

First Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2017

Romans 5:12-19 (EHV) – ¹²So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned. ¹³For even before the law was given, sin was in the world. Now, sin is not charged to one's account if there is no law, ¹⁴and yet death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those whose sin was not like the transgression of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the gracious gift is not like Adam's trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of this one man, it is even more certain that God's grace, and the gift given by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, overflowed to the many! ¹⁶And the gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin, for the judgment that followed the one trespass resulted in a verdict of condemnation, but the gracious gift that followed many trespasses resulted in a verdict of justification. ¹⁷Indeed, if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through the one man, it is even more certain that those who receive the overflowing grace of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ! ¹⁸So then, just as one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people, so also one righteous verdict led to life-giving justification for all people. ¹⁹For just as through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous.

Introduction

Some of you probably have blocked out such memories, but go back to high school for a minute. Specifically, think about the math courses you've taken over the years. Didn't we all wonder how we'd ever use some of those principles and formulas? Like it or not, we all have to deal with math in our everyday lives. Not everything, of course. As far as I'm concerned, "sine" is a thing on a post along the road; "cosine" is something you do to help someone get a loan and "tangent" is where some of you get me to go in Bible class. [In case you don't remember, those are all terms from trigonometry.] But other types of math are very applicable. We need to use simple accounting to stay on top of our bank accounts. We need to use geometry to figure out how much floor covering or wallpaper we need to buy. We use simple addition and subtraction all the time. We even use that RATE x TIME = DISTANCE stuff, when we calculate how long it's going to take us to get somewhere. At least I have.

Theme: Review the Truths of Spiritual Accounting.

Today's lessons involve some basic mathematical principles. Paul gives us a word problem in which one person is heading in one direction and a second person is heading in the exact opposite direction. What are the results when you put the two together? To answer that, let's **REVIEW THE TRUTHS OF SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING. One man brought us all "into the red." Another man brings things into balance.**

Part I: One man brought us all "into the red."

Recall how Paul's letter to the Romans is a well-laid-out doctrine course. He starts off by preaching law for 2½ chapters to both Gentile and Jewish Christians in the capital city of the empire. He finishes his law section in chapter three with a very blunt statement. Whether we're talking about Jews or Gentiles, **"there is no one righteous – not even one!"** Then he begins to preach the gospel. In the rest of chapter three, he says that **"there is a righteousness, however, from God, through faith in Christ Jesus."** Chapter four is the example of this fact from the life of Abraham who was righteous in God's eyes because God credited to him the righteousness of Jesus. In chapters six through eight, Paul's going to talk about the subject of sanctification – the Christian life that flows out of faith. Chapter five, then, is a key section of the book. It answers the questions why we're able to live godly lives and what motivates us. We'll look at the answer in more detail, but to sum it up, we were dead, but Jesus made us alive. That's both the reason and the motivation for serving God.

More than a few people would suggest that the events that took place in the Garden of Eden either are myths or that they don't much apply to Christians today. Not so! Paul takes the Romans right back to the first book of the Bible. **“So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned. For even before the law was given, sin was in the world. Now, sin is not charged to one's account if there is no law, and yet death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those whose sin was not like the transgression of Adam.”**

The story is recorded in today's First Lesson. Humans were God's crown of creation and he spent six days getting ready the world in which that crown would live. With loving care God breathed the breath of life into Adam and gave him a marvelous companion, created from his own body. God made man in his own image. That's the Bible's way of saying that Adam and Eve knew exactly what God's will was, and that they were holy and sinless as God was.

How long did it last? We know that man's perfection and perfect knowledge of God's will was short-lived. Perhaps within just a few short days, a number of angels, led by Satan, rebelled against God and then determined to drag the rest of God's perfect creation down with them. The devil certainly didn't use the voice of a roaring lion, but used the body of a crafty serpent to do his dirty work. **“Psst – Eve! Over here. Did God really say...?”** The very first sin that ruined God's creation was doubt in Eve's mind, which led her and Adam to act against the one thing God had forbidden them to do. In God's court, they had no defense. God said, **“You must not.”** They took and ate. Guilty!

In this area, Scripture is very logical. God had told them that if they ate of the tree, they would surely die. When God confronted them, he told them that they would return in death to the dust from which they were created. Ezekiel says it plain as day, **“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”**

Keep following God's logic. Through one man, sin came into the world. Death came through sin. Adam and Eve gave birth to a son in their own likeness and image. God's image had been lost. From the time he was conceived in the womb, Cain was sinful, simply because he was a human being. Sadly, nothing has changed in the thousands of years between then and now. Each baby is still conceived in Adam's image – sinful. The simple fact that babies die is because they are sinful. Every human dies because we're all sinful.

