

Lent 1
March 13, 2011

Two Men Who Changed Your Life Forever

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Romans 5:12-19

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Who has made the biggest impact in your life up until now? We all have individuals who influence us along the way, haven't we? Maybe it was your mom or your dad. Maybe another relative that you deeply respect. It seems like most people can pick out a teacher they had in grade school that profoundly impacted them. Or maybe a teacher in high school or college. Maybe it was a good friend. Maybe it's your spouse. Maybe it's a mentor, a coach or even a person you never met personally, but their words and their insights have truly changed you.

Today I want to talk to you about two men who have touched the lives of each and every one of us. Two men who have fundamentally changed our lives forever. Understanding how they have changed your lives will help you better understand who you are, who your God is, and how he feels about you. It will change your view of yourself, the world and eternity. So for that reason, listen carefully today.

Now, right up front I want to apologize. When communicating to a group of people in this fashion, it is inherently difficult to convey complex ideas. We learn about these two men who have changed your life forever in a letter the St. Paul wrote in to the Romans... and St. Paul often wrote letters containing complex ideas. I'm not the only one who thinks this. St. Peter wrote in his second letter this: 2 Peter 3:16 “[Paul’s] letters contain some things that are hard to understand.” Some of what we will talk about today is a little hard to understand. You already heard this text in the second lesson today in Romans 5:12-19. Now if you're a life long Christian, maybe you followed what Paul was saying without too much trouble. But if you only have come to know Christ more recently, or haven't read these words in a long time, you might have been scratching your head a bit by the time I got through that reading. As a professor of mine would sometimes say, “I understand *every* word. But no two words consecutively.”

So I'll need your patience and concentration. You may want to open up to the text in the pew Bibles. It's on page 1753. Let's tackle it.

Okay, who is the first man who changed our life forever? “**Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.**” The one man who sinned is... Adam. We heard about this first sin in the Old Testament lesson for today. You say, “But wait... that first sin came through two people... Adam and Eve... a man and woman.” And you're right, of course. But Paul is doing his best to teach us something here, so he doesn't go into details. God put Adam and charge. The buck stopped with Adam. Adam heard the serpent tempting his wife, and he stood by saying nothing. Worse, he ate of the fruit himself when his wife offered it. Adam was every much as guilty of the first sin as Eve. So Paul just talks about Adam here.

When Adam disobeyed God, there was a consequence for that sin. Death! Before that first sin, God provided a tree of Life to the 1st couple. They were free to eat from it. God intended that they live forever. But when they rebelled against God and obeyed the serpent... when they trusted the serpent and called God a liar... when they put their faith in the serpent and became unbelievers in God... death was the punishment. “The wages of sin is death.” The unnatural separation of body and soul is the consequence of sin. And to the person who dies apart from God and his promises, an eternity separated from God in hell – that is, eternal death -- is the final consequence of sin.

“and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” This simply means that Adam’s sin didn’t just affect Adam, but his sin and its consequences (death) were passed along to his descendants as well.

Now, Paul anticipates an objection at this point, and it may be one that you thought of. “But wait! From the time of Adam until the time of Moses, people did not have the revealed, written law of God! How could they sin against God if God’s law hadn’t been enumerated?” You cannot be arrested for breaking a law that doesn’t exist, so neither should man have been found guilty before God for breaking commands of God that God had not yet given. The 10 Commandments weren’t given until about 3500 years ago. The earth was created 6000 – 10000 years ago.

Paul anticipates this argument and interrupts his line of thinking to address it: **“for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.”** So were those who lived from Adam to Moses by default not guilty? No! They were guilty before God. How can we be so sure? Simply because they died. The wages of sin is death. If they died, it could only be because of sin. Not sin against a specific command of God, but sin in their very nature. Even if the argument could be made that they could not be held accountable to God for breaking laws he never gave, Paul says all people *are* accountable to God for the sin that naturally occurs in their hearts, inherited from Adam.

What this means for you and for me today is this: From the very moment we are conceived we are guilty before God for sin. We haven’t yet committed any sins... but our very nature is corrupt, and for this we are not holy and pure before God in heaven.

