

Ruin's greater reversal

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[0 : 00] We'll do turn, if you would, to the passage there in Romans chapter 5, and we're looking this morning at verse 12 to the end, where Paul speaks about ruin's greater reversal.

Let me ask why the bodily resurrection of Jesus is so central to the Christian faith. If central it certainly is, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, he says that if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you're still in your sins.

If Christ's resurrection, he means, is just an idea, a kind of myth, to enrich our lives here on earth, then according to Paul we are of all people most to be pitied.

We Christians are self-deluded fools, but worthy of no respect at all, if Christ is not raised. Now, Jesus' bodily resurrection is central to the Christian faith, because our human death is central to the tragedy of our human predicament.

It's death, isn't it, that robs us of far more than anything else in this world. It robs us of things far, far more precious than our greatest achievements and our greatest possessions.

[1 : 30] It's death that robs us of our loved ones. It's death that destroys our shared loves. In the end, it's death that will take our own lives, every single one of us.

But Jesus' resurrection is the answer to that great enemy of death. He was raised, says Romans 4, verse 25, for our justification.

And therefore, chapter 5, verse 1 says, we have peace, we have reconciliation with God through Jesus. And that means, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, a guarantee of glory.

The glory of eternal life, not death. Look at verse 10. Much more, says Paul, now that we have received reconciliation, shall we be saved in his life.

That is, his risen, triumphant life. The gospel of grace guarantees glory for all of us, because Jesus is already glorified. He is already glorified in life eternal.

[2 : 37] And how can what Jesus did long ago, and how can what happened to him, really affect a whole host of individual people?

How can it affect me so long afterwards? Well, the fact is that things done by others long ago can and do affect our lives very deeply, don't they?

My identity and that of my extended family is shaped by the fact that many years ago, one of my forebears, my mother's great-great-grandfather, went to Africa as a missionary.

And the family remained there ever since for many generations. Because of that fact of what he did, my life has been shaped, to some extent at least, by Africa. I eat nachies.

When I'm sick, I take mooty. And I support the springboks. Not only when they're playing England, just like the rest of you, but when they're playing anybody, except Scotland, of course.

[3 : 36] And I'm saying, well, most of us here this morning who are Scots, well, we've got British passports, haven't we? And that is because some 400 years ago, King James VI of Scotland went south and took the throne of England as well to create a united kingdom.

And in myriads of ways, the actions of individuals in the long-distant past have shaped the identity of our lives. And we all have our own significant family histories.

And those histories impact us still today. But here in Romans 5, 12-21, Paul says that there is an ultimate sense in which all of us, human beings, all of us, share a common family history that has shaped all of our lives in the most profound of ways.

We share the family legacy, he says, of one man, of Adam. And the legacy that we share, of course, is a legacy of death. We are in Adam.

And that is why every one of us dies. But God's justifying grace in Christ has the power to liberate us out of that family of death and into a whole new family and a whole new humanity, whose legacy derives from another man, Jesus Christ.

[5 : 03] And his legacy, says Paul, is very, very different. His legacy, which overflows abundantly to all his true family, is life.

It's a legacy of life eternal. His race will be saved in his risen life, says Paul, even as Adam's race share in his death.

Now, Paul sums that up very, very briefly in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, where he's talking about the vital importance of Christ's resurrection. Don't turn it up, but just listen to what he says there.

Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Listen, for as by a man came death, by a man also has come the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, and then at his coming those who belong to him.

[6 : 06] Well, that is exactly what Paul unfolds and unpacks right here in these verses, as at the same time he tells us and shows us why that is so.

Because the sheer rebellion of man is overturned, he says, by the Lord Jesus, the new man, the true man, who becomes the liberating life giver to all, all who belong to him by faith.

That's the message. And we're going to look at it carefully. The passage is rather tricky, but we're going to look at it in two ways, as Paul, I think, invites us to do. First of all, looking at the old humanity in Adam, and then the new humanity he describes in Jesus Christ.

