

No Thanks to Adam, Thanks to Jesus

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, hello there, and let me end my welcome. My name is Mark, and I'm pleased that you're able to join us today. We're working through Romans chapter 5, verses 12 to 21 tonight.

Well, let me pray before we look at this passage in detail. Father, again, we thank you for your word, that it gives us life as we read it, understand it, and we allow the Spirit to change us by it. And so this is our prayer again tonight, that you will change us into the likeness of your Son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, there is, I'm sure many of you are aware, in literature and the arts, a fascination with the power of one.

That one person with the power to change the destiny of an entire civilization or society. So think Harry Potter, he's on the screen there, the one destined to defeat Voldemort, break the power of evil over the magical world.

Even though I have to say poor Harry, he's just a confused kid who's lost his parents at birth. Or take Frodo Baggins in the Lord of the Rings, the diminutive Hobbit, but nevertheless tasked as the one to destroy the ring.

[1 : 23] Or how about Neo in the Matrix? That one's a few more years earlier, during the 90s. But again, the one who will free humanity from the machines.

This idea of the one even became the title of a book, The Power of One by Bryce Courtney. Where one of the themes was that anyone can be the one, if only they had the drive and the vision.

Well, this theme of the one is found in the Bible too. And tonight, looking at the second half of Romans 5, Paul uses this very idea to show how Jesus is the one for all humanity.

Except, of course, this isn't fiction. It's reality. This is truth we can believe in and stake our lives on. But Paul begins not with Jesus, but Adam as the other one in the Bible. You see, we've been studying, haven't we, about the universal wrath of God against sin.

[2 : 33] All of us are under the judgment of God because of sin. But how did this come about? Why are there no exceptions in history?

Well, because Adam was the one who brought sin and death to all in the world. So if you look with me in verse 12, which I've also got on the slide, we read, Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people because all sin, well, Paul breaks off mid-sentence here, and so I will.

This one man is a reference to Adam, which Paul makes clear in verse 14. And with our Genesis reading earlier, we know that this sin was the eating of the fruit from the only tree that God forbade them to.

But they disobeyed, and so sin entered the world through him. And as Paul will say in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23, because the wages of sin is death, death entered the world as well through this result.

This isn't just physical death, by the way, but spiritual. We're estranged from God, and Adam and Eve's casting out from Eden was symbolic of this.

[3 : 59] Death came to all people because all sin. Now, what does this mean exactly? Well, firstly, we can look at it purely from an empirical point of view.

Everyone dies because everyone sins. You look around, and it's hard to refute, isn't it? No one lives forever because no one is sinless.

But Paul is saying more than this, isn't he? For he begins with, in this way. Meaning that, no thanks to Adam, we find ourselves under the judgment of death because of him.

But the question becomes, how does Adam's sin result in death to us? Well, one explanation is that we've inherited his sinful nature.

It's like a genetic disorder. We've inherited his sinful gene or nature. Now, please note here, I'm simply using this as an analogy.

[5 : 02] There's no sinful gene as such, biologically. Rather, I'm just referring to a spiritual state, which once Adam fell into, also spreads to us somehow, so that we all have his fallen nature.

We can't explain how it happens, but it's true nevertheless. And yet, even though this is true, such that we are all individually guilty before God, and on account of our own sinful nature, I think Paul here is saying more than that.

You see, the statement itself is expressed in the past tense. Death came, and all sinned. You could perhaps construe it to mean that Paul was speaking just of people in the past, as he was speaking. But I think if you read the whole context of Romans up to now, it doesn't quite gel, does it? Paul has been speaking of the universality of sin, and death, and judgment.

Further, as we look down later in verse 19, Paul reinforces this by saying, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners.

[6 : 20] Here, it's quite clear, isn't it, that we're counted guilty, not simply for our own sin, but for Adam's as well. Thanks to Adam, or perhaps more precisely, no thanks to him, his act of one, his one act of disobedience, has made all of us guilty.

Now, to many of us, this all seems rather foreign, doesn't it? Because we live in an individualistic world, where each individual is responsible for their own actions.

And we think it's only fair if we're punished for what we've personally done. So, for example, if a boy commits a crime, we don't send his father to jail, do we?

Even if his father was negligent in bringing him up. But I want to suggest that actually, this way of thinking is not as foreign as we think.

Just take, for example, citizenship or work rights. Did you know, for example, that if one of your parents happens to be born in the UK or in Europe, then you automatically have work rights, working rights in the European Union, in the EU.

[7 : 37] Maybe even citizenship rights. Even though you've never stepped into that country. You know, many young people take advantage of this, didn't they? To get on a working holiday over there.

And of course, we've known, over the last few years, it's come back to bite a few of our MPs because it's made them dual citizens, even though they didn't realize it, which meant that they were disqualified from sitting in our Australian Parliament.

But there's also examples of this that work negatively, just like Adam with us. Consider, for example, this whole notion of white guilt.

Now, I'm not saying I agree with this notion at all, but it's quite a prevalent thought at the moment, isn't it? And what does it argue? Well, that white people today are guilty for their forebear's sins just by simply being white, even though they had nothing to do with it, even though there may have been recent migrants to this country, and even though some white people today are actually less advantaged or less well-off than people of colour.

