

“Two Men and Two Worlds”
Romans 5:12-21
January 8, 2023

INTRODUCTION:

Today’s passage helps answer a question many have had concerning the benefits of Jesus’ death. How can one person’s sacrifice bring such blessings to so many people? Paul’s answer to that question goes all the way back to the first man, Adam. Just as Adam’s sin brought death and destruction to so many, even so Jesus’ obedient death brought life and grace to many. Jesus is a second Adam. In a sense, the whole world can be divided into two human races. There’s the race of sinful humanity and the race of redeemed humanity. Paul’s description of these two men and the two worlds they bring about provides us with another helpful and encouraging summary of the gospel.

This passage reminds me again of an old Charlie Brown cartoon. Lucy and Linus are sitting indoors watching a downpour out their window. Lucy says to Linus, “Boy, look at it raining... what if it floods the whole world?” Linus responds, “It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow.” Lucy: “You’ve taken a great load off my mind.” Linus: “Sound theology has a way of doing that.” The theology contained in Romans 5 serves to encourage us, to give us confidence, to strengthen our assurance of salvation, and to deepen our love for God, among much else.

I. Two Men

Though he is not named until verse 14, it is clear from the beginning of the passage that Paul is referring to Adam. **“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”** (v. 12). Adam is the one man through whom sin entered the world. His one act of disobedience has brought such harm to the world. It may seem to some that the results of Adam’s sin far outstrip his misdeed. He disobeyed God by eating some fruit that God told him not to eat. Clearly, he was wrong, and the effects of this wrong have been utterly devastating. It resulted in death, not only to Adam but to all men. Sin became like a cancer upon the world, growing, multiplying, and wreaking havoc everywhere. Wars, genocides, murders, theft, rapes, poverty, disease, abuse, addictions and more have brought immense misery to billions. How could such devastation result from one sin?

The answer to this question lies in the biblical principle called representative headship. This phrase means that Adam was acting not just for

himself in his sin, but also for all his descendants as well. He was a representative head. An old children's catechism words it like this: "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." While this idea doesn't fit well with American individualism, it can be found throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, there is an account of one man sinning when Achan took valuables that were to have been devoted to God. The result was not just bad for Achan, but for the whole nation, as they suffered defeat in battle as a result of Achan's sin. The same principle can be seen more positively too. When David defeated Goliath, it was a victory not just for David, but for the entire nation.

This idea of representative headship is taught in Romans 5 too, in this phrase "**because all sinned**" (v. 12). There are basically two options regarding the meaning of this phrase. Either all sinned by following Adam's bad example, or all were counted as having sinned because of some relationship that all humans share with Adam. The first option has a theological name called Pelagianism, so named after a fifth century British monk named Pelagius. His view is that Adam was just the first sinner, and the entire human race followed his example into sin. While it is undeniable that humanity has followed the example of Adam, it seems clear to me that more is meant by this phrase. St. Augustine understands Paul to be teaching that Adam was head over the human race in a representative way, sometimes called the federal headship of Adam. This means that guilt comes to us because of Adam's sin.

The Augustinian view of federal headship seems from verses 13-14 clearly to be the one taught by Paul. Notice that he says that where there is no law, sin is not counted (v. 13). In other words, those living between Adam and Moses, a period of thousands of years, were not counted as sinners because they broke God's laws. God had not yet given his law. But death, the penalty due sinners still came upon them all, without exception. How could it be that all died even while sin was not counted against them? Paul's answer is the federal headship of Adam. They sinned in Adam as their representative head. This idea of representational headship is made crystal clear in verse 19. "**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.**" Jesus is like Adam in being the representational head of another race, the race of those who believe him and follow him. Just as the race of Adam inherits the guilt of Adam, even so the race of Jesus' people inherits righteousness because of Jesus' righteousness.

