

Romans 5:11-21 - Joy

ROMANS SERMON #13 - Advent Week 3 - Joy

December 17, 2017

When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, he said

Luke 2: 10b "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

When Jesus was announced, when Christianity was kicked off, the angel said this is good news (Gospel), and it is news of great joy. This baby in the manger would bring a lot of things to earth. But the angel was sure to mention the joy. Good news was coming, news of great joy.

But so often, our religion doesn't seem to look like good news of great joy. In fact, you could argue that religion has done more harm than good in the world. Geopolitically, look at all the wars that are fought over this stuff. It seems like we might get along better without it.

This is why John Lennon wrote his song imagine - to dream of a world where we didn't believe in this stuff. You know the lyrics, but he sings:

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace

He can sing a beautiful song about how peaceful and good the world would be without it.

So why did the angel and John Lennon disagree so severely? The angel says its good news of great joy, and Lennon's experience was "we'd have a whole lot more joy without it."

And we don't have to look out at the globe to see the joylessness of religion. Most of us have probably known the bitter, angry Christian. Who seems like he or she would have been better of if it weren't for Christianity. And some of us, at dark moments, might even wonder if that wouldn't have been true for us. Maybe we'd have more joy without it.

But by faith we believe the Bible. The angel got it right and Lennon got it wrong. But we want to experience that. So let's pray - and let's ask for that joy.

One of the reasons our Christianity is not a source of joy is because often our Christianity isn't Christianity.

And in the book of Romans, Paul is, more than anywhere else, laying out what Christianity is and isn't. And in Romans 5, starting in verse 11 today, he is going to give us some of the most dense theology in all of Romans, which is a dense book.

And I know we can sometimes be turned off by dense and hard theology, especially during the Christmas season when we want everything to be as light as a snowflake. But if I told you there was a chest of gold buried in your back yard, you wouldn't mind a little digging.

And what's buried here is joy.

So let's dig. We'll dig through the hard stuff and hopefully get to the joy underneath it all.

11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.12 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— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

So Paul is explaining to us here how Christianity works. And the first thing he does is explain how sin works.

God had put Adam and Even in the garden. And God told Adam not to eat from one tree, but the serpent tempted Eve, and here's how it went down:

Genesis 3:1-6 "He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

So the serpent tempts first and foremost by causing them to doubt God's word - "did God really say not to eat?", and to doubt God's goodness, "God is withholding something from you - your eyes will be open! You'll be wise. You will be like God. God just doesn't want any competition and He is keeping something good from you." A whole garden is full of delights and potentiality. God had given them the world. But forbidden them one fruit. And, wanting to be wise like God and experience the forbidden delight, Adam sinned - he ate anyways.

This was a bad day for the history of the world. Because three bad things happened according to Romans:

- 1) **Sin came (verse 12)**. This is where things went badly. There had been perfect harmony with God, a paradise existence. But sin entered the picture when Adam didn't trust God and did his own thing.
- 2) **Death came**. People dying wasn't an original feature. But the wages of sin is death, and so when Adam and Eve sinned, the handwriting was on the wall and they would soon die.
- 3) **Death spread**. Sin and death didn't just affect Adam and Eve and then those bugs got worked out in the 2.0 version. What they brought into humanity, sin and death, spread to everyone.¹

And he says the reason for that is that "all sinned." He doesn't just say that everybody since Adam sins like Adam did (even though that's true.) He says that when Adam sinned, all sinned. We sinned too in the garden.

We bear his guilt. This idea is called original sin - that ever since the fall we are not born good and then get corrupted. We are born already corrupted and act accordingly. It is not true, as Rousseau said, "that man was born free and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau, *Social Contract*), but that we are born in sin and slavery and Jesus came to set us free.²

But you say, "That's not fair at all. I wasn't there. Adam was a dufus. I would have been satisfied with everything else in the world and avoided that

¹ Timothy Keller, *Romans for You* (Round Hill: The Good Book Company, 2014), 124.

² As Quoted in John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity, 1994). 19.

one tree, I would have put up an electric fence around it, dug a moat around it, and we'd be fine."

