

Last week, we had heard about how wonderful it is to be justified by faith, because that means that we are now friends with God. God has made us his own by giving us his own Son. But yet, it's all too easy for us to hear that and to still say, "Well, that doesn't actually apply to me. Because I know what I have done. I know the sins that I have committed in my past. And if someone knew half the things that I have done, they'd never be able to look me in the eye again. So maybe God's not actually going to forgive me. Maybe God can't forgive me for the things I've done. Yeah, forgiveness is for other people, but maybe it's not for me." But honestly, this is simply not true, because God's grace is not something that he gives to other people, to give to everyone except for you. God's grace can cover over the very worst of sins. Christ can save the very worst of sinners. And to really drive home this point for us this evening, Paul makes a comparison between two men, between Adam and Christ. Because no matter how great Adam seems to be, no matter how terrible the things that he has done, Jesus is still greater. In other words, no matter how terrible our sins are, the grace of God in Jesus Christ is greater still. That's what we hear in our reading for this evening.

Now, we have to admit, of course, that this passage in Romans chapter 5 is a fairly dense one. Paul has packed a lot in here, and so we need to move through it carefully. I would, of course, invite you to follow along in your Bibles, if you have one with you. But Paul begins in verse 12 by saying this: "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." So the one man that he has in mind here is Adam, our first father. And Adam sinned, and because of his sin, Sin and Death have come into the world. It's important to note here, though, that Paul is treating Sin and Death as if they are people. These are not just concepts. They're not just ideas. He's treating them as if they are actual people. And so you can picture a great city surrounded by all of its enemies. Sin and Death are on the outside trying to get in. And Adam went down to the gate, and he opened it up. And because he opened the gate, Sin and Death have now come into the city. It's been completely overrun by the action of one man. That's what Adam's sin was like, Christians. Because of that one action, that one sin, when Adam took the fruit from the tree, Sin and Death have now come in to the world. Sin and Death have now come to all of us, so that we are all under the rule of Sin. And it's not like he could just push Sin and Death back out. It's not like he could push them out and close the gate. It's too late for that. It seems like it's a terrible thing has happened to us. And honestly, it seems like nothing worse could happen still.

But in reality, it is actually worse than that. That's why Paul goes on to say, verse 13: "For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law." So in other words, it's not like the Law caused this problem to happen. It's not like Moses created sin when he gave the Law to Israel. That's not how it works. The sin has always been, but it's hidden. We didn't see it for what it was, so that we think that it's something less than what it actually is or that it's better than it actually is. Because we cannot see sin rightly, we underestimate it. That's what it means that it's not counted as sin. The Law has to come in to show it for what it truly is. But that's how bad things really are, Christians. Not only have Sin and Death come into the world, we don't recognize how bad things actually are. We think that everything is still fine. Sin and Death are running rampant through the streets of the city, and we think everything is A-OK. That it's just business as usual. We can go on with our lives. That's a far worse situation to be in, to think that we are doing better than we actually are.

And for this reason, Paul goes on to say, verse 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 now that Adam let Death into the world, Death has become a king. Death reigns over all of us. We are all under his sway, and there's nothing we can do to get away from him. Nothing we can do to escape him. Not even those who did not sin like Adam. Because Adam knew exactly what he was doing when he took that fruit from the tree, he knew he wasn't supposed to do it. He knew exactly what the consequences would be, and yet he did it anyway. But even for those who don't know the Law, who don't know what God wants them to do, they too are under the reign of Death. They too are under the reign of Sin. Everyone in the city is now subject to king Death because of the sin of one man.

And so we can see, then, just how terrible this situation truly is. We can see how terrible and evil Adam's action actually was. The city has fallen, because he opened the gate. And Sin and Death may seem too strong to us. It may seem like there's nothing that can be done. And maybe we even think that Sin has too strong of a hold on us, that there is nothing that we can do or that anyone could do, for that matter, to take this sin away. What can be done in the face of such a situation?

Paul tells us that something has been done. This is why he goes on to say in verse 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 in other words, another man has come into the picture, a greater Adam, a second man, Jesus Christ. And because of what he has done, Sin and Death have been overcome. Because many died because of what Adam did. Sin and Death have come into the world as a result of his one sin. But Jesus has brought into the world the Free Gift and Grace. And note here that he's also treating these as if they are people, that they are individuals, that they have personalities. They're not just concepts. So Jesus, in other words, has also opened the gates into the city where Sin and Death reign. And Free Gift and Grace are so great that they can overcome everything that Sin and Death have done.

This is why Paul says, verse 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." So Adam's one sin brought condemnation, and rightly so. His one act of disobedience doomed us all to Sin and Death. But even though Sin and Death have reigned for a long time, and even though sin has increased into a giant army, Christ has brought into the world Free Gift and Grace, and they can overcome all of it. The grace of God in Jesus Christ can defeat an entire army of sin. One sinful act brought judgment, but one free gift brings life. One sin is enough to condemn us all, but one free gift is enough to forgive us all of our sins. One sin brings death. One free gift brings life in Jesus Christ forever. Adam's sin might be like a stain upon our souls which we can't seem to get rid of, but the grace of Jesus Christ is like an ocean, enough to wash away all of our sins and far more besides, to have an abundance left over. Because no matter what Adam has done, and no matter what we have done with him, Christ is far, far greater still.

This is why Paul says in 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." So because of Adam, Death became a king, one that we are all subject to. But because of Free Gift and Grace, we have become kings, kings with Jesus reigning over all of these things, set free from bondage to sin. Because what Jesus has done is far, far greater than anything Adam has done to us.

Paul continues when he says: "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." Adam brought condemnation. Jesus brought justification. Adam's sin made us all sinners. Jesus' grace makes many righteous. No matter what Adam did, Jesus is greater still.

This is why Paul says clearly in the last part of our reading: "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." The law makes us see Sin clearly. We can see it for what it actually is, in all of its hideousness, in all of its ugliness, in all of its evil. But the thing is that when we see Sin clearly, it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And as a result of that, we wonder if anything could possibly be done. We wonder if anything could possibly overcome our own sin, because it just seems too great for us. But Paul tells us that where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. You can even translate that like this: "where sin increased, grace hyper-abounded." It's like it's exploding. It's like it's going all over the place, so that no matter how big Sin seems to be, Grace is bigger still. If Sin increases by one, Grace has increased by a million. If Sin expands a little bit, Grace explodes into everything around it. Because even though Sin reigned like a king through Death, Grace reigns like a king through life. And Grace is a king whose kingdom will never come to an end. Sin will come to an end. His tyranny will be overthrown. But the grace of God in Jesus Christ goes on forever.

So what does this all mean for us then? Christians, do you feel the weight of your sins? If so, good. We should feel our sins and see our need to be forgiven clearly. But does that cause us to wonder if there is no way out for us? Does seeing Sin clearly cause us to wonder whether God could actually forgive us? That forgiveness is for somebody else but not for me? If that's how we feel, Christians, come to Christ. Call on his name. Because his grace is far more than enough to cover even the blackest of sins. "Though your sins are like scarlet," says the Lord, "they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become as wool." "He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. He will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea." And the Lord says to you today, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." Though your sins may be great, Jesus is greater. Though your sins may be black, Jesus is brighter. Though your sins may seem like they will never come out, the blood of Jesus Christ can wash away even the very worst of sins. So come to him. Come to him, and call on his name, and you will find forgiveness for your souls.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have promised that all who call on your Son, Jesus Christ, will be saved. Cause us to see our sins rightly, but also cause us to see the richness of your grace, knowing that all who trust in your Son will find free and full forgiveness. In his name we pray. Amen.