

Romans 5:12-21
Death and Life for Everyone

Main idea: The gospel is Good News for all people of all nations.

We've talked many times over the years about how one of the most crucial things that we can do as a church is to be united.¹ Jesus prayed that we would be one, just as He and the Father are one, and that our unity would be a testimony to the whole world so that they would also believe in Jesus.² And Micah reminded us in his sermon last week that it's ok to disagree, and how even when we disagree about many things, we can still be united in our faith in Jesus as our Savior.

I begin my sermon this morning with these reminders because this morning, we will all be put to the test. Many of you will disagree with my understanding of Scripture and the gospel this morning. I've been preaching these things for the last 6 or 7 years now, but this morning I will be far more abundantly clear about what I believe the Scripture teaches, and because of that, many of you will be upset with me.

But before you do, I want to remind us of one more thing that we can all agree on. There's only one thing that makes any of us Christians, and it's the simple truth that Jesus died for our sin, and we receive God's grace through faith in Jesus.³ We sin, but Jesus saves. That's the gospel in five words. And if we can agree on that much, then we're part of the same family of God.⁴

We can vote for different politicians, we can disagree about masks and vaccines, we can even disagree about when we should have church online versus in person. None of those things determine if you're saved. So if, at the end of this sermon, if you believe you have serious disagreements with me, I want you to know that I'm okay with that. It doesn't mean our disagreements don't matter and that we shouldn't try to reconcile them, but even if we can't, we are still brothers and sisters in Jesus.⁵ So, are you curious about what I'm preaching on yet? Good. We'll get there.

I read a story about a plane crash that most likely could have been completely avoided. It was Flight 401, which departed JFK Airport in New York on Friday, December 29, 1972.⁶ Between the captain, first officer, and first engineer on board, they had a combined total of over 45,000 hours of flying experience, so the crash was not for a lack of experience.

It all began as they were approaching their destination, and the first officer noticed that the landing gear light was not coming on. They could still lower the landing gear manually, but the light was supposed to confirm that everything was correct and in place. So they requested permission from the tower to remain in the air, circling the runway while they tried to figure out why this light would not come on. While they tried to diagnose the problem, they turned on the autopilot, they tried changing the bulb, they contacted the tower again to see if they could confirm that the landing gear was in position, but it was unclear.

The crash occurred because while the entire cockpit crew was preoccupied with a burnt-out landing gear indicator light, they failed to notice that the autopilot had accidentally been disengaged, and as a result, the aircraft gradually lost altitude and crashed.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:10

² John 17:21

³ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁴ John 1:12-13

⁵ Just like Paul and Peter were still brothers despite their disagreement. Paul didn't question Peter's genuine faith in Christ, even though he believed he was wrong. Galatians 2:11-14

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Air_Lines_Flight_401

They treated the lightbulb as if it were a matter of life and death, and as a result, over 100 people were killed. Sometimes we fail because we're focused on what's important, while neglecting what's essential.

We have a mission as a church. Our mission is to join Jesus in His mission in reconciling the world to God.⁷ But sometimes we get distracted from that mission to focus on important things like politics, or sociological issues, or even particular points of theology. These are important things, but we need to be absolutely focused on the mission.

Our Scripture this morning will remind us what the message of our mission is. And this message is for all the world, because it's literally a matter of life and death.

Romans 5:12-21.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned. In fact, sin was in the world before the law, but sin is not charged to a person's account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a type of the Coming One.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many. And the gift is not like the one man's sin, because from one sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification. If by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:12-21)

Father, I pray that we would see Your grace toward us all this morning, so that we would see how good You truly are. In Jesus's name, Amen.

We sometimes say of the most important things in our lives that they're a matter of life and death. For example, I might say that it's a matter of life and death whether or not we have ice cream in the fridge, and Susie might say the same thing about Diet Mt. Dew. But we don't really mean that the lack of these things will kill us.

Some things really are a matter of life and death. Getting enough sleep. Eating a proper diet. Getting some exercise. We can often get by neglecting these things for a while because our bodies do a pretty good job of maintaining themselves, even when we don't take care of them, but these very basic things truly are a matter of life and death, and most people don't give them much thought.

⁷ Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Corinthians 5:19

We have a habit of doing that with some of the most essential things. So Paul writes about the gospel in such a way in our passage this morning that ought to wake us up to just how essential it is. In fact, the gospel isn't a matter of life and death, but rather a matter of death and life. As I hope you see from the Scripture, death doesn't get the last word. Life does. But we won't see how crucial it is to receive life from God until we first see how desperately dead we are without Him.⁸

Verse 12.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Sin entered the world through one man: Adam. And God promised Adam that because he sinned, dying he would die.⁹ We die because sin entered the world. But it wasn't just because of Adam's sin. We all sin and bring death.¹⁰

I feel like a broken record on this point, but it's important to keep saying it, because we don't seem to get it. We're all sinners. We've all broken God's law.¹¹ It's not just the Democrats. It's not just the Republicans. It's not just the atheists, agnostics, homosexuals, trans, liberals, or conservatives, Chinese, or whoever it is that you personally blame for the state of our world today. The Bible is clear that we've all sinned, and that includes you, and that includes me.

In fact, verses 13 and 14 point out that even before God gave the law through Moses, death still reigned. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." I think Franklin may have been exaggerating the taxes part, but it is true that ever since Adam's sin, death has been certain.

But my main point this morning, the essential thing, isn't that all have sinned, but rather it's the same point that Paul has made several times so far in the book of Romans, and it's this: the gospel is Good News for all people of all nations.¹² This passage can't be more clear. It's true that all have sinned. Ever since the beginning, we've all been disobeying God. Death reigned from Adam to Moses to us today apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

But the fact of our sin is not the fullness of God's message to us. As we read at the end of verse 14, Adam "is a type of the Coming One."

