

# A Slave for Death or Reigning in Life?

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[ 0 : 00 ] I hope you don't feel I was insulting you by saying that most of us think we're smarter than God. But I think it's going to be true because many of us find that text in Romans very complicated.

One of the things I should let you know is I'm not a very good evangelist. I'm just not very good at it. I think it's a gift that others have, not me. But what I have learned is the importance of unashamed witnessing for Jesus.

And that there's just simple ways that I can bear witness to Jesus in my daily life. And I frequent certain coffee shops. And because I frequent certain coffee shops, some people find out I'm a pastor or that I'm a Christian.

And a couple of weeks ago after church, one of the things I often do after church service is I stop off at a Starbucks and get myself a dark roast coffee from my drive home. It's a simple pleasure.

And a couple of weeks ago, I went to Starbucks to have coffee and the barista knew that I'm a pastor. And she said, oh, good.

[ 1 : 01 ] I've been meaning to ask you, what do you folks, you know, I think she even pointed at me, what do you folks think about reincarnation? Like, do you guys believe in reincarnation?

You don't probably, right? So it was just one of those real God moments, you know, where in a normally busy coffee shop for about 10 minutes, only one or two people came in.

And I had a conversation about the difference between the resurrection hope and Jesus and reincarnation with the two baristas and two other customers.

And myself, the five of us had a 10-minute conversation, just a God moment. But as I was driving to go home, I did this.

That's why I have a bit of a dent right here, because I do it so often. Because so often after I have a conversation talking with somebody, I think of better things I could have said.

[ 1 : 58 ] And that's what happened. I had a better thing that I could have said to her. Because what I could have said to them is, how come it is that in no newspaper in the world, every newspaper in the world, or maybe not all of them, but it's not unusual for a newspaper to have obituaries, right?

People who've died. How come there's no newspaper in the world that has a nirvana section?

These people have attained nirvana this week. And when they die, they're just going to stop the cycle of reincarnation, and they're going to merge with the one.

Like, how come on no place on the planet is there a reincarnation, not a reincarnation, a nirvana section? In fact, I should have said to her, and how come it is that if there was one, you would mock it?

You would make fun of it. In fact, every comedian on the planet would make fun of a nirvana section. People who've become so perfect in this life that when they die, the cycle of reincarnation has ended for them.

Like, why is it? That's what I should have said to her. And believe it or not, Romans 5 tells us all about that. So if you were to, you see, here you go. You thought this text didn't have anything to do with bearing witness to Jesus.

[ 3 : 07 ] It has everything in the world to our Christian life. It's one of the most important texts in the Bible. So it'd be a great help to me and to you if you got your Bibles and turned to Romans chapter 5, verses 12 to 21.

Romans 5, 12 to 21. And this text tells us why it is that not only is there no nirvana section in any newspaper, but that if there was, we'd mock it.

We'd mock it. We'd make fun of it. We wouldn't believe it. And what does it say? It's a very odd text and it's going to take a, just pray for me.

It's going to take a couple of minutes to unpack it before we read all of it. But notice the very, very stark and stunning way that it begins. In fact, one of the things about the Bible is that people, I think, often don't realize that the Bible is so profoundly realistic that we find it shockingly depressing. That, in fact, most Canadians would find a verse like this shockingly depressing. But it's very, very true. Listen to it. Read it again.

[ 4 : 29 ] This is a very stark passage.

On one hand, it's very simple, very easy to understand, but it's very hard for our minds to grasp and want to stay with it. So if you could put up the first, if you could put up the first point, here's the thing which is so shocking about this text.

The very first thing that it's sort of claiming. Now we have to, there we go. Sin, Adam's desire to be God, caused death. That's what this text is saying.

Sin, Adam's desire to be God, caused death. Now, just as an aside, many of us don't like using the word sin anymore. And in fact, usually if I was to bear witness to Jesus in some type of way with, you know, different people that I've met, I probably wouldn't use the word sin.

