

Rom 5:12-21 Tasting God's life*Tim Anderson 2/9/23*

Late last year we did a series on Paul's letter to the Romans.
At least we did the first four and half chapters.
Unfortunately Romans is a long letter.
People lose patience with you if you preach the whole thing.
It would take me 6 months
to take a passage from Romans each week
and get from the start to the end.

Makes you appreciate the people who went before us.
They didn't have such short attention spans.
Paul's readers in Rome no doubt got through his whole letter
in less than six months.
Anyway we're back into Romans for another three and a half chapters.

Those people who lived in generations
before the invention of the bicycle and underarm deodorant,
were not quite as primitive
as we sometimes patronisingly imagine them to be.
The fact that I live surrounded by the wonders of modern technology
doesn't make me clever.
In fact, I couldn't make a bike nor underarm deodorant,
let alone a plasma TV.
The folks from past generations
didn't have as much clutter crowding their minds.
Maybe they were better at writing and understanding complex ideas.
Certainly the apostle Paul who wrote this letter
had a razor sharp mind
like a chief justice on the high court bench.
And the Christians he was writing to in Rome
must have been clued up enough
that he thought they'd read and understand what he wrote.
So let's approach the Scriptures humbly.

Recognising that it will be hard work to read and understand.
But the hard work will be worth it,
because we will gain some insight into the mind of God.

Casting your mind back 12 months to the first half of Romans 5,
it told us to recognise all the good things that come to us
because Jesus died for us.

We are justified.

Just as if we'd never sinned.

And so we have peace with God.

We stand in God's grace.

We have the certain hope of life forever with God.

And we have God's love poured into our hearts.

Now,

Paul has another tack for showing us how good God has been to us.

In the second half of chapter 5,

he compares Adam's sin with Christ's death on the cross.

Whatever bad things happened to us because of Adam's sin.

The good things that come to us because of Jesus are much greater.

And the aim is again

to get us to realise how good God has been to us in Jesus.

It's important for us to keep in mind that overall aim
because this passage raises another issues we need to look at
and it doesn't have much to do with God's goodness,
it's more about our badness.

The question this passage raises is 'original sin'.

I think it's important that we address the issue.

This passage is actually the most detailed in the Bible about original sin.

So if we don't talk about it when we preach Romans 5 we never will.

But at the same time,

we don't want to lose sight of the fact

that this passage is really about God's goodness more than our badness.

Let's keep that in mind.

So. Original Sin.

What I'm going to do is outline for you three positions,

Position #1.

Adam sinned.

We all copy Adam.

So we all sin too.

There's no actual causal connection between the sin of Adam and our sin,

it's just we all do what he did.

Like Adam we're all born good until we sin.

Position # 2.

Adam sinned.

That marred Adam's nature.

We all inherit Adam's marred nature.

Because of our fallen nature

it's unavoidable that we will sin.

Position #3.

Adam sinned.

In some way, we were all part of Adam when he sinned because we are descended from him.

So we share the guilt of Adam's sin and we are born with that guilt.

We're already in need of God's forgiveness when we are born.

Three different beliefs about original sin.

Which will Romans 5 support?

Let's look at the evidence in the passage.

The first piece of evidence is verse 12.

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.”

That piece of evidence doesn't really help us narrow down the options.

It could mean all have sinned by copying Adam.

It could mean all have sinned

because they inherited Adam's fallen nature.
Or it could mean all have sinned
because they were part of Adam when he sinned.

But there are more pieces of evidence in verses 15, 17 and 18.
In verse 15 we read, "Many died by the trespass of the one man."
In verse 17 we read, "For if by the trespass of the one man,
death reigned through that one man."
And in verse 18, "One trespass resulted in condemnation for all people."
In each case,
it's just not possible to say that human beings just copied Adam.
No.

Adam did something and we like it or not are caught up in what he did.
So option one is out.

We were not born good.

Option 2, that we inherited Adam's fallen nature but not his guilt
is logically possible,

but it does seem strange that in this whole passage,

Paul doesn't mention a fallen human nature

if that's what he intended us to understand.

Instead what he says is, "Many died by the trespass of the one man."

and "One trespass resulted in condemnation for all people."

It doesn't sound like there's a middle step.

Adam sinned, causing us to sin and so we died.

Instead it sounds like Adam sinned and we died.

and that's option 3.

