

A new identity

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[0 : 00] The first reading this morning, Genesis chapter 2, verses 15 to 17, and then we'll be moving on to chapter 3, 1 to 13. Genesis chapter 2, verse 15.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Chapter 3, verse 1.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden.

[1 : 10] Neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, Your eyes will be opened, And you will be like God, Knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, And that it was a delight to the eyes, And that the tree was desired to make one wise, She took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, And he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, And they knew that they were naked.

And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God Among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, And I was afraid, Because I was naked and I hid myself.

[2 : 24] He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, She gave me the fruit of the tree, And I ate.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done? The woman said, The serpent deceived me, And I ate.

The reading is from Romans chapter 5, And can be found on page 1135 in the church Bibles. Romans chapter 5, And we start at verse 12. 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, For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given.

But sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, Even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, Who was a type of the one who was to come.

[3 : 47] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, Much more have the grace of God, And the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, Abounded for many.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.

But the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 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.

Therefore, As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, So one act of righteousness Leads to justification and life for all men.

For as by the one man's disobedience, The many were made sinners, So by the one man's obedience, The many will be made righteous.

[5 : 06] Now the law came in to increase the trespass, But where sin increased, Grace abounded all the more, So that as sin reigned in death, Grace also might reign through righteousness, Leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Dorothy, thanks very much for reading for us. Please do keep Romans chapter 5 open, As we continue our series of talks in Romans, Having had a break for a few weeks over Easter. Now my aim today is to convince us, Of the sheer enormity, And scale, Of what has happened to us, If our faith is in Jesus Christ, And in his death for us.

And to see, That as a result, Our lives can never, Be the same, Again. Just look back, To Romans chapter 5, Verse 1, Therefore, Since we have been justified by faith, We have peace with God, Through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That if you like, Is a summary, Of what we've seen in Romans, So far. The Christian, The person whose faith and trust is in Jesus, And in his death for us, Has been justified.

[6 : 35] They are right with God, And therefore, They are at peace with God. And what's more, Verses 5 and 10, Speak of future hope, And future salvation, On the judgment day.

But despite how wonderful that is, It seems to me, It is all too possible, For us to end up, With a very small view, Of what Jesus has done, For us.

I think that's probably a danger for all of us, It's a danger for those of us who are Christians, It's also a danger, I think, For those of us who are, Who are just kind of curious, So to speak, Who are just looking in, On the Christian faith.

I think one danger, Is a kind of tick the box view, Of the gospel. A tick the box view, Of what Jesus has done, Which says, Well yes, I understand what Jesus has done, And I can believe it, And that is a box which I tick.

But no more. It doesn't lead to a change, Of life. But remember, The very reason, Why God has given us, The book of Romans, Is not simply so, We'll tick the box, And say I believe it, But actually for the whole of our lives, To be changed.

[7 : 46] Back in Romans chapter 1, Verse 5, Paul speaks, Of the obedience, Of faith. I think another danger, Is what you might call, The ticket in your pocket, View of the gospel.

And perhaps there's a view, That goes something like this, I believe that Jesus died for me, I believe that I'm going to heaven, And I'm, I'm pleased about the confidence, Therefore, That I have for the future.

I made no mistake, That is a wonderful thing, To be certain about. It's a wonderful thing, To be confident about. But it goes no further, It has no impact, On our lives, In the here and now.

Now we just booked our summer holiday, A couple of weeks ago, And we're going to, One of our favourite spots in Wales, Which we've been to a number of times, And it is lovely, To have the ticket, So to speak, Confirming the booking.

It's actually not a ticket, It's an email, But nonetheless, It's lovely to have, The ticket, So to speak, Confirming the booking. It's a lovely thing, To look forward to. But I have to say, It hasn't really affected my life at all, Over the last two weeks, Since the booking was confirmed.

[8 : 56] I haven't, I haven't been kind of, Wandering around, Dulwich, Speaking Welsh, Or, Or anything like that. I've simply, Fired away, It's in our holiday file, And I know it will be useful, In August, In the future.