Sin is something which is mocked as a word, right, in Canada. It's something that's mocked. The comedian could say, oh, sin, and everybody would laugh, right? That's how it is. And often, for many Canadians, when they hear the word sin, they think it's talking about sex, which it isn't, actually.

[ 5 : 49 ] But sin's a very, very precious word that even if it's just at the level of the church, when Christians are together with each other, it's an important word for us to actually hold on to and hold dear and use.

Because, you see, in our culture, when people talk about right and wrong, well, first of all, as you know, many people in our culture, one of their big beliefs is that nobody can tell another person what's right or wrong for them.

I mean, basically, just about every song you hear on the radio, every TV show, in some way, that will be part of one of the messages which is communicated day in and day out, that nobody can tell another human being what's right or wrong for them.

And there's an incoherence in our culture about that. And I understand that because, you know, we jump on people and beat them up if they do certain things that are wrong. But on the other hand, even while we're beating them up, the very next breath, we'll say nobody can tell another person what's right or wrong for them.

And we tend to think of right or wrong as being involved with hurting people. But the word sin is such a precious word to Christians because it reminds us God exists.

[ 6 : 56 ] And that we can act in ways and do act in ways or fail to act in ways which are an act of rebellion against him and an act of trying to be like God.

And the word sin keeps that before us. So I wouldn't use it if I was talking in a Starbucks to people because they wouldn't get it.

They'd think I was joking. I'd try to use other language. But we need to understand and remember the word. And that's what the text says, right? It's not as if I'm just saying, it's not as if this is some, I don't know, medieval idea by sex-starved monks who whip themselves on the back, who came up with this weird idea.

No, it's a Bible word. It's a Bible word. And we should love Bible words and try to remember them. Listen to that verse again. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sin.

It's a Bible word. And what this text is saying is that sin, Adam's desire to be God, that caused death. That, in fact, death, on one hand, it's a biological reality, but it's ultimately, it was caused by Adam deliberately rejecting God's command because Adam wanted to be God, like God.

[ 8 : 28 ] If you could put up the next thing, that would be very helpful. Yeah, put up the next point. Here's the next thing, which is very, very, very unusual in this text. It's very un-Canadian, but it's what the Bible teaches.

I sin because I am a sinner. I am not a sinner because I sin. In other words, it's not because, okay, you followed me around for a week and you say, what?

Whoa, see how many times George sinned? Sinner. No. It's saying that I sin because I am a sinner. Just think for this for a second.

If you met anybody who said, you know what? I've had two children and my wife is expecting our third child, but we're convinced that this child will do nothing wrong her entire life. Like, this is going to be the perfect child. Really? Really? You'd all laugh. But as the parent became more and more insistent, no, no, no, no, really, this child will never be selfish. [ 9 : 30 ] She's never going to tell a lie. She's only going to love the truth. She's never going to avoid doing something she should do. And on and on and on. Well, you'd mock her, right? Why would you mock her?

Because you wouldn't believe that some baby is about to be born and that this one baby is going to be perfect. You wouldn't believe that, would you? Like, nobody would believe that.

Like, that's the same reason why, to my barista friends, I should have said to them that you would mock. It's part of the same reason why you would mock a nirvana column in a newspaper.

Because we know that human beings do wrong things. And the Bible here is saying, when it says here, therefore, just sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.

Why? Because all sinned. And as you're going to see in a moment, we read more of the text. It's telling us that human beings are sinners. There's something bent and broken about us that causes us to do things which are wrong.

[ 10 : 32 ] Not everything we do is wrong, but there's just a tinge of a desire to be like God that touches everything there is to be about a human being. I sin because I am a sinner. I am not a sinner because I sin. If you could put up the next thing, that would be very helpful.

And here's the thing that's also completely shocking about this text. Sin and death are inevitable, not natural. That's what the Bible is telling us.