Somehow we were part of Adam when he sinned.

And so we share his guilt.

Many died by the trespass of the one man.

Romans 5 pushes us to believe that
we were all part of Adam when he sinned
because we are descended from him.
So we share the guilt of Adam's sin
and we are born with that guilt.

Now I understand
that this is a counter intuitive conclusion for us to reach.
We live in an individualistic age.
We find it impossible to understand
why we should be held accountable
for things we haven't personally done.
There's a bit of our former prime minister John Howard in most of us
which says,
"Why should I say "sorry" for the stolen generation,
I had no part in the actions of a previous generation."
But the individualism which is second nature to us
is actually a product of the 18th century enlightenment.
It's foreign to Biblical thought.
Let me illustrate.
Hebrews 7 referring to the story in Genesis 14,
says that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham,
because he was still in the loins of his great grandfather
when Melchizedek met him.
That is, when Abraham gave Melchizedek some money
you could actually say Levi was doing it too
because he descended from Abraham.
Even though Levi wasn't born for many years
after Abraham paid the money.
For us, that's the strange and counter intuitive world view of the Bible.
But there it is,
somehow we participated in Adam's sin.
The song writer realises it in the song
"How deep the Father's love"
when he writes,
"Ashamed I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers."
I share the guilt of those who gathered around the cross to taunt Jesus.

Now you might ask,
"Why does it matter,

I do plenty of my own sins anyway.
 Why does it matter if original sin makes me a sinner,
 or if I do it all by myself?”

The cash value of our answer to this question
 lies in how optimistic a view of the human condition we have.
 The champion of the first view
 was a British monk called Pelagius in the 5th century.
 And those who follow him
 have tended to be optimistic about the human condition.
 The champions of the third view are Augustine and the reformers,
 and they have tended to be very pessimistic about the human condition.
 What’s the advantage of being pessimistic about the human condition?
 It conforms to reality.

It was a worldview shaped by reformed thought on this question
 that gave rise to the notion of the separation of powers in a democracy.
 You know the independence of the three arms of government,
 the executive, the police force and the judiciary.
 And the separation of powers has undoubtedly been a tremendous boon
 for restraining sin’s power in society.

On the other side,
 those with a positive view of the human condition
 have often thought that if you could just quarantine children
 from the corrupting effects of society
 and give them a really good education,
 you might be able to move the world towards utopia.
 Well you can see Paul’s view of the value of education for curtailing sin
 in verse 20.

The ultimate education is the teaching of God’s law.
 And Paul says,
 “But the law came in,
 with the result that the trespass multiplied.”
 Education can’t actually deal with the human condition.
 It’s only the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

It's only the free gift of righteousness
that can deal with the human condition.
That's the gospel!

And now we're talking about the gospel,
I think it's time we moved
to concentrating on what the passage says about the gospel.
Because as I said before.
The whole point of this section is to emphasise again
how good God has been to us in the gospel of Jesus.
I've got three ways that we recognise
how good God has been to us in the gospel.

Firstly, we recognise what Jesus has set us free from.
The things that Jesus sets us free from in this passage
are death 6 times and condemnation twice.
It's only when we recognise how terrible was the position we were in,
that we are able to fully appreciate God's goodness in rescuing us.
In the gospels we often see
that it's the prostitutes and tax collectors who loved Jesus most.
Because they knew how much they owed him.
They knew how much they'd been forgiven.
What we need to realise is
that Jesus has saved all of us from death and condemnation.
We have been saved
from the same fate as the prostitute and the tax collector.

A friend, David, was car pooling home from work
with a colleague from the school he teaches at.
David's colleague is an atheist,
and he was asking David questions about his faith.
Quite provocative questions.
"David, do you believe I'm going to burn in hell in the fiery furnace
because I don't believe in your God?"
Now that's a doozy of a question to get

as you're driving home from work,
 trying not to get munched by a semi trailer.
 So David gives him the honest truth minus the colourful language.
 "Friend, I believe that those who don't follow Jesus are eternally lost."
 His friend replies.

"You know if you guys really believe that,
 you should be knocking on doors and shouting it from the street
 corners."

Now we might not agree with the strategy David's friend suggests.
 But his point is a good one none the less.

When we realise the enormity of what we are saved from.
 It should make a big difference to us.

