

Romans 5:12-21, Part 2 1-15-22

The Reign of Grace

We began last time to unfold the riches of the last ten verses of chapter 5. In many ways, that study was preparation for today. If you missed it, check the podcast, the website or the YouTube channel, as today's message and last week's are really more one than two. The passage is a bit long. Romans 5:**12-21** *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. ²⁰The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Today we are going to focus mostly on the comparison made in these verses between Adam the first and Adam the last. Between the first human and the Lord Jesus. But, there are several lines in this portion of Romans that are difficult to understand and I want to begin by addressing those. They are not on the main point, but serve as sideroads if you will. We start with a quick visit back to the doctrine of original sin. Verse 12 among others tells us that all the human race fell under guilt, condemnation and death because of what Adam did. In Christian theology we call that idea *original sin*. It means that humans are not just born with a propensity to sin, but with actual guilt abiding on them. We looked at that briefly

last Sunday – I referenced our confession of faith which says - WCF 6:3 *They* (referring to Adam and Eve) *being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.* “The guilt of this sin was imputed.” And, I am sure, for some of us this was troublesome to hear. It does not seem fair. When we compare Adam and Jesus we will say more on this and hopefully you can grasp the justice of God in this matter. But, at this point I would simply note that any objection of injustice is invalidated when you reveal yourself to be a hypocrite by means of your own personal sin. You see, I may not like what Adam did, but every time I opt to disobey God, you know what I am doing? I am casting my vote with Adam. I am expressing my agreement with him in his choice to do his own thing, to despise the word of God and to commit cosmic treason.

Now to a second side-road. This addresses the hint of universalism in Romans 5. By *universalism* I mean the proposition that all humans ultimately make it into God’s glory and are saved. If you look at our passage you may see a line that could lead to that conclusion. Specifically, verse **18** *as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.* We see that all humans were cast down into judgment by Adam’s sin – so why not conclude that all humans are lifted up to grace and glory through the work of Jesus? Well, largely because so many other portions of the New Testament very clearly teach that the benefits of Christ’s work only accrue to those who have faith in Jesus. And, the word speaks often of eternal death and those who will experience it because of their sin and unbelief. This one line can’t possibly contradict so many other Scriptures and it doesn’t. In context, the word “all” here can be understood to mean “all who are in Christ.” As we will see, humanity is divided into two races – those who are in Adam, which is where we all start. And those who are in Christ. Only a portion of those in Adam are transferred, by grace, into the Christian camp. But all of that portion are justified. The very next verse in Romans 5 would suggest that to us as it says there **19** *as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.* There you get the word “many” which aligns more obviously with all else that we read and know to be true.

One more quick side-road today. This one about the law. Verse 20 has this enigmatic statement – **20a** *The Law came in so that the transgression would increase.* What is he trying to say there? Increasing transgression? That doesn’t

sound like anything good. But Paul has already told us that the law of God is good. So, what does he mean here? A bit of conjecture is involved to be sure, but I suggest he means that the law increased sin by making it more obvious to us, pointing it out, to the end that we notice it more readily and hopefully will be convicted about it. The NLT actually translates verse 20 this way **20** *God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were.* I think that is the primary idea.

Very good then – time to get on the main highway for today and look at this marvelous word about Jesus as the last Adam. When I call him that I echo I Corinthians 15 which names Jesus that. But clearly in our passage, Paul is comparing and contrasting Jesus with Adam. In verse 14 we read a reference to Adam and then it says **14c** *who is a type of Him who was to come.* NLT says **14** *Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come.* Representation, symbol, type – all convey the same idea. One of the reasons why I hold to the notion that the Bible is inspired by God is the presence of obvious messianic types in the Old Testament. It is extraordinary – these actual historical characters whose story is told centuries or millennia before Jesus – and yet we see the parallels so plainly. Besides Adam there was Isaac – son of Abraham, the son of promise who was offered up as a sacrifice by his own loving father. Such a picture of Jesus to come. There was Joseph, the favored son, betrayed by his brothers, even sold for silver, wrongly accused, thrown into prison and then raised from that low place to the right hand of power where he becomes a Savior to his brothers. Just phenomenal the parallels to the Jesus story. There is Esther, the queen, who uses her beauty, her acceptability before the king, to intercede for Israel and rescue them from slaughter. You also have the non-human types, the lamb and the oxen slain for the sins of the people, their sins laid upon the spotless male animal. All of these are types. You can draw lines between what the Old Testament says about them and what we read of Jesus who is called by theologians the anti-type, the one who corresponds to the type. Type and antitype. Adam and Jesus. Romans 5 is the classic passage. Let's break it down.