But it doesn't matter, does it, by this argument. You are guilty by virtue of your skin colour. White people in the past are deemed to be representative of you.

[9 : 05] And if they were guilty, then so are you. Well, that's the same principle at play with Adam. Now, just so that I'm clear again, I'm not saying I accept this notion of white guilt, but all I'm saying is that this idea of one type of person representing everyone else, just like him, isn't as far-fetched as we think.

And in the case of Adam, this is indeed how God has decided to be the case. Adam has been nominated by God as humanity's representative, and his act of disobedience implicates all of us. We're guilty not simply because we inherited his sinful nature, although that's true. We're guilty because we're all descended from him. Now, you might wonder why I'm making such a big fuss about this.

Well, besides the fact that Paul does, it's because this is the same principle that will also allow us to be righteous in Christ.

That's Paul's argument, really. But before we get there, Paul does make a digression. That's why he stopped mid-sentence in verse 12, because he wanted to address the issue of the law, which has been a recurring theme in the first four chapters.

[10:28] So, verse 13 on the slide, The idea Paul tries to rebut here is that it's only those who break the law who are guilty.

No, Paul contends that everyone sins, including those who came before the law. For these people, who came between Adam and Moses, their sin didn't make them lawbreakers, because there wasn't a specific law that they were accountable to.

Yet what they did was still wrong. Paul, in Romans 2, has already argued that they knew it was wrong. And so they are just as guilty as those who are lawbreakers.

Again, we have examples today as well. So, for example, it's not a crime to be unfaithful in marriage, is it, nowadays? That is, the courts can't charge you as though you've committed a crime. And yet everyone considers cheating in marriage as wrong. In fact, many would consider it worse than cheating on your tax return, which is against the law.

[11:57] And so, even though these people who lived from Adam to Moses didn't sin by breaking a law, unlike Adam who did, and unlike those who came after Moses, that is, the Jewish people, they were still rightly subject to death for their sin.

So, in the end, Paul's point is that we're all subject to Adam's curse of sin and death. That's our first point. There are no exceptions. Sin and death came to all through the One.

This is the power of the One, the negative power of the One, if you like, through Adam. But having shown this, Paul now shows how this very same correspondence or relationship exists between Jesus and us, those who receive the gift of righteousness by faith.

So, on the next point, you see, unlike something like white guilt, for which there is no way out for those who are in Adam, there is now, through Jesus, justification and life for all who believe.

Paul will make this explicit in verse 17. But first, he points out that while this gift through Jesus has the same principle of correspondence to us as Adam's guilt, there is a difference.

[13:22] It is qualitatively different. And so, that's what he deals with now in verse 15. He says, But the gift is not like the trespass. How so?

For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many? Here, Paul says, God's grace is much more better, sorry about the grammar, but it's much more better than the death brought on by Adam is bad.

If you consider the devastation that Adam's sin, one sin has wrought, and, you know, if you look around, it has, hasn't it? Because everywhere we look, there's the grief of death.

There's the breakdown of society and relationship because of sin. If you think that's really bad, then God's grace makes up for that and more. Paul describes this as the grace that overflows to many.

It doesn't just negate the impact of that one sin, but it overflows into gifts of joy and peace and love. And its effect cannot then be taken away again.

[14:36] No further sin, no other Adam can then now come along to take away Jesus and what He has done for us. So friends, if any of you out there is listening and has not yet received this gift, then this is God's offer to you through Christ Jesus.

Yes, it requires repentance and faith. It requires owning up to your own sin and your pride. But if you're willing, then this is a free gift of abundant grace that is yours.

But that's not all because in verse 16, Paul then says there's more. He reads, it reads, No can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin.

The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. I think what Paul means here is to point out that whereas in verse 15 we see how vast this benefit is to us, here in verse 16 we see just how powerful Jesus' death is.

His one act of obedience cancels not just Adam's trespass, but all trespasses, each and every single one of them. Have you ever seen these video clips of dominoes that fall?

[16:06] They set it all up and fall. Well, here's a, let me give you a taste of it, here's one video that does. Look, I could play that whole clip, it was probably three or four more minutes of it, it's mesmerizing, isn't it?

But the point of it is this, that all it took was one push, didn't it, for this girl, and it's a bit like Adam's sin, isn't it? It brought everything down.

But imagine if someone could reverse all that with one similar single act. Now take a look at this other video and see what you see. That was fantastic, wasn't it?

Now of course, I mean, that can't really happen, it only happened because they played the video backwards, hope you realize that. But, that's not true for Jesus, is it? Because in his case, he's done exactly that, with his one act, he's reversed the consequences of everything that Adam has done.

He didn't just die for one sin, mind you, or indeed one sinful man, he died for the sin of all those who are being made righteous. That is, all the fallen dominoes get right up again, not just the first one that got pushed down.

[17 : 21] By his one death on the cross, Jesus bore the full weight of all the sins of humanity. That's the extent of God's love for us.

