

A Christmas Decision

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Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] Good morning all. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5. Romans chapter 5. If you are new or visiting, we welcome you. My name is BK. I have the pleasure of serving as one of the pastors here. Special welcome to those who are here visiting our friends and family for this Christmas season.

But just to bring you a little bit up to speed on where we're going is we have been in Romans now over the last several years and we are ending chapter 5 and we're ending it this morning.

And I don't know if you've enjoyed it but I would say that Romans chapter 5 has been one of my favorite chapters to ever preach from. Just the truth that is magnified through the words of Paul and today's text serves as an excellent Christmas text.

The first thing we need to understand that this morning is not about Christmas sentimentality. This morning is not about emotional nostalgia or seasonal tradition.

This morning is about the truth of Christmas. And it's truth that needs to confront us before it can comfort us.

[1 : 25] The truth of Christmas, and I'll repeat, is a truth that confronts us before it comforts us. As we all know this morning is part of the Advent series and Advent is nothing but honest.

You see Advent doesn't begin with a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. Advent actually begins with a problem that exists in the world that we do not know or can fix.

It is a darkness so real that there's no amount of Christmas cheer can outshine it. And it is a rain so powerful that there's no humanly way to vote it out.

Two weeks ago we face the honest truth. We live in a kingdom where death reigns. Romans 5.12 tells us that just as sin came into the world through one man, that is Adam, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Death came in Adam and takes no prisoners. Here's the fact. Christmas makes no sense at all unless you accept this truth.

[2 : 57] Without understanding that we live in a reign of death through sin, Christmas makes no sense at all.

Last week we talked about the world talks about gifts, but Paul tells us about the only free gift because God gives what we could never earn, and he gives it without string.

As Romans 5.15 says, But the free gift is not like the trespass, which is the sin. For if many died through Adam's sin, much more has the grace of God and the free gift, by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

So what's left? Well, that is what we are getting into this morning. Today is the Sunday where we stop talking about Christmas as a concept, and we deal with Christmas as a kingdom.

Why? Because Romans 5 doesn't end with inspiration. Romans 5 ends with a throne. Romans 5.21 is the triumphant crescendo.

[4 : 15] Paul's final summary, where he says there are two realms, there are two dominions, and there are two reigns. Sin reigned in death.

Grace might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And this tells us that Advent is not merely a season on the calendar.

Easter, Advent is a regime change. It is one kingdom being ousted, and the rightful kingdom being taken.

Now what I want you to demonstrate for you this morning is that Christmas isn't just offering you gifts, Christmas is offering you a new reign.

A new kingdom, a new rule, a new authority. And here's the question that we cannot dodge on this December week.

[5 : 27] Who is reigning over you? Who is reigning over you? Not who do you admire?

Not what do you believe in theory? Or not what you post at Christmas. As my good friend Andy King says, but who rules you when you're alone?

Who rules you when you're angry? Who rules you when you're tempted? And who rules you when you're afraid?

Because the Apostle Paul makes clear that everyone lives under a reign. And Advent confronts us with this. The fact is, you cannot celebrate peace on earth while living under a reign.

That produces death. You need a transfer. You need a new king. You need what Romans 5 calls grace reigning.

[6 : 37] So this morning, I have three simple action points to tell you where we're going. The first point is, we're going to admit the reign we were born under.

We're going to admit the reign we were born under. Number two, we're going to receive the reign we can never earn. We're going to receive the reign we can never earn.

And three, and we're going to submit to the Lord whose reign alone leads to life. And here's why this matters.

Christmas doesn't merely announce that a baby was born. Christmas announces that a king has come. So please turn with me in your text to Romans 5.

I'm going to read verses 19 to 21 together. And then we're going to deal with the reign. Verse 19, For as by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners.

[7 : 46] So by the one man's obedience, the many were made righteous. 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 our Lord.

So my first action point for you this morning is, you need to admit the reign that you were born under. You need to admit the reign you were born under.

Romans 5.21, As sin reigned in death. See, Paul begins where Advent always begins. It doesn't begin with joy.

It doesn't begin with hope. It doesn't begin with peace. It begins with honesty. As sin reigned in death.

[8 : 48] This phrase is not background information. It is the reason Christmas exists. Before Paul tells us what Christ brings, Paul tells us what already rules.

And what rules is not neutrality. What rules is not freedom. What rules is not innocent. What rules is sin.

And death came because of sin. Now notice what Paul doesn't say. He does not say sin appeared. Because we know that sin entered through Adam.

He does not say sin exists. That would be far too small. He does not say sin influences. That would be too weak a statement.

He says sin reigned. This is the language of kingship. It means death has dominion.

