

The Astonishing Free Gift of Salvation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 December 2025

Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our third Advent Sunday.! To be honest, I was going to reprimand Dave Nannery for showing up here without Christmas colors on.

But I would have just shown the hypocrite that I am. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 5. Romans 5. Now, we've been here for a while, and when we look at this text, we often wonder, what kind of Christmas text is this?

I would argue that it is probably one of the deepest and most theologically, I'm forgetting the next word after theologically, not in-depthful, but insightful into what Christmas is about.

And that's why we have stayed here in this text. So we're going to stay here leading up into Christmas Eve. Because the truths that hit us are often the truths that the world wants to give us through the message of modern-day advertising and whatnot.

So please turn with me at Romans 5. I'm going to read today's text beginning in verse 14. Verse 14.

[1 : 52] Verse 15.

Amen. Let's be honest. Let's be honest. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Let's be honest. We know it's the Christmas season. Which means that everywhere we look, there's this one word, plastered, everywhere from commercials to Amazon boxes.

Gifts. gifts. We are inundated with gift bags, gift cards, gift wrapping, gift exchanges.

Buy one, get one gift, right? Even gifts you didn't ask for from people you barely know. Christmas has become a world of gifts. But here's the thing about the worldly gifts.

[3 : 21] Most of them really aren't free. You pay for them or someone else pays for them. And if we're being honest, sometimes we give a gift because we feel obligated. We feel guilty. We feel pressured. Our gifts come with strings, comes with expectations, come with price tags.

But if you've been paying attention to my reading of Romans 5, Paul introduces us to something that the world has never seen or ever experienced. And if you were hearing me, I tried to give a little bit of rise to two words that appeared throughout the text. In verse 15, it talks about the free gift.

At the end of verse 15, we read about free gift. In verse 16, Paul talks about a free gift. In the end of verse 16, we have free gift again. And in verse 17, free gift. There is five mentions of this word free gift.

Why? Because everything God gives us in Jesus Christ is truly free. There's no strings. There's no conditions.

There's no paybacks. There's no performance needed. There is no prove yourself first. There is no 25-year payment plan. Church, this world free gift. This world free gift is the wonder of the gospel.

[5 : 04] God gives us what we could never earn and he gives us it to us freely.

God gives us the wonder of the gospel. Last week, we looked at why we need the baby in the manger. How sin came into the world through Adam. Adam's sin, Adam's guilt, Adam's legacy is a part of every man and woman and child that are born into this world of death. Death entered through sin.

Let's be honest. We face the weight of Adam's sin every single day. We face the reality that we also cannot save ourselves. But here this morning, Paul turns this corner.

Remember, if last week was about the catastrophe that we deserve, today is about the gift we do not deserve.

Today we behold something that should make every believer stop, breathe, and stand in awe, which is the astonishing free gift of God in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 35] You see, today's text, Romans 5, 15-17, is not just telling us that God gives. It is telling us how astonishing his giving truly is.

This is why the angels sang. This is why the shepherds hurried. This is why the magi traveled. This is why Mary treasured every moment in her heart.

Because the morning when Christ was born, the greatest free gift in the world was now entering our story.

This morning, I want to share with you three amazing truths about the wonderful free gift that goes beyond any of our understanding and just how full of grace God truly is.

Before I go any further, let me pray, dear Lord, Heavenly Father, these truths that we're talking about, I pray that they hit us hard like a 60-pound sledgehammer to the head or better yet, to the heart.

[7 : 51] Father, I pray that this truth deals this or drills this deep hole in our heart where these truths can rest, that we can ponder upon them, that we can meditate upon them, that we can truly worship you with a full understanding of the beauty, the glory of this free gift.

And Father, not that it is just for us, but this gift glorifies you, the giver. It doesn't tell us how special we are.

This gift tells us how great you are. So, Father, this morning, as always, I pray for a clarity of voice, clarity of thought, and I pray that you'd give those who hear this sermon a clear understanding of this wonderful free gift that you so lovingly chosen to give to us.

So we ask these things in your most holy, precious, and everlasting name. Amen. So I want you to know the first truth about this free gift. This free gift surpasses Adam's trespass.

This free gift surpasses the trespass. Notice it says, but the free gift is not like the trespass. Now, it was kind of interesting doing the study.

