

## **“An Overwhelming Victory”**

### **Romans 5:12–21**

#### **What assurance do we have?**

*China v America.* It used to be Russia v America. These days in our region it's China v America. The battle for power and supremacy. The head of one country verses the head of another country (slide). Donald Trump verses Xi Jinping. Communism verses capitalism. The race to exert foreign influence and power.

It's a complicated regional drama. As things play out the balance of power shifts. It's China in the ascendancy, then America, and back to China, and the pendulum swings and shakes. No two countries can claim a lasting victory.

*Gospel v world.* What assurance do we have that Christ has won for us a lasting victory? In the conflict between the gospel and world, who will be the ultimate victor? Even though my heart belongs to Christ, can this be undone? How certain is my salvation?

This morning we return to chapter 5 having dealt with verses 5 to 11 last week. God justifies us through faith in his Son. And with faith comes peace; and from peace flows the hope of the glory of God. But how assured is our freedom in Christ? “If it's too good to be true”, too often it is.

Is the gospel too good to be true? Can Christ's achievements be weakened or cancelled?

You know the situation. Chaos, sickness and death put on a brave face. From our perspective they look victorious. I visited a person seriously ill in hospital this week and in that moment it didn't look like the gospel was winning. People get sick and they die. The world looks out of control. Ruthless dictators and terrorists often have the final say.

It's as though the world is a rushing river of madness and no-one can escape its flow and we Christians are trapped in its eddies.

From the perspective of this world, it may not look like the cross is winning. We may question our reconciliation. What assurance does God give me that my peace with God is a lasting peace, that my hope is a certain hope, that my suffering is suffering with purpose?

In Rom 5.12–21, Paul assures us that the unrighteousness that Adam brought into the world, the unrighteousness that we make our own, has been totally and utterly defeated. The gospel brings total victory. Death may have come through Adam, but life comes through Christ. This is the big idea and it flows from verse 19, “For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5.19).

Nothing can separate the person justified by faith from the love of God and the eternal life that he gives. Let’s find out why.

**Contrasting Adam and Christ.** Paul assures us of Christ’s victory by contrasting the negative achievements of Adam with the everlasting victory of Christ. Either a person belongs to Adam’s line, or a person belongs to the line of Christ. If you’re outside Christ you belong to Adam, if you’re in Christ you belong to his family tree.

There is no exception. If not in Adam then in Christ, if not in Christ then in Adam. Paul unpacks the consequences of belonging to each family in verses 12 to 21 which falls into two parts. (1) Adam is introduced—verses 12 to 14; (2) Adam and Christ are contrasted in verses 15 to 21.

*Adam is introduced (v. 12–14)*

We sin in and with Adam. Although not mentioned by name, verse 12 introduces us to Adam, “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—” (Rom 5.12).

Is it all Adam’s fault? Can we blame our mess on Adam? Sin invaded the world of human beings through Adam. Then death entered the world through sin. As Adam was the door through which sin entered, so sin was the door through which death entered. In this way, death came to all men and women.

Just as my three boys share something of my nature—and we can only hope they share more of their mother’s nature—so each of us are familiar with sin because we share Adam’s spiritual condition which leads to death. We belong to Adam because his rebellious nature is in each one of us. It’s as though Adam heads a humanity which is like him.

Theologians call this “participation” i.e. we all sin *in and with* Adam (slide). “In Adam” because we share his nature; “with Adam” because we sin just like him. We “participate” in Adam’s nature. Whether the unsaved person knows it or not, they share in Adam’s nature by willingly continuing in their rebellion.

Through Adam, death comes to all people because all sinned.

Adam is an historical figure. Paul’s theology breaks down if Adam is no more than a made up person. Paul confirms that the man created in the image of God and put into the garden was a real person, not a made up figure for the sake of a good story. For if Adam did not exist, then his sin does not exist and death does not exist.

Christ did not die for the sake of a good yarn. Adam is historical. He is the head and representative of the human race. As Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones says (slide), “God has always dealt with mankind through a head and representative. The whole story of the human race can be summed up in terms of what has happened because of Adam, and what has happened and will yet happen because of Christ”.

Adam and Eve were real people living in a real place in real time. The garden was real, the tree was real, the serpent was real, the trespass was real. Adam’s sin was real, the curses were real, his death was real.

Adam was a real person and death came into the world through him. This ties into the next point ...

The importance of original sin. How powerful do you think the gospel is? Remember back in chapter 1 Paul said that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. How powerful do you think the gospel needed to be to gain victory? To enable God to declare people righteous?

Just a little bit powerful ... because people aren’t that bad. Or maybe more powerful in order to overcome the mess of this world. Or perhaps the gospel is an enormously powerful because such force is needed to assure victory?