[9 : 53] Commentator Douglas Moe says Paul is deliberately portraying sin as a ruling power exercising dominion over humanity.

Not merely as individual acts or moral failures. This is not about behavior. This is about authority. And you need to understand that.

It's not about behavior. It's about authority. In other words, sin is not just something we do. Sin is something we were born into.

Or better yet, born under. Sin is a rule. Sin is a rule. Sin is a rule. And the evidence of that reign is unmistakable. It's because we both, we all know death.

Death lives in this world. Death is not incidental. Death is not accidental. Death, if you did not know, is not natural. Death is actually the public evidence that sin rules.

[11 : 03] John Murray presses this point with theological precision. He says, death is the sign that sin has exercised dominion over the human race.

See, that's why Advent cannot begin with the manger. It has to begin with the grave. This is where our culture, it pushes back, right? We're told that death is a natural part of life, right?

The circle of life. It's just the way things are. We're told that decay is normal.

And we're told that suffering is meaningless but unavoidable. But scripture says something far more sobering.

You see, death is not merely an ending. Death is the evidence. It's the announcements that something has gone catastrophically wrong.

[12 : 07] And here's the part we resist the most. Paul does not say that sin reigns over some people. He simply says sin reigns.

There's no qualification. Sin reigns over some people. And that reign includes moral people. It includes religious people. It includes generous people.

It includes church-going people. It includes good people. See, here's the thing. Sin reign is not entered by behavior.

As I stated, sin is herited by birth. So one commentator says, The universality of sin's dominion demonstrated by the universality of death.

It means if death touches everyone, then sin has ruled over everyone. There is no exceptions. That's why Advent is not sentimental.

[13 : 11] Advent is confrontational. It tells us the truth before it offers us hope. So you don't need a Savior because you've made bad choices.

You need a Savior because you were born into the wrong kingdom. The kingdom that we live in now, we are not born free.

We are born ruled. We are not self-governing. We are not neutral. We are not undecided. We are governed. And this explains something every honest person already knows.

And I know some of you here are fighting what I'm saying. Nobody rules over me. Listen, I get it.

We live in a place which worships neutrality or worships the ability to self-govern. But let me ask you a few questions.

[14 : 18] Why does sin, and I define sin, things that violate our conscience, that we know are wrong. Why does sin feel stronger than our resolve to do good?

Why does guilt linger after I've said sorry? And why does death haunt even the best lives that have ever lived?

The answer is simply, you cannot outgrow the rain. My friends, this is why Paul begins here. Because until you admit the rain, you will misunderstand Christmas.

If you think sin is just a mistake, Christmas is simply a lesson. If you think sin is weakness, Christmas simply becomes an encouragement to do better next time.

But, but, if you admit that sin reigns, then Christmas becomes what it was truly meant to be.

[15 : 34] And that is an invasion. Let's look to action point number two. Receive the rain that you could never earn.

See, here Paul's turning the corner. He does not soften the diagnosis. He does not minimize the danger. But he does introduce something utterly new. Grace also might reign through righteousness.

Paul is saying that into a world where sin ruled like a tyrant, another reign has entered history.

And that reign is not judgment. It is grace. Notice the word Paul chooses. He does not say grace responded. He does not say grace countered.

He does not say grace balanced sin. He says grace reigns. Because the reality is grace is not on equal terms with sin.

[16 : 41] It serves as if it serves as a foil of some sort to balance the scales. As sin reigned in death, grace reigns through righteousness.

So here we have two reigns, two authorities, and two kingdoms. Now I want you to see here how Paul presents grace.

Grace. Now, grace is not just God's attitude towards sinners. Grace is a power that exercises dominion.

You with me on that one? Grace is not just God's attitude towards us. Grace is power that exercises dominion. Paul wants us to understand that grace is not passive.

Grace is not fragile. Grace is not reactive. Grace rules. But Paul is careful and, dare I say, precise about how grace reigns.

[17 : 49] He says grace reigns through righteousness. That phrase matters enormously. Grace does not reign through leniency.

Grace does not reign through lowering standards. Grace does not reign by ignoring sin. Grace reigns through righteousness.

And that righteousness is not your righteousness. John Murray makes this crystal clear. He says grace reigns only because righteousness has been secured.

There is no reign of grace apart from the satisfaction of divine justice. What he's making reference to is the cross.

This is crucial. Grace reigns because Jesus Christ obeyed where Adam failed. Grace reigns because Jesus Christ lived under the law and fulfilled it perfectly.

[18 : 57] Grace reigns because righteousness has been accomplished. Righteousness has been credited. And righteousness has been applied. For those that are new, you might understand that righteousness, it means...

