

Grace in One Man
Romans 5:12-21
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Introduction

Good morning, Union Church. My name is Kyle Rodriguez, and it's my privilege to get to preach the Word of God to you this morning.

Last week was Easter Sunday, and it was a glorious celebration for us. So many volunteers served faithfully to help us have a great Easter, from special Easter snacks available, a beautiful and meaningfully decorated stage area, nearly 40 kids in Union Kids on Sunday, which is the most kids we've ever had the privilege of serving—and our volunteers served joyfully in about 80 degree heat back there. I got to witness you all welcoming new people, some of whom were not believers, and love one another joyfully. It was a great day!

And the thing that fuels Christians to joyfully celebrate and love one another and sacrificially serve in such a glorious manner is one thing: Hope.

If you missed it last week, Pastor Ethan continued in our series on the book of Romans, and the basic thrust of the message was that Christians should be marked by a tenacious joy *because* of hope; hope that is bought by Jesus Christ. Hope is the key ingredient of Christian joy, Ethan said.

Hope is incredibly powerful. The problem is, it's hard to keep it. Hope is hard to sustain.

Over the last four or five years in particular, much has been made about the hopelessness of the youngest generations of Americans. Gen Z and younger Millennials are much more likely to have depression, with much higher rates of suicide. And one of the primary contributing factors to that is the rise of internet technology and social media.

Of course this is a complicated topic, but one of the primary factors, sociologists surmise, is the fact that with a more connected world, death and scandal and the horrors that accompany them are more visible than ever—and with that increased visibility comes a rise in worry, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Just in the last 10 days, here are a few of the news items that have dominated:

- A ship collided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore and killed six people
- A massive earthquake hit Taiwan, with at least 10 people dead and hundreds of people still in need of rescue
- There was a federal raid of a hip-hop and business mogul's homes for a human trafficking investigation

- A major documentary was released describing serious allegations of sexual assault and abusive working conditions in children’s television
- Gambling scandals in two major sports leagues
- A food aid convoy was attacked in Gaza, resulting in the deaths of seven humanitarian workers
- A massive drought in Southern Africa was declared a national emergency in several countries, threatening dozens of millions of people

And that’s just the news. That doesn’t even include ongoing wars, tension and division connected to the upcoming election, economic concerns, regularly revealed scandals among church leaders and denominations, conflict over gender and sexuality, and exposure to hatred and vitriol and more on social media and the internet daily.

Now, I’m not claiming that this era is more difficult to live in than another era or anything like that but being exposed to all these things so regularly—of course it takes a toll on hope! Hope is hard to sustain when you’re surrounded by death and sin and suffering.

How can you hope when you are surrounded by sin and death? That’s our question today.

So, let’s pray, and then look at God’s Word together.

1. The Presenting Problem: Sin is prevalent around us, death is inevitable. (v. 12-14)

So, this is the presenting problem: we are surrounded by sin and death. Paul knows that, we know it, and it’s a severe obstacle to maintaining hope. So, we need to talk about sin and death. But, before your eyes glaze over, you need to know there is a depth here to Paul’s teaching here that we often miss, so I need you to stay with me here.

“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—now note that Paul doesn’t complete his comparison here. You see how Paul is making a comparison: “just as...” There should be a “so too...” after that, right? Just as McDonalds has its Big Mac, so too Burger King has its Whopper. The “just as” clause tells us that Paul is making a comparison here.

But before Paul actually finishes his comparison, which he’ll do down in verse 18-19, he realizes that he’s made a big claim that he needs to clarify. What is that claim?

That sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.

Paul says all of humanity, that descends from Adam, has been infected with the rot of sin, precisely because of Adam’s action—he is the one man.

And the entire essence of what Paul is saying here is that there is an intractable relationship between Adam and you. So, this is the key: When Paul says: “All sinned” at the end of verse 12

here, he's not saying: "Every individual person, at some point in their life, sinned, so, every individual person will die." There is a truth there, but that's not what Paul is saying. He's saying: In Adam, in Adam's sin, all humanity was counted guilty of sin.

Look at the logic of the sentence:

- A. Sin came into the world when Adam sinned.
 - a. Because Adam sinned, death came into the world
 - b. But Adam was not the only one to die; Death has spread to everyone
- B. Why? Because in Adam's sin, we all sinned.

And I think this is the entire reason why Paul pauses the comparison he's going to make, he needs to clarify this. This is a hard concept.

"For sin was indeed in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law."

