

Cicero said, *“To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to remain a child always.”*

The Lord Jesus would not have you remain a *child always*. He would not have you and I be ignorant of the most important lessons of human history.

When we send a child to school we expect them to study the history of the Roman empire. This is proper. This is useful. But the Roman empire is now dead. When we send a child to school we expect them to study the conquests of Napoleon Bonaparte and Alexander the Great and Hannibal Barca and Adolf Hitler. Studying these historic figures is all proper and useful. But all those men are dead. All the people they conquered are dead. All the lands they claimed as their own are now claimed by others. The urgency and significance of their lives and cultures has faded with time. Even the great men who are alive today and the great nations on the earth today are passing away, just like those before them.

But there is a history of the world that is always significant and always urgent. It is that history of two men who are heads of two races of men.

The first Adam is the head of all men born into this present evil age. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, is the head of all men born again into the age to come. All sons of flesh have descended from the first Adam by ordinary generation. All sons of the Spirit have descended from the last Adam by regeneration.

In the first Adam's one trespass the original righteousness with which man was created was forfeited. In its place all his posterity have been born with original sin. We have all entered this age guilty. We have all received from the first Adam the corruption of our nature at conception.

Because he was our *federal head*, our *covenant head*, our *representative head* before God, we all sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression. The historic significance and urgency of this man of history cannot be overstated for your life and my own. Through our covenant union with the first man, Adam, we have brought a reign of sin and a reign of death upon the world.

So before we speak again of the better Adam and his better covenant, let us take some history lessons from the first Adam that are always relevant to men's lives.

**The FIRST LESSON is this: the human story is far more fragile than we have been told.** The apostle sent to us by the risen Christ tells us the truth. In our text tonight he says, *“sin has entered the world”* and *“death came through sin”* (v. 12).

All the instability in the world and in the works of men comes from the effects of sin.

But what have we been told outside the scriptures? Well, the Romans told us the world is unstable because not enough people were Romans. The British Empire told us the world is unstable because not enough people were British. The Communists, the Socialists, and the Capitalists have all told us the same thing. They all say the world is unstable because not enough people are Communist, Socialist, or Capitalist. In our own country we hear it from the Democrats and the Republicans. If the Red States became Blue States, or if the Blue States became Red States, then everything will get better, we're told. The world will hold together then.

But God's Word tells us something different. God's Word tells us that a foundation of sand runs under the entire human story. That foundation of sand is called sin. It is sin that makes nations unstable. It is sin that makes institutions and movements and ideologies unstable. An economic system may have everything to commend it, but because of sin there will always be enough depravity to ruin it.

Sin comes from the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. Pouring out of each human heart is steady stream of this sand, upon which nothing lasting can be built. This sand of sin is filling in around our feet. And wherever we take ourselves it goes with us. We add our pile of sand to somebody else's pile—a husband, a wife, a neighbor, a nation—we all together destabilize and sink the world. We are all culpable.

**The SECOND LESSON is this: sin is far more serious than men would like it to be.** We heard in verse 12 that "*sin has entered the world.*" The sinking sand is everywhere. But now notice *how* sin entered the world. It entered the world through one man. That one man was Adam. But notice *how* that one man opened the door to let sin into the world. He did it by *one sin* (v. 16), *one trespass* (v. 18), *one act of disobedience* (v. 19).

Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, who is infinite in being and perfection, who has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself. He is so perfectly holy, good and glorious that even one trespass against His sovereign dominion has cast an entire world into darkness, ruin, and death. Any of the first Adam's later obedience could not undo the damage of his earlier disobedience.

This is stunning news: one man's one trespass has corrupted the entire race of men. Do we have ears to hear this? Maybe it sounds like God is making too big of a deal out of too small an incident.

