

New Life: The Much More Reversal

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Date: 16 January 2011

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[0:00] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

He created the day and the night and the waters and the dry land and all the plants and the birds of the air and the creatures of the sea and the animals of the land.

And then God said, Now let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion.

Let them reign. Let them reign over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, the animals and all the earth. So God created man in His image.

In the image of God, He created them and God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and bring it into order and reign.

[1:12] Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky and over every living creature. Reign over the earth. And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Brothers and sisters, we were created to reign. Not in some overbearing, tyrannical way at all.

We were created in the image of God as the image of God. The picture, if you will. The reflection of God. Meant to show forth God in and through our lives as rulers over the earth.

Genesis establishes that men and women are given responsibility and authority over the earth. Just as God takes responsibility and exercises authority over us.

Adam was to reign in a garden. To enable it to flourish. To work and to grow it. And to expand it.

[2:22] To create. Not unlike what God Himself had done. To see how the world was meant to work, brothers and sisters, we read Genesis 1 and 2.

Where we learn that the God who created everything is the King who rules over everything and over humanity. And that humanity then, created to reflect God's character, does so by ruling over creation in His image.

And then creation itself, together with mankind, therefore becomes the way in which God reveals His glory. The way in which God reveals Himself as the one who is sovereign over all.

The Lord of Lords. This is what it means to be truly human. It means to live as an image of the King. Ruling over the world while depending on God. So that God gets all the glory for our lives as we exercise the authority He's given us using what He's provided to do it.

[3:40] That's called being a human. But that's not the world we know. Because the problem arises when we who are created to act on behalf of God.

Think instead that we can somehow be God. Back to Genesis. 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 that tree, you shall surely die. Well, you know how that one ends. The tempting words of the serpent.

Surely you shall not die, he said. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

And it's been the same story ever since. Claiming to be wise, we become fools, Paul says. That's life in the shadow of Genesis chapter 3.

[4:53] And so it is that all too often what we see in this world is the abuse of man's God-given authority. The reign of man acting in God's image now diminished to the tyranny of man acting under sin.

Just to turn on the TV news, or to read the front page of the newspaper, is to be bombarded with the ways in which men and women scorn God and abuse the authority given us in the downward

spiral of sin and death that mocks the Creator and His intention.

You will surely not die, the serpent said. But they did. They died. They died when they were driven out of the garden by God Himself, separated from the source of life.

Their relationship with the creation now cursed, and in the end, waiting to return to the dust from which they had come. And so by man came death.

And we need that tragic account in our minds. Because our text this morning as we hear from the living God and His Word is Romans chapter 5, verses 12 to 21.

[6:21] And thanks be to God, Paul says, this death brought by Adam is overcome. 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.

David said last week in his sermon that beginning in chapter 5, we're now in happy Paul territory. And we are, I guess, but I warn you that this is a thick text.

I didn't say this to the 9 o'clock crowd, but I just watched their eyes glaze over about halfway through the sermon. It's a bit of heavy slogging through this text. In verses 1 through 11 of chapter 5, Paul established that as those who have been justified by faith, we have a hope that's secure by virtue of the work of Christ on the cross.

So, when you come to verse 12 of chapter 5, you just might expect that Paul's going to go straight away now into a description of just what exactly that means for our lives.

But he doesn't do that. At least, not exactly that. Instead, if you read very carefully, you'll notice this somewhat strange shift in verses 12 to 21 of chapter 5.

[7:43] Paul moves from talking in the first person using pronouns like we and us at the beginning of chapter 5. He'll go back to that in chapter 6. But here he switches and starts talking about things in the third person with pronouns like they and them, describing something out there.

It's almost as if Paul realized he needed to stop and take a step back and sort of scale his way up a theological mountain from which his readers then could better see the horizons on both sides from what has come before and what is yet to come.

I think scaling a mountain is actually a rather fine description of what it's like reading this text. You may have felt the density of it a bit as it was read aloud. I've introduced it by going all the way back to Genesis since that's very much in Paul's thinking here.