[9 : 16] I came upon the, not came upon, I obviously have his commentary by John Stott. He was a influential British Anglican pastor, theologian, and author.

And in his commentary, he makes this interesting comment about verse 14. He kind of asked this question, and let me just read you verse 14 again. It says, Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who were sinning, but was not like the transgression of Adam.

And he says something really interesting. Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. That Adam was a type of Jesus.

Now, Stott wonders if the Apostle Paul, after writing this statement, felt a little bit embarrassed. That maybe he almost regretted writing that statement.

Because what follows is a demonstration about how much more Christ is greater than Adam.

[10 : 25] He kind of starts with this type, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, let me just tell you right now. He's far greater than a type. The passages we are looking at this morning, offer us so much detail and theological truth as to why Jesus is so much more than Adam.

He clearly says the free gift is not like the trespass. It's like Paul is clearing up any type of misconception that might be had from verse 14.

Simply saying there is simply nothing in Adam that compares to what God gives to us in Christ. The truth is we are so prone to think that the fall has no equal.

Death has no rival. Sin has no competitor. Except one. Which we read is the free gift of God.

Let me give you two observations from this verse. One, we know that Adam's trespass spreads death. But Christ's gift spreads grace beyond measure.

[11 : 34] Now, before I go any further, I want you to understand this word grace. Sometimes we quickly just give this understanding that grace means unmerited favor. But let me just give you an expanded definition of this word.

Grace is that quality in God, that attribute in God, which leads God to be gracious towards and to bless the utterly undeserving.

Grace is favor shown to people who do not deserve any favor at all, who indeed deserve the exact opposite. Grace is favor of God.

Grace is favor of God. So when Paul says, for if many died through one man's trespass, this is the bad news we faced last week. We know that Adam's rebellion triggered a chain reaction of devastation.

Death spread. Sin multiplied. Creation groaned. And humanity collapsed. And I want you to think about this.

[12 : 44] It only happened through one sin. It wasn't all of Adam's sin. It was just that one sin that brought death into this world. But here, I want you to notice the contrast.

Much more has the grace of God and the free gift abounded for many. That word, the phrase much more is Paul's way of saying what Christ gives doesn't just repair what Adam broke.

It actually surpasses it beyond imagination. Let's be honest. Adam's trespass was great. But Christ's free gift is greater.

Adam's fall is devastating. But Jesus Christ's free gift is overflowing. Adam's sin is powerful.

But the grace that we have in Jesus Christ's free gift is all powerful. Now, I want you to pay attention to that word abounded.

[13:55] It overflowed. Paul could have said the free gift matched the trespass. Paul could have said the free gift reversed the trespass.

Or Paul could have said the free gift corrected the trespass. But he doesn't. What he says is the free gift abounded. The Greek word here, it means it overflowed.

It spilled over the edges. It ran beyond the boundaries. The idea here is that Adam dug a grave. But Adam, or Jesus, filled it with a river.

Adam opened a wound. But Christ poured in healing life. Adam's sin left scars. But Jesus Christ's gift leads glory.

And this is why the free gift matters. It's not measured. It's not proportioned. It's not conditional. It's not dependent on performance.

[14:57] It tells us that the free gift is abundant. The free gift is overflowing. The free gift is extravagant. So here's the Christmas implication.

God is a better giver than we are at sinning. God is a better giver than we are in sinning.

The fall shows us how deeply sin runs. But the incarnation, the birth of Christ, shows us how deeply grace runs. Christmas is God shouting across the universe, My generosity is greater than your guilt.

You see, this is the wonder of this passage. We are not saved by our effort. We are not redeemed by our repentance. Since we are not restored by our resolve. We are rescued by a free gift.

This isn't a gift that we grow into. This isn't a gift we qualify because we've been to church ten Sundays in a row. But this is not a gift God gives reluctantly.

[16:16] This free gift is abundant. It is overflowing. It is surpassing.

The truth is God gives freely, joyfully, and abundantly. You see, this is the heart of the Advent astonishment.

God did not send Christ reluctantly. God sent him freely. Christ did not obey begrudgingly. He obeyed joyfully.

And here's the truth that we need to nail into our hearts. Is that salvation is not offered sparsely. It is offered abundantly.

The reason we worship this child in the manger is not simply because he came. But he came as the free gift who surpasses the trespass.