Not only are all people sinful, they're sinners. Paul says that, even before Moses received the two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments, **“death reigned,”** because people broke the law that was written on the tablets of their hearts. There was no excuse for the people who lived between Adam and Moses, even though they didn't have the written laws of God. They couldn't say, “Where does it say it's wrong to murder? Who says idolatry is wrong? I never knew we couldn't commit adultery.” Their hearts condemned them. They'd missed God's demands of perfection like a shooter misses his target. They'd crossed the clear boundary into forbidden territory. And the result of disobedience to God's commands? Death.

We've been talking about death, but what do we mean by that? There are three kinds of death: physical, spiritual, and eternal. Paul's referring to the first two when he says that death came through sin. All people from Adam on die physically. Their souls will be separated from their bodies and the bodies will return to dust – whether they decay in a tomb or are cremated in a fire. Sin also results in spiritual death, which is much more serious. Every single person after Adam was born an unbeliever and enemy of God.

Transition

Because they're spiritually dead, they deserve – we deserve – the third type of death – eternal death in the fires of hell. Adam brought us all “into the red.” Thanks be to God that we still have a second part to our sermon. The first Adam brought ruin, but another man brings things into balance.

Part II: Another man brings things into balance.

Paul says that the first Adam **“is a pattern of the one to come.”** There are several similarities between the first and second Adams – between Adam and Jesus. They were both human beings. In respect to the first Adam, that’s no big deal, but in Jesus’ case it is. Jesus is the God-man. He was 100% God and 100% man in one person. As such, he had the characteristics of man. He slept, he ate, he hurt, he cried. He suffered under the effects of sin. As we heard in the Gospel Lesson, he was tempted just as we’re tempted. The reason Jesus had to be human was because he needed to be under God’s law as our substitute. And in order to fulfill his Father’s plan of salvation, he also needed to be human so he could die as our substitute.

Another similarity is that they were the only two humans who were able to say that they were without sin for a time – Adam (and Eve) for a very short time, and Jesus all the time.

When Paul says that Adam served as a pattern of the one to come, what he’s really referring to is the scope of the results of their actions. **“For if the many died by the trespass of this one man, it is even more certain that God’s grace, and the gift given by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ, overflowed to the many! So then, just as one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people, so also one righteous verdict led to life-giving justification for all people. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous.”**

Just as sin and death came into the world through one man, so also did eternal life come into the world through one man. And notice the scope. Adam’s sin made all people sinners. Jesus’ work of salvation, both active and passive, made all people righteous. That is a uniquely Lutheran teaching in this day and age. All Christian churches teach that Jesus died to save people, but very few churches clearly proclaim the fact that he died to save ALL people – that all people have been and are saved through the work of Jesus.

That’s where the similarities end. As tragic as Adam’s sin was, Jesus’ salvation was much greater. **“The gracious gift is not like Adam’s trespass. And the gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin, for the judgment that followed the one trespass resulted in a verdict of condemnation, but the gracious gift that followed many trespasses resulted in a verdict of justification. Indeed, if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through the one man, it is even more certain that those who receive the overflowing grace of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ!”**

People are born filled up to the brim with sin. God’s pours his grace into us, not just to the brim, but Paul says it overflows. God doesn’t stop displaying his undeserved love to us!

What an awesome victory Jesus won! God demanded that you hit the bull’s eye of his law every single shot and that you never cross over the forbidden line. Where you couldn’t succeed, Jesus succeeded perfectly. Just think about Jesus’ victory over Satan in the wilderness! He was the lamb without blemish or defect. When God demanded that sin – whether the original sin and guilt of Adam that you’ve inherited or your sinful thoughts, words, and deeds – be punished by the unquenchable fires of hell, Jesus suffered and died and suffered hell in your place. The reason we know our salvation is sure is because Jesus paid the price for every single person that ever lived or will live. If he paid for them, you can be 100% sure that he paid for you. That’s what God’s grace is. He loved us in spite of who and what we are. Right now, as you’re sitting in the pew, you’re a citizen and heir of heaven. Sure, we still suffer the results of Adam’s sin. We’ll never be free from sin in this life and we’re still going to die. But we’ll only experience the first death – the physical. We’re spiritually alive and we’ll live eternally with our Savior in heaven. He and he alone has brought us into perfect harmony with God.

And that’s some spiritual math you can use each and every day! Amen.