We'll spend a little more time on some of those concepts towards the end of the sermon but here in the middle for a little while I'm going to admit that I'm stealing a very basic outline of this text from another preacher who I respect very much.

Just the main points, not the whole sermon. I'm not preaching his sermon. Just the main points but a basic outline just to touch on the content of this passage. It won't work for me to cover every verse of this text in detail and admittedly I'll be assuming quite a lot at times especially if you've not been with us through Romans up to this point.

[9:18] But don't worry if some details just go past you and you don't catch everything. You don't need to understand everything to get the basic point of this text and to respond. And indeed there's a lot I won't even cover and there sure will be some lingering questions.

But the basic point is this. that what Jesus Christ has done for us is far greater than what Adam did. And what Jesus Christ has done for us has far more wonderful implications for our lives. The question to be asking yourself along the way is who exactly you're following.

Whether as you look at your life you see yourself more in the following of Adam or of Christ. We'll consider the text then in three sections in this easy to remember format.

Ready? Verses 12 to 14 will focus on the ruin of humankind. Verses 15 to 19 will be about the rescue of humankind.

[10:26] And verses 20 and 21 then will be about the reign of humankind. The ruin the rescue and the reign.

I like alliteration and there you have a nice progression. And you already know where we're going. We saw it in Genesis and we'll come back to it at the end. That we were meant to reign.

And reign we shall through the one man Jesus Christ. But Paul begins where we did just a few moments ago in the abyss of the ruin of mankind.

Verse 12 Therefore just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin and so death spread to all because all sinned.

Paul begins in Genesis making a simple but profound point that death was not part of the original creation. The entry of sin brought death.

[11:30] Now by death the Bible often means and I think Paul means here separation from God who is the source of life. This would of course include the physical death that is the outworking of that separation.

That as descendants of Adam every one of us every one of you and me all of us enter into the world in a state of death.

We're born alienated and separated from God and so we all come under sin's reign by means of death. You cannot escape it.

On that understanding of history our chief problem is not most deeply one of individual sinning your sinning and my sinning. It is rather at the deepest level the mysterious connection that we have with Adam's sin that brought death.

According to Paul Adam stands at the beginning of the first major phase of human history and thereby if you follow his logic it is Adam who determines the character of that phase for everyone who belongs in it and that is everyone in humanity.

[12:49] That's just not an easy concept for modern westerners to grasp. We're simply not accustomed to thinking of sin as a power capable of altering some kind of structure in reality.

I don't think we are. But we've read this text and you know that Paul's going to get to his main point that Christ will reverse these effects of Adam.

And so Paul teaches that in these two men in Adam and in Christ is essentially the whole of the human story from start to finish. We were at the start.

We'll be at the finish by the time we're done. Sin and death were introduced by Adam. Both are undone and reversed through Jesus Christ.

And so the status of every human being of every person sitting in this room of every person you know in your life the status of every human being depends on either the work of Adam or of Christ.

[13:58] Now given verse 12 we would expect that Paul would begin to contrast the work of Adam that he just talked about with that of Christ straight away but he doesn't do that.

You see in fact the dash at the end of verse 12 in the ESV. That's the editors telling you Paul doesn't really care about syntax at this point. He decides not to complete his comparison here. Instead he pauses all together and begins to provide a different sort of clarification. And with the argument of chapter 4 still in mind Paul now asserts that sin and death in verses 13 and 14 both exercised their power independently of the law that was given through Moses.

Sin is universal in other words. So that Paul says because this mattered to his readers that even before the law of the Old Testament was formally given through Moses death reigned and all sinned.

That the damage done by Adam's sin affects every human being in every place and at all times.

That's the reason for Paul's parenthesis if you will in verses 13 and 14.

[15:13] We all disregard God and his glory. That didn't start up after the law came. The law didn't introduce sin nor could the law rescue us from sin.

Our rescue the next section of this text or rescue would come then through a second and far greater Adam. The last phrase of verse 14 tells us that Adam was a type of him who was to come meaning Jesus the Messiah.

