

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



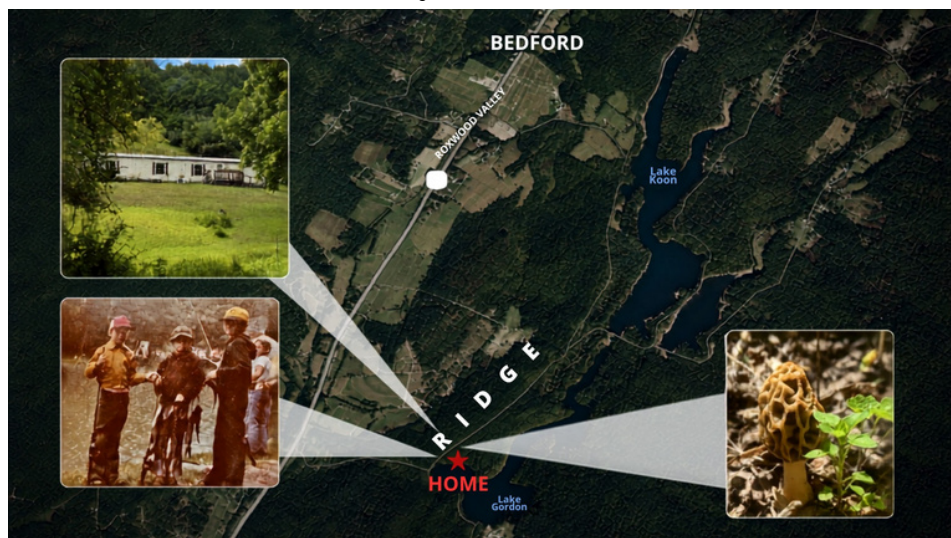
SUNDAY AUGUST 23, 2026
ROMANS 5:12-21

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RULED OVER, OR REIGNING?



I'll often have a text or call exchange with my sister or brother that says something like this "Hey Du, I'm going to the valley this weekend, wanna go?" Or my brother might say "Yo, when are you headed to the valley next?" And when we say "valley" we are referring to the valley of our childhood, the same valley where my grandma Betty lived that you heard me talk about, where my mom and dad still live. It's Bedford Valley.



None of us siblings currently live there, but for the longest time we called it home. The valley was very formative in all of us. I would say Bedford Valley shaped who I am, shaped part of my identity. Certainly, my love of fishing, wild mushrooms, and everything outdoors comes from there. But I also have a sense of stability anchored there. Whereas I lived in 20-some different homes in my life in two different continents, my grandma lived in one place, the valley.

But the valley isn't the only place that I called home. There was a second place - that was also very formative in my life, that was western Brazil where I spent my older childhood and teen years. My deep love of soccer - futebol - and Latin culture, and rice and beans, and coffee comes from there.



I had a first home that influenced my identity and formation, then I had a second. Both were important, both are who I am, both were called home. One without the other is not a complete picture of my early life.

Paul argues in today's passage that we as followers of Jesus Christ have a first and second source that informs our identity spiritually, the first Adam, and the second Adam. Both are equally true, neither should be ignored, both form a complete picture of our life now as Christians, but the second is "even greater". Hold on to those words "even greater".

Paul's letter to the Romans is written to both Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus living in Rome. The Gentiles – what the Jews call everyone who is not Jewish – see themselves as civilized and educated. The Jews follow the Torah and come from Israel, a tiny country under Roman occupation and treated with contempt. The Gentiles consider anyone not Roman or Greek a "barbarian".

Followers of Jesus from both the Jews and Gentiles make up the church Paul is writing to, a church that is divided. Last chapter Paul helped them see themselves as one spiritual covenant family under Father Abraham, the father of all who are counted righteous by faith. Note: one covenant family by faith. That is their joint spiritual heritage.

In today's passage, Paul argues that their joint spiritual heritage goes back in Genesis even further, back to Adam.

Why Adam? In the first part of **Romans 5** we saw what Jesus accomplished through his death. It's an amazing list!