Sin and death are inevitable, but they are not natural. You see, if you go back, you can go online and listen. I've been going through a series of the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

And in fact, we've talked about creation and evolution and Adam and Eve in the fall. Last week, we talked about Genesis 3. But what the Bible teaches is that God made the entire world good and perfect.

And it was because of Adam's sin, Adam and Eve's sin, that human beings are sinners.

[ 11 : 33 ] And that death came. That's what this text is teaching us. No, I think that only, I think it's only the Christian faith that teaches something like this. And only the Christian faith, only this text explains one of the most fundamental experiences that we have as a human being.

That on one hand, we know that death seems natural to us. On the other hand, we know that it shouldn't be. That there's something just wrong about death.

That in some way, death is just an offense. It just doesn't make, it just isn't right somehow death.

And only the Bible, only this account makes clear to us why it is that human beings think that.

And so, you know, really, I fall into the habit of saying that death is natural. But really, if I was listening to the Bible, what I need to say is that sin and death are inevitable for every human being. But they're not natural. It's not the way God created the world and the universe to be. Now, why is it that the Bible says these things? It says these three things because of an idea which is weird.

[ 12 : 44 ] Which is not how anybody in the world talks. And it's going to be hard for us to get our minds around, but it's what the Bible teaches.

And you know what the fact is, friends, is that reality is weird. Like, the more we know about reality, the weirder reality is. Like, talk to some physicists and biochemists and stuff.

Talk to them about how it is in quantum mechanics, how it is that events can seem to happen before the event. Where two particles can be in the same place at the same time.

Or how it is that light ultimately, if you were able to shoot a beam of light and do it in such a way that it wasn't affected by gravity or anything like that.

That it would eventually, after eons, come back to the point at which you shot it because space is curved. How can space be curved? That's weird. But that's the current scientific understanding.

[ 13 : 43 ] If you could put up the next point, it would be very helpful. Here's what's underneath all of these three ideas. It's what accounts for these three ideas. Human beings have a covenant head.

And his name is Adam. It's the Bible presents this idea that, on one hand, every human being is unique. Every human being is responsible. But that human beings aren't just like Lego pieces.

They're not completely separate. That God designed and created the human race in such a way that we are connected on one level. As well as being individuals and having our own responsibility.

But at a fundamental level, we are connected. And some of you might hear it expressed as a federal head or a covenant head. But in some way, all of us are connected with this very first person, Adam, whose act and actions has an immediate effect and consequence for every human being.

The Bible says that's the way that human beings were actually designed and created by God. It's not the way we think of it. But that's what the Bible is saying. And since the Bible is giving us the owner's manual to describe how it is that human beings actually are.

[15:02] And that's why there's not going to be a baby that comes out that's going to be perfect. That's why we sin because we're sinners. It's why life, sin and death are inevitable but not natural.

Because when Adam, as our covenant head, acted to rebel against God, that instantly affected all people. We might not like it.

We might ignore it. We might not even know about it. But it really happens. Same as, you know, we have a bit of an idea about how this works in different levels. It's like Trump made the executive order to send, to bomb the Syrian airfield that had been the source of the chemical attacks.

No American could say, well, that's just all Trump's fault. America did it. Right? America did it. In the First World War, which we've been a lot of talk about, Vimy Ridge and the celebration of 100 years of it, when Canada declared war on Germany, no Canadian could say, well, that's just a whole pile. That's just a small number of white guys who made that decision. Canada was at war. On one level, we have a bit of a sense of it. And that's what the Bible teaches, that we have a covenant head.

[16:25] That's how humanity is built, to have a covenant head. And his name was Adam. And when he acted in rebellion against God, let's look at verse 12 again.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world, how? Through one man. Why through one man? I couldn't do it, you know. Daniel couldn't do it. Amy couldn't do it.

Pierre couldn't do it. Like, we wouldn't kneel. We don't have that standing. But humanity has a covenant head. His name is Adam. And when that one, as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

And at the level of the original language, with the verbal tenses of one man and then the plural, it's an extremely, extremely awkward sense that doesn't really make grammatical, it's not the normal way grammar would work.