But it has no impact at all, On the way I live, Now. Well, God wants us to have, A big view of the gospel. Not a tick the box view of the gospel, Not a file it away, A ticket in the pocket, View of the gospel, But a big view of the gospel.

So that is my aim today, To convince us of the sheer enormity, And scale, Of what has happened to us, If we have put our faith, In Jesus Christ, And his death, For us, And to see that as a result, Our lives can never, Be the same, Again.

Well, For those of us, Who are not yet trusting Christ, I hope we'll see something, Of the wonder, And what a brilliant thing, It is, To put our trust, In Jesus. Now, At first sight, And you may all have thought this, As Dorothy read the passage for us, This passage, That's rather complicated, Just notice, Really, The structure of the passage, Have a look at verse 12, Where the apostle Paul, Begins a sentence, Therefore, Just as sin came into the world, Through one man, And death through sin, And so death spread to all men, Because all sins, Now he doesn't finish that sentence,

Until verse 18, Okay, So verse 18, Therefore, As one trespass, Led to condemnation for all men, So one act of righteousness, Leads to justification, And life, For all men, And I hope we can just see, By looking at those two sentences, That actually, Although there are difficult bits, In these verses, Actually, It's very simple, It's basically about a contrast, A contrast between Adam, And the results of his life, And Christ, And the results, Of his life, And I've tried to reflect that there, On the outline, On the back of the service sheet, Let's think first of all, About the reign of sin, In verses 12, To 14, Have a look again, At verse 12, Therefore, Just as sin, Came into the world, Through one man, That's Adam, And death, Through sin, And so death, Spread to all men, Because all, Sins, Now notice, Will you, The apostle Paul, Assumes, That Adam, Was a real figure, Of history, And the point is, Very simple, It is that, All of us, Are enslaved, By the power of sin, And that sin, Leads, To death, These verses, Describe it, And they, What we might call, A sort of deadly, Progression, Sin entered the world, Through Adam, Death came through sin, [11:48] And therefore, All die, Paul's taking us, Back to the Garden of Eden, It's why we have that first, Reading from Genesis, Two, And three, As Adam ate, The forbidden fruit, Of the tree, Of the knowledge, Of good and evil, Breaking God's commands, A clear challenge, To God's authority, And his rule, As Adam decided, Actually, I'll be the one, Who will decide, In God's world, What is right, And what is wrong, I'll be the one, Effectively, Who is God in the world, God won't be God anymore, And the judgment, That comes upon Adam, Is death, God had said, That if he ate, From that one tree, He would surely die, And that is just, What happens, So that is verse 12, Sin comes into the world, The result is death, And the whole humanity, Is ruined, Now if we had read on, In Genesis, This morning, We would have seen, How sin and death, Spread out,

Through those early chapters, Of Genesis, Almost like a virus, So in the very next generation, One of Adam's sons, Kills his brother, Within nine generations, The world is in such a mess, That God has to destroy, And bring judgment, On the whole of humanity, Apart from Noah, And his family, Indeed, If you read through, The early chapters of Genesis, What is so striking, Is the repeated pattern, Of what we are told, About Adam's descendants, Each one we are told, Lived and died, Lived and died, Lived and died, Remember the swine flu virus, Two years ago, The fear, About how quickly, It was spreading, The fear of its deadly, Effects, Well, Or can we see, Here is something far greater, As sin, Leads to death, In all people, It's just what, You see, Isn't it, In the world of Narnia, Those of us who have watched, Some of the Narnia films, Or read the books, All of us are by nature, Sons of Adam, And daughters, Of Eve, Now that is what the Bible means by original sin.

Adam is our representative. All of us inherit his nature. We are all as guilty as he was. And I put a diagram there on the outline, just to try and capture the sense of this.

For those who like diagrams, everyone is born in the likeness of Adam, under sin, and sin leads to death. Now that is not to say that we are incapable of doing good things.

