

There is a principle that tends to be true at all times, in all places, among all peoples, in all cultures that it is easier to break than to build. It is faster to tear down than to put up. It takes less effort to mess up than to clean up. Demolition goes faster, is cheaper, takes less work than construction. This is true when it comes to groups. Big groups make big messes with little effort in little time. You've seen that on college campuses over the last few weeks. We see it every year when you put middle school boys in a camp dorm room for five days. But it's also true of individuals. Think of how many massive, expensive, tragic disasters have come as a result of one person's mistake. One ship's captain steers a tanker off course and runs aground, causing a massive oil spill that takes years and millions of dollars to clean up. One inspector overlooks a small piece of a big system and it causes a major malfunction that

takes time and money to correct. One operator fails to push the right button at the right time and the whole operation blows up. You see it all the time. It's easier to break than to build.

But imagine one person committing one act so profoundly, cosmically destructive that all of humanity through all history with all their collective ingenuity and energy and sincerity, could not undo the damage. In Romans 5 the Apostle Paul says that's exactly what happened to Adam. Or rather, what Adam caused to happen. One single act had devastating, humanly irreversible consequences for the whole world. Like as bad as you could imagine the situation to be, it's worse. For everyone. For all time. That's a lot to lay at one guy's feet, and yet it's the story of the Bible. Adam plunged humanity into ruin.

Now last week, Caleb showed us in Romans 5:1-11 how Paul offered this hope – this firm confidence, this settled assurance – that those who are justified (declared right in God’s sight) by faith in Christ can have peace with God, can have access to God, can rejoice in suffering, can experience His love personally and intimately, can be reconciled to Him, and will ultimately be delivered from His just wrath on the final day. So here’s the question: how can believers have this hope and confidence in the face of this universal ruin caused by Adam? What exactly did Adam do, what did it mean, and what can undo it to give us this promised hope?

Those are the questions that Paul sets out to answer in the second **half of Romans 5**, in vv.12-21. So I want to

invite you this morning to take a Bible and turn with me to Romans 5, and I'll ask you to follow along as I read, beginning in v.12. And as we read, and as we take some time to unpack this passage, my goal and my prayer is, first, that you would see and understand and acknowledge the pervasive effects of Adam's sin on the world, and second, that you would trust and rest in Christ's provision as the abundantly generous, overwhelming remedy for that and for us [READ ROMANS 5:12-21].

Paul begins by introducing the problem, the origin of every bad thing he's talked about so far in Romans, the reason the wrath of God is poured out on the world, the reason we need to be reconciled to Him. The cause of it all is one man, the first man, Adam, **and the ruin** he brought on humanity. But before we really dig into the text itself, I want

to draw your attention to an assumption Paul makes that can be easy to overlook, but it matters. It's important.

Through this whole passage, Paul treats Adam, speaks of Adam, as a real, historical, actual person. Not a myth, not a legend, not a story, not a symbol, not a fictional character that just serves as an avatar for mankind. A real person who actually lived, who actually did the things the Bible attributes to him. And if Paul believes that and speaks that way of Adam, we should as well. We should regard Adam as a historical figure. I just want to establish that up front, that we're not just talking about ideas; we're considering actual people who lived and breathed and acted.

Now Paul starts this passage like he's going to make a comparison – just as this thing happened through this

person, so this other thing happened by this other person – but he gets sidetracked. He introduces the first thing and the first person (Adam), but then he just kind of stays there in order to magnify the seriousness of the issue. He says that through this one man, sin came into the world, into humanity. Before Adam, there was no sin. The root of all human disobedience can be traced to Adam in the garden explicitly disobeying God's direct, clear command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He had been created and charged to rule and care for creation under God's authority, but he rebelled against God's rule. And when he did, when he disobeyed God, this force called sin – so think of sin not just as something you DO, but a personified principle – this power of sin is unleashed on the world.

And along with sin, through sin, comes death. Now, because death is universal and unavoidable and so familiar to us, we are tempted to think of it as a natural part of the living process. You live, then you die. But Paul makes it clear here that death is not natural. It was not part of the original design. Death is the consequence of sin, the wages of sin, the penalty for sin. When Adam sinned, he experienced immediate spiritual death – the breaking of intimate relationship with God, evidenced by Adam hiding from God in the garden – AND eventual physical death. But Paul's emphasis here is on the spiritual consequence, Adam's relational separation from God.