I'd be the first to say,
 it's too easy for me to get blasé
 and forget what Jesus has set me free from.
 I used to have death and condemnation,
 now I have justification, righteousness and eternal life.
 It's amazing, isn't it?

How good has God been to us in the gospel?
 Secondly, we recognise how much Jesus has achieved.
 In verse 18 it says,
 "One man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all."

In verse 19,
 "By the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."
 For all. The many.

The scope of what Jesus has achieved is immense.

Now of course it doesn't mean

that absolutely every single person will be saved.

You can't read the Bible as a whole and believe that.

But we mustn't let our qualifications blind us
 to the immensity of Jesus' achievement.

Just because the internet doesn't go to every single house on the planet
 doesn't take away from the fact
 that it's an incredible communication tool,

that spans the whole world.
Jesus death on the cross makes salvation available
across the sweep of history.
Those believers in OT times who placed their faith in the living God
have life because of Jesus' gift.
Those believers in the 80 generations since Jesus' death
have had the gift of life on that same basis.
Jesus' obedience will continue to give life to believers
until he comes back again.
From Melbourne to Zambia.
From Addis Abbaba to Beijing.
From New York to Lithuania.
Across every time and every place
that one man's act of righteousness brings life.
If fact the scope of Jesus' achievement is such,
that you can say there's only two sorts of people in this world.
Adam people and Jesus people.
Either you're caught up with Adam and his sin,
or you're caught up with Jesus and his free gift.
There's no middle ground.
You have to be in one camp or the other.
You're a Jesus person or you're an Adam person.
You can't elect not to play this game.
If you do nothing, you're an Adam person.

Looking around this town,
many people don't give God a second thought.
It's not that they are particularly bad people.
They just have no interest in religion or God.
And they face condemnation and physical death and eternal death.
Because they are Adam people.
People who are unwittingly caught up in the sin of Adam.
It's a sobering thought.
And a great reason to pray for the people of our town
and to pray for opportunities to tell of the gospel of Jesus.

How good has God been to us in the gospel?

Firstly, we recognise what Jesus has set us free from.

Secondly, we recognise the scope of what Jesus has achieved.

Finally, we recognise how much Jesus has given us.

Here's a question for you.

And I'm going to ask someone to answer this question.

It's not a rhetorical question.

So put your hand up if you have an answer.

I'm looking at verse 17.

“For if, by the trespass of the one man,
death reigned through that one man ...”

Now I want you to give me the natural end of the sentence.

Put your hand up, if you can tell me the natural second half of this sentence.

“Then by the righteous act of one man,
life reigned through that one man.”

That's the second half that would balance, isn't it?

But that's not what Paul says!

Look at what he says,

“how much more will those
who receive God's abundant provision of grace
and the gift of righteousness
reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”

In simple language,

He doesn't say,

“Adam made death king
but Jesus makes life king.”

Rather he says,

“Adam made death king
but Jesus makes US king in life.”

Paul is comparing Adam and Jesus.

But it's not a balanced comparison.

The benefits you get with Jesus far outweigh

the problems you get with Adam.

You see Jesus doesn't just give us forgiveness of sins.
Those who have life in him, reign with him.
Jesus makes us kings and queens of the world.
That's what reign means.
When Jesus died on the cross for me,
he didn't just pay the penalty for me,
he gave me a kingdom.

Well I don't know about you.
But for me that's a mind blowing thought.
It's like you're a prisoner on death row.
And the judge comes to you and says,
"It's OK, you don't have to go to the electric chair.
I'm going to go and do it for you.
You're free.
Oh and by the way,
after I've been executed to pay the penalty for your crimes
they will make you president of the United States."
If it wasn't true,
it would be too unbelievable even for a Hollywood film.

God has been so incredibly good to us.
Despite us being caught up in the sin of Adam,
and being deserving of death and condemnation,
Jesus has set us free from death and condemnation
and given us righteousness and life.
Jesus gift of life is not just for us.
It's not just for the people of this church
for the whole of its 150 year history.
It's for the whole world for the whole of history.
Jesus doesn't just give us life when we deserved death either,
incredible though that is,
But Jesus makes us kings and queens,

people who rule his world with him.
Surely God's goodness to us is beyond our comprehension.

How do we apply this truth to our lives?
I think we start by saying thank you
by loving God,
by serving him with all our heart.
So let's express our gratitude to him now.