So first of all, let's look at verses 12 to 14 in particular, where he describes the great ruin in Adam. All Adam's helpless race, says Paul, live in bondage to sin and death, which reign over them like a cruel, tyrannical power from which no one but no one can escape.

In Adam, all die. Human beings, in other words, all die. Now that is a fact I think none of us would want to deny.

[7 : 31] But some of us might take issue as to the reason why we all die. Look at verse 12. Paul says very plainly here that human beings die because of sin.

Death, he said, came into the world of men. It wasn't there originally. It is not a natural part of human life. It is a natural part of plant life.

There has to be decay in composition if we're going to have autumn and winter and spring and summer. It's part of the cycle of nature. It may very well be part of the natural cycle of animal life, but it is absolutely clear in Scripture that death is not natural for human life.

And we all know that instinctively. Of course we do. That's why we grieve so greatly when we lose a loved one. And every fibre of our being knows that it's not just natural when somebody dies.

It's not just a part of nature that we rejoice in. It's wrong. It's terrible. It's painful. It's a curse. It's a blot on our lives.

[8 : 38] It's a blot on this world. That's why we struggle against death. The very language we use speaks about that. We battle against cancer. We fight for our lives if we're drowning.

It's because we're made as human beings for life and not for death. God says, verse 12, sin came into the world and death through sin.

Because death, as one theologian has put it, is the materialized form of guilt. And it all, says Paul, was a result of one man's sin, that is, Adam's transgression.

His rebellion against God's command is what released sin into the world. Notice it's sin, not sins. Sin is an enslaving power.

Which once it's let loose, says Paul, it touches all humanity. Death spread to all men, he says, because all sin. Note that all, all, all through this passage. Now be careful here.

[9 : 48] Don't misunderstand what Paul is saying. He is not saying that because everybody began to sin also in the same way as Adam, they share his punishment. That is the very opposite of what he's saying all the way through this passage.

His whole concern is to show in this passage the respective results of one man's rebellion and one man's righteousness. Twelve times through the passage we have that thing.

One man. Now for clarity, look down to verses 18 and 19. As I said, that's where the sentence that begins in chapter 12 really finishes.

Verses 13 to 17 are an addition, a parenthesis. But look at verse 18. It's very, very clear. One trespass, that's Adam's, led to condemnation for all men.

The condemnation of death. Verse 19. By one man's obedience, many were made sinners. And actually through verses 15 to 17, the same point is made repeatedly.

[10:47] We all die in Adam because we all sinned in Adam. And we were all condemned as a race in Adam.

Verse 16. The judgment following one trespass brought condemnation. Condemnation for the many. Now you might be thinking to yourself at this point, that sounds very, very unfair. Why should I be held responsible for Adam's sin? That's a fair question. But what we need to see is that Paul isn't dealing here merely with Adam and with Christ as individuals, but as representative figures who stand for their whole family, who stand respectively for their whole humanities. They act for and on behalf of their respective constituencies. And we're all familiar, aren't we, with that whole concept of representation. Our whole parliamentary system is based on it.

Our MP is our representative. He's not a private individual, but he represents all his constituents. And his voice in the parliament is their voice. We understand it when our own government represents us as the people at an international conference or something like the United Nations.

[12:11] When you hear on the news that the United Kingdom blocked such and such a decision at the United Nations, what it means is that we all, you and I, voted in our representative's vote.

Now we might feel distant from that. We might feel unaffected by that. But let me tell you, we are not unaffected by it. We certainly do bear the consequences. If our representatives vote to take our nation into a war, it is the real lives and the real flesh and blood of our people who are affected. We are not just distant from it. That's the same thing in sport, isn't it? We don't say a couple of weeks ago that 15 Scotsmen were playing 15 South Africans on a field at Murrayfield.

No, we said Scotland was playing South Africa and we beat them. As England didn't, Edward, by the way. We won, didn't we, in their victory.

And we rejoiced at it. We exalted. Just as we lost and were humiliated and shamed by being trounced by the old blacks the week before. And that is the concept that Paul is speaking about here.