[17:18] So if the free gift God shows that Christ surpasses Adam's trespass. The next gift shows something even more astonishing.

Not only does the free gift overflow. This free gift overturns the verdict. So the second truth about God's free gift. Is the free gift overturns the verdict from verse 16.

See, if the first gift is astonishing because it surpasses the trespass. The second gift is astonishing because it overturns the verdict that happened because of Adam's sin.

Notice verse 16. 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. Two words I want you to understand here.

[18:23] Condemnation and justification. What these are, these are legal verdicts from the throne of the universe. Now, I want us to understand what Paul is saying here.

Notice the one term. One trespass leads to condemnation for all. I think we get that, right? We kind of covered that last week in depth. That Paul reminds us that Adam's sin is not simply wounded humanity.

It condemned humanity. That was one trespass. We saw immediate judgment. And the world received universal condemnation.

And the verdict from heaven was guilty. All because of one sin. Adam sinned once and condemnation spread like wildfire across the world.

We know this. We know guilt. We know shame. We know failure. We know condemnation feels like our default setting, right?

[19 : 37] We do feel the weight of Adam's one sin. But in this passage, Paul turns everything upside down.

Notice it says, Many trespasses leads to justification through the free gift. It says, But the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

Now, this is a little bit of a tough one to grasp at first reading. And I want to explain this a little bit for you. What Paul is doing, he's building a contrast between the work of Adam and the work of Jesus. Adam's work went from perfection to destruction in one sin. Because that's all it took to offend a holy, just, and perfect God.

You with me on that? Just one sin. Now, the work that Jesus did, the work that Jesus did, came after sin had multiplied to its fullest extent.

[20 : 39] By the time Jesus shows up, we've had centuries of rebellion. There's been generations of law breaking. There's been sins upon sins upon sins.

Israel's failed under the law. We've got Gentile idolatry. And then there's personable. Sorry. There's personal, repeated, conscious sins. And then after all of that, God gives the free gift of justification.

Now, remember what that word justification means here. It's a legal declaration. God legally declares the sinner righteous in his sight on the basis of Christ's obedience.

What he's saying is, if one man was enough to condemn the world, how powerful must Christ's obedience be to justify sinners after countless centuries of sin?

[21 : 46] Amen? Do you get that? One little sin by Adam, but God was able to overpower mountains and centuries of sin.

Adam's single trespass brought condemnation to all, but Christ's single act of righteousness brings justification after an entire world's worth of sin.

Do you see the scale? Well, one trespass leads to condemnation. Many trespasses leads to justification. So here's Paul's point.

After many trespasses, God did not lower the standard. He didn't say, man, I gave him the law. I gave him the prophets.

I gave him kings. I gave him land. But they're just not getting it. How about I lower my standards, right? Maybe if they show up at the synagogue three times a year, everything will be okay.

[22 : 50] Maybe if they can just try to be really good people. Maybe if I just turn my eyes a little bit like a loving grandfather and not recognize my grandson's sin.

No, that's not what he does. Because if he did, he would compromise his justice. Instead, God justifies the sinner by crediting Christ's righteousness to all those who have sinned.

And accept this free gift. The truth is this gift cannot be earned. It cannot be purchased.

It cannot be inherited. You see, if Adam's one sin was enough to condemn us all, then Christ's obedience is more than enough to justify us all.

That is why this free gift is so astonishing. Christ does not justify people who have sinned a little. Jesus Christ justifies people who sinned a lot.

[23 : 56] Paul, who's writing this article, was a murderer. He advocated for the death of Christians before God intersected with his life. You see, God justifies people who have many trespasses.

In fact, who have countless trespasses. In fact, have nothing but lifelong trespasses. And here's the thing. He does it freely. Another way to put it is many sins do not exhaust God's grace.

What does this mean for you? Let me tell you. Your worst record of sin is no match for the obedience of Jesus Christ.

You hear that? Your worst record of sin is no match for the obedience of Jesus Christ. You see, the wonder of this gift is that Christ overturns a verdict no human could reverse.

And this is why he does it. Christ took the seed of the condemned so that you may take the place of the justified.

[25 : 12] And this is the miracle of Christmas. The judge stepped into the world not to announce a sentence, but to bear the sentence. And in bearing it, he overturns it with a gift that is completely and gloriously free.