The truth of the matter is, if it sounds like a small thing to us it is because we have made God small to us. We have made God an idea, a conjecture, a speculation instead who He really is, the Holy One who is alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. Whose knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of us creatures, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. Who is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To whom is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

If we come to know who God is, we will not argue about the comprehensive impact of even one trespass. Sin is far more serious than men would like it to be. Even if we could stop lying, stealing, lust, dishonoring and coveting for a day, the first sin of the next morning would be enough to ruin a world and a race of man.

But the seriousness of sin goes even further than that. Verse 13 and 14 of our text says that sin was in the world even before the law was given. The proof of this, says Paul, is that men were dying from Adam to Moses, dying before there was law. This means sin is not just the actual and outward transgressions of man against a code of law. Sin is much more than actual transgressions. Sin is more than an act of stealing. Sin is more than an act of lying. Sin is part of man's constitution. A dark principle is at work in him. Sin is the corruption of man's nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually.

As David wrote in Psalm 14: "*The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if*

*there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one."*

All this means man's sin problem is far more urgent than just actual transgressions. Someone might say, "I will stop that sin when I am older." OR: "I will stop that sin when this thing or that thing comes to pass." OR: "I could stop that sin tomorrow if I wanted to." But here is one lesson of our text tonight – even if you could stop sinning for a day you will still be a sinner. You and I sin because we are sinners. We are not sinners because we sin. The only way you can stop being a sinner is to go back in time and stop Adam from sinning his first sin.

As Paul says at the end of v. 12 - "*all sinned*" when Adam sinned because as head of the human race we were in him. What he did we did. The guilt that was his is ours. The corruption of his nature corrupted our nature. The sentence that fell upon him fell upon us.

**The THIRD LESSON is this: death speaks the truth more clearly than man ever will.** When we first hear this passage from Romans 5 it might strike us as very abstract. But there is a word here, a word that allows for no abstraction whatsoever—death.

We are told in v. 12 that "*death spread to all men because all men sinned.*" Death is what we earn from God for our sin. "*The soul who sins shall die,*" says, Ezekiel 18:4. "*The wages of sin is death*" says Romans 6:23.

Why does death follow sin like a paycheck follows a week of work? Because death is what sin deserves. God will inflict no pain on a sinner but that which a sinner deserves. Even sinners in eternal hell, which is called "*the second death*" in Revelation 20, will only be treated as they deserve to be treated. There is no more dreadful doom for a sinner than to be treated as we deserve by the exacting justice of Almighty God.

Death is to be cut-off from life. The scripture teaches that for sinners death - this cutting-off - is both present and future. It begins in this life and continues in the next forever. In this life unrepentant sinners are cut off from the life of God as evidenced by their not knowing God, not knowing any peace with God, not rejoicing in any of God's mercies in Christ, not confident in any of God's promises, not loving God's Son, God's ways, or God's people.

In next life, all this death continues for the unrepentant sinner plus even more death: no enjoyments, constant anguish, no friends, constant isolation, an eternity of stillborn hopes.

Death is all around us, always bearing witness to the truth of God's condemnation against man's sin. Death is the world's greatest ruler. Nothing has reigned on earth quite like it. It has conquered more men than the greatest empire. It has reigned century after century. Are we listening to the testimony of death? I suspect that when we arrive before the throne of God's judgment he will say to us, "*Did you not see all those men dying? Did you not feel your own body dying? Did this not teach you that something terrible and severe had entered the world?*"

**Well, let's now go on to better things.** Even though all we have heard so far is significant and urgent history lessons of the world, if this is all we know we are still ignorant. If this is all we know, we have not yet risen to *Cicero's* challenge – *we are still children*. We must not only know the first Adam, we must also know the last Adam.

**Our FOURTH HISTORY LESSON then is this: Jesus is the most important man in human history.** As important as the first Adam appears to be, for the great damage he has done, Jesus, the last Adam, is more important because he overcomes all the damage.

Notice how Paul's brief history of the world here in Romans 5 always begins with Adam but always ends with Jesus.

**v. 15.** Where Adam brought us into debt by his trespass, Jesus brought us into grace by the free gift of his life and work.