[13:21] In Adam, he is the representative of all his race. He is the head. He is the federal head, as it's sometimes put theologically. All who are bound to him by nature suffer the consequences of his action.

Just as federal nations are bound together for well or for woe. We're seeing that at the moment, aren't we? In a very good illustration. In the single currency across Europe, the people, the governments of the people, the Portuguese, the Irish and so on, have bound them together in a federal currency union.

And Irish people and Portuguese people and Greek people are having their wages slashed because they are united in a currency that affects them, even if they don't like it.

Well, so it is, says Paul, with original sin and death. Adam, as the representative, as the federal head of all humanity, unleashed the reign of sin over all, and condemnation and death came to all. And notice that emphasis all the way through the passage on the all. Remember, Paul's concern through this letter is very especially to cut off any sense of pride in the religious insider, particularly the Jewish Christian, who might think himself a little bit superior.

[14:47] But notice, says Paul, all sinned. Remember chapter 3, verse 23? All sinned and lacked God's glory. And need God's justifying grace that is received only by faith.

But all who have faith in Christ are therefore the true progeny of Abraham, he said, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. Well, now he's just saying the same thing, but in the negative.

Adam, he says, is the father of the unfaithful, of the condemned, of the disobedient, of those who die. All of them. Whether they know the Bible, or whether they don't know the Bible.

Whether they're a Jew, or whether they're a Gentile. And that's the point he's making in verses 13 and 14, if you see. No one can claim that they are not wholly culpable.

All are condemned in Adam because all sinned, says Paul. And the pagans, the non-Jews, can't possibly claim that because they didn't have the law, they didn't have specific commandments from God written down, so we must be innocent.

[15:54] No, says Paul, verse 13. Because sin was in the world long before the law came through Moses. You can't technically transgress a law if you don't have that law.

It hasn't been given yet. But you do still sin. And you're still guilty of it. Now, Paul says that in chapter 1, remember. People know enough of God's truth to be culpable, but the fact is they suppress the truth in their wickedness.

Because they're rebellious by nature. So sin was in the world, says Paul. And if you want proof of that, just look at the tombstones. Death reigned from Adam to Moses.

And that tells you that sin was a problem, even for those who didn't have the letter of the law. Even over those, verse 14, who didn't sin in exactly the way as Adam did, transgressing a clear, written down command of God, if you like.

Death is the result of sin. And since there was death, there must have been sin right from the beginning. Death reigned from Adam onwards.

[17:04] If you doubt that, just go back to the book of Genesis and read chapter 5, the genealogy of Adam. Adam begat Seth, and he died. Seth begat Enosh, and he died. He begat his son, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died.

Death reigned. Even the great men of faith died, didn't they? Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph. None are innocent, says Paul, because Adam's sin condemns all who are in him by nature. Verse 15, many died through one man's trespass. Verse 16, the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation. No one, but no one, is unaffected.

Not the faithful ones, not the ignorant ones, not the incapable ones, not even the infants, or the unborn. All sinned, and therefore all die.

In Adam, all die. But it's also what verse 13 implies. Where there is law, the implication is that sin is counted, and is all the more culpable.

[18:19] So the Jews who had the law of Moses, and yet broke the law, and rebelled against God's clear commands, well, they did sin in exactly the same way as Adam sinned. They sinned, and they also transgressed the law.

So Adam is the father of all the condemned. Those without the law, and those who have and know the law. In fact, if you look at verse 20, Paul says again, that the law came in for the Jews to increase the trespass.

The presence of God's law only serves to make the Jews even more guilty than they were before. So Paul's saying, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, whether you have knowledge of God's specific commands or not, we are all together united in the plight of our fallen humanity in Adam.

A man's a man for all that, is what he's saying. And Rabbi Byrne's words are right, even if his sentiment was very wrong. We are all born equal, that's dead right, but not equally good in God's sight, equally bad.