Well that's not true because we are like him. But this is saying not only that we would have done the same thing, but in Adam, we did it. We did sin in the garden.

Which is a tough concept to grasp. Its the concept called Federal Headship³. Adam was our Federal head, or our representative.

And just like when we elect representatives to go to congress for us, they make our decisions. They can declare war, and then, whether we wanted to go to war or not, we are at war. In them, we declare war. In the same way, Adam was our perfect representative, and in him we all sinned.

And we might say, "Still not fair, because I didn't elect Adam. I didn't vote for that guy." (#notmyfederalhead).

But God chose him to represent us - and God perfectly knows who would represent us perfectly.⁴

He chose better than we could ever choose someone who perfectly represented our hearts. And he sinned. And in him, all who were represented by him sinned, all of humanity sinned. And now all will die.

³ For more on Federal Headship, see <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/our-first-federal-head/> and <https://carm.org/federal-headship> and Timothy Keller, *Romans for You* (Round Hill: The Good Book Company, 2014), 124-128.

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Romans for You* (Round Hill: The Good Book Company, 2014), 128.

No tidings of comfort and joy yet.

But verse 14 tells us where this story is going. **“Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”** Adam, our representative head, was a precursor to another representative head that was going come. Another Adam was going to come on the scene to represent essentially another humanity.

And he would be a successful and better version of Adam - changing everything for all of those who have him as their representative. Spoiler alert, that’s Jesus. The second Adam who will succeed in every way that Adam failed, and represent all of His people in doing so.

15 But the free gift 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 Jesus is going to come as a second Adam. Adam was the head of all of humanity, Jesus would be the head of a new humanity.

But that’s about where the similarities end. Because Christ over-corrects, over-achieves, and gives us something far weightier than what Adam gives us. He will be tempted like Adam was, but perfectly pass the test. And those who come under the headship of Christ have something completely different than we had under Adam.

Here he says because of Adam’s sin in our behalf, many died. The consequences of our representative’s sin are very mathematical. One for one consequences: death for sin. But what we have in Christ is not like that - it

isn't just a matter of strict accounting and giving what is owed. What Jesus gave us isn't an equal weight on the other side of the scale.

Jesus produced far more good than Adam produced evil.

"The gospel of the grace of God has proved itself much more efficacious in the production of good, than sin in the production of evil."⁵

His grace abounded. In Adam we are paid what we are owed. If Christ is our head, we are the recipients of a lavish generosity. Adam's sin was a human activity, Christ's obedience for us and death for us is a gift of God.

Through Adam's sin, many die. Sin and death spread, and we all get justice: death. But Jesus comes to give us something far better: He comes to give grace.

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.

Follow the logic of this verse: Adam sinned once, and the result was condemnation.

All who would ever believe in Jesus sinned a countless number of times - and you'd expect immeasurable condemnation. But after their countless sins, there was a free gift. Justification. They were called righteous!

If Adam was called wicked and doomed after one sin, you'd expect after out billions of sins we'd be billions-of-times wicked and doomed. But the free gift

⁵ C.H. Hodge as quoted in Stott 161

is not like the result of Adam's sin. It's super-abundant, aboundingly generous gift. It isn't what we are owed, what we work for, what we deserve. It's grace.

This doesn't make sense. Grace is almost too good to be true. We should never believe this if it weren't announced by the guy who rose from the dead.

This means that for you, in the place of your many sins, God offers many more "units" of grace. And when you think that God would have to be almost unjust to forgive me and bless me - well He is not unjust, because He paid for all of it on the cross - but it is just that kind of undeserved grace that he offers to all who will come under the headship of Christ.

In *Joy to the World*, we sing "he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found."⁶

He doesn't offer a stingy amount of grace that's available just for those who sin stingily. But pours out an ocean of blessings to wash away our mountain of sin. You're not going to out-sin His potential for grace in your life.

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.

Because of what Adam did, death reigned. But because of what Jesus did, life reigned. Under Adam, the normal course of humanity is death -

⁶ Isaac Watts, *Joy to the World*. http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Joy_to_the_World/

everybody falls apart and eventually dies, and then they face eternal death. It's a hopeless situation.