**v. 16.** Where Adam's sin brought us into judgment and condemnation, Jesus' free gift brought us into justification.

**v. 17.** Where Adam's trespass ushered in a reign of death for us, Jesus' free gift of righteousness has ushered in a reign of life for us.

**v. 18** Where Adam's one trespass led to condemnation for all of us, Jesus one act of righteousness led to justification for us all.

**v. 19.** Where Adam's disobedience made men sinners, Jesus' obedience makes men righteous.

What all this means is that only Jesus, God incarnate, has the gifts to go up against the sin and misery of the first Adam. You do not have those gifts – *personal, perfect and perpetual obedience*. I do not have those gifts. Only Jesus does.

Let us not forget the exacting words of this apostle in v. 15 - "*that one man Jesus Christ,*" and in v. 17 - "*the one man Jesus Christ,*" and in v. 19 - "*the one man's obedience.*" We must not look for anyone else. No man but Jesus can overcome the sin, condemnation, and death of the first Adam.

**That brings us to the FIFTH LESSON: God's grace is always far greater than man's sin.**

Notice the way v. 15 and v. 16 open. Paul says twice in those verses: "*the free gift is not like*"... "*the free gift is not like.*" Paul is teaching us something about divine grace. He is teaching us something about the abundance that is in Jesus Christ, a lesson he concludes in v. 20 saying: "*where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*"

Paul wants us to know the grace of God not only negates the operations of judgment against us, but his grace abounds in the opposite direction, unto justification and life. God's grace to us through Jesus does not just restore man back to that original creation righteousness where we can be on probation again in the covenant of works. The grace of Jesus does not give us opportunity to take another shot at what Adam failed to do. No. That covenant of works is irreparably broken. Grace does something far better. It not only removes our guilt, it not only settles our debts, it not only lifts condemnation off us...*it abounds far beyond that... it gives us eternal life not just probationary life... it puts justification upon us...crediting us with all the righteousness required of us, not a righteousness produced by our own lives but produced in Jesus' life.*

Heidelberg Catechism, Question 60 spells this out beautifully: *How are you righteous before God?* Answer: "*Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me, if only I accept this gift with a believing heart.*"

*“The free gift is not like trespass”* God’s judgment gives you exactly what you deserve. His grace gives you more than you could ever deserve, more than you could ever earn, more than you could ever be worthy of. Grace super-abounds. “Abundance plus,” as John Murray liked to say.

**The SIXTH LESSON is this: the cross is the fullness of Christ’s obedience on our behalf.**

In v. 18 Paul speaks of the cross when he says, *“one act of righteousness that leads to justification.”* He speaks again of the cross in v. 19 when he says: *“by the one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”* [intertextual proof– see 5:9]

In the prophecies of Isaiah and in the New Testament scriptures, the entire ministry of the Messiah is construed as a great act of obedience to the Father. Isaiah 53:11 says this about him: *“by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”* Philippians 2:7 says this: *“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* Hebrews 5:8 says this: *“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”*

Of course Jesus’ obedience must be both perfectly active and perfectly passive in order for him to be our Redeemer. His perfectly active obedience is his lifelong keeping of God’s law and resisting all temptations without sin. His perfectly passive obedience is suffering all the penalties of the law on our behalf. His obedience had to fulfill the law in both ways.

But here in Romans 5 Paul *contracts* the active obedience and the passive obedience of Christ into “one act of obedience” – the act of laying down his life for ungodly men and women like us. Why is Paul willing to make this contraction?

Because Paul knows that all the obedience of Jesus under the law as a boy, as a youth, as a man, as an earthly son and the heavenly Son, all of that obedience before the cross was to prepare him as an unblemished sacrifice for sinners. For his passive obedience to be effective his active obedience had to be impeccable.

So here is the stunning grace of the cross: Jesus, who was always obedient, received the judgement all our disobedience deserved. And we who have always been disobedient received the righteousness he earned. Praise be to God for this indescribable gift!