[14:40] Clearly we are. But it is saying that all of us by nature reject God's rule over us, just as Adam did, and the result is death.

Spiritual death, but also physical death. Now I don't know about you, but I think we can find it very hard to get our heads around this, in our individualistic culture.

But actually, it's perhaps not as alien as we might think. I'll just take, for instance, the current situation in Libya, with British planes and British personnel enforcing the no-fly zone over Libya. And the question people have been asking is, should we be engaging in military action over Libya? Now when that question is asked, should we be doing this, people aren't saying, aren't they, well, you know, should I be going down to my local army surplus store, buying kind of khaki uniform, quickly trying to rustle up a pilot's license from nowhere, jumping in a fighter jet, and personally dropping bombs and shelling Colonel Gaddafi's tanks?

Now when we talk about we, in that sense, we're identifying, aren't we, ourselves as individuals, as part of the nation. Those RAF pilots who fly the planes, the politicians who make the decisions, they represent us.

[16:03] Well, can we see here, in a similar way, Adam is our representative. We inherit his nature.

What do you say, where is the evidence? Well, it is that we all sin. We all do that same thing that Adam did, that we end up as the ones who decide how we want to live, and we reject God as the rightful ruler of his world.

It's why verse 21, if you look to verse 21, talks about the reign of sin. Now some of us are teachers.

Just over coffee, why not bowl up to a teacher here this morning, and ask them, are lying lessons part of the national curriculum?

Are dishonesty lessons taught in classes? Do they have to teach children to be selfish? Or ask a parent? Are their children naughty, because they've taught them to be naughty?

[17 : 15] Or because it's part of their nature? It's because it's part of their nature. The other piece of evidence is that we all die. Verse 14 talks about the reign of death.

Sin and death have reigned ever since Adam, even before the law was given and labelled as sin. That is the point, I think, of verses 13 and 14. The law given to Moses didn't change anything. As Paul says in verse 20, the law was added so that trespass sin might increase. The law simply shows us where we're wrong. It's like a torch, which you perhaps shine underneath your oven or behind the back of your fridge, and it shows you there is dirt.

It doesn't make the dirt. The dirt was there all along. It simply shows you that there is dirt there. The reign of sin. Let's secondly move on and think about the reign of Christ in verses 15 to 21.

And just to say, I hope there will be time for questions, as usual, after the talk. So if you have questions, there may well be questions, then do ask afterwards and save them up for then. But the reign of Christ, verses 15 to 21, and the main point here, really, is in verses 18 to 21, and the similarity between Adam and Christ.

[18 : 36] But first of all, very briefly, Paul wants us to notice some differences. So first of all, how Jesus is not like Adam. Notice verse 15, Adam's sin led to death, but through Jesus comes the free gift of grace.

Notice secondly, verse 16, the result of Adam's sin is judgment and condemnation, but the free gift of Jesus brings justification, which is the very opposite. And thirdly, notice verse 17, the result of Adam's sin is that death reigns in all people, but in Christ it's those who are in him, in Christ, who will reign.

Just again, think back to Genesis and the Garden of Eden. And God's intention right back in Genesis was that Adam would rule the world on God's behalf.

Now he failed in that, and death ended up ruling Adam instead. But now here, you see, is the wonderful promise of a new humanity, of men and women fulfilling their original purpose to rule God's world.

And we'll see more of that in Genesis, in Romans chapter 8, when we look at the new creation. So three very brief ways in which Jesus is not like Adam, but let's focus on the main thing, which is how Jesus is like Adam.

[19 : 58] And it is simply that the action of one man has affected many. That's the main thing. The action of one man has affected many. Have a look at verse 18.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, speaking of Adam, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men, speaking of Christ.

That's why you see back in verse 14, Adam is described as a type or a pattern of Christ. because the actions of both Adam and Jesus have enormous consequences all the way through history for many, many, many people.