Now, Paul has already taught that all people are guilty for their individual sins. Remember, back in Romans 1? No one is without excuse, Paul said. But here, Paul is trying to show that there is actually a deeper dimension of guilt that we carry.

Remember, for Paul the law is what clarifies and exposes our sin. The law actually make us even more guilty by revealing our sinfulness! Now, before God sent the law it would be somewhat difficult to show people their sin, that they were rebelling against God's commands, because he hadn't given them his commands, at least not in a clear way.

Yet, Paul says, "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam."

Okay, so let's work backwards in this sentence.

Some sins are not "like the transgression of Adam." The transgression of Adam was a willful, defiant act of disobedience, a blatant disregard for God's Word. God gave Adam a clear command, he disobeyed.

But some people's sin, Paul says particularly those who lived between Adam and Moses, was not like that! God did not give them a clear, verbal command that they willfully disobeyed. And yet, Paul says, they were dying! Death was reigning over every human being who had ever lived--no matter whether God showed up to them and gave them clear commands or not. Why? Because in Adam, all have sinned, and all are guilty, and so, all are under the same curse of death.

Another way theologians talk about this is through the language of covenant. It's as if God made a covenant with all of the human race--a covenant of works. Adam--whose name literally mean's "man"--was mankind's representative. If he did "good works", following God's law and fulfilling the roles God gave him, then he (and all his descendants) would be in right relationship with

God. But if he did not, if he failed to keep the terms of the covenant and disobeyed, then his relationship (and not only his, but all of his descendants) with God would be broken.

And this is why, on the same day a toddler may die, a dictator may die—both are under the curse of death, no matter the level of individual guilt they bear, because both bear the guilt of Adam's sin. Every one of us bear the guilt of Adam's sin, and bearing the guilt of Adam's sin, we bear the corruption of Adam's sin, and being corrupted by Adam's sin, we, in the course of time and history, all prove ourselves to be sinners to the core.

Now, the reaction to this, quite often is: "That's not fair! It's not fair for God to count me guilty before I was ever born and had a chance to disobey him. It's not fair for me to be destined to be someone I never chose to be!"

See, we live in a culture that has so valued the individual's right to self-determination that we sometimes miss reality. We've missed the fact that the vast majority of life is not self-determined but influenced by millions of factors well outside our control.

Steph Curry did not decide to be born into an NBA player's family with countless resources and a dad who could teach him how to shoot from age 5. Nor did he choose to be born with natural skill and athleticism. Now, certainly, Steph Curry has worked hard to develop that skill and take advantage of those resources, but he isn't *Steph Curry* simply because of his self-determined choices.

Each of us are intractably connected to other people. The decisions of people impact you. The culture you grow up in impacts you. The parents that you're born to impact you.

Imagine that a thousand years ago, two brothers grew up in the wilderness somewhere. And they have a relationship with one another, they actually make promises with one another, that they will be totally devoted to one another. They call it a "Covenant of Friendship." Then, one betrays the other. He breaks the covenant.

And now, they begin feuding. Any time one of them is out in the wilderness hunting or something, they're looking over their shoulder, afraid they're going to get attacked. And they do, over time, attack one another, and retaliate, and back and forth it goes for years. And eventually they get married and have kids and their families engage in this feud and hatred and they fight over land and livestock and marriages and the conflict becomes embedded into their very being over generations and generations. And everyone in that tribe suffers because of it—the war and its effects are brutal and touch every member of those tribes. Not because each individual at some point neutrally looked at the facts and made a choice to hate the other tribe—but because of the actions of their forefathers, generations prior.

That's the story between humanity and God. Because Adam, our representative forefather, chose to forgo his responsibility to lead his family to obedience and worship and honor of God and instead rebelled against the creator, thrusting not only himself, but his wife, his kids, and all of his descendants, into a never-ending conflict, enmity, with God.

And as much as we might want to proclaim: “That’s not fair!”, each of us live out that enmity with God if we’re given a chance. We prove that we bear the guilt, we make the choice—again and again—to side with that family. We are not counted sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners, born into a rebellious, unfaithful family of oathbreakers.

Now, why is it important for us to understand this? Well, it reminds us that death and sin are a far greater problem than we might want to admit. If we’re only focused on our individual, external sins that we can see, we might tell ourselves the lie that “I just have to clean myself up,” especially if we’re mostly just measuring ourselves against other people.

We hear of another’s scandalous problems and we think: “At least I’ve been faithful to my wife, at least my kids are pretty well-behaved, at least I can keep a job! Oh, I have this one vice, but I just have to clean that up, and I’ll get to that eventually.”