We refer to Adam's sin as "original sin." By this we mean more than the simple idea that it was the first sin. We also mean that it was the origin of sin in the human race. Mankind is not essentially good. There is a defect in our nature that results in sin becoming our natural instinct. Children don't have to be taught to be selfish and willful, yet they all exhibit such behavior. We don't become sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners. Further, we are held to be guilty because of Adam's sin, because he is our

representative head. But the opposite is also true. In the second Adam, our sinful nature begins to be weakened, and is continually weakened through this life. Though it still maintains great strength in this life, when we see Jesus it will be finally and completely destroyed. Further, the second Adam provides us with righteousness and forgiveness. We may be declared guilty because of the sin of our representative head, Adam, but we are declared innocent by our representative head, the second Adam, Jesus.

Have you ever read Genesis 3 and longed for a do-over? You see all the misery that has resulted from the entrance of sin into the world, an entrance through a door opened by Adam, and there is a strong desire to turn the clock back and make another run at this. To use a golfing term, can't we take a mulligan? The good news of Romans 5 is that Jesus has given us a do-over. Just as the first Adam's sin opened the door to untold misery, the second Adam has closed the door to misery and reopened paradise for us. He has done so through his substitutionary death and resurrection.

Do you see how this is a great affirmation that gives us great security? Our security is based on what our representative head, Jesus, has done for us rather than upon the shaky foundation of our performance. Here's the way the great London preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it. "Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous."

II. Two Worlds

The influence of these two Adams is immense. Entire worlds are affected and defined by them. This is indicated by the five-fold repetition of the word "reign." To reign means to have authority over a domain or realm. It assumes the presence of a kingdom, and two such kingdoms are mentioned here, brought about by these two Adams.

The kingdom brought about by the first Adam is marked by sin, death, judgment and condemnation. As a result of Adam's sin, we read in verse 14 that death reigned from Adam to Moses. The same point is made in verse 17. **"For if because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man..."** It should be pointed out that the Christian view of death is different than the view that is often prevalent in our secular age. Our secular culture views death as the natural end of life. The biblical view is that death is not merely part of the natural cycle of life and death. It is an enemy. It is part of the world only because things spun out of control through the sin of Adam.

Another part of this world brought about by the sin of Adam is judgment and condemnation. **"For the judgment following one trespass brought**

condemnation” (v. 16). Judgment and shame became a part of the world immediately upon Adam’s sin, and they have been part of the world ever since. It didn’t take long for Adam to become judgmental. After God asked him if he had eaten from the forbidden tree, he quickly responded with a statement that judged both Eve and God himself. **“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate”** (Gen. 3:12). Nothing in that statement is untrue. God did give the woman to the man, and she did give the fruit to Adam. But in its context, as an answer to God’s question, it is clear that his purpose in making this statement is to clear his own guilt. He feels the burden of shame and condemnation for the first time, as evidenced by his act of hiding from God. So Adam judges others to calm his own guilty conscience.

Judgment and shame have been part of Adam’s world ever since. As I was thinking about that this week, I was struck by the way judgment stifles creativity. That brought to mind my homiletics classes in seminary. Homiletics is the name of the course where preachers learn to preach. Since the only way to learn to preach is to preach, all homiletics classes require you to preach. So each of us would take turns preaching in front of the class (and a video camera), after which our classmates would critique the sermon just preached. So what we had were inexperienced preachers telling other inexperienced preachers how to preach. There was also a professor there, whose remarks were generally far more encouraging and helpful. I strongly disliked preaching in such a setting and found the whole thing to be something that stifled creativity. That’s the world we live in, the world brought about by Adam’s sin.

Thankfully, the second Adam has brought about a different realm, reigned by things other than sin, death, judgment and condemnation. Note the contrast of verse 17. **“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.”** Who reigns in this world made possible by the obedience of the second Adam? Surprisingly, it’s us. It’s those who have learned the right verb. It’s not those who have achieved mighty things. “Achieve” is not the dominant verb of their lives. It is those who have *received* “the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness. Those entrusted with the power and authority to reign in Jesus’ world are the humble who receive what God has to give us through Christ. They end up with power not because they have seized it, but by receiving it from the hand of God.