What is it? Free. Here's the Christmas implication. The free gift does not ease your guilt.

It's meant to erase your guilt. See, many Christians live as if Jesus came to make their guilt more manageable. Anybody know what I'm talking about? If I only can manage my shame. If I can only throw in a little bit of good works, I won't feel so bad. But the gospel is better than that. You see, the free gift of justification removes the guilt. It cancels the record. It overturns the sentence.

[26 : 26] It silences the accuser. It closes the file. It ends the case. It simply declares you righteous.

This never is God ignoring your sin. This is God justifying you through the righteousness of his son. This is not a second chance.

This is a new verdict. This is not a new... This is not a probation. What God offers is a pardon. Christmas is not leniency.

This is legal righteousness which is freely given. And this tells us why Christmas is so astonishing. The child in the manger came to overturn the verdict against you. So if the free gift surpasses the trespass, if the free gift overturns the verdict, then Paul shows us one final breathtaking truth.

[27 : 29] The free gift not only rescues us, this free gift enthrones us. The third truth about God's free gift is the free gift establishes a new kingdom.

And I talked about this last week, but I'm going to take a little bit of a different angle on this. Notice how it says, Much more will those who receive the gift of righteousness reign in life.

Church, if the first gift shows us God's generosity, the second characteristic of the gift shows us God's mercy, then this third gift shows us God's majesty.

Verse 17, For if, because of one man's trespass, death reign through one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace, there it is again, abundance, the overflowing, the astonishing amount of grace, and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Let me explain it to you slowly. We know that in Adam's kingdom, death reigned. That's why Paul says death reigned.

[28 : 43] He's using royal language intentionally. Death just wasn't present. He didn't live in a world where there was sin. But death was the one that sat on the throne.

Before Jesus Christ came, death sat on this throne of humanity. This is why death ruled over every family.

Death ruled over every culture. Death ruled over every generation. Death ruled the grave of every man and every woman. And here's the thing about death.

Death didn't ask permission. Death doesn't negotiate. Death doesn't surrender territory. So where Adam ruled, death ruled. Where Adam fell, death rose.

Death is the dark kingdom we were born into. A kingdom where every subject eventually dies. But then Paul speaks two of the most astonishing words in Romans 5.

[29 : 51] Much more. Because into Adam's kingdom a new king has come. You see, in Christ's kingdom grace reigns and we reign with him.

And Paul says, much more will those who receive the free gift of righteousness reign in life. Not only does Christ dethrone death.

Not only does Christ conquer sin. Not only does Christ justify the ungodly. He actually invites us into his reign. His kingdom.

Three things stand out. Notice it says, those who receive. The kingdom is not earned. It is received. The kingdom is not bought. It is given for free. You don't climb in it. You don't earn it. You are brought into it through a free gift.

[30 : 50] Number two. Calls it the free gift of righteousness. Adam gives guilt. Christ gives righteousness. Adam makes sinners.

Christ makes sons and daughters. Adam handed you a grave. Christ now offers you a throne and a crown.

Notice number three. It says, reign in life. As one author puts it, he says, this is not poetic. This is positional.

It means sin is no longer your master. It means that shame is no longer your identity. It also means that death is not your destiny.

Why? Why? Because you belong to a new king. A new kingdom. A new humanity. You do not reign because you are strong. You reign because God reigns.

[31 : 50] And you are now unified in him because of the free gift of Jesus Christ. Christ. This is what's so astonishing about Romans 5.

It teaches us that Jesus Christ doesn't save us. But he elevates us. He takes us from the courtroom to the throne room.

Where we were once condemned, there's now a coronation. Where once we were slaves, we are now co-heirs with Christ.

And how does Christmas fit into that? Well, the manger is the birthplace of the kingdom.

When the world looks at the manger, they often see a baby, straw, and a gentle zine. But heaven saw a king, a throne, and a kingdom breaking into Adam's world.

[32 : 58] We know the chaos that surrounded the birth of Christ. Herod sensed it and he trembled. The angels knew it and they sang. The demons recognized him and cried out in terror.

Simeon held him and blessed God. And Hannah saw him and proclaimed redemption. Because Christmas was not the birth of a tradition.

Christmas was the invasion of a kingdom. And the kingdom did not come here to give you advice. It came to make you reign in life through Jesus Christ.

