

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Once upon a time there was a good land where all the animals got along with each other, and all the animals and the people liked each other very much. A good king and a good queen ruled this good land. People enjoyed their work and got along, because no one acted like a big shot and no one engaged in back-stabbing. No one got sick and no one ever died, so no one was ever unhappy. | But one day the queen and the king had a visitor—a friendly visitor, who was also very wicked. This visitor tricked the queen into taking something that did not belong to her. The king saw what she did, but he didn't stop her. In fact he went along with her bad choice. It was a very sad day. The king and the queen lost control of their kingdom. They became nothing more than puppet rulers, with the wicked visitor often pulling their strings. The friendly visitor became a tyrant. He had taken control of their thrones, and every day he reminded them what they had given up. Even though the queen was the first to do wrong, everyone blamed the king. It was really his fault. Because of his failure to do what is right, the whole land was helpless against the wicked and cruel tyrant. They needed to learn HOW TO DETHRONE A TYRANT OR TWO.

Actually there are three tyrants: sin, its consequence death, and its wicked author the devil, who tries to come off as friendly. How did these tyrants take over the good land? You heard the real story in the Old Testament lesson for today. But how to dethrone these tyrants? This was a job for another Good King, whom you met in

today's Gospel. The wicked tyrant tried to trick the second King too. But the second King wouldn't be tricked, forced, or manipulated into doing anything evil. The Good King dethroned all three tyrants: first by not giving into sin, second by paying the death-debt every sinner owed and then rising from death shattering death's power to hold sinners in the grave, and third by taking away the wicked tyrant's right to accuse people of their sins.

We have before us a difficult portion of Paul's letter to the Romans. Difficult? Well, the general concepts are easy enough for even a child to understand. Adam sinned. He made himself sick with an infection that would kill him. And he passed that death-inducing infection on to all his children and grandchildren, all the way down to you and me. But Jesus brought a cure for the infection that Adam started, a cure powerful enough to make everyone all better. He wants each of us to have the cure so the infection won't make us "completely dead," that is, won't separate us from God forever. You want the cure, don't you? Actually you have been taking doses of Jesus' miracle cure for some time now. That's why you're here, for another dose of the good news about Jesus, because through faith in Jesus you are actually cured, as far as God is concerned. See? Simple enough even for a young child to understand.

But apparently God didn't want us to get bored with the simplicity of his plan. And apparently he didn't want smart people to think they were smarter than God. So he revealed certain aspects of his plan that are so profound that at one point in the apostle

Paul's letter to the Romans (11:33), even he had to stop exploring the depths of these truths and give way to his sense of awe and just praise God with these words: "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*"

I'd like to take you into some of these profound points. But first, ask God to help you pay attention to some background. Understanding the gist of Paul's letter to the Romans will help. These Roman people are Christians Paul hasn't met yet. He's probably writing to them from Corinth on his third missionary journey. Since much of the Eastern Mediterranean is well on its way to knowing Jesus better, Paul wants to go do mission work in Spain, the Western Mediterranean. Paul will need the help of the churches in Rome because Rome is the farthest west Christianity has spread by then. So by Paul's letter he is introducing himself to the believers in Rome. In this letter Paul reviews with them the Christian teachings so they will understand what he's basing his mission work on. Then, you see, the Roman Christians will know they can support Paul in his mission work, because they all believe the same truths from God.

So far in his letter to the Romans Paul has established that everyone is sinful, and everyone is declared not guilty (justified) through faith alone in Jesus, not by their good works. Good works can't save anyone because people lack holiness. God, however, has provided holiness for all people in Christ Jesus our Lord. He just gives it to us. So now we all have peace

with God and salvation from sin through faith in Jesus. That's what Paul has communicated so far. Good stuff, huh? In today's sermon text the apostle is proving that we have peace with God by comparing and contrasting Adam and Christ.

Here comes Adam. Our text says: *12So then, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death also spread to all people, since all sinned.* Alright, Paul! Way to connect us to our Old Testament Lesson for today (Genesis 3). Evil was introduced into God's perfect creation when Adam deliberately disobeyed God. God had warned Adam that the day he ate of that tree he would surely die. Ok, so Adam didn't just keel over with the fruit still stuck in his teeth. He didn't stop breathing that day. But Adam did die spiritually. Spiritual death was what God had promised: separation between God and man. Later on Adam's sin killed him physically too. But in the meantime, Adam's sin infected all his children and their children and their children, etc. All of us inherited the sin-condition from our parents. "Pastor, why are you talking about a sin-condition? Isn't sin just the bad words and behaviors we do?" Yes, but sin is also this corrupt condition we all find ourselves in. And sin causes death. In fact here in v. 12 we have the answer to the question: "Why did so-n-so die?" The answer is always: "Because so-n-so was a sinner." Or as the Holy Spirit puts it through Paul: *Death came to all humans, because all sinned.* Think of Covid-19, except more easily spread, and way more deadly than just 3%.