So Paul has made a specific point, bending grammar in the original language to emphasize one man, one act in the past, currently and into the future, affecting all.

[17:31] The singular and the plural, the past and the present and the future. In the original language, it's even more stark because we have a covenant head. Now, some of us might think there's all sorts of things that might go through our head.

But at the end of the day, what the Bible is saying is that this is unbelievably huge, big news. Good news. Why is it? Because we can say, God, is it possible, given that we have so messed up that I am a sinner, that I, there is no way that I can not, I can't undo that.

I can't. Can you provide another covenant head? Whose life and death, because of the way human beings are designed, can you provide another one?

Father, in your grace and mercy, can you provide a second one? Next point. By his grace, God provided a second covenant head, and his name is Jesus Christ.

By his grace, God provided a second covenant head, and his name is Jesus Christ. And just as with that first Adam, who desired to be like God, and so rebelled against God, and every human being linked to that first Adam was implicated and involved in that act, so it is possible that God, who's designed human beings that way, could provide a second Adam, a true and greater Adam, whose life and death can stand for me.

[19:21] Could you put up the next point, please? I hope I haven't got this. Yeah, I do this. I have jumped ahead a little bit, but by his grace, God provided a second covenant head, his name is Jesus Christ.

So with that in mind, let's read the text from verse 12 on. With those, and with this in the background, now you're going to make, this text is going to all of a sudden begin to make some sense to you.

And it is unbelievable good news. Let's go to verse 12 again. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Right? Why? Because Adam is our covenant head. For sin, verse 13, indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

Now, this is a bit confusing. So just going to pause there for a second. If you go back, Paul wrote this as a letter, and in Romans chapter 2, he shows why it is that even people who do not know God's commands directly, that God can still justly judge them.

[ 20 : 26 ] And if you go down to verse 20 and 21, now the law came in, that's God's word, right? The law came in, sorry, now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

So what's going on here? What he's saying basically is this, because you see, what's one of the main things that all human beings think we need to deal with sin? Better advice.

Better rules. Better knowledge. Better willpower. That's behind all religion, all spirituality, and all irreligion.

It's going to look different if you're doing yoga. It's going to look different if you're in Thailand practicing Buddhism. It's going to look different if you are in Canada practicing religion.

It's going to look different in different parts of the world. But the fundamental idea is if we just had better rules, if we just had better rituals to follow, if we just had a method of being centered so my willpower is stronger, if we just had a way by which our mind could have a bit of a higher IQ, then, and the Bible is saying, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

[ 21 : 45 ] It doesn't work. It just doesn't work. It doesn't work. So it's like saying before they understood germs, that germs existed, people still died, right?

But what happened when they understood that germs exist? Well, they start to take, you know, if you're dealing now with a cut or something, or in public sanitation, they started to get ways to deal with germs.

But what happens is we learn more and more and more about germs. We just find more and more different ways that things pass from us to other people that kills them. And then even if you deal with every germ, death still happens.

You see, all that the sin does, all that the knowledge of germs does is help us to understand a process. It doesn't help us to necessarily defeat death. It does. And all God's perfect rules do is make us more and more aware of the different ways that we sin that we never even dreamed of before.

That's what the text is saying. Go back to here. Verse 14. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, because Adam transgressed a direct command of God that he knew came from God, who was a type of the one to come, a true and greater Adam, a second Adam to the first, as the hymn puts it.

[ 23 : 08 ] But, verse 15, the free gift is not like the trespass. So how is it going to describe what the second Adam does? The second Adam's action is described as a free gift, completely and utterly undeserved, no strings attached, not because we are worthy, but purely and utterly because of the generosity and the love and the compassion of the giver.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. Why? Well, if many died through the one man's trespass through Adam, much more have the grace of God and the free gift.

By the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many. The word grace in the book of Romans, it tries to communicate to us both unmerited favor that is perfectly just and comes from God and has power to change.