WHAT JESUS

Accomplished Through His Death

1	Made right in God's sight by faith	Romans 5:1
2	Peace with God	Romans 5:1
3	Stand in place of undeserved privilege	Romans 5:2
4	Be confident & joyful of sharing God's future glory	Romans 5:2
5	Able to rejoice in problems & trials	Romans 5:3
6	Given the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with love	Romans 5:5
7	Saved from God's condemnation	Romans 5:9
8	Restored friendship with God (reconciliation)	Romans 5:10

And the question that list leaves us with is "How can peace and reconciliation with God and that whole list be accomplished thru one person's death?"

Paul answers that question by telling us that just as peace and reconciliation with God were accomplished by one man, Christ, sin and death also started with one man, Adam.

Verse 12. Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world, sin brought death, death spread to everyone, everyone sinned. One man. It makes sin and death sound like a virus, doesn't it?

Think about how a common cold spreads through your homes. One person walks in carrying a virus - maybe from work, maybe from school - and within a few days, everyone under your roof is coughing. Nobody else went out and caught that virus themselves; they didn't choose it, didn't ask for it. But because they're connected to that one person - sharing the same air, the same space - it spreads to all of them automatically. That's the picture behind **verse 12**.

Adam is the "head of the household" for the whole human race. When he sinned, it wasn't contained to him. Sin and death spread to all of us; we all come from Adam. I didn't individually invite it; I inherited it just by being human, just by being "in the house". And so did you. So did both the Jews and Gentiles.

That's **verse 12**: one man, and it reached us all.

Often people ask why did Adam ruin it for all of us? That's really a question about fairness and injustice. Go back to **Genesis 3** - you know, the Serpent and the fruit... and in the story take Adam's name out and put your name in. You know yourself pretty well - how long would you have lasted before disobeying God's command? If you are like me, and I know you are, the answer is "not long". So, I have no grounds to judge Adam. Why, because from a sin perspective I am Adam. BTW my middle name is Adam - I am reminded of my sinful spiritual heritage every day.

Now when the text says in **verse 12** that "everyone sinned", it means that Adam's sin is the sin of all. That may be hard to swallow, but hold on, we will get there.

Verses 13-14 anticipates an objection: if sin and death spread to everyone because of Adam, what about the period before the Law was given to Moses? The objection was that sin isn't counted where there is no law to violate - so how could death have reigned over people in that period?

Paul's response: sin was already in the world from the time of Adam, long before the Law existed - and death's reign reaches all the way back to Adam, not just to those who broke Moses's law.

The "infection" of sin and death didn't require each person to break an Old Testament rule; it spread because we are all connected to the source, one man, Adam.

The end of **verse 14** informs us that Adam "was a symbol, a representation... Traditional translations say a "type" of. I think the **verse 14b NIV** captures it best saying a "pattern of the one to come". A pattern is something that is observable.

To see what Paul means by "pattern," consider Joseph in Genesis. Joseph was also a pattern of Christ.

Watch the patterns:

Joseph was rejected by his own brothers and sold for silver, at one brother's suggestion - Judah (**Genesis 37**) - Jesus was rejected by His own people and betrayed by one of His own, Judas, and sold or betrayed for what? ____ silver.

And Joseph went from the pit, to prison, to the right hand of Pharaoh, and used that position to save and provide for the very brothers who betrayed him (**Genesis 45**).