The natural human brotherhood of man is a brotherhood, says Paul, in sin and death. Death spread to all men, or all sinned.

[19:38] Now death, of course, means what it says on the tin. It means physical, biological death. But it also means more than that.

That's clear, I think, from verse 21. Death is clearly, they are the opposite of eternal life. And just as eternal life includes physical and bodily resurrection, so death is more than merely a bodily death. But it's death, a separation from God, eternally. In Adam, all die. And friends, that is the explanation for our world as we know it.

All die. Our loved ones die. Apparently innocent little ones die. And we will die. And left to ourselves, we will die eternally.

That, says Paul, even Adam's tragic legacy as the originator of our death contained the seeds of hope. Verse 14.

[20:56] Verse 14 says Adam was a type, he was a foreshadowing of the one to come. One who was like him, in that his action overflows to his family, but utterly unlike him, in that his entail is Adam's in reverse.

In fact, it's Adam's in reverse plus so much more. And verses 15 to 21 give us the answer to the great ruin in Adam. And that answer, says Paul, is the greater reversal in Christ.

As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Now, we need to see Paul's logic that leads from verses 1 to 11 of the chapter, all about justification, on to verse 12, and to this focus on Adam and Christ.

Once we were all condemned under sin, says Paul, but now, chapter 5, verse 1, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have received reconciliation, he says. In other words, we've had our spiritual death, our spiritual alienation, reversed. So we're no longer enemies of God.

[22 : 07] We're no longer spiritually dead, but we're alive to God. His own spirit has been poured into our hearts. So says Paul, having been already reconciled spiritually, much more, verse 10, will we be saved in his life, saved into the glory of a future eternal, bodily life in God's presence forever.

That is, now that our spiritual life is restored, bodily life also will certainly be restored too. You see, for Adam, the condemnation of spiritual death then resulted in bodily death for him and all his race. That's a fact. We all die. But now, through Christ, says Paul, reconciliation in spiritual life will surely likewise also be followed by restoration to bodily life, to resurrection from the dead.

That is just a certain effect. And that's his logic here. And that's why verse 12 says, therefore, he's adding a further layer of explanation onto verses 1 to 11.

This then is what has come about. He says, just as sin and death came into the world through one man, and so, look down to verse 18, so they are saying, just as one trespass led to condemnation, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

[23 : 36] Not lots of acts of righteousness, notice, not our righteousness, but one. What is that act, verse 19? Just as one man, Adam's disobedience, made many sinners, so by the one man, Christ's obedience will make many righteous.

And look at verse 21. So that as sin reigned in death, grace might also reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Do you see it as a total reversal? Spiritual death and bodily death has been transformed into spiritual life to be followed by bodily eternal life, an ensured future that rests, says Paul, not on us, but solely on the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is alive, risen, never to die again.

The one who, chapter 8, says, no longer is under the dominion of death and therefore all those who are in him are likewise no longer under the dominion of death.

whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, if you're in Christ, you are no longer in Adam. And that's what the all men and the many that Paul is talking about here in verse 18 and 19 means.

[25 : 00] He is clearly not talking there about all humanity automatically. All humanity automatically are Adam's natural race and in Adam all die.

it's all, he says, without distinction. It's all who are in Christ because, if you look at verse 17, they have received what Paul calls the free gift of righteousness through the one man, Christ Jesus. They will therefore certainly reign in life through him. Not just live, by the way. Look at verse 17. It's very important. They will reign in life life.

See, Paul is not just here talking about a great reversal of sin and death in Jesus Christ. He's talking about a greater reversal. And that's the whole point he breaks off his argument to make after verse 12.

He labors it in verses 15 to 17, lest we should be in any doubt what's at all. Isaac Watts is absolutely right in that hymn that we sang to begin the service. Listen again.

[26 : 08] where he displays his healing power, there Eden's curse prevails no more. In him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost.

Paul says, yes, Adam was a type, a pattern of the one to come. But when you start to examine the similarity, well, you find it's like comparing a tiny black and white image with a great huge colour photograph.