In Dante's Inferno, there's an inscription over the gate to hell that says "Abandon all hope — Ye Who Enter Here."⁷ We have lots of humanistic hopes - that we can fix what's broken in the world and make it all a better place. But we all still die. It's not a good story in the end. Death reigns through Adam. Abandon all hope.

But those who receive Christ receive an abundance of grace, and life reigns. We die, but rise again. What's lost is restored. What's sad "becomes untrue."⁸ And the banner no longer reads, "Abandon all hope" but "Hope never disappoints."

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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.

Now a question should come up when we read this verse.

He says that Adam's sin led to condemnation for all men. Which we get - he was the first person, sin entered through him, death entered, death spread to everybody. And it seems to say that then Jesus came in, and the same thing happened in reverse: everybody gets justified and everybody is made righteous.

⁷ Dante. *Divine Comedy*

⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*

And people will take from this verse an idea called universalism: that in the end, everybody ends up justified, in heaven, forgiven.

So is that what this verse is teaching?

If it were, that would contradict everything he just said in chapters 1-4 - that you need to have faith in Jesus to be justified. It would contradict chapter 1, that many are under his wrath. It would contradict chapter 2 and 3 where he says that even the religious people are not better off. It would contradict chapter 4 where he says Abraham and David believed and then were justified. Everything up until this point is that you must believe to be saved.

Just 1 verse earlier in verse 17, Paul wrote, **“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.”**

This grace must be received, there are those who receive it, and by implication, those who don't receive it.

So it is best to interpret verse 18 in the light of everything else Paul has been writing about. When Paul talks about all who are justified in verse 18, he is talking about all who are “in Christ.” All who are under Adam - all of humanity, is condemned. All who are under Christ's headship - those who receive Him by faith, are made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:22 says “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

“The action of each head has a significance for the people who belong to each head.”⁹ - Doug Moo.

What matters is who are you under. We are all, by default, under Adam. But by faith we can be part of a new humanity, under Christ. What makes all the difference in the world is do we trust in Jesus.

So all of humanity is divided into those who are under Adam, and those who are under Christ. Being under Jesus by faith is all that matters.

But if that’s all that matters, what about all the commandments. Can we really say that all of the efforts we make to be good don’t matter?

Isn’t God a just God who knows if you’ve been bad or good, so just be good for goodness sake and you’ll be fine?

Didn’t God give his commandments, his law, so we could follow it, be good, and be received by God as a result?

Verse 20:

20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

⁹ Doug Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 334..

He says that law only increased the trespass - it increased the sin. Paul says that because of our wickedness, even good commands make us worse.

For one, they increase our guilt. We read through the Bible, and when we read commands, we realize we're more guilty than we thought we were.

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

You see how the standard doesn't make you feel less sinful, but more? More guilty? The standard is right - it is perfect.

The law is good, but I am not.

But it exposes my imperfections. It exposes my sin. I can't read this and say, "I'll perfectly follow this to make myself OK." It shows me I'm worse than I thought.

And now that I know the command and I know better, I'm even more guilty. It's one thing to drive 65 miles per hour on a road without speed limit signs - you're only kind of guilty there. But if you blow past the 25mph school zone speed limit sign at 65, you're even worse. You're a terrible person if you do that!

And while we know from our conscience that we've violated some standards, once we know God's law and have speed limit signs, we're even worse people!

The law gives us behavior to shoot for, but, knowing me, it doesn't give me any hope. Because I'm a wreck. It tells me what to do, but gives me no help in getting it done. It condemns me for breaking it, but can't pardon me.

We're not sure who originally wrote this poem, it's usually attributed to John Bunyan, but someone wrote:

*"Run, John, run, the law commands
But gives me neither feet nor hands,
Better news the gospel brings:
It bids me fly and gives me wings" - Bunyan?*

The law commands, but doesn't help. It condemns but can't pardon. It judges but can't forgive.

"but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,"

Jesus came as a true and better Adam.

Matthew 4 "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written," "He will command his angels concerning you,'and" "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written," "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

All the tests Adam failed, Jesus passed. He fulfilled the law.