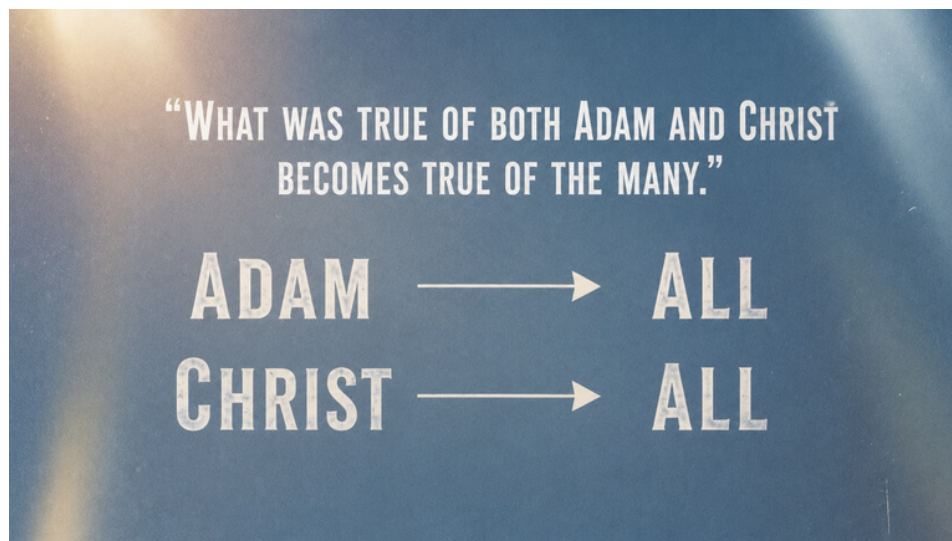
Jesus went from the cross and grave (pit) to the right hand of the Father, and uses that position to save the very people who rejected Him. The pattern set in Joseph shows up again, centuries later, in Christ.

If Adam was a pattern of the one to come, Christ, it means what was true of Adam would show up again in Christ.

Hold that idea of pattern for a minute, because I want to address one foundational piece before we look at the observable patterns of Adam in Christ. Paul is referring to Adam as a real person, not an allegorical character in a creative story. Think this through, **verses 12-14** carry no weight if Adam was not a real person.

And further in **verses 15-21** Jesus, who was and is a real person, is compared to Adam. How effective would the comparison and contrast be if Adam was not a real person? More on that in the sermon notes.

OK back to patterns. In **verses 15-21**, to understand this section, know that the pattern will follow this one rule.



Paul says this even more concisely **1 Corinthians 15:22** “Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life”.

So, let’s see how this plays out in **verse 15**. This is where that hard-to-swallow idea from **verse 12** - that Adam’s sin became the sin of all begins to make sense. The same principle that made Adam’s sin our sin is exactly what makes Christ’s righteousness ours too.

Note that comparing the sin of Adam that affected all to the act of Jesus that also affects all, the text describes Jesus’ act with the words “even greater”. Meaning the act of Jesus doesn’t just cancel out or resolve the reach of sin and death from Adam’s sin; rather, the act of Jesus reaches way further, accomplishes way more - as Paul writes “even greater”.

It’s like this, let’s suppose you have a plumbing issue at your house - that’s fresh on my mind because I have had a few of those recently - and so you call the plumber. When he comes, you let him in and then go do errands. Not long afterward you receive a text from the plumber saying all done and that it was a simple fix.

You eventually get home and open the door, and there is not just fixed plumbing but you stand in shock, mouth on the floor, as you see a whole new kitchen - with heated floors, dual dishwashers, and InSinkErator. And then you notice a whole new bathroom with a jacuzzied tub and heat lamps, heated toilet seats. What you needed was your plumbing fixed, what you received was, in Paul’s words, “even greater”.

That’s Paul’s point in **verse 15** “God’s wonderful grace and gift of forgiveness” was “even greater” than the reach of Adam’s sin that brought death.



And Paul tells us a little more about the “even greater” part by using the words “grace” and “gift”.

And then the “even greater” gets “even greater”. Paul expounds on what else “even greater” means in **verse 16**. Instead of “condemnation” for “our many sins”, “God’s free gift makes us right with God”, it gives us right standing with God. So picture yourself – messy sinner you – standing before the supreme judge – Holy God. Paul says that because of God’s free gift we don’t stand before God in condemnation, we have right standing with God. Where I expect condemnation because of my yuck, I’m given right standing. The “even greater” just got “even greater”.

In **verse 17** Paul adds more description to the reach of sin and death by using language of being ruled over – note the word rule. Sin and death “ruling” means that no one escapes sin – we are all sinners – all of us are in Adam. And death is the consequence of sin.

But Paul tells us God’s “wonderful grace and gift of righteousness” is “even greater” than sin and death that rules over all of mankind. Paul says in the end of **verse 17**, all who receive the “wonderful grace and gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.”

Now to give you a picture of being “ruled over by sin and death” and then what it means to “triumph over sin and death,” let’s go back again to the life of Joseph.