That's what grace is describing. Unmerited love and mercy and favor that's perfectly just, that comes from God and has the power to change. And then look at verse 15.

And the free gift, once again, is describing what the second Adam does. We don't understand the second Adam unless we understand that God didn't have to provide a second Adam, but he did. And he did it not because I'm so beautiful, I'm so wonderful.

[ 24 : 29 ] No, he did it because he's love. He did it out of generosity, out of freedom. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin, Adam.

For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation. And here we don't mean condemning people in a bad sense. It's a legal term. As if, you know, they bring somebody, has charges brought against you and the evidence is heard.

And when the evidence is heard, there's a pronouncement of guilty because you really did it. That's what condemnation means here. But the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

This is such a powerful idea. The idea in the original language is imagine that out of Adam's single act, it's like maybe a small snowball at the beginning of a, you make a snowball at the top of a mountain where there's snow.

And a little kid just makes a little tiny snowball and starts to roll the snowball down. And as the snowball rolls down, it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And before you know it, there's an avalanche. And the image is that in this avalanche of history that has been coming for thousands of years, in the midst of that avalanche comes a Jesus Christ who stands in the middle of the avalanche and he stands there and all who are behind him and in him the snow passes by.

[ 25 : 51 ] In an avalanche of rebellions against God. That's what Jesus sees when he's at the Father's throne. And he knows that when he's going to go to earth, he's going to live and be rejected and die upon the cross.

And when we see the cross of Christ, Jesus dying upon the cross, we see that Jesus, that great act of righteousness, plunged as the avalanche is coming and it plunged right there and it is unmovable and all who stand behind and in the cross, the avalanche goes around.

Verse 17. For if because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Now, by the way, the word righteousness here, it's about God making us righteous. It's the idea is of making right. Okay? You know, making right.

It's like a manager in a store and she understands that maybe the staff have screwed up, that the people are really, really unhappy at the way they've been treated, that the bill's wrong, the food was crappy, etc.

[ 27 : 18 ] And the manager, she knows she has to go and make it right. Just make it right. And that's the idea here, that God, in a way which is perfectly just, out of his love for us, comes to make it right because we can't make it right ourselves.

And it's very interesting here. Look at verse 17. For if because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man. Friends, I want to tell you this. Sin and death enslave us.

When we sin, we are training to be better slaves to sin. And we might think we're becoming more like God, but all we're doing is becoming better slaves under the reign of death.

And look at what it says here. But much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness, God making right, what is it? It doesn't all of a sudden that we serve life.

No, we reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. That rather than being slaves, God makes us princes and princesses in the kingdom of life.

[ 28 : 46 ] to rule to rule under the rule of Jesus. I am in Adam by biology. I can only be in Jesus Christ by God's power received by faith alone.

You see, Jesus does all of this for me. He is the second Adam. He is the new covenant head. God's provision for human beings like you and me. and all I can do, I have nothing in my hands.

All I can do is ask, I can't get in Adam by my, I can't get in Jesus by my brilliant personality, my wit, my smile, by my rituals, by my accomplishments, by my perfect life.

I can't do it. God has to take me and move me from being in Adam to having a new covenant head. And all I can do is ask him in faith that Jesus would do this.

And he does it. He does it for the wise and for the foolish, for the high IQs and the low IQs.

[ 30 : 03 ] He does it for street people. He does it for people on Parliament Hill and on Bay Street. But he has to do it. And we can only ask him by faith. And you see the, well, let's keep going.

Therefore, as one man's trust, verse 18, therefore, as one trespass, remember this, all within this idea of the covenant head, this one trespass led to condemnation for all men.

So one act of making right, that's righteousness, leads to being made right, justification and life for all who are in this second covenant head, who are by God's power put into this new covenant head, Jesus Christ, by faith alone.

Verse 19, for as by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience, the many will be made right with God. Now, just before I read these last two verses, this is unbelievably, powerfully good news.