Third, Paul says that this consequence of death spread to all men. Adam's sin and the death it brought affected and

infected everyone. Everyone. These two forces – sin and death – enter and capture and dominate the world. All humanity is impacted by this one man’s sin, so that every single person can be said to be “in Adam,” identified with him, in solidarity with him. So because Adam sinned, Adam died, and we all die as well.

So why did Adam die? Because Adam sinned. And why do we all die? Because we all sin. And that makes sense. And it’s true, in part. But what Paul is talking about here is more than just the consequences of your individual choices to sin, your voluntary sinful acts. There is a corporate element, a collective explanation to this whole experience. Each person dies spiritually – is separated from God – because each person sins, but ALSO, according to v.18, ONE PERSON’S trespass led to



condemnation for all. There is a sense – I want you to hear me when I say this, I really want you to get this – in which, while we did not technically, willfully, physically sin in the garden – we didn't reach out and take the fruit and put it in our mouths – we are nevertheless included in Adam's sin. He acted as our representative. He acted for us, as us, in solidarity with us. So while we may not be guilty of his sin, we are bound up with it and impacted by it and condemned through it. In a spiritual sense, we sinned with and in Adam. And I know that may be confusing and it may not seem fair. We argue all the time that we shouldn't be accountable for crimes our ancestors committed. Our gut says that's not right. And yet Scripture and even our own human experience show man's repeated, consistent inclination away from God and toward evil. How else do we explain that? We don't start life neutral like Adam did.

We aren't born innocent. We are born corrupted, under the reign of sin and death. And we certainly confirm that in time and experience with our own sinful acts, but that is a result of the fact that Adam, in the beginning, acted as a representative for all humanity.

Now you could argue that Adam got what he deserved because he directly disobeyed a clear, explicit command of God, but not everyone has. But Paul says that for all those who lived between Adam (who received a direct command of God) and Moses (who received the law, a whole collection of direct commands of God) – so all those people who didn't have those kinds of direct, explicit commands to disobey – sin still existed in the world (you could still sin even if you didn't sin exactly like Adam did) and the power of death still reigned as a consequence of

that sin. So even though there may not be an explicit charge of sin without a specific law you've broken, because of Adam's single sinful act, all of mankind still feels the impact and experience of sin and still suffers the consequence of death. It's why we take the gospel to the unreached places in the world, to people who have never heard of Jesus or the gospel, places they've never read the commands of God. It's because they are sinners under the sentence of death because of Adam. Even without the clear commands of the law, the sin and death that Adam introduced to the world are so powerful that they exercise dominion over all people. That is the magnitude of the problem, the severity of Adam's ruin.

And then, having established all that – and that's a lot! –

Paul is now going to get to his main point, comparing what

Adam did with what someone else did, someone who was to come, a second representative acting on behalf of humanity, One who invites us to identify with Him, One for whom Adam is a type, or foreshadowing. That One is Jesus. And he **offers a remedy**.

So Paul unpacks this relationship between Adam and Christ, and how a single act of each one defines and marks out the destiny of those who belong to each of them. Paul makes two contrasts between these two men, Adam and Christ. The first, in v.15, is that the free gift is not like the trespass. Not whose act is the trespass? Adam's act. And what did Adam's trespass bring about? Death to more than just the one who committed the act. Effectively, it brought death to everyone. Both spiritual and physical death. Real, certain death. Abounding, universal,

inescapable death. Whose act is the free gift? Christ's act, specifically here His sacrificial death. It's a gift of grace.

And what did Christ's gracious act bring about? An abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness to many, to those who respond to and receive that gift. A grace and righteousness that's even more certain and even more real than the death brought by Adam. A grace and a righteousness that is superabounding, overwhelming, that nullifies and replaces death. Paul wants us to see that Christ's act doesn't just answer Adam's. It doesn't just counter it. Christ's work is greater in every way. It is infinitely more powerful than Adam's sin. The grace of Christ overflows to an extent that it triumphs over what Adam introduced to the world. Sin and death have been decisively, definitively defeated by Christ for those who receive His grace. The problem that was bigger than we

could imagine is conquered by a solution greater than we could fathom. That's the first contrast.