Joseph spent over a decade with zero say over his own life – sold by his own brothers, owned by Potiphar, then locked in a cell under the authority of a prison guard. Traders, master, jailer – he was ruled over the whole way.

But then – in a single day, Pharaoh pulled Joseph out of that cell and set him second-in-command over all of Egypt. “Ruled over” to “triumphed over”. The same man who had no say over his own life now ruled the nation that had enslaved him.

Paul says in the end of **verse 17** that “all who receive the wonderful grace and gift of righteousness... will triumph over sin and death.” Once ruled over by sin and death, now triumphing over sin and death. How? Thru Jesus Christ.

Paul captures the power of this triumph over death in his taunt against sin and death in 1 **Corinthians 15:55**: “Oh death where is your victory, oh death where is your sting?” Brothers and sisters – through Christ that triumph over sin and death is ours.

Verse 18 repeats the truth of v16 but adds another “even greater”: “new life for everyone,” right at the end of the verse. Where Adam’s act brought sin and death and condemnation, Christ’s act brings not just right standing with God, but also “new life for everyone”. Where sin brought the judgement of death – in Christ we no longer face the spiritual death sentence.

It's like someone on death row, the day they are to be executed, suddenly is taken from the execution chamber, given their belongings, and set free. Just as if the crime never happened. They are now free - they have a new life. That's what Christ did for us: pulled us off death row and gave us new life. And that is not all Paul is clear: that exchange from death row to new life is available to everyone.

Verse 19 is repeating what we already covered, except for the word at the end of the verse, "many"; most translations say "the many". This word "many" is most likely a link back to **Isaiah 53:11**. So Paul ties his teaching on justification back to the suffering servant in **Isaiah 53**.

Verses 20-21. And here Paul reminds us that where sin increased, or where sin abounded, God's grace became more abundant. Grace is not merely sufficient to answer sin – it superabounds. And **verse 21** leaves us with the beautiful image of God's wonderful grace ruling over sin and death.



So, let's go back to my story. Bedford Valley and Brazil - two homes, both true, both shaping who I am. Neither gives the whole picture alone.

Paul says the same is true of your spiritual identity. You have a first home in Adam, and a second home in Christ. Both are real. Both are true. But the second is "even greater."

In Adam, sin entered, death spread, and sin and death ruled over every one of us - Jew and Gentile alike. That's the home of sin and death none of us chose, but all of us were born into. Then Jesus came. He lived the only sinless life in history - sin had no rule over him. He took our sin on himself, died the death we owed, and rose again, proving death had no rule over him either. He's the only person to ever walk into our home of sin and death, and triumph over it.

And what he accomplished, he offers free. His grace and gift give us right standing with God, new life reigning over sin and death right now, and eternal life with him forever. Where Adam left us condemned, Christ leaves us reigning.



If you're in Christ, that's your home now - live like it. Sin and death no longer own you, so stop living out of the old address. Walk today like someone who reigns in life through Jesus, not someone still waiting on death row.

And if the only home you've ever known is the first one - if sin and death are the only rule you've experienced - hear the good news: you don't have to stay there. The same grace that reigns right now is being offered to you, free, today.

BONUS

CONTENT:

Romans 5:12 Was Adam real?

Jesus referred to Adam as a real person.

Matthew 19:4-5 (par. **Mark 10:6-8**) - Jesus quotes **Genesis 1:27** and **2:24** directly as historical ground for his teaching on marriage. **Matthew 19:8** - Jesus references "the beginning" (Eden) as real history, not allegory.

The biblical genealogies refer to Adam as a real person. For example, **Luke 3:38** - Jesus's own genealogy lists "the son of Adam, the son of God" in the same historical chain as every other ancestor.

Romans 5:15-21 Patterns of Adam in Christ... this is "antithetical parallelism" - an observable pattern that repeats but does or accomplishes something different or greater. This Greek rhetorical device reinforces the passage's main point: grace doesn't just answer sin, it's "even greater."

Understanding a passage's literary devices sharpens interpretation. Recognizing which device is in play, and knowing what that device typically does, helps you read the passage the way the author intended.

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