That’s not how sin works. Sin is a much, much deeper problem than that, it has its hooks in you. And you might be able to fool yourselves for a year, two years, maybe even decades, that you have it under control, but eventually—either sin is going to erupt in you in ways that devastate your life OR you’re going to get to the end of your life... and death is going to come for you—no matter how squeaky clean your reputation was.

Death will come for you just as it does the murderer and the addict and the dictator. Because all of us bear the guilt of Adam’s sin. The rot goes deep.

So, what you need is not merely a new example. Someone to show you how to be a good person. And what you need is not merely someone to pay the punishment for your past sins and get you to neutral, so you can try again.

What you need is a new representative who will be obedient for you. Someone who will establish a new family, a new tribe, that relates to God not in enmity, but in perfect love and obedience and joy. One who establishes a new covenant of faithful friendship with God.

2. The Savior’s Solution: Christ’s redemptive work is parallel to, and yet greater, than Adam’s failure (v. 15-19).

And the whole point of Paul bringing up this relationship that you have with Adam, which has resulted to being surrounded by and filled with sin and death, is to say that Adam does not have the final word! Jesus is the new and better Adam!

Here, at the end of verse 14, what does Paul say about Adam: “**Adam was a type of the one who was to come**”—that’s Jesus.

Now, when we talk about something in the Bible being a “type” of something else, we mean it’s a sign that points forward to and prefigures a future thing, a greater reality. And in doing so, it helps us to see the greater reality more clearly.

I heard one pastor explain it like this: Kids, some of you in here have met my dog, right? If I asked you to describe Camper, how would you describe him?

Well, you might say: "He's brown! He's got four legs, he's got a long, wagging tail. He likes to eat food. He likes to run." Now, if I asked you, describe Camper, but in relation to, the Dyer's dog: Ivy. Well, Ivy is much smaller than Camper, so you get a better sense of how big Camper really is. Ivy is brown too, but a lighter brown. They both have fur, but Camper's is straight and coarse and Ivy's is wavy and fine.

In comparing them, you get an even clearer picture of each one. And in comparing Jesus to Adam, you get a clearer picture of the glory of Jesus and what he has done.

Like Adam, Jesus is the head, the representative, of a group of humanity before God. But, Paul says, he's so much greater! Look at verse 15 with me:

"The free gift—what Christ has done—is not like the trespass—what Adam has done—For if many have died through the 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!"

Paul says, if in Adam many received death, in Christ, many receive the grace of God in even greater abundance. And Paul points to two results of Christ's perfect representation:

First, **"the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification."**

So, Adam's sin brought condemnation—condemnation not only for himself, but for the whole human race. One sin, all condemned. One sin, a broken relationship with God for all. But, Jesus, in his role as representative of a new humanity, under the new covenant, his actions have brought justification—for all those whom he represents. One righteous man, all justified. One obedient life, eternal life for many.

And look at how the grace of God is evident here: When did condemnation come? After one man's trespass. When did the free gift come? **"Following many trespasses."**

God didn't simply send Christ after Adam's fall, to pay for Adam and his family's sin. He sent Christ after thousands of years of sin and millions upon millions of Adam's descendants racking up even more guilt.

One commentator wrote: "That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment, that is perfectly understandable: that the accumulated sins and guilt of all ages should be answered by God's free gift, this is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension."

Christ is the better Adam, because undeserved justification following many sins is so much sweeter than rightful condemnation following one sin.

And, look at verse 17, Jesus is better than Adam because his representation brings life!

“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 is where understanding the strange reality that the guilt of Adam’s sin has been counted to you—imputed to you—makes such a huge difference. One pastor put it like this:

“The deepest reason why death reigns over all is not because of our individual sins, but because of Adam’s sin imputed to us. So, the deepest reason eternal life reigns is not because of our individual deeds of righteousness, but because of Christ’s righteousness imputed to us by grace through faith.”^[1]

Now, Paul sums all this up in verses 18 and 19. He finally completes the comparison he started back in verse 12.

“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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, there’s a question that many people rightfully bring up at this point: Is Paul teaching a kind of universal salvation here? He says just as Adam’s sin led to condemnation for all, Christ’s obedience leads to life for all men, right? Doesn’t Jesus’s obedience have to reverse the curse for all of humanity to truly be greater than Adam’s?

And it’s a good question. But, the answer is no.