The second contrast is in v.16, the free gift is not like the result of the one man's sin. The first contrast was about degree (how much); this one is about consequence (so what). What does Paul say was the judgment for one trespass, Adam's sin? Condemnation. And what is the gift given by Christ for many trespasses? Justification. So first, the results are complete opposites. Condemnation vs. justification. Being declared guilty vs. being declared righteous. Under judgment vs. under grace. And second, the number of sins considered shows the superabundant grace of God. A single sin by Adam served to bring condemnation on the world. But all the collected sins of history are perfectly absorbed by God's free gift. What

reigned as a result of one man's trespass? Death. Who will reign through Jesus? Those who receive abundant grace and the free gift of righteousness will reign in life. And they will not just reign, but they will reign MUCH MORE! All that death from v.12 that came through ONE MAN to afflict ALL MEN is totally, perfectly, abundantly extinguished! Those who receive God's grace and His free gift of right standing will themselves reign in LIFE – abundant life, eternal life, starting the moment they believe. The pervasiveness and destruction of death will be overwhelmed by life. Jesus more than reverses the curse; He surpasses it! In 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 Paul writes, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

Which takes Paul to his conclusion, **our result**. Adam's ruin, Christ's remedy, and now our result. And he frames it in a series of "as this...so that" statements. In v.18 he says AS on trespass led to condemnation for all men, SO one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. But what does that mean? We know that the condemnation from Adam extended to all people. No exceptions. Everybody. So does this mean, then, that Christ's death and resurrection secured justification and life for everyone as well, for all people with no exceptions? Because Paul certainly teaches the opposite of that even in Romans. He teaches that some will suffer judgment and wrath. So what does he mean here when he says that Christ's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all? Does he mean all KINDS of people, like both Jews and Gentiles? Maybe. Is he saying that the provision is



made for all and the offer is extended to all? Maybe. Most likely, though, “all” here means all those who belong to that group, to that representative. So Christ offers justification and life just as certainly to ALL those who belong to Him as Adam brings condemnation to ALL those who are his. And who belongs to Adam? All those still under the reign of sin and death. And who belongs to Christ? Those who have received the gift of righteousness and life.

In v.19 he says AS one man’s disobedience made many sinners, SO one man’s obedience makes many righteous. What was the one man’s disobedience? Eating the fruit, disobeying God. What was the one man’s obedience? His perfect, sinless life culminating in His sacrificial, substitutionary death. In Adam, people become sinners both through his sin imputed to them (put on their record)

and their own sin acted out. In Christ, people become righteous by His gift alone. It isn't by their own works or their own obedience. In fact, Paul says the law was actually added to INCREASE trespasses. The law wasn't given to fix sin. It couldn't. The law was given to make sin worse. The law intensified the seriousness of sin by naming it and exposing it as sin. The law turns each person who breaks it into his own personal Adam, transgressing a direct command of God.

But AS sin increased through the law and reigned in the dominion of death, SO grace abounded and reigned ALL THE MORE through righteousness leading to life through Christ. Where the law inflamed sin, grace abounded all the more. The bigger sin grew, the more grace outpaced it. The more the reign of death expanded, the bigger the

power of life extended. To paraphrase Charles Spurgeon, where sin was a mountain, God's grace was the waters of Noah's flood which covered their peaks. We sing it from time to time, "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt..." Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.

So we've seen this morning Adam's ruin, the sin and death he brought into the world. We've seen Christ's remedy, the gift of grace and justification and life that He secured. And we've seen our result, that where condemnation and sin and death abounded in Adam, righteousness and grace and life abound all the more in Christ. But it comes to this: all people exist in relation to one of these two men. Every individual stands in solidarity with one or the other. And the actions of these men determine the eternal destiny of all

those who belong to them. On the one hand, you have Adam. Every wicked, rotten, ugly, painful, unjust, hurtful thing in this world exists as a result of his single act of disobedience. The effects of his sin are everywhere. They are real and tangible and universal. Every sin committed against you, every sin committed by you, every awful habit you hate but can't seem to shake, every broken heart, every broken friendship, every broken marriage, every abuse, every death, every war, every evil thought, every evil word, every evil deed. And those who live under the control of that force, that power that he introduced to the world, are under a sentence of death, not just for what he did, but for their own sin and disobedience as well.

On the other hand, you have Jesus Christ, who, by His grace and by the gift of His perfect life, His atoning death,

and His glorious resurrection, overcomes and eliminates every one of those terrible things I just named. For those who have consciously, willfully entrusted themselves to Him, casting themselves on His mercy, theirs is a surpassing, superabounding gift of life and righteousness. He, by His life and by His grace, has fully and finally overwhelmed the reign of death for those who believe. So whose side are you on this morning? The side of the ruiner or the Redeemer? Are you in Adam or are you in Christ? If you are in Christ this morning, hope and rejoice in Him. Trust in Him and rest in His provision for you and for the world. If you are in Adam this morning, turn to Christ, run to Him, repent of your sin, trust in His work, and receive the gift of righteousness and life.