Another word is to be good, but it means so much more than that. But the Bible tells us because of our sin, we are not able to be present before God.

It means there's no harmony. And something has to cover us. And that's what this righteousness is. It is Jesus Christ giving us his covering.

His righteousness which he paid for on the cross. You and I cannot create this righteousness. Why?

Because we live under a reign of death. Everything we touch has the smell and decay of death. We need someone who is outside the reign of death to offer us this righteousness.

[20 : 07] If you were here last week and you heard the testimonies that were offered, Isaac Caudel shared this one thought that he wondered why Jesus had to live in this world.

And it's a great question. Why didn't he just snap his fingers and make it all right? Because the righteousness that allows us to have harmony with God required a real life.

A real life that lived in obedience. A real life that was tempted. A real life that was in the flesh.

A real life that was in the flesh. A real life that was in the flesh. And that is why the son of God had to be born on Christmas day. See the child in the manger did not come merely to die.

The child in the manger came to live. He came to live righteously. He came to live obediently. And he came to live faithfully in our place.

[21 : 14] And he was the only one to do it. Or able to do it. Because that's why when you wonder, why was he born by the Virgin Mary? No longer tainted by Adam's sin.

He came in under a different kingdom. Thomas Schreider notes that Paul's emphasis shows that grace reigns by establishing believers in a new standing before God.

And that standing is not earned gradually. It's not improved incrementally. It is received. Which is the reason why Paul uses the word grace at all.

Unmerited favor. And this is where we need to slow down and be honest. We all love that idea of grace, right? We all want to be forgiven.

We all want to be accepted. We all want to be shown mercy. Amen? Even in our worst.

[22 : 21] Even when we feel we could not handle it. We still want to be forgiven. We still want to be accepted.

We still want mercy. But Paul is not offering grace as a feeling. Paul is proclaiming grace as a reign.

And a reign demands reception. Not negotiation. The great Presbyterian pastor James Montgomery Boyce said it plainly.

Grace is not merely something God shows. It is something God does. It establishes a new rule over those who belong to Christ.

Amen? Give me a Baptist amen. Amen? Even you Presbyterians can say amen. Amen. This means that grace does not ask permission.

[23 : 22] Grace dethrones sin. Grace transfers authority. Grace establishes Christ's rule where sin wants governed. That is why Paul's language is so careful.

Grace reigns through righteousness, not around it. Which means grace does not produce lawlessness. And I'm going to get into a very specific point.

Grace, when you're in that kingdom, produces obedience from a new position. John Stott simply says, grace does not free us from righteousness.

It frees us for righteousness. You know what I'm talking about? Because the biggest question that always gets asked to a pastor is, grace, there's accusations that if we are under grace, I can just, that's why Paul talks about, talks about sin abounded.

Do you guys remember that verse? Talking about, if I go and sin, if I, the more I sin, the more I magnify grace. Look at how many times I've been forgiven, right? I remember I was horrified.

- [24 : 30] There was a young girl in our youth group. Came from a non-Christian home. Came to know Christ through our youth group. And while she's at camp, someone's telling her that now that you're a Christian, you can actually live any way you want.

Because you always have grace. Here's the point. Why would someone who's been under the reign of death, who is now in the reign of life, want to go back?

Why would their inclinations be towards the old? In case you don't know, we're going to be getting into some of those deeper questions as we move forward in Romans.

But the point is, when you're in the kingdom of grace, you want to live. As a child of grace, amen? This is the kingdom. And this is where Advent presses us personally.

Christmas is not merely about receiving comfort. Christmas is about receiving a king. You do not receive grace the way you receive a holiday sentiment.

- [25 : 44] You receive grace by surrendering authority. By acknowledging that Christ's righteousness, not your own, governs your standing.

By trusting that what he accomplished is sufficient. And I'm going to be honest with you, it's humbling. It's a free gift. But we always want to pay back, right?

Oh, they gave me a gift over Christmas. I got to make sure I get them next year, right? You know, got to pay that back. See, the biggest mistake we make, and it's the reason I repeat this over and over and over, it's because I see it over and over, is that when God starts pressing on our hearts to humble ourselves before him, we interpret that as, I need to try harder.

I need to be better. I need to be gooder. See, it's not about those things.

It's not about proving sincerity. It's about receiving a reign that you could never earn. And Paul will not allow us to treat grace as a safety net while we remain in control.

- [27 : 14] Grace reigns. Where grace reigns is where Christ rules. See, grace is not static.

Grace is not aimless. Grace is not temporary. Grace tells us where it goes. This is the third action point.

And this is submit to the Lord whose reign leads to life. Notice that Paul ends Romans 5 with direction. It's not emotion.

