

All Roads Lead Here: Son of Man, Son of God
By Jason Huff
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Genesis 5:1-11; Luke 18:31-33; Romans 5:12-19

Our final Scripture reading today is from Romans 5:12-19. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 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 was a pattern of the one to come. 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! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 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. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 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.”

The Lion King was a box-office smash, making nearly a billion dollars in 1994; it's still in the top 30 box office hits of all time. It didn't just make a lot of money; it was really good. In the opening scene, the newly born lion cub Simba is presented to all the other animals that bow down to him as the song “Circle of Life” plays. As the movie explains, the animals respect the “Circle of Life.” The antelope eat the grass, the lions eat the antelope, but eventually the lions die and become the grass the antelope eat. Harmony, right? The problem is, it's not a circle of life. It's a circle of death. The next animal up the food chain eats the previous animal in the chain. I don't think you could make a catchy Elton John tune from “Circle of Death,” though.

In this section of Romans, Paul tells us the nitty gritty of why things are the way they are. Romans 1 to 3 showed us we are all sinners in desperate need of grace, that we are dead in sin, that there's no way around it, not even good works, so we really need Jesus and His forgiveness. But where did it all start? Who's responsible for this mess? That's what our passage answers. Not only do we learn why we're in this predicament, we also see how Jesus' gift of grace works to reverse the problem and to get us out of the circle of death that plagues the human race.

Let's sort through Paul's first sentence. He says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world.” Here's how it worked. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they were in a unique state. They had two possibilities. They had the possibility of sinning or not sinning. Before they disobeyed God, the possibility existed that they might disobey, but it wasn't a given. It was not in their nature to sin; it wasn't their imperative built into their DNA to defy God. It was only a possibility.

In the same way, they had the possibility of dying or not dying. They were conditionally immortal. What I mean is this: they didn't have to die. They could have lived forever in a perfect state in paradise. Nothing could touch them or harm them; no cancer, no accident, no heart attack, no disease; they were completely immune to all the things that might someday get us. The only way they would die would be to disobey the one law God gave them. Nothing external to them could kill them. The only thing that could kill them was their choice to disobey.

Now Eve disobeys first, but humanity comes through Adam because God made him first; Eve was made from him. When Adam sins, he locks the whole human race into its destiny. By disobeying, he and all humanity are locked into disobedience. The choice has been made; the possibility of not sinning no longer exists because sin has happened. Everyone sins because it's now in our nature, through Adam. He passed it down to all his descendants.

Because sin entered in the world, into the very core of our being, so did death. A righteous, merciful, just God could not let wicked human beings live forever, becoming more evil and depraved through the centuries. It had to end with death. In Genesis 6, after letting many humans live several hundred years, God puts a stop to it because He saw that every inclination of the human heart was to evil. God puts a finite limit on human life around 120 years. Because sin happened, the possibility of earthly immortality died with it.

Genesis shows us the result. Our passage from Genesis 5 today sounded weird. We only heard a little bit of it. It keeps going, listing generation after generation of Adam's descendants. But did you catch the pattern? Adam has a son, and he lives another so many hundred years having more children, and he dies. Seth, Enosh, Kenan, the list goes on. He had a son, he has other children, he dies. Every one ends, "he died." We expect that because we expect death. But the pattern isn't how things had to be! We are defined by death, but we weren't meant to be.

Paul goes on to say, "Sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 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 was a pattern of the one to come." There was at least a 2500 year gap between Adam's sin and God giving the law to the Israelites. That's a long time without God's law. The people between Adam and Moses couldn't officially sin by breaking the law of God. But their actions were still evil. It isn't necessary to have a law saying "don't murder" for us to figure it out. God wrote it on our hearts. Even though the law wasn't in place, we still died because disobedience to God was on every human heart. We defied the consciences God gave us in our dealings with God and one another. Even though God didn't take sin proper into account, death came for the youngest to the oldest, the most innocent to the most cruel.

It's about this time that we start thinking, "Wait a minute. Why is my life ruined, why is the world ruined, by this one guy's choice to eat the forbidden fruit in the garden?" It doesn't make sense to us, especially as Americans. We celebrate the right to make our own decisions. We see success and failure riding on our own shoulders, our own choices. We choose our own spouses, choose where we live, what career to have, what shows we watch. And if you're like me, I hated group projects in school. Because the person who cared the most about their grade did the most work, and that was always me, and there was always somebody slacking off.

We tend to think the same thing about Adam. What a slacker! There was only one thing he couldn't do and he did it. Surely if God had put 100 of us in the garden, at least one of us would have chosen to ignore the devil and his temptation to eat from the one forbidden tree. We want to have the chance to get it right ourselves, and we don't think it's fair to have the burden of somebody else's choice affecting our lives and even our eternity.

But we need to step back from that. When the stakes are high, we actually want someone to represent us. I'm OK at acoustic guitar and bass, but if aliens were invading and the only way to stop them was to assemble the world's greatest rock band, I'd be inviting Paul McCartney and Billy Joel and Eddie Van Halen, people who've sold millions upon millions of albums. If my life depended on a fast swim, I'd want Michael Phelps; if it depended on a basketball game, I'd choose Chicago Bulls-era Michael Jordan. I'd be a fool to think I'd do better than them.

But that's what we have in Adam. We have a man who is unstained by sin. He has no sin nature. He decided what he wanted to do without being enslaved to sin. His mind was unclouded by sin; his body is not tainted by disease or death or unnatural desires. He was the perfect representative of the entire human race. And he chooses to defy God's one order. None of us could possibly do any better than Adam because we have all those things standing in our way. We are bound to sin; we are influenced by the desires it creates in us; we are motivated by our fear of death. God allowed Adam to be our representative because he is greater than the rest of us, not less than us.