In using this language of typology Paul just means that Christ can be viewed both in comparison and in contrast with Adam. in comparison Adam's action impacts those after him in a way similar not identical but similar to how Christ's action will impact those who come after him.

But in most other ways in this text the contrast is really the point. Even that correspondence I just noted is meant to highlight the difference and the superiority of Christ in his work.

And what becomes instantly clear is that the rescue of Christ is far greater than the fall of Adam.

Paul wouldn't take three verses here in the heart of Romans just to say that sin and condemnation and death are different from righteousness and justification in life.

[16:50] I mean that can't be the point. The point is that it doesn't just balance out nicely. The point is that Christ and his righteousness and justification in life are much more than Adam and his sin and condemnation and death.

So verses 15 through 17 now tell us that the work of the second Adam Jesus is far greater than that of the first in a few ways.

Verse 15 Adam's the pattern of Christ but the free gift Paul says 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.

So while we can note that judgment came because of one man and salvation comes because of one man and that there is one way by which all people fall and one way by which all may be saved they are not equal forces.

The sin of Adam brought death a decaying degenerating force but the grace of Jesus Christ is a dynamic power.

[18:15] Not only did grace do away with death it also restored what had been destroyed. It's far easier to make a mess than to clean one up.

Note that for Paul grace is not just the favor of God. It's not just the fact that God shows us favor. It is also the activity itself that demonstrates that favor and all of the divine power that comes with that.

And we need that power. Because Paul says death is inescapable that it is only the power of the grace of God that opens up another chapter beyond the one that ends in death for the human race because Christ's work is far more powerful than death.

Now verse 16 another contrast 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.

Adam's one transgression brought death. Jesus' death brought forgiveness for thousands of transgressions. Such is the greatness of God's grace that it forgives many thousands upon thousands upon thousands of transgressions.

[19:45] Then verse 17 Christ's work is far greater by being more efficacious Paul says 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.

And we'll return to reigning in life later. But for now note this important point that when Paul says those who receive the abundance of grace he implies there I think that there are those who do not receive it.

In other words Paul shows us here that the many in verse 15 who die because of Adam's sin and the many who experience God's grace are not one in the same group.

Some receive the grace and some don't. But the main point of verse 17 is I think a bit of a surprising one.

That according to Paul to receive God's grace does not mean that we simply exchange rulers in our lives. Did you catch that? He says that through Jesus Christ we move from being ruled by death to becoming ourselves rulers in life.

[21:18] More on that in a moment. Move on to verse 18. Because here at last in verse 18 Paul restates the comparison that he began and abandoned way back in verse 12.

He had a lot of other things he wanted to get in between here. In verse 18 then he summarizes the greatness of our rescue this way. Therefore as one trespass led to condemnation for all so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

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. There is in that summary both correspondence and contrast between Adam and Christ but the main point still remains the contrast that the result of Adam's trespass is condemnation while the result of Christ's righteous deed is acquittal or justification the ESV says justification that brings life.

Adam in disobedience grasped for equality with God as Paul would say in Philippians Jesus Christ in obedience did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross.

The result is marvelous in verse 19 that the many were made sinners and the many will be made righteous.

[23:04] Now there's seriously a whole sermon waiting to come out someday just on verses 18 and 19 but not right now. We've seen then the ruin of mankind we've seen the rescue of mankind and now we return to the theme that I highlighted in the introduction the reign of mankind verses 20 and 21 we have here I think a summary of all that Paul's been saying verse 20 now the law came in to increase the trespass but where sin increased grace abounded all the more in verse 14 Paul had dealt with the situation of human sin coming before the law was even given now as he nears his conclusion in verse 21 he addresses how it is that the law fits in the plan of God at all the answer is that the law was given to increase trespass it wasn't given to make us stop sinning chapter seven is going to be very clear on this point when we get there that when the law comes in alongside those who are already dead in