They are not the same at all. It's not just the reversal. It's much, much more than that. And he says that three times. Verses 15 and 17 and 20.

Look at verse 15. The free gift is not like the trespass. It far outweighs it. Sin, the trespass, yes, leads to death for many, but the gift of God's grace is vastly greater because it undoes death. It doesn't just start with something neutral. It starts with something negative, with death and undoes it. One scholar says this, the gift of grace is nothing short of new creation.

[27 : 18] Creation, not merely out of nothing, but out of anti-creation, out of death itself. In verse 16, the free gift is not like the result of man's sin.

Why not? Well, Adam started in a perfect world and he wrecked it. But it wasn't as though Jesus just started in the same place as Adam and succeeded where Adam failed. He came into the carnage of a world that was already wrecked by sin and he undid all the condemnation to bring justification.

He undid all the wrong and brought it back not just to nothing but to righteousness. And look at verse 17. Because of Adam's trespass, death reigned through that one man.

But the reversal isn't as we would expect. It's not that death reigns in Adam and life reigns through Jesus. It's much more than that. Who is it who reigns in life through the one man Jesus? It is the people who receive the free gift of righteousness. It's all who are in Christ by faith who will reign in the eternal kingdom of life.

[28 : 31] It is Christ's people who will reign as kings of the universe. Remember those marvelous words in the vision that Daniel saw in Daniel chapter 7 when the Son of Man ascended to the glorious throne and took his throne and he was told the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess it forever.

The kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole of heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High and all dominions shall serve and obey them. See, Christ is not merely undoing the damage done by Adam and restoring the original. He's doing something incomparably more wonderful.

It's not just darkness defeated and even restored. It's not just restoration. It's consummation of God's whole creative eternal purpose in Jesus Christ.

Man was made, wasn't he, to have dominion over the world in glory. That was his calling. But no sooner had it begun than it turned to dust and to death.

[29 : 48] that now in Christ the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost. Friends, that is the sheer wonder of the gospel of our God.

Into the wreckage and the misery and the chaos of human sin has stepped the abundance of his grace and the free gift of righteousness through our Lord Jesus Christ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, to comfort those who mourn, to bring the oil of joy and of gladness instead of mourning.

Just as the prophet said, he shall build up the ancient ruins, he'll repair the devastations of many generations. Instead of shame, there will be a double portion of rejoicing and of everlasting joy. He will swallow up death forever and wipe away all tears from every face. Our God is the God who turns the tragic rebellion of sin into the triumphant reign of his saints all through the abundant grace, the abounding grace of the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ and his righteousness which far outweighs Adam's trespass and your trespasses and my trespasses.

And that is the message of the whole of the Old Testament scriptures. In his grace, God gave his word, his law, his Torah to Israel.

[31 : 27] That's what verse 20 says. But he gave it never as a means of salvation, as though somehow they could undo themselves the whole entail of sin. No, says Paul, it increased the trespass.

That is, it magnified, it clarified the sheer enormity of the whole problem of humanity. It showed how terrible human sin really is. It's what the Bible still does today, isn't it?

If you're new to the scriptures, anybody who begins to read the Bible and learn more about God and his holiness and about himself and their sinfulness, well, the more you read of the Bible, the more you understand how big, how enormous your own personal problem with God is, you discover how hopeless your own predicament is.

It's like the sun, isn't it, coming out after days and days of winter darkness and cloud and you've been sitting looking through your windows which look to you perfectly clean until the low winter sunshine shines on your windows and shows that they're absolutely filthy.

You just haven't seen it. that is what God's word does when it shines upon our life. And yet, the other thing is that the absolute wonder of God's word is that the more it highlights and the more it magnifies the darkness and the blackness of our sin, the much more it magnifies the amazing grace of God.

[33 : 00] Look at verse 20. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. so that as sin reigned in death, grace might also reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ruins greater reversal through the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. My friends, why does Paul write these things to the church in Rome?