Now this is where some say, “Wait! That’s not fair!” You know what? Maybe it’s not fair. It’s not fair when a baby is born with a genetic disease passed along from his parents. It’s not fair that a baby is born a crack addict because his mother is one. I am not to judge how fair it is that we are born sinful and already guilty and therefore doomed for certain death. It’s just the way it is. It’s reality. God wants us to acknowledge and believe today that each and every one of us truly was profoundly impacted by Adam.

Let me just pull from this text the rest of the references to this first man, Adam, who has a lasting impact on us today: **“Many died by the trespass of the one man.” “The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.” “By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man.” “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,” “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.”** Now Paul throughout this section is contrasting the impact of that one man Adam with the impact of another man... but we’ll talk about him in just a second.

But first let’s make this personal. How has this man Adam changed our lives forever? Pulling this all together: Adam disobeyed God and introduced sin into God’s perfect world. Adam lost God’s holy image. His children shared his sinful image. All are born in sin. We are born in sin. Born with a corrupt, sinful, guilty heart. And we choose to add to original sin, actual sin on a daily basis. As a result are under God’s judgment and condemnation, and we are powerless to change his verdict. Death is the just penalty: physical and eternal. In fact, here’s an interesting statistic. How does the death rate in Afghanistan compare to that in America? Answer: They’re identical. 100%. 100% of the descendants of Adam in Afghanistan die. 100% of the descendants of Adam in America die! So because of Adam, your life today and mine were changed forever.

There is a hymn that reflects these thoughts. Let’s pause at this time and sing the first three verses of hymn 378. Would you pay special attention to the word?

Is there hope for us who are so impacted by the first man, Adam? Paul speaks of a second man who changes our lives forever. It is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to selected verses from the text that talk about the impact of this second man.

“For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”

Adam’s sin had a horrible effect on all his descendants. But the good news is this: the grace of God (that is his undeserved love) is even greater than Adam’s sin and its consequence of death. God has a gift for us (not earned or deserved) and it comes to us through Jesus Christ. And this gift is so tremendous, it overflows to all people.

“Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.”

Beautiful contrast! One sin, judgment, condemnation for all. Since that first sin, countless have been heaped on top. Has the avalanche of sins overwhelmed God and his ability to forgive them? Not at all! The gift of Jesus offers a “not guilty” for every sinner on the planet!

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”

When Adam sinned, Death became king. No one could knock death off his throne. Until Christ came. God’s overflowing grace provided a free gift to all descendants of Adam. Righteousness / image of God / the gift of being declared right in God’s sight. Christ kicks death off the throne and places “life” there in its place!

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

Here the obedience of Christ is lumped together as a single great act of righteousness. From birth until death, Jesus lived in line with the Father’s will. In death he submitted to the sacrifice which was the payment for all people. His blood shed was the all-sufficient payment for the sins of all people!

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

What Adam ruined when by not listening to God, Jesus set straight again through his perfect listening to the Father’s will. Just as all are made sinners by Adam’s fall, all who trust in Jesus are declared right by God because of his obedience.

Did you hear all the words that were piled up to describe Christ’s work compared to Adam’s sin? If you happen to have your own Bible in front of you and open, you could underline these words each time they occur: More. Overflow. Gift. Grace. Abundant. All. Do think God’s trying to drive home a point with us? Jesus completely fixed what Adam ruined. And it wasn’t a hack job partial repair. It’s complete. Jesus set straight the path Adam turned crooked. Jesus restored the image of God that Adam destroyed. The avalanche of man’s sin could not outpace God’s grace, God’s giving, God’s love, and the forgiveness of Christ. The avalanche hit Christ with full force, and he came out alive and very well. Man’s unrighteousness brings death. God’s righteousness in Christ Jesus brings life.

Adam profoundly impacted our life. But because God loves us so much, he sent a second man... his own Son *for us* as the perfect sacrifice. Jesus' impact and change on our life trumps all the damage Adam did. We didn't deserve it. God didn't owe it to us. But because of his love and mercy, as a gift flowing from his undeserved love, he sent Christ to save us. Battling Satan on his home turf, Jesus came out the victor – when tempted after 40 days of fasting; when faced with demons that had possessed people; when faced with disease; when faced with death itself; Jesus overcame it all and won the victory. The worst event in human history was corrected by the most blessed event of human history.

Jesus has changed your eternal future for you! In a world of sin, sorrows, suffering, pain and death, you have peace. You have hope. You have joy. You have *life*. All praise be to this second man, Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Romans 11:33-36