In other words, Adam represented humanity in the fact that we sinned, and in the fact that we all receive the penalty for our sin, which is death, but there would be Another One who would come and who would represent humanity in a much fuller way.

Verse 15.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many. (Romans 5:15)

⁸ Ephesians 2:1-3

⁹ Genesis 2:17

¹⁰ Romans 3:23

¹¹ Psalm 14:2-3

¹² Romans 1:5, 1:16, 3:23-24, 4:16-18, 5:6, 5:8, 5:10

With the trespass, Adam's sin, we all inherited death and hell. But with the gift, which is free, we inherit eternal life.

For most of the history of the church since around 400 AD, the Church has been influenced by the Catholic church, which taught that salvation wasn't by grace, but by grace plus works. And as such, it's not for everyone. According to that line of thought, it's only for the best. It's for the people who jump through the right hoops and live the right way. So since about 400 AD, the Church, not just the Catholic church, but most Protestant churches, have kind of ignored a whole bunch of Scripture that teaches that salvation, since it's not according to works, but according to God's grace, is for everyone.¹³

Jesus said in Luke 19:10:

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

Not some of the lost, but, "the lost." And, of course, we understand Jesus to be the one who leaves the ninety-nine in order to rescue the one lost sheep.¹⁴ One of my favorite verses in all the Bible is Titus 2:11. I have it printed on these cards if you'd like to use them to invite others to church. It says:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. (Titus 2:11)

Jesus didn't die to bring salvation just to some people, but all people. That's God's desire, just like we read in 1 Timothy 2:4, that God:

...wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

A lot of preachers try to explain these verses away in light of their theology. But when they do that, it sounds to me like they're saying that God doesn't really love all people.¹⁵ You see, I think a lot of Christians like the idea of God's love, but only towards those that they think deserve God's love.¹⁶ But the Bible says that God loves everyone, and that just as all have sinned, God's gift of grace is for all.

Look at verse 18.

So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. (Romans 5:18)

So how much more clear can it be? Verse 18 is clear that just as there is death for everyone because of sin, there's also life for everyone because of Jesus's sacrifice. The gospel is literally a matter of death and life for everyone!

Now, some people would read verse 18 and say, "yeah, but what about verse 19?" Good, so let's look at verse 19.

For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

¹³ Psalm 66:4, Psalm 145:8-9, Zephaniah 3:9, John 1:29, John 3:17, John 12:32, John 12:47, Romans 11:32, 1 Corinthians 15:22, Philippians 2:10-11, Hebrews 2:9, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Peter 3:8-9, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:14

¹⁴ Matthew 18:10-14

¹⁵ John 3:16

¹⁶ They remind me of the disciples when they wanted to call down fire. Luke 9:54

So, according to verse 19, you might point out that it doesn't say that all will be made righteous, it says "the many" will be made righteous. Good. So who are "the many"? Well, read verse 19 again.

For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

So, according to the first part of verse 19, "the many" are the ones who were made sinners. That's all of us. And "the many" will also be made righteous, because Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.¹⁷

In the end, just as death reigned because of our sin, grace will reign because of Jesus's righteousness. That's what we read in verses 20 and 21.

The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:20-21)

Paul was saying that grace will be multiplied even more than sin was multiplied. Paul is saying the same thing that we've sung so many times: that grace is greater than all our sin.

So it seems a bit weird to say that some sins won't be covered by God's grace in the end when we believe that God's grace will be multiplied more than sin. Some of you are wondering, "How can you believe all this? Don't you believe in hell?" Yeah, and outside the gates of the New Jerusalem there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth¹⁸ until all the world sees what their sin leads to, and calls on Jesus, so that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.¹⁹

So, just to be absolutely clear, this is what I believe. I believe you must believe in Jesus to have a relationship with God and go to heaven.²⁰ I believe that hell is real, and that everyone who refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Savior in this life will go there.²¹ But I do not believe that hell as we usually picture it is eternal, because I've come to believe that God will ultimately save all people by grace through faith in Jesus.²²

Now, I'm sure that we have a very wide array of questions and emotions being experienced during this sermon this morning. Some of you are surprised that the good news really might be as good as you've always hoped. Some of you are sad that this sermon might lead to my soon or eventual dismissal from this church. And some of you this morning are angry. That's ok. We've talked before about how even anger can be good and glorifying to God, if you use it as an opportunity to grow in your trust of God.

So no matter what emotion you're experiencing this morning, I pray that you would take it to God. Don't believe or disbelieve anything I've said this morning just because I said it, but test everything, and hold onto the good.²³

¹⁷ John 1:29, John 3:16, 1 John 2:2

¹⁸ Revelation 20:11-15, 21:1-8, 22:14-15

¹⁹ Philippians 2:10-11 extends the invitation to those who are "under" the earth.

²⁰ John 14:6

²¹ Matthew 10:32-33

²² God Himself swears that this will be the case. Isaiah 45:23

²³ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

And I hope that as you do so, you'll see that what I'm describing is the gospel, which is good news of great joy that shall be for all the people.²⁴

—

Some Christians believe God desires for all to be saved, but gives them free will.²⁵ Some Christians believe God is absolutely sovereign, and all who He predestined to be saved will be saved.²⁶ Some of you believe one of these. Some of you believe the other. I believe both.

I believe that God really does love everyone. And I believe that God really is sovereign. And, believing both, I believe that God really wants to, and really will save all.

²⁴ Luke 2:10

²⁵ Revelation 22:17

²⁶ Romans 8:30