And why does the Holy Spirit cause them to be preserved in the scriptures for us? How does he want us to respond to this account of the greater reversal of the ruin of human sin by the superabounding grace of God?

Well, let me suggest three things as we close. First of all, he wants to turn our hearts upwards. He wants us to raise our voices in joy as we contemplate the wonderful assurance of God's grace. What can be more wonderful than to know that however much sin can overtake this world and overtake your life and my life, God's grace abounds all the more.

[34 : 21] And grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. I don't know about you, but I can tell you how precious and how wonderful how there is much more the grace of God's for my life.

That I can sing, Jesus, lover of my soul, boundless grace with you is found, grace to cover all my sin. That I can sing and know it to be true, Jesus, full of pardoning grace, more full of grace than I have sinned.

but I can say that. So can you. Because our Lord Jesus Christ is not like Adam, he's much, much greater and through his obedience, through his righteousness, not mine, he will lead me safe to glory to reign in life with him.

He wants to turn our hearts upwards to rejoice in the absolute security of God's grace. Second, he wants to turn our heads downwards.

He wants us to lower our voices in humility as we contemplate the reason for God's grace. No matter what our background, no matter how long we've been Christians, who we are, we were all, all, under the power of sin and death.

[35 : 48] Death spread to all men, all sin, death reigned, all were condemned, sin increased, sin.

Some of us here come from Christian families, some of us from utterly pagan families, some of us come from East End families, some of us come from West End families, some from this country, some from others, but every one of us comes from Adam's family.

Every one of us is by nature a child of wrath, condemned to die. But every one of us who has been brought into Christ's family has been brought in by the sheer abundance of grace and the free gift of God unto eternal life.

And the truth is, friends, the more we advance in the knowledge of God's word and its instruction to us, the more aware we become our own consciousness of sin, the Lord magnifies our sin.

But the more conscience we become of the grace that abides all the more. And that means that the way on and the way up in the Christian life is always the way down and down in humility and in service.

[37 : 15] So in our church life and in our own Christian life, surely our preoccupations should be more down than up for our own pride, our own ego. But the world might see more and more of the true heart of our faith, which Her Majesty the Queen spoke so eloquently about to the General Synod of the Church of England just a couple of weeks ago.

That true heart of our faith, she said, is fine, and I'm quoting, in the concept of service and sacrifice as shown in the life and the teachings of the one who made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.

joy in the assurance of grace, humility in the reason of grace, and finally, Paul wants us to turn our lips outwards.

He wants us to open our mouths urgently and boldly to proclaim the offer of God's grace. Don't miss the marvelous universal focus in this passage about the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The marvelous abundance of grace that guarantees glory for you and for me, says Paul, is available for all who will receive the free gift of righteousness.

[38 : 28] All sinned and lack God's glory, desperate to all men, but so also one act of righteousness leads to life for all. Adam's race who will receive the abundance of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ will find that life.

And there's no other way to find that life, says Paul. And how will they believe in one whom they haven't heard? And how will they hear without someone proclaiming to them? Adam's children are all around us in this church, aren't they?

They're walking up and down Buchanan Street today, they're driving past in their cars now. They're in the school that you go to, the university that you go to, the lab you work in, the office, they're in your family, they're the neighbors where you live.

But what God has done to reverse the curse of Adam is more than enough to reverse that curse in every single child of Adam in this world who will turn to him.

There's no child of Adam whose ruin is too deep, whose life is too tainted terribly, whose history is too sinful.

[39 : 47] But the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot much more reverse it and change it and redeem it. And that's true for you this morning.

It's true for anybody who will receive that free gift of righteousness. So let's joyfully and humbly and yet also urgently and boldly open our mouths to tell the world of this sovereign grace and love abounding over sin and death and hell.

And on its glories may our souls forever dwell. Let's pray. Lord, as we come now to this table which proclaims to us invisible words what we have just read in the written word, would you indeed turn our hearts, every one of us, to look into the face of Jesus, to fix our eyes upon the cross, and to taste even now the joy of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.