had checked the signature with other examples of the Czar’s signature, he became convinced that it was genuine. And sure enough, early the next morning, a bag of gold arrived from the Czar that took care of the exact amount that was owing! And when the audit was completed later that day, all was well.
         2. And sin’s penalty is way worse than a fine or prison – The wages of sin is? Death. And that means eternal condemnation in hell. A huge penalty; who can pay? Jesus Christ! He has delivered us from sin’s penalty.
      2. But He also delivers us from sin’s **power**.
         1. We confessed this in Heidelberg Q/A 1: “He has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.” Tyranny is total, un-hindered, control. Before we come to faith, Satan is our lord and master. We are entirely in his service. We are slaves to sin. It is what Romans 6 speaks about. But once we come to faith, we gain a new Lord and Master - Jesus Christ. We will not be totally free of sin until we die or Jesus returns, but we are now able to choose not to sin. We can now truly please God with our thoughts, words, and behaviour.
         2. Jesus Christ delivers us from sin’s power.
      3. But He will also deliver us from sin’s **presence**. And this point is the one that is most in view here in v25.
         1. When Paul said, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” what he was lamenting was the fact that despite being a forgiven sinner, he still sinned and He still had to die. So he was longed for heaven when he would be completely free of sin’s presence.
         2. Can you imagine what that will be like? I find it so hard to comprehend. When I start thinking about it, some sinful thought quickly intrudes!

* 1. But the point is that if you have believed in Jesus Christ, He ***has*** delivered you from sin’s penalty, He ***is*** delivering you from sin’s power, and one day He ***will*** deliver you from sin’s presence! That is why our Catechism answers says, I need to know how I am set free from such sin and misery. Do you know this? Is Jesus your deliverer?

1. Well, I think we all know how much the young man whose gambling debt was paid for by the Czar would have served Nicholas from that day forward. And that is basically our third point. For the last thing that we need to know in order to live and die in the joy of the comfort of belonging to Jesus is How the delivered **MUST LIVE**.
   1. And this comes out in the first four words of word of v25, “***Thanks be to God***.” The Christian life, the life of one delivered from sin and eternal condemnation, *must* be and *will* be a life of thankfulness.
      1. Some of you will know that the Heidelberg Catechism is divided into three sections. And those three sections are the three things identified here in Q/A 2 – sin, deliverance, and thankfulness, or the three Gs – guilt, grace, gratitude, which are easier to remember. And many commentators have observed that the Book of Romans divides up into the same three sections: Romans 1-3 explores our guilt, Romans 4-11 explores God’s grace in Christ, and Romans 12-16 explores the life of gratitude. And this last section is just as important as the first two. The diamond of th3e gospel that Paul explores in Romans doesn’t end with chapter 11.
      2. So turn with me to **Romans 12:1**: “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy (which is the deliverance from sin and misery, by faith in Christ, that has been explored in the first 11 chapters), to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship*.”
         1. If we know and believe that we have been undeservingly delivered from sin’s penalty and power, and that will be delivered from its presence, we must and we will offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Our love for Christ and our thankfulness for this deliverance will be our ***every day****,* ***all day****,* ***every part of who we are and what we have****,* ***sacrificial****,* ***selfless****,* ***holy****,* way of living.
         2. And because we now have the Spirit of Christ living within us, as Chapter 8 explains, Paul can give us 5 chapters of law/commandments, knowing that we will delight to read instruction about life in the church, loving one another, practicing hospitality, obeying level 3 lockdown rules as part of how we honour governing authorities, and avoiding every kind of sexual immorality, and strive to do it all.
      3. You know, I have sometimes heard people refer to the story of the woman caught in adultery to show the love of Jesus. They contrast Jesus with the wicked Pharisees who brought the woman before Jesus. And they say, Unlike those Pharisees, Jesus didn’t judge her; He just loved her as she was. But that is simply not true. Do you remember Jesus last words to her? He said, “*Go, and from now on sin no more*.” Di He love her? Yes. Did He forgive her? Yes. But He expected that being forgiven would change the way that she lived. It must! And He expects this of you and me also. That is the full gospel!

So if you know how great your sin and misery are, and how you have been set free from all your sins and misery, *and you are striving to live a life of thankfulness*, then you *are* living and you *will* die in the joy of the comfort of belonging to Jesus. Amen.