And so, that's why Paul says that the gift is much greater than the trespass. And so, he says in verse 17, for if by the trespass of one man, death reigns through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

If the finality of death has ever dawned on you, then let your faith and hope rest in Jesus instead. For in him, grace reigns to bring life and freedom from that death.

And I think especially during this pandemic, that reality of death has really hit home, hasn't it? Each day, we turn on the news, 11 a.m., the premier gets up and he reads off the daily deaths from COVID-19 and sometimes we see the reports of what the global count is.

ordinarily, we don't like to face up to something like that, do we? But the fact is, the truth is, we all will face death one day, wouldn't we?

[18 : 47] It's just that the pandemic has really brought it home to us, brought it near to us. And well, I think perhaps it's actually a blessing in disguise because it's really prompted us to come to terms now with it before it's too late.

It's a blessing because sin and death don't have to be the final word if we act on it now. We can be rescued by faith in Jesus.

And over and over, Paul reminds us that this is God's grace. Even though we have sinned and we are helpless, God doesn't hit us over the head with it.

He knows we're helpless. He knows we're powerless. Instead, he gives us his son as a gift. He's gracious to us. We can be forgiven for our wrongdoing by showing faith in him, just like Abraham did, which we saw two weeks ago.

Now again, I say, how Jesus' righteousness becomes our righteousness, we can't fully comprehend. But it's the same principle, that if Adam's sin can make us guilty, then Jesus' obedience can make us righteous by faith.

[20 : 04] And so that's what Paul now says in verse 18. This was the mid-sentence that he started in verse 12, which he now completes. Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. Now, Paul may use the phrase all people here, but it's clear from verse 17 and from the context of Romans that he's not talking of all people regardless of faith, but any or all provided they have faith in God.

And that, in short, is the whole point of tonight's passage. No thanks to Adam we all sin and die, but thanks to Jesus we have the gift of righteousness and life.

Now, Paul isn't done just yet, but he has one final comment about, surprise, surprise, the law again. So he says in verse 20, the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You see, Paul wants his Jewish readers indeed all readers to understand that nothing he says undermines the law. God's plan of salvation had a purpose for the law from the start.

[21 : 40] The law was never a decoy or a false trail used by God to mislead his people, the Jews. No, even though the law was never the answer to Adam's sin, God still gave them the law because his purpose was to use it to increase the glory of his grace.

For Paul says where there was no law, then the severity of sin would not have been made so obvious. Again, let me use another analogy from our stage four restrictions.

We all know now how important it is to stay home if we've tested positive and to isolate. I can't do an impressionation of the Premier, but you've heard him say it over and over again.

But it's only when he then backs it up with the hefty fines that we've seen that people started to take him seriously. Similarly, all the other fines of not wearing masks and the like, people took them seriously because of the fines because now they knew that the government really meant it. So also the law was brought in to accentuate the trespass, to make people realize, make the Jews realize just how serious their sin was.

[23 : 00] So that when God then finally comes along to forgive us our sins in Jesus, we can then see how glorious that grace was. To know how wrong we've been, how serious the sins were, and then to be forgiven for them because of what Jesus has done, shows how great that sacrifice was, how glorious that grace was.

Friends, it's easy enough to see what's wrong in this world, isn't it? Whether it's systemic injustice or individual wrongs, many people in the world proclaim to be experts at it, but being able to diagnose what's wrong and being able to offer a cure are two very different things, aren't they?

And so while it's important to be able to call these things out, what comes after is just as important. And what God provides, and what only God provides, is a clear path towards forgiveness and redemption and reconciliation.

Otherwise, when you call out people for what they've done wrong, and there's no way for them to make amends, all it does is weigh them down with guilt. all that does is create ongoing animosity because there's no grace.

Well, it's only in the gospel that we are able to find that grace that God gives. Not simply to erase the guilt of sin, but to offer life as well.

[24 : 39] And it comes through not atoning for our own sins, us doing what we can to amend, make amends, but it comes through faith in Jesus' obedience to his Father.

And that's why each week as we've been going through Romans, but it's also each week as we've been going through the Bible, we talk about no one else but him, but Jesus. I will never tire of it, and I hope you will never tire of hearing about him.

You see, if I went on about somebody else, even if it's a famous preacher or whatever, then please feel free to shut me up. But not with Jesus. Why? Because he's truly the one with the power to change history.

He has changed history, not just for the world, but also for each and every one of us if we have faith in him. Where there was only sin and judgment, there's now grace and the gift of righteousness. Where there was death, which we all deserve, there's now life eternal. And the great thing is, no one can take that away from us.

[25 : 51] If you've received this by grace, then please keep holding on to it by faith. And if you haven't, then tonight is your chance. Believe in Jesus, and this great gift of God is also yours.

Let me pray. Father, we thank you for Jesus, whose obedience has brought us life, even as Adam's disobedience brought us death. Thank you that by faith we receive this great gift of righteousness. And not only is the penalty of sin against us canceled, but we have eternal life and the hope of glory. Father, we pray for those of us who are still considering if putting our faith in Jesus is all worth it.

Please help them to see that it is. Please help them to cast away their fears and doubt and humble them to believe in Jesus unreservedly so that they may receive the abundant gift of grace you have given to them.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.