I wonder if you noticed how verse 18 echoes Romans 3, 23 and 24. Just have a look over the page to Romans 3, 23. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

And Romans 5, 18, all have sinned, but the one act of righteousness, the death of Jesus on the cross, leads to justification. Notice how that is repeated in verse 19, how the action of one man affects many.

[21 : 28] Verse 19, for as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

In other words, Adam's attitude to God was one of disobedience. Jesus' attitude, one of complete obedience. In his life, but supremely, of course, in his death, by dying on the cross in our place. And through his obedience, through his death, the many are made righteous, forgiven, set free from sin, and the penalty of sin that is death.

Now again, I put a little diagram on the outline to show this. Here, can you see, is the reign of Christ, Christ, which is characterized by grace, life, and righteousness.

And for those who have perhaps nodded off or who are just kind of struggling slightly to grasp this whole language of being either in Adam or being in Christ, this is the key thing to grasp.

[22 : 37] Okay? There are just two reigns under which you can live your life. You can either live under Adam, facing death, spiritual death and physical death, or you can live your life under Christ.

That is the main point of these verses. You can either be in Adam as all of us are by nature, or you can be in Christ. Both are there, aren't they, in verse 21.

If you have a look at verse 21. So that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And the key thing is that the reign of Christ is far stronger than the reign of Adam. I wonder if you noticed that as Dorothy read these verses for us.

So did you notice it in verse 15? For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift of grace by that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

[23 : 49] Or again, verse 17. 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.

Or verse 20. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

Sin and death have spread like a virus in the world, but grace abounds all the more. Grace is far greater than sin, far stronger than death.

In other words, the work of Jesus in his death and resurrection is so much more powerful, so much stronger than the work of Adam.

Instead of condemnation, Jesus has brought justification, a declaration that we can be right with God, both here and on the judgment day.

[24 : 57] Instead of death, Jesus has brought life. Instead of slavery to sin, Jesus brings grace and freedom. Can you see the contrast?

Now what I want to do with the rest of our time, having established that contrast between the reign of sin and the reign of Christ, is to spend the rest of our time thinking about the implications of that, because the implications are enormous.

And they all beg the question, how big is your gospel? How big is your understanding of what Jesus Christ has done for you?

How big is your gospel? Let's think, first of all, in terms of our identity. And I wonder how you define yourself. I wonder how you define yourself.

Might be by your job. In other words, first and foremost, as you think about who you are and the sort of person you are, you basically think, well, I'm a teacher or I'm a carer or I'm someone who's in full-time education, I'm at school.

[26 : 06] Or perhaps you define yourself by the education and qualifications that you have. Or perhaps by your family. In other words, as you think about yourself, first and foremost, you think of yourself as a husband or a wife or a father or a mother or a child, perhaps.

Or perhaps you define yourself in terms of your image and the way other people see you. Or perhaps by the stage of life you're at. You're retired. Or you're middle-aged or you're at school. And there are a whole range of other ways in which we could possibly define ourselves when we think about our identity. Perhaps our race or our culture or our nationality or our sexuality. There are a whole range of things.

But far more basic than any of those things, far more fundamental, is that we are human beings.

We are all by nature in Adam under the reign of death.

That is what defines us. That is what defines you more than anything else. If you're not a Christian, in other words, this is how God sees you.

[27 : 20] Under sin, under death and judgment. It's why there is nothing that is more important than turning to Christ and seeking forgiveness if you have not yet done that.

Well, for those of us who are Christians, once we have grasped that actually we have moved from the reign of sin to the reign of Christ, why everything changes.

Nothing can ever be the same again. Our transfer from one to the other changes us at a far deeper level than occupation or nationality or education or stage of life or any of those things.

It is the deepest change possible that any human being can ever make. People talk about culture shock. They go and live in another country and actually everything's changed.

They now live in a different realm and everything has changed. The big things have changed and the small things have changed. The expected things have changed and the unexpected things have

changed.

[28 : 30] Well, let me ask, is your gospel that big? Not just a kind of tick-the-box view of the gospel, not just a ticket in your pocket that will be useful one day when you get to heaven, view of the gospel, but a gospel that is big enough to change the whole of your life.