It's not an abstraction. It's not possibility. It's direction. Grace reigns leading to eternal life. That word leading matters.

It means movement. It means trajectory. It means inevitability. Paul is saying something we try very hard to avoid. Every reign takes you somewhere.

- [28 : 16] No reign is stationary. No reign is neutral. No reign is paused. The ultimate reality that you have to admit this morning, my friends, is under the truth of scripture, are you led by death or are you led by life?

There is no other option. you see under the reign of sin your destination is clear death reigns let's be honest death isn't a surprise we know death isn't an accident death is not unfair death is the rightful destination of a reign that has authority over humanity but paul says something astonishing grace also reigns and it leads somewhere else and notice how precise paul is he does not say grace leads to improvement he does not say grace leads to self-fulfillment it does not lead to a better version of you he simply says grace leads to eternal life but it's more than that what it means is a guaranteed outcome of belonging to the realm where grace reigns that means eternal life is not something you earn at the end eternal life is something you move toward because you live under the reign of grace so when paul says eternal life he does not mean merely duration he means quality of life restored under the rule of god that's how we're to think of it life in fellowship with god freed from the dominion of sin and death and secured forever writes john murray and that life begins now and it's consummated forever but paul is even more specific grace leads to eternal life through jesus christ our lord that that final phrase is decisive paul could have ended through christ he could have said through jesus but he adds this one particular word to actually our lord because reigns require a ruler grace reigns because jesus christ reigns amen note it says grace's reign is inseparable from christ's authority which means grace is not of independent from allegiance you do not receive eternal life without receiving a lord you do not enter grace reign while retaining ultimate authority over yourself to be saved means that jesus is your lord and you live under his authority and this is where advent sharpens this point the child in the manger is not merely a gift he's a king and christmas is not the arrival of comfort it's the arrival of authority the announcement a savior who is christ the lord boyce says again there is no salvation that does not involve a transfer of rule from sin to christ that's what paul is describing here a transfer of kingdom a change of allegiance and a new authority that governs your life so here after going through this entire chapter of romans 5 the question that is begged to ask is and if i may ask it of you

not may i'm going to ask it anyway who is lord over you who is lord over you like i said before not who you admire not who you respect not who you reference at christmas but who commands your obedience now for some of you you're going to say you know what i don't have any other false gods so i i'm just doing my own thing you know what you're saying right there in that moment you're god you're indeed the false god but who commands your obedience who shapes your decisions who governs your direction because the reign you submit to is the reign that leads you see under sin's reign life narrows life hardens and ends in death under grace reigns life opens life heals and moves toward eternal life and paul has made this contrast clear over and over and over and now he does something he leaves us with the decision you see romans 5 ends exactly where advent ends with the throne paul has shown us sin reigns in death grace reigns through righteousness and eternal life comes through jesus christ our lord there are not many paths there are not many reigns there are not many outcomes there is only one king and christmas tells us that the manger is not the end of the story it's the beginning of his reign the child was born to live righteously to die sacrificially to rise victorious and to reign eternally so my encouragement to you as we prepare to celebrate christmas this last stretch i want you to hear what romans 5 states clearly you can only live under one reign the fact is you already do the only question left is whether you will receive the free reign of grace and to submit to jesus christ as lord or you pursue death so on christmas eve i'm not going to explain this i'm going to announce this wonderful joyous news unto you is born this day in the city of david a savior who is christ the lord let us pray dear holy heavenly father we give you thanks for your grace this free gift you offer us father i ask that you would give us an understanding that when we choose to live our own way for ourself we are choosing the way of death there is no argument to be made we live in a world of death but not for those who have come under the lordship of jesus christ not for those who place their trust in him

not for those who come to the end of themselves and said i can't do it only you can jesus can i have your righteousness i need to be under your lordship father i i ask especially for those who born into christian families that christmas is no big deal it comes around every year they're used to the same type of christmas feelings i'm going to improve i'm going to do better i'm going to kind of negotiate with god that if i do this he'll do this for me lord i pray that you would strip them of that i pray you would truly reveal yourself to them that you would take out their stony hearts their desire to live for self pray that you open their eyes to know that self leads to death because let's be honest we cannot overturn death but jesus christ did on that easter sunday when he rose from the grave victorious not only did he live in a way that we get his life but he tells us that death has no sting so father we love you we thank you for this incredible chapter lord i pray our blessings as we meet with loved ones and i pray we have encouraging conversations and opportunities to share with people how that understanding of grace has shaped our own life we're not here to judge we don't look down on anybody the reality is we were all sinners in need of a savior so father i thank you for this season and i thank you that your your love for us was so great that you sent your only son to die for us we ask these things in most holy and precious name amen