First, we note the similarities between Adam and Jesus. I will give you four. The first is that both were real, historic figures. This is kind of obvious from the text, but I only mention it because there are plenty of scholars who teach that Adam was not a real historic character, that he is a mythical figure – meant to teach us something true, but not to be taken literally. There is in fact a school of old-earth, theistic evolutionists who claim Scriptural fidelity but deny the historicity of Adam

and Eve and the stories from the garden. There are several problems with that perspective. It goes beyond just an interpretation of Genesis and theories of human origins, because Paul takes up Adam as a type of Christ and treats Genesis as a historical account. He compares a historic Christ to a historic Adam. It would seem quite nonsensical to compare a historical figure to a mythical one.

We can wonder who would win a fight between TJ Watt and Cam Heyward but it would be silly to imagine a fight between Watt and SpiderMan. One is a real historic person, the other is imagination. And, I would note as well that Adam appears twice in the New Testament in the genealogy of Jesus. Ben preached on that in December. Clearly, the writers of the gospels are giving us an actual record of real human-beings who go back in history. There is Adam at the beginning of the list. Don't tell me he is just a mythical character. Jesus really lived. Adam really lived. They have that in common and much more.

Secondly, Adam and Jesus both entered into a covenant with God. We have many examples of covenants in Scripture. With Noah, Abraham and his sons, David and so on. The term "covenant" isn't used with regard to Adam but we can see the elements of one. God made a promise – It was a negative one. You eat that tree and you die. But, in light of Romans 5 we can say that there was a flip side to the warning. Don't eat that tree and you will live with me in blessing forever. Just so, a covenant was made with Jesus. In the secret council of heaven, the Father and the Son entered into a covenant of redemption. Jesus agrees to become the head and representative of a new humanity, taking upon Himself the task of fulfilling divine law and then dying to make satisfaction for the sins of the people who were given to Him. Jesus even speaks that way about all who would believe. He calls them in John 6:**37a** *All that the Father gives me*. Four times in John He uses this language – that the Father has given to Jesus certain select individuals who will repent and believe and come to comprise His body and His bride. We are those given to Jesus and when did this happen? Before the foundation of the earth in the secret councils of our trinitarian God. The new covenant introduced 2,000 years ago is only an offshoot of the eternal covenant between Father and Son.

So, a historic Adam and a historic Jesus were in covenant with God. Thirdly now, we see that both endured a trial, a probation, a test. The test involved what we think of as temptation. For Adam it came via the serpent of old and, to some extent Eve. Adam was appointed to guard the garden but he failed in his first and only major contest. Why he failed is an unexplained mystery – but fail he did. Verse 12 of our passage says that Adam allowed sin into this world and death with it.

Verses 16 and 18 says he transgressed and invited condemnation. That was the Adam story. At least, the first Adam story. But Paul says there is a second Adam story. A last Adam story. And whereas, Adam the first blew it terribly, Adam the last conquered. Jesus took on flesh, came under the law, endured temptation and trial and walked in perfect obedience even unto death. The probation of Jesus is probably seen most clear in two gospel stories. The first is early in His ministry when He spends forty days fasting in the wilderness and then is confronted by the devil. Adam fell with a full stomach in a rich garden. Jesus stood while in weakness in a desert. Satan brought his big guns to tempt Jesus to seek glory apart from the cross, but Jesus rebuked him and wore Satan out. The other occasion we can see the contest raging is, in fact, in a garden. Right? The garden of Gethsemane. There the devil again sought to deter Jesus from following the Father's will all the way to Calvary. I can't explain how the divine son of God would struggle, but struggle He did, sweating drops of blood as He said, *Father, not my will but thine be done*. Against those words, Satan had no reply. He was beaten – not by Adam the first, but by Adam the last, our Savior, our champion and the head of a new humanity. There are not many hymns that mention this theme from Romans 5, but I point you to a couple. One entitled *Be Ye Glad*. "In these days of confused situations. In these nights of a restless remorse. When the heart and the soul of a nation. Lays wounded and cold as a corpse. From the grave of the innocent Adam, comes a song bring joy to the sad. All your cries have been heard, and the ransom has been paid up in full, be ye glad." The other we have sung – *Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery*: "Come behold the wondrous mystery He the perfect Son of Man. In His living, in His suffering Never trace nor stain of sin. See the true and better Adam Come to save the hell-bound man. Christ the great and sure fulfillment of the law; in Him we stand." Thank God that we find our hope in the champion of God who defeated sin and Satan on our behalf. We stand in Him.