You know, there's not even one ounce of

comfort in such a thought. It does not make me feel good about myself or about any of my dead loved ones. It mashes my face into this reality: someday I'm going to die too! ...unless Jesus comes back first.

Dear friends, the better we come to grips with how completely sin has infiltrated our life, and how devastating sin's consequences are, the better equipped we are to plumb the depths of God's love for us and how his power rescued us from the tyrants sin and death. Jesus has dethroned the tyrants who ruled over us.

Next Paul wants to answer an objection he anticipates from some of his readers. See, when Adam sinned, he did so by breaking a direct command: "Don't eat from this tree." But this was the only commandment God gave until his people met him at Mt. Sinai under Moses' leadership. Although Adam died because he broke a commandment, no one else from Adam to Moses had eaten from the tree. And yet they died. Why? Because they all sinned. And the wages of sin is death. Remember: you don't have to commit a specific sin to be condemned. It is enough to have the sin-condition. That explains why babies, who have not had time to do anything sinful, still sometimes die. You don't die unless sin has infected you.

Now doesn't that just offend your sensibilities? To hear that God condemned all people because one man partook of a piece of fruit? If that offends you, and if you're going to be consistent, you must be just as offended by the fact that God decided to forgive the whole world because another Man died on a cross. But that's God's way. Adam was a type or picture of

the Savior who was to come (14c). Adam is like Christ, only in reverse. In Adam all died. In Christ all are made alive. Here's how Paul put across these thoughts. *12So then, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death also spread to all people, since all sinned— 13For even before [Moses received] the Law [from God at Mt Sinai], sin was in the world. But sin is not charged against any one's account when there is no Law [and the 10 Commandments were not given until Sinai.] 14Yet, death ruled from Adam to Moses, also over those who did not sin in the same way as Adam did in his disobedience [when he broke the one commandment God had given thus far: don't eat from the tree]. (Adam was a type [picture] of Him who was to come.)*

Now for those deeper insights. Are you up for the challenge? It'll take some work, but for each point you latch on to, your inner joy will deepen. Lean in and say another quick prayer for God to help you focus on this. Ready?

Paul gives five contrasts between Adam and Christ. If you think what Adam's sin accomplished is bad, wait until you see what good Christ's righteous life accomplished.

1) Here's the first profound point Paul makes: God's grace is not at all like man's failure. Compare the causes. Each cause (man's failure and God's grace) had a different effect on the same multitudes. Here's how Paul puts it: Multitudes died as the result of one man's failure, but God's grace has overflowed even more on the multitudes (v 15). God's grace is stronger

than our failures.

2) Here's the second point: What Jesus brought is not like what Adam brought. In other words, compare the results. The gift Jesus brought is not like the results which came when Adam sinned. Here's how Paul puts it: The judgment which followed Adam's one failure resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which followed many failures resulted in acquittal (v. 16). The results Jesus brought are not like the results Adam brought. God's grace has a better outcome.

3) Here's the third point: Compare who gets to rule in each scenario. Here's how Paul puts it: Death ruled as a result of Adam's failure, but we will live and rule even more because of God's overflowing grace (v. 17).

4) Here's the fourth point: Compare the outcome (similar to v. 16). Here's how Paul puts it: Through one failure, 'condemnation to death in hell' came to all people, yet through one act of declaring righteous, 'acquittal which brings eternal life' came to all people (v. 18). It's right there for anyone to latch onto by faith.

5) Here's the fifth point: Compare the behaviors as cause (similar to v 15). Here's how Paul puts it: Through the disobedience of one man (Adam), multitudes were caused to be sinful, so also through the obedience of the One Man (Jesus), multitudes will be caused to be righteous. They are declared not-guilty of sin (v. 19). Jesus' behaviors are magnificently effective at causing us righteousness.

If you managed to stay with me through all that, then God blessed you with a great capacity for listening and understanding. The point of all this is that the Holy Spirit wants us to have access to a deep appreciation for how completely Jesus overturned the terrible consequences of Adam's fall. Boil it down and you also have the answer to the question, HOW DO YOU DETHRONE A TYRANT OR TWO (or three)? You bring in Someone stronger than the tyrant to act as a representative for those under tyranny. This second Adam (Jesus) throws the tyrants off the throne, then takes charge of the empty throne, and pulls us up onto the throne to rule with him. Life is the consequence for us instead of death. God's grace is much more powerful a force than sin, death, and Satan combined.

At this point I want to ask, "So, what now?" Just think where we are in the church year. It's Lent, the season for considering our sin and its ugly results. Lent is a time for true contrition. But Lent is full of good news too. Today we see Jesus victorious over sin and Satan. So rejoice! And since Jesus has dethroned the tyrants for you, go over and kick 'em while their down. How? Make plans for not falling back into sin. That's right, choose a sin you fall into a lot, and pray about it, and figure out some strategies for not repeating it, and ask almighty Christ to help you fight it, and ask a Christian friend to keep asking you how you're doing against it. Christ has dethroned the tyrants. He rules the throne of your life now. Show that you rule with him by how you live and talk and think.