So the idea that a free gift is not just a pardon. It is power. It is a promise. And it is a position. And as one author says, this is the astonishing wonder of Advent.

It says, the king came not only to rule over you, but to raise you to rule with him. There is only one question that I have for you this morning.

[34 : 08] Have you received the free gift? This morning we've stood, we've heard in astonishment at how amazing the free gifts God gives us in Christ.

One, it's a gift that surpasses the trespass. What Adam broke, Christ overflows with grace. Two, a gift that overturns the verdict. Many trespasses turned into one verdict of righteous.

And it's a gift that establishes a new kingdom. Death used to reign over you. Now through Christ you reign in life.

Three qualities, three truths, three wonders, three declarations of a God who gives us more freely than we sin. But here's the thing.

These gifts don't matter if you don't receive them. That's why Paul says in verse 17, Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness will reign in life.

[35 : 16] Not earn, not deserve, not negotiate, not perform. Receive. See the greatest tragedy of Christmas is not how many gifts go unopened under the tree.

It's how many people sit in church year after year without ever receiving the free gift of God. Some of you may think I'm too sinful.

I'm too messed up. I have failed far too many times. You might say I'm not ready.

I'm not shiny enough. And some will believe that God doesn't want me. But if I'm to tell you, this is exactly the point of the free gift.

The free gift is not for the qualified. The free gift is for the needy. The free gift is for the guilty.

[36 : 27] The free gift is for the helpless. The free gift is for you. This is why Christ came.

This is why he was born. This is why angels filled the sky. This is why shepherds ran to Bethlehem. Because the king came not to demand but to give us something.

Not to burden us but to bless us. Not to condemn us but to justify us. Not to leave us in Adam but to raise us in Christ.

And he does it freely. All he asks is, will you receive the free gift? Will you receive what I freely offer you?

That is the question God asks. Because the moment you do, you move from Adam's world into Christ's kingdom. The moment you do, you move from condemnation to justification.

[37 : 32] The moment you do, you move from where death reigns, where now life reigns. And you move from despair to wonder. And the first thing you're going to do is thank God for this incredible gift of free righteousness.

For those of you who are going to be baptized, this is the time you can depart, get changed, and get ready. Let me pray for you.

Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, we thank you for this glorious free grace that you give us. We thank you that your great love surpasses all my great sin.

All our great sin. That your great love surpasses all our shame, all our guilt, all our wrongdoing.

All those times when we live for self rather than live for God. Father, forgive us.

[38 : 51] Father, may the confession of our mouth be this day. Thank you, Jesus, for your free gift which I freely accept. Let me quit striving.

Let me quit hiding. Let me quit pretending my own little religiosity, playing church, playing Christian, but not really being dependent on you.

Not really surrendering all to you. Father, there's always going to be a lie that Satan's going to whisper in our ears that we do not deserve it.

And it's true. When Satan whispers those lies in our ear, we say, yep, that's true. I'm horrible. My guilt is real.

My sin is effectual. It has hurt people. I have caused others misery. I have caused myself misery. Even how I've responded to other people's sin to me, I have responded in such a way that creates chaos.

[40 : 02] We can say that's all true. But for those who accept the free grace that Jesus Christ offers, we can now say it doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Father, because I'm now a child of the King. I live in His kingdom.

And He reigns over me. I'm not afraid of death. Death has no sting anymore. I know that I live eternally with the King and as a child of the King.

So, Father, I pray that You would use this Christmas time to reinforce these truths into sometimes our rock-hard head or our insensitive heart or sometimes we've been fooled, we've been tricked, we've been lied to by the evil one to think we're good enough or we're not like other people.

But this is what makes the grace of God so amazing. It appeals to every single one of us.

[41 : 24] Father, I give You thanks for the testimonies we are going to hear this morning. As those who will testify to You about what it means to follow You as they publicly proclaim through the act of baptism that they now reside in the kingdom of God.

And by this baptism, they're being ushered into the church to be a part of God's manifestation, how God shows His kingdom through the world.

God uses the church. It's where the truth is proclaimed. It's where we serve one another and honor one another.

So we ask You these things, the blessing upon those that are here this morning, upon hearing these testimonies and the words of these, of Paul in Romans 5.

I give You thanks. In Your name we pray. Amen.