Now, to our fourth point of comparison between Adam and Jesus. Both served as heads or representatives of particular bodies of people, or races or descendants. Paul says this several times in just a few verses. By the sin of the one – Adam – many are made sinners, are condemned and die. By the righteousness of the one, the obedience of the one, the gift of the one – Jesus- many are made righteous, are justified and know eternal life. The contrast could not be greater. But these are the two races of humanity. All of us start in Adam. Some get graciously transferred to the race of Jesus. This is the idea theologians call "federal headship." Adam represented all his people. Jesus represented all his. Our

individualism recoils at this kind of thing. But this is reality and we experience it all the time. When our nation went to war with Germany and Japan – who were we fighting against? Were we out to get that 19-year-old German boy who was sent to the front lines? Were we out to bomb that simple Japanese farming family? Of course not. But, the Japanese and the Germans had leaders that became hostile toward our nation and took their nations down with them. Just so, Adam took down his entire posterity by his cosmic rebellion. And who of us are connected to Adam? We all are. Do your 23 and me thing and you will see it. We all go back to our first parents. This is heavy stuff and I don't pretend to grasp it fully. It is a deep magic, but it is a magic that results ultimately, not in my destruction, but in my salvation as we will see.

Almost every verse that is before us references our unity with our head – either Adam or Jesus. Our union with Adam is responsible for our spiritual death, our inherent guilt. By the transgression of the one we are all made sinners. That is what it says. But it also says that by the obedience of the one, especially his obedience to bear sin upon the cross, we are made righteous. We don't become righteous in ourselves. We are made, accounted, considered righteous. The merit of Jesus is imputed to us. This is gospel. This is glorious. This is good news in every way. We may start in Adam but we don't have to stay there. We can be wed to Jesus, joined by faith and love to him and thus all that is his becomes ours. And it becomes our forever. The effect of Adam's sin can be nullified by Christ. But the work of our redeemer is eternal. So, we read in 21 *as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

So, let's put a bow on our compare and contrast of Adam and Jesus and finish where our chapter finishes – overwhelming great news. Overwhelming great news. All that stuff about Adam was admittedly a downer, but it really just forms the context for the glories of Christ's gospel. The reign of death is backdrop for the reign of grace. Being in Christ instead of Adam means we are no longer under the rule of sin and death, but under the sweet dominion of grace and life. I mean, just look at the terms of joy in our passage. Start in verse 15 where we read “free gift.” But there's more – it speaks once more of a gift and twice more of grace. Verse 16 – free gift again. Verse 17 “the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness, which Paul says will reign in life. Reign in life. Reign in life through Jesus. Verse 18 speaks of justification of life. Verse 19 many are made righteous. Verse 20 – *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* And then in the last verse we read

about the reign of grace which is life eternal in Jesus. I mean, this passage just explodes with gospel glory and good news. Boom! Have you ever read any John Bunyan? Bunyan is best known for his allegorical writing. I love *Holy War*, but his most popular is *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the most read and esteemed books of all time. Reading Bunyan is a spiritual feast. The man just oozed Scripture. It seemed to fill every thought and every sentence he spoke. Well, Bunyan, you may know, wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* from prison. He was persecuted by British authorities for not submitting to their tyrannical dictates on how to worship. Bunyan, somewhat like John Newton, was converted to Christ out of a rebel, carnal background. But boy did he ever come to grasp the gospel. And when he wrote his autobiography he entitled it *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Typical Bunyan – the title comes from two Bible verses – the first of which is Romans 5:**20** *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*. All the more. Paul uses that phrase when he writes about the impact of Christ's work. Jesus is the much more messiah who drives sin and death off the throne and establishes a kingdom of grace and life. *O for a thousand tongues to sing, my great Redeemer's praise. The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace*. Death has enjoyed a long reign, but grace now triumphs through the gospel. And in that triumph, you and I find life and we find freedom because though our sins they are many His mercy is more.

I will close with a personal story. While I was writing this last point my phone rang. It was a man from San Antonio named Scott. I had not spoken to Scott for, oh twenty-five years. He was in our Florida church for just a few years back around 1990. But he called me, partly to catch up, but mostly to simply say *thank you*. Scott had come to our church at his wife's urging. He was an unbeliever, living for the things of the world, until I invited him to join a men's group I was leading. In that group he encountered men who were living for a different kingdom, who were genuine, Christ-loving engineers and husbands and fathers. Scott grew to trust Christ. He moved to Texas but didn't leave Jesus behind in Florida. His story is that he became the head elder in his church as he disciplined his three children. His third daughter is in Indonesia as a missionary. He called after twenty-five years to say *thank you* to me. Why? I had a role in pointing him to Jesus, and Jesus made all the difference in his life. Jesus took this man who was in Adam, under condemnation and death, and gave him grace, life, abundance, freedom, peace and joy. Scott's story has been repeated millions of times. It could be yours. I especially loved that Scott didn't hoard his spiritual treasure. He passed it on to his children and to others as well because what a privilege is ours to call people out of their bondage,

into the freedom of the children of God. You could look at verse 19 as a missionary promise. **19** *As through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.* Knowing that, let's share the message of Christ, of grace, of life and look with hope for the harvest.