We might hate that Adam represented us, and we definitely hate what his failure did to us. But we still need a representative. We don't want our status with God to be wholly on our shoulders. Because if Adam didn't pass the test, how could we? And here's the blessing: we do have a new representative who gives us a free gift. Here's what Paul says: "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!"

Jesus is our new representative. Jesus is the second Adam. He is the Adam who succeeds to live without sin where the first Adam failed. He is human, so He has the ability to stand as one of us. That's why Jesus' favorite title for Himself is "the Son of Man" – He came as a man to redeem mankind. And because Jesus is also divine, God's very own Son, He has the ability not only to save Himself but the rest of us, to become our new leader. For everyone who trusts in Jesus, we are counted under Him and not under Adam. His righteousness counts for us.

The means is the same – Adam is one representative for humanity, and Jesus is another, because Adam is a type of Jesus. As our initial head, Adam is of the same type as Jesus who will become the head of all believers. But the gift and the trespass are very different. Because of Adam, every human being dies physically. And if it weren't for Jesus, we would die spiritually as well. But because of God's grace through Jesus, life overflows to us from God Himself! One is so much greater than the other because one brings sin, death, and destruction, whereas the other brings freedom from sin, victory over death, and the rebuilding of the heavens, the earth, and everyone who trusts in Jesus.

Jesus is so much more powerful than sin and death. Romans says, “The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 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.”

Adam’s sin contaminated everything and is the root of all the sins and trespasses that follow. All the wars and violence, all the suffering and grief, spring from one sin. But those individual sins add up. How many sins do each one of us commit in a lifetime? If not in our actions, what about our thoughts and minds? It’s not just a little manageable pile. Each one of us has the huge garbage heap! We each could fill a landfill with all our contributions to sin!

But despite the radical multiplication of sins over the centuries, Jesus’ grace to us through His life, death, and resurrection covers every last one of them. We are forgiven all of them. One sin of Adam’s leads to a vast, uncountable number of sins. But the work of Christ erases them all for everyone who is counted under Him. As Martin Luther put it, “As Adam’s sin has become our own, so has Christ’s righteousness become our own.”

But that’s not the only thing – death reigned in us because of Adam, but for believers, we reign in life! We live now confidently, joyfully, boldly, knowing that Christ lives in us. We live in hope because we know that even our physical death is not the end. When that occurs, we get to be with Christ! We will live with Him! And at just the perfect time, Christ will raise us from the dead; we will have our bodies back, only made perfect, and we will rule alongside Him in His Kingdom. We who were nothing because of sin gain everything through Jesus.

We get to be righteous; we get to be like God in His character and be right with Him. If that doesn’t make you joyful, nothing will. Because there is nothing better than knowing that someday, you will live in the King’s palace and be seated at His table and be like Him. God doesn’t give you faith in Jesus to make you a little better or to give you earthly comforts. God gives you faith to bring you back from spiritual death and to become like Him in your soul.

Now we’re to the last section: “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 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.”

We have to be careful with this last part because of the use of the word “all.” Are all people saved? No. The “all” applies to everyone counted under their head. The result of Adam’s one trespass was condemnation for all who are counted under him, who do not acknowledge or desire or follow God. But the result of one act of righteousness – Jesus’ willing sacrifice of Himself after living a sinless life – brings life to all who are counted under Him.

This is a reassurance to us. Do you have faith in Christ? Do you trust your life to Him, your salvation, all that you do? Then you will not lose your reward. The “all” means that if you are counted under Jesus, you won’t wind up outside.

There's been a lot of talk in the past couple of weeks about the state of modern air travel, right? Tons of flights cancelled out of Florida at Spring Break, then now two incidents of people boarded on an airplane who were ushered off by police, sometimes violently. You paid your money; you did everything they told you; but somehow you don't have a seat.

Let me reassure you: that doesn't happen in the Kingdom of God. You are not going to lose your spot in God's Kingdom to someone who was a little more godly in this life than you were. You are called to be godly, the proof of your salvation is that you want to be more godly and act it out, but you aren't going to be bumped. If you are under the lordship and headship of Jesus, you have a ticket worth more than any first-class trip on any airline in the world. You have a pass to eternal life in the presence of your Savior. All of us who trust in Him have that same pass. Rejoice in that.

Now the last little bit: "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." Through Jesus' obedience, we will be made righteous. Note that it doesn't say we will be declared righteous – that's what happens when we are justified before the Father. The Father calls us righteous because we are counted under Jesus.

We will be made righteous. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to us so that we would become more like Him. The Holy Spirit is our companion to remind us of God's ways. The process where we actually become more godly is called sanctification. Through the various trials of this world, we start becoming the people we were made to be.

You are not counted under Christ so you can do whatever you want. You are counted under Christ to become like Christ. It's a long process of denying ourselves our sinful desires in order to fulfill the desires God is placing in our hearts. If you are worried about whether or not you are counted to Christ and not Adam, I'd say the prime factor is this: do you want to become more like Jesus? No one under Adam does, but all under Jesus do.

If you are not sure where you stand, or if you know for the first time that you finally want to stand with Jesus and be like Him in His love, kindness, mercy, and grace, then talk to Him. Ask Him to place you under His Lordship. He will do it. And if you do know, then leave today in peace. Your destiny does not lie with Adam. It lies with Jesus. Your destiny is not just sin after sin leading to death and hell. Your destiny is far better. You have true life within you. You have the Holy Spirit within you. You have the ability now to start to act like your Lord. Let us leave today committed to showing that we truly belong to Jesus Christ and ready to enjoy His presence both now and forever.