Adam when it confronts a hard heart and says things like don't steal don't lie don't covet it that the effect of all that is that we actually do those things and now they are specifically named as acts of transgression right so the law increases trespass and so for Paul the answer to the sin problem is not the law but grace grace increased all the more he says grace super increased literally the picture is one of an unending overflowing grace a grace that knows no bounds one that goes beyond anything imaginable one that need only be received and finally then what is the purpose of this grace verse 21 so that has sin reigned in death grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord it's not just that grace super abounds but that this grace is something that can be seen and known as reigning over death and sin and hell in this world all of it unto eternal life and I think that that includes the reigning in life that Paul talked about in verse 17 how much more will those who receive God's grace Paul said there reign in life through Jesus Christ now if that is the final point of this admittedly very dense very hard to follow theological argumentation if that is the final point if the goal of it all is that grace reigns through righteousness and if that can at least in part be understood to mean that we who are made righteous are reigning in life now then my question all week long has been what does it mean to reign in life what does this grace reigning through righteousness look like we must in this passage be talking about a changed life the reign of grace produces righteous living you were made a sinner

Paul says you really were a sinner you are made righteous Paul says you really are righteous oh you're not sinlessly perfect you don't have sinless perfection of righteousness Jesus Christ is sinlessly perfect and that is given to our account but yet there is a transformation a being made righteous so that the life of which Paul speaks the eternal life of which Paul speaks will indeed be finally fully realized only at the day of the resurrection but just four verses into chapter six Paul begins to indicate that this life that he's talking about has already begun to invade in the present evil age now the gospel of Christ for Paul is that the power of sin and death have been broken that they no longer reign in us if we have received the grace of God sin and death no longer have authority in your life

Christian their authority is defeated by God's grace God's grace has the authority in your life now it will be for the preachers coming up in the next few weeks to unpack how it is that we live now as those who are reigning in life and in whom grace will reign unto eternal life but I want you to see at least this morning that that's the end to which we're going there are only two places in the Bible where this reigning in life is on full display we've been to one of them already in Genesis in Genesis 1 and 2 before the fall but isn't it interesting that the Bible closes with a scene in which our reigning in life has at last come about in perfection that in the new heavens and the new earth the revelation there are two things highlighted in chapter 22 the last chapter of the

[29:26] Bible two things highlighted as the central activities of renewed resurrected human beings within God's new creation two things worshipping

and reigning in the picture of the new Jerusalem come down from heaven to be on the earth in Revelation 22 where you find the tree of life no coincidence in verse 1 you come then to verse 2 and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the new Jerusalem and his servants will worship him they will see his face and his name will be on their forehead and night will be no more and they will need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they this is you and me they will reign forever and ever brothers and sisters we were made to reign and in this dense text in which

Paul contrasts Adam Adam the man who disobeyed with Jesus Christ the one who was obedient to God's saving purpose and who has therefore rescued the human race I think Paul expresses more than just the fact that our sins are forgiven though that's there in all of its beauty but I think Paul means to point out that those who receive the free gift of God who receive the obedient death of Jesus Christ on their behalf in the gift of righteousness that it brings will and are even now reigning in life I think that Paul means to say that through the one man Jesus Christ we become genuine human beings at last that here is the way back to what was lost in the garden and all of it leads to eternal life when we will be placed in authority over God's renewed creation we are the ones who will reign in life in perfect dependence upon God forever that's our hope but it's not just in the future the new life we have by means of

Christ begins now in the midst of a world still ruled by death still in the spiral of sin and death we who reign in life are called to live as the new creations we are raised with Christ Paul says elsewhere living out our vocation as the image of God on the earth practicing if you will for what we will do for all time how do we do that that will be the focus of the coming chapters of Romans I hope you'll be with us to learn all about that but you can start even this week by asking just this basic question over what in life what in this creation whether small or large over what do you have some degree of influence or authority what organization what relationships what land what possessions whatever it is what might it mean for you as the image of

God to reign in life in that area to be the grace filled grace empowered image of God to the world these are the questions Paul puts to us in his dense theology in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen