

If you've ever watched a professional wrestling match, you probably figured the whole thing was staged. But I knew a guy who wrestled back in the 50s, and he said the only thing that was staged in his day was who was going to win and who was going to lose, and that everything else between the beginning and end was up to the wrestlers themselves.

That's kind of like the match between Adam and Jesus as described in the passage written by St. Paul to the church in Rome. We know who's going to win, but there's a whole bunch of stuff in between the beginning and the end that's up to the wrestlers themselves. It's the fight of the millennia. This morning we're going to talk about what that's got to do with our walk with God and with one another.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **ROMANS 5:12-21**

**Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—<sup>13</sup>To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.**

**<sup>15</sup>But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! <sup>16</sup>Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. <sup>17</sup>For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!**

**<sup>18</sup>Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. <sup>19</sup>For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.**

**<sup>20</sup>The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Let's begin with the first line. Paul wrote, **"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (v.12)**. This passage sounds like a word salad, at first, anyway. But let's sort it out by taking a look at just the key ideas. Paul was saying that Adam introduced sin into the world all by himself, and, just as God promised, he died. As a result, a pattern was set: Anyone, which is everyone, which includes you and me, who sins, dies.

Paul said that **"sin entered the world."** **"The world"** includes people and everything else on the planet, including the planet itself. Later he wrote that **"the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:21-22).**

Disease, natural disasters, climate change, birth defects, and a torrential downpour when you go to Disneyland with your children are all the result of sin. God is the source of life, sin results in separation from God, and as a result, everything in the world, left to its own accord, dies.

Adam wins the first round.

Paul wrote, **"but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command" (vv.13-14).**

In other words, after Moses delivered God's laws and statutes to the people in writing, there was now a new order for taking account of one's sin. Nonetheless, death reigned before and after Moses because everyone still sinned just as Adam had in the beginning.

As I said, we know how this match is going to end, but there's a whole bunch of stuff that's going to happen between now and forever that no one could've anticipated.

Paul talked as though sin had a life of its own. For example, he said that sin **“reigns,”** as in it rules over us. Later he wrote that we are enslaved to sin and we obey it (6:16-17). He said that sin pays wages, which is death (6:23); and that it seizes opportunities to deceive and kill (7:8,11,13).

But despite sin’s power, it’s not a free agent, which means it is not a person whom we can identify and lock in a cage. It’s worse than that. Sin is a force which lives in our own hearts. It’s a condition, a way of thinking, a way of living, a lifestyle choice. It pervades every part of each person and every microbe on the planet.

Adam takes round two.

But we have just begun. Paul wrote, **“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! <sup>16</sup> Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. <sup>17</sup> For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”**

One way to break this down is to look at the progression of Paul’s thinking according to the two opponents. First there’s Adam: Because of his sin, **“many died”** and fell under judgment and condemnation and therefore **“death reigned.”** On the other hand, because of God’s grace in Christ we were justified and therefore life reigned. Death versus life—that’s the contest.

But solving the word puzzle is only a means to an end. The takeaway is that Adam was like Jesus in so much as just like his sin spread across the human race, so too did God’s grace **“overflow”** to everyone!

**“Overflow”** is one of Paul’s favorite words to describe God’s generosity towards us. Later in Romans, he wrote, **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).**

If you've ever wondered how you have kept the faith, why you are still optimistic despite the twists and turns in your life, it's the Holy Spirit in you whose grace overflows your heart. Which means when you feel alone, when you're discouraged, when you have run out of resources to calm your nerves, you may call on the Lord, and claim this promise of overflowing hope for yourself, and give thanks for the Holy Spirit who intercedes on your behalf.

Paul also wrote this about God's overflowing generosity, saying, **"God is able to bless you to overflowing, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:8).**

In Christ, there's no such thing as the optimism which tries to see a half empty glass as half full, for the glass is ALWAYS overflowing with grace, God's undeserved favor, his love, his life, his light. Let us believe it. Let us pray it. And let us give thanks.

Paul, still comparing Adam's impact on humanity with Christ's, continued, writing, **"Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. <sup>19</sup> For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (vv.18-19).**

This part's pretty easy: Adam got us all in trouble, but Jesus saved the day. But there's also a takeaway here which we can hold close to our hearts during this Lenten season. Again, Paul wrote, **"one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people."** This is why Jesus is going to win this match. The **"righteous act"** is the Cross; it was that act where Jesus said to the thief on the cross beside him, **"Today you will be with me in paradise"**; it was that act when our Lord cried out from the tree, **"It is finished,"** and the veil in the Holy of Holies was ripped down the middle, giving access to all people to God's redeeming love; it was that act at the Crucifixion when there was a great earthquake, and the earth split open as a sign of our Lord's decent into hell and his declaration of victory over sin, death, and the devil.

And that's why we're here, to worship him, the one who set us free; to give thanks to the Lord for everything he has done and will do; to press forward in his

light, doing the work he's equipped us to do to proclaim this Good News to our neighbors.

We are winning.

Paul finished this section, writing, **“The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vv.20-21).**

This means that God gave Moses the Law so that the people could see how wrong they were. But he didn't leave them there. That's what the devil does. But the Lord used the law to show us that we needed help, his help, because without it sin would be our master; it would reign over us. But with God's help grace reigns **“to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

Jesus has not only won this match, he has thrown sin out of the ring, and he is Lord; his life and grace reigns. We have been forgiven for our sins unto eternal life.

But the fight continues, for we ourselves still have one foot in the ring while we are in this world. Nonetheless, Christ's grace and life are for our lives today. Our salvation is a lifelong experience, a lifestyle, a way of thinking and living.

Christ reigns in our lives when we repent for our sins; Christ reigns as his mercy overflows from our hearts with forgiveness and love for one another; Christ reigns as we bear fruit in the relationships we have with one another.

This week, brothers and sisters in Christ, let us meditate on the consequences of sin, that it infects every part of the creation, which cries out for redemption.

This week let us pray that God's grace and life in Christ would permeate the world, our country, our church, and our own hearts and minds that we might be a part of the Lord's work of reconciliation in the world.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.