Is that your view of the gospel? Far greater even than the change that Kate Middleton underwent on Friday as she was transformed from being a commoner to ten minutes later being a princess.

Is that your gospel? Is it that big that it affects the whole of life, that nothing again can ever be the same again?

Or is it simply a tick-the-box view of the gospel? A ticket in your back pocket view of the gospel that will be useful on the judgment day? Well, we'll think more about that next week.

What about in terms of assurance, or we might say confidence? You see, let me ask the question. Do you ever find yourself thinking, is the death of Jesus really enough? Is the death of Jesus really enough?

[29 : 49] Can I really be sure that I'm forgiven if my faith is in Jesus? After all, Christians continue to sin, and Christians continue to struggle with sin, and there may well be some of us here this morning, and we're acutely aware of that struggle with sin today.

What's more, Christians die like everyone else. I gather that 13,000 people will die in the world today and tomorrow, and the next day. 50 million people die every year.

You see, both our present experience of sin and the future reality of death, why it can cause us to think, can't it, well, is the death of Jesus really enough? Well, yes.

Look at verse 20. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. See, you and I cannot deny the effects of sin and death in our lives, but grace abounds all the more.

Sin and death are overthrown in Christ. Those of us who are Christians, we no longer live in a place dominated by sin and by death, but instead in a place dominated by grace, life with God, both here and in the future, and righteousness.

[31 : 04] In other words, the big change doesn't happen when we die. The big change, the move from being in Adam to being in Christ, happens at the point when we put our trust in Jesus Christ.

That is when the big change takes place. It's why Jesus and the rest of the New Testament simply refer to a death for the Christian as sleep.

Just like moving house. Just a change of address. Again, how big is your gospel. Thirdly, let's think about the implications of this for world mission.

Turn back, will you, to Romans chapter 1 verse 16. Now we keep saying that these are the key verses of the letter.

I guess some of us may know them off by heart by now, but let me read Romans chapter 1 verses 16 and 17. For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[32 : 07] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. In other words, that everyone, regardless of background, regardless of race, regardless of culture, can be right with God through the death of Jesus, through the gospel.

But again, we might well find ourselves why aren't we asking the question, well hang on a moment. How can the act of one man 2,000 years ago, the death of Jesus, how could the act of that one man 2,000 years ago really affect so many, many people?

Can that really be the case? Well yes, because it's happened before. Just as the action of that one man, Adam, affected the whole of humanity, so the action of Christ in dying for sin can have an impact on anyone who will trust him.

The problem with sin is universal. All have sinned, all fall short of the glory of God, and wonderful, the solution is capable of being universal as well.

Anyone can be justified, anyone can be declared in the right with God, if only they'll put their trust in Jesus for themselves. I take it it means that as a church we need to be absolutely committed to proclaiming the message of Jesus to everyone, regardless of culture or background, committed to the fact that the overflow of grace is enough and sufficient for everyone.

[33 : 51] Indeed, it may be there's someone here today, perhaps you feel a total outsider. You're not a Christian, your life's a mess, you hear about the death of Jesus and it all just sounds so remote.

Two thousand years ago, can that really affect me and change my life? Could God really forgive me? Well, yes, Jesus has died.

He has done enough. If only you would do verse 17, receive God's gift of grace and forgiveness, nobody is beyond the reach of the message of Jesus.

Nobody. If only you will receive it for yourself. Well, why don't we pray together?

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

[35 : 02] Heavenly Father, we praise you for your wonderful gospel again this morning. Thank you for the enormity of what you have done by Christ. Thank you for his life of obedience and supremely for his death of obedience.

And we pray, Heavenly Father, that we wouldn't be unmoved and unchanged by his death. God, as we pray, from a tick-the-box view of the gospel or a tick-in-your-back-pocket view of the gospel.

We pray that we would be transformed and changed in every aspect of our lives. And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.