You see, the problem for most of us Christians is we don't believe this. We believe, okay, I come to faith with Jesus. There's a bit of a salvation moment, a bit of a crisis. But then what really matters is

how obedient I am.

[ 31 : 13 ] I remember a couple of years ago, there was a person who used to come to this church who was like a very public Christian. He had a very high reputation, a great leader in lots of places.

He came to this church for a while and came from a very godly Christian family and he started missing church and I had a conversation with him. And the problem was he was doing some, he was sexually knowing his girlfriend and he felt like a failure.

He felt like he couldn't come to church. You see, why did he think he couldn't come to church? Because his relationship to God depended upon his obedience.

Look what this verse is saying. Verse 19, for as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. See, Jesus does two types of things for me on the cross as my covenant head.

On one hand, he pays the penalty for my sin. He pays the penalty that I could never pay for my sin. But he does something else.

[ 32 : 27 ] His obedience is mine. Did you hear that? His perfect obedience stands for me. Did you hear that?

His perfect obedience stands for me and for you. His perfect obedience stands for me and for you. You know, one way to understand what happened in the fall, it's like the idea of probation. When we hire somebody, we say you have three months. And during those three months, you can be, you know, you can be let go, but after three months you're an employee.

In a sense, one way to understand Adam and Eve in the gardens is that there was a probation period and they failed it. They failed it by their own willful act.

and Jesus keeps that probation period perfectly for me. And all of a sudden, all therapy, all spirituality, all religion, which is based on in some different way my ability and my desire to be good and to justify myself and to put God in my debt and all of a sudden when I realize that God doesn't even look at my obedience, he looks at Jesus' obedience for me.

[ 33 : 54 ] Then all of a sudden as that grips you, you're in a new land. You're in a new world. How I'm going to live my life is no longer based on anxiety or self-fulfillment or putting God in my debt.

All of those normal wellsprings of desires to do good get, die. The more we are gripped by this, that Jesus is my covenant head, not only paid the penalty for my sin, his obedience is mine.

See, it's why one of the most important things we can do at church is week by week be reminded of the gospel. Because as the gospel begins to grip us at the level of our heart, the motivation to live completely and utterly changes.

verse 20 and 21 in closing. Now the law came in to increase the trespass. We talked about that earlier, but where sin increased, grace superabounded all the more so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness.

God making us right with himself, God making us leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. brothers and sisters who are in Christ, you need to be gripped by the gospel.

[ 35 : 26 ] You need to be gripped by this knowledge, not only that Jesus paid the penalty of our sins, but that his obedience is yours as your covenant head when you, by faith alone, put your faith and trust in him.

And if you are here, you're an atom by biology, and you've never made Jesus your covenant head, there's no time better, literally no time better than right now to call out to him that he would be your covenant head, your Savior and your Lord.

Please stand. Just before I pray, always remember that when you're seeing Jesus' death upon the cross, that image of the cross in the midst of an avalanche, in fact, another way to understand it is in the Garden of Eden there was the tree of life, and the way to that is closed.

And when you see Jesus dying upon the cross, you see the tree of life come to our fallen human world. And that's why Jesus dies between two thieves, one who mocks and rejects Jesus, the other who begins by mocking but ends by believing him.

And Jesus says to him, today you will be with me in paradise. And the word paradise is the same word used to describe the Garden of Eden. And Jesus died between two thieves, one mocking, so we will never presume, the other having faith so that we can have hope.

[ 37 : 07 ] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, there is so much of a desire within us that our obedience is what really matters.

Yeah, the gospel's important and the gospel gets me in church, but my obedience is what you really look for. That's what you, that's what really matters. Father, we confess before you that we have not been fully gripped by the wonder and depth of the gospel, that Jesus is the true and greater Adam, that with him is our covenant head when we put our faith and trust in him, that the penalty of our sins is paid for, and that his obedience, his right standing with you is ours.

Father, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by this truth, this gospel, so we can begin to live free and bring you glory.

And we ask this in the precious name of Jesus and all God's people said, Amen.