Because Paul qualifies exactly who it is that gains the benefit of Christ’s righteousness right here in this passage, in verse 17: **“...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.**

Those who receive. Some will not receive, some will. And we know that through the rest of Romans, Paul has made very clear how to receive it: Through faith in Christ. Paul is very clear, in Romans, and elsewhere (2 Thess. 1:8-9), that those who do not know God through Christ, that do not grasp the promises of God by faith, will not be judged righteous and suffer wrath.

But, what Paul *is* saying is that just as the sin of Adam was transferred to all of the members of his human race, without fail, so too the obedience of Christ is universally transferred unto all of the members of his new humanity.

And there *is*, of course, a universal element to the salvation offered in Christ. Just as the curse of sin has infected all people indiscriminately, so too the offer of the gospel is given to all indiscriminately. Just as the curse of sin has infected every tribe and tongue and culture in humanity, so too Christ will redeem people of every tribe and tongue and culture.

Again, the glory here is in the parallel. Just as all of Adam's children were surely affected by the curse of their representative's sin, so all of Christ's people will surely be made right and transformed by his righteousness that leads to life.

3. The Superabundance Principle: Even when sin is highlighted and death is everywhere, grace abounds all the more (v. 20-21).

Okay, so, the question is, how do we apply this? Why did Paul need to put this in here? This is where we try to bring this full circle.

Remember, the question we started with was: How can you hope when you are surrounded by sin and death? When your failures are flaunted in front of your face? When your suffering is snowballing, and open wounds are getting jabbed? How do you maintain hope?

It's easy to believe when life is going well. How do you believe when things fall apart?

Well, I think Paul's final two verses help us connect the dots.

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

Now, I think the reason that Paul brings up the law here is because there would be some Jewish pushback to his concise summary of human history. It might go something like this:

“Okay, Paul, I see what you're saying about Adam and sin entering through Adam, and all that. But what about Moses? What about what God did when he entered into relationship with Israel to constitute a new relationship with humans at Mt. Sinai and make us a holy nation? How does that fit into this picture of Adam and Christ?”

And to that, Paul says, you misunderstand. The law didn't come to open up a new avenue for salvation. The law didn't create a new tribe, a new humanity, that would exist in peace with God. What the law did was actually shine a spotlight on your sin! In a sense, it made us even more guilty, because now we had even more commands that we could directly, defiantly disobey in rebellion.

God, theoretically, could have sent Christ without ever sending the law, creating Israel, any of that. But Paul says, by instituting the law, God shown an exposing light on sin, that his grace would shine all the brighter. But this doesn't just happen in the Old Testament, it happens today, too.

Maybe someone comes to church for the first time, and they hear the law of God and they feel gross. Because of sin in their life has suddenly been explicitly, painfully exposed. Maybe someone gets confronted by a brother or sister in Christ and feel ashamed. Maybe it's reading a

part of the Bible you never read, and suddenly, your stomach starts to churn. And the tendency in that moment is to flee. Flee Christianity. Flee the church, flee the Bible, silence the quiet voice of condemnation in your own heart. Flee the hurt.

But the point of the law of God is make the sin feel greater, to increase our awareness of guilt—but the train doesn't stop there—it keeps going to the cross, where the grace of God is shown to abound all the more!

If you don't let the moral teaching of the Bible prick your conscience, you'll never feel the grace of the Bible heal your wounds. If you don't see the hideous nature of sin—even sin that the World excuses or even celebrates—then you won't see the glorious nature of grace! Don't resist the way that the law of God makes you feel bad. That's the design!

And this connects not only to the new Christian, but the seasoned Christian. This is what answers the question: “How do you maintain hope when sin and suffering abound?” You know, you remember, that grace abounds all the more!

When sin in the world, or in yourself, is highlighted, when suffering and death in the world, or in your backyard, is overwhelming, let yourself see the pain, feel the guilt—and know that the grace that reverses the curse is even more glorious. When sin abounds, grace abounds all the more!

So, if you confessed pornography use this week. God's grace abounds all the more.

If you are drowning in exhaustion and your limitations are just staring you in the face, know that God's grace abounds all the more.

If you have been reminded of your past failures, believe that God's grace abounds all the more.

If you have been drowning in the curse of death and suffering, know that the grace that reverses the curse and brings about life abounds for you. If you are in Christ, our representative has already beat death once, and one day he will defeat it once and for all.

The bitterness of sin and death is there so that grace and life would be sweet to you. I so desperately want us to be a people who have tasted the bitterness of sin and death—and aren't afraid of it—because grace will be ever sweeter.

[1] John Piper, “Adam, Christ, and Justification, Part 2”
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/adam-christ-and-justification-part-2>.