Colossians 2:13-14 "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

God did in Jesus what the Law could not do in us.

The law brings good advice that we could never keep and only end up condemned. The Gospel is good news - of great joy! It's an invitation to all people without exception, to accept the headship of Christ, the substitution of Christ, Christ as your representative on the cross, and be freed!

And the biggest reason for our joylessness in our Christianity is that our Christianity is not Christianity. It's just another tired old burdensome moralistic religion.

It's just rule keeping and law keeping and working to be good or wise or successful. It's "do more, try harder." By itself, that's the way of Adam, and of course it's joyless.

One author wrote, *"I think good preachers should be like bad kids. They ought to be naughty enough to tiptoe up on dozing congregations, steal their bottles of religion pills, spirituality pills, and morality pills, and flush them down the drain"*¹⁰

So if I could spend just a couple of minutes being that bad kid, knowing that I need my religion pills flushed down the drain too.

Our Christianity will only be joyless religion if we only see God as Adam saw him when he was deceived:

Withholding

Not good

Loving to prohibit

Like the whole reason for his existence in the garden was to tempt him with the one tree he couldn't have. A God who loves to say no. A God who put us in a material world so we could be tempted by it, as opposed to enjoy it for his glory with a few prohibitions for our good.

Our Christianity will be Joyless if It's All An Effort to Prove Yourself

To God, parents, kids, self, church.

¹⁰ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Foolishness of Preaching*, p.14

Our Christianity will be Joyless if we think it's mainly about life-improvement and self-help.

We tend to hock useless programs for life improvement and call it Christianity, and then threaten people with what will happen if they don't improve and become their best selves. That's not good news, it's good advice at best. Nothing for angels to sing about.

Our Christianity will be joyless if its the grounds for being critical instead of gracious

Law criticizes. Grace pardons.

And we become like what we worship. If we're more affected by the law, we'll be critical. If we are mesmerized by grace we'll be the most gracious people in the world. We've been forgiven so much, so much has been washed, so much pardoned. God has been so patient with me in Christ, and if I believe that I'll be far more prone to patience with others.

We're so often affected by failures and deficiencies, in ourselves and others, and more like Clark Griswold's father-in-law who sees this house so covered with lights that it can be seen from space and blinds the neighbors, but says, "some little lights are not twinkling."

"I know Art, thanks for noticing."

Our Christianity Will Be Joyless if We Think Sin and Death Still Reign

We sometimes tend to operate like the second Adam never came. That God is against us, eager to repay us for every sin. Or that life will just go from bad to worse, it will be one loss after another until we are gone. But we forget the resurrection part. That Jesus rose, and now life reigns for all who are in him. Our life will be a decline into death, a relatively short decline, and then resurrection to life eternal. That's where it all ends up for us. Not in the grave, but in a resurrection. So when things are bad here, and they do get very bad, there's an undercurrent of joy.

It's like you're traveling on some windy roads to go to the lawyer's office where you'll be picking up your million dollar inheritance. And the car is breaking down, you get a flat tire, the journey seems so frustrating. But there can still be joy if you remember where you're going. That you're gonna dump this clunker as soon as the check clears and be free from all this. You can laugh at a lot more when the future is bright.

And since our future is the inheritance of the saints, we will mourn. But not like those without hope.¹¹ Not without any ability to find joy. Because we have a true and better head, and life reigns.

¹¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Bulletin Notes:

Romans 5:11-21

Joy

I. Our Fall in the Garden - (Romans 5:11-14)

II. Our True and Better Adam - (Romans 5:15-19)

III. Better Than Religion (Romans 5:20-21)

IV. A Cause for Joy

Questions for Small Group Discussion:

- 1.) What does it mean that in Adam, all "sinned"?
- 2.) Why do we typically grate against the doctrine of original sin?
- 3.) Is there evidence that we are sinners by nature and not just by choice?
- 4.) How is true Christianity a burden-lifter?
- 5.) What do you think is the role of God's commands in the Christian life?
- 6.) How are the doctrines of Romans 1-5 a cause of joy?