There is one other appearance of the word “reign” in our text, and it’s in the final verse. **“As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”** (v. 21). Jesus has established the reign of grace. Note the surprising grace of verse 16. **“For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.”** If Adam’s one sin was answered by condemnation, what might we expect God’s answer to

be to the accumulated sins of generations of fallen people? Surprisingly, and by God's grace, it is the free gift that brings justification and pardon. This brings about an entire realm of grace.

God's call to his people, all those who belong to the race of the redeemed, who are under the representative headship of the second Adam, is to live out and embody this reign of grace. What does it look like for us to do so? Grace reigns in a marriage when husbands and wives forgive one another. Grace reigns when friends are willing to be honest and vulnerable with one another, knowing that their friends are safe. Grace reigns when we don't take offense when a fellow church member does something offensive to us.

Since I used a preacher illustration earlier when speaking of the way a judgmental atmosphere stifled creativity in the homiletics class, let me use another preacher illustration. This one is about one of the more significant preachers of church history named John Calvin. When Calvin was a young man, he had a deserved reputation of being proud and combative. He had accepted a position to teach in Strassburg, Germany but was unable to take up that post when a regional war broke out there. Instead, he went to Geneva and soon became the city's leading pastor. This position ended after only two years due to quarrels between Calvin and the governing authorities of the city. Facing unemployment, the natural place for Calvin to go next would have been Strassburg. Things had calmed with the war, and conditions would have permitted his return. But there was a problem. A leading and influential figure in Strassburg was a godly man named Martin Bucer. Before his falling out at Geneva, Calvin had frequently and publicly criticized Bucer as being too kind and not tough enough on his theological opponents. He had also written of Bucer's most recent book that it was "so thickly bestowed with blemishes" that one might wish for "a single sweeping erasure." Bucer replied to Calvin with such kindness and grace that Calvin became so convicted of his pride that he barely slept for three days. Bucer then invited Calvin to pastor the French-speaking church in Strassburg. He became Calvin's friend and mentor. The gifted but proud Calvin became the man we know because of his years of gracious union with Bucer. That's the reign of grace. What would it look like in your domain for grace to reign? What would it look like in your marriage, your neighborhood, your community group at church, or your workplace?

CONCLUSION:

Every single individual who has ever lived has a representative head of either the first Adam or the last Adam, Jesus. You are either part of fallen humanity or redeemed humanity. Do you want to be part of the race of humans ruled by sin, death and judgment, or the race ruled by grace and life? Anyone can become part of the redeemed race simply by trusting in the second Adam.

Discussion Questions

Romans 5:12-21

1. When Lucy said to Linus, “You’ve taken a great load off my mind,” Linus replied, “Sound theology has a way of doing that.” Can you think of some ways that sound theology has done that for you?
2. The theology of this passage is the representational headship of the first Adam and the second Adam, Jesus. It is summarized in verse 18. If you were trying to explain this to a child, what are some points you would want to make? How do the biblical stories of Achan on the one hand, and David and Goliath on the other hand, illustrate the truth of representational headship?
3. We believe the Bible teaches original sin. This means both that Adam’s first sin was the origin of all sin in his ancestors by passing along a sin nature to us all, and that we are accounted as guilty because of Adam’s sin. How do you navigate the tension between seeing the good in others, while also accepting this reality of original sin?
4. What practical help is given to us by this teaching of representational headship? To help answer that question, consider the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. “Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous.”
5. The kingdom and world brought about by the first Adam is marked by sin, death, judgment, and condemnation. What is it like to live in a world marked by judgment and condemnation? Can you think of specific ways you have been harmed by a spirit of judgmentalism, condemnation, and shaming?
6. The world brought about by the second Adam is one where, according to verse 17, Jesus’ followers will have a role of reigning. What do you understand to be involved in that reign?
7. The world brought about by Jesus is also a reign of grace. Can you think of ways you have benefited from this world of grace, ways that others have shown grace to you? What are ways you can think of for you to show grace to others, perhaps other family members, co-workers, or church members?