Only when we understand the problem do we understand the solution.

The problem humanity has is deep and dark and treacherous. Sin is evil and it leads to death. Our problem is an existential one. We do not deserve to exist. A just outcome for rebelling against God is death—forever. Verse 12 teaches us about, what theologians call, “original sin”.

We inherit the sin of Adam. Jeremiah 17.9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it”? Sin and death come to us through Adam and we prove it every day. The result is often called “total depravity”. This means that sin affects every part of us: body, mind, emotions, will, motivations and choices.

Our participation in Adam’s nature means that the corrupting influence of sin is so intense that none of us can save ourselves. How does God respond? How does Christ measure up to Adam?

When our boys were young they’d ask silly questions: If there was a fight between superman and batman, who’d win? If spider man had a fight with Church Norris, who’d win? If Bamby had a fight with one of the three little pigs, who’d win?

Paul doesn’t answer these questions in Romans. In fact, I don’t think anyone answers these questions!

We know from our own experience and knowledge of the Scriptures that Christ overpowers sin and which Adam brought into the world. But how Christ does that so convincingly and completely is what attracts us to verses 15 to 21. And it’s what gives us the assurance we need to face each day in this world.

In 1973 things weren’t so great in Uganda. Men were being executed for crimes and on this occasion the local bishop was allowed to speak to three men due to be executed.

“Before we could say anything, one of them burst out: Bishop, thank you for coming! I wanted to tell you. The day I was arrested, in my prison cell, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. He came in and forgave me all my sins! Heaven is now open, and there is nothing between me and my God! Please tell my wife and children that I am going to be with Jesus. Ask them to accept him into their lives as I did.

The other two men told similar stories, excitedly raising their hands, which rattled their handcuffs. I felt that what I needed to do was to talk to the soldiers, not to the condemned. So I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood. The military men were standing there with

guns cocked and bewilderment on their faces. They were so dumbfounded that they forgot to put the hoods over the men's faces!

The three faced the firing squad standing close together. They looked toward the people and began to wave, handcuffs and all. The people waved back. Then shots were fired, and the three were with Jesus. We stood in front of them, our own hearts throbbing with joy, mingled with tears. It was a day never to be forgotten. Though dead, the men spoke loudly to all of Kigezi District and beyond, so that there was an upsurge of life in Christ, which challenges death and defeats it.

The next Sunday, I was preaching to a huge crowd in the home town of one of the executed men. Again, the feel of death was over the congregation. But when I gave them the testimony of their man, and how he died, there erupted a great song of praise to Jesus! Many turned to the Lord there”.

### **Adam verses Christ (v.15 –21).**

*Gift verses trespass (v. 15–17). “The gift is not like the trespass”. Verse 18,*

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! 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. 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 something tragic happens in our community people are usually very generous. Like when money is given to help the victims of a shooting or other serious crime. When Katrina Dawson was killed in the Lindt Café siege a foundation was set up in her name. The foundation finds, funds and mentors inspiring young women.

The tragedy of one life taken was matched by incredible acts of generosity and grace. It’s as though in some way the events of that tragic siege have been subverted by the loving actions displayed by many others. Someone said of Katrina:

If there is one thing above all that we can learn from Katrina's example, it is how to love, to show love, to use love, and by loving to make other people and places better. I believe Katrina's greatest achievement was to make sure that those she loved knew that she loved them - her children, Paul, and all of her family and friends." *Julie Taylor, Barrister and Colleague of Katrina*

We learn in verses 15 to 17 that God overwhelms the tragedy of Adam with his love in action. The gift overshadows the trespass. Adam's actions were reckless. He insisted on going his own way. Adam deviated from the path that God had clearly shown him. He did not understand the universal consequences of his actions—judgement, condemnation, death.

God's responded with a gift which overwhelms Adam's actions. The gift God gave undoes the tragedy of Adam and the gift promises a life that Adam never knew. We see this in verses 17, "those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness" are promised that they will "reign in life" i.e. as Stott puts it, "We become kings, sharing the kingship of Christ, with even death under our feet now, and one day to be destroyed".

How much better is the gift that flows from God's grace. It blots out the consequences of Adam's tragic turn, the gift gives us eternal life and installs us as kings—and queens! The gift of Jesus overwhelms the trespass of one man. The power of the gospel is the power to defeat sin, condemnation and death and give new life.

The gift of Christ is so magnificent and so wonderful and so strong and so majestic that the consequences of Adam's trespass are well and truly washed away. Your salvation in Christ is assured!

*Sin verses grace (v. 18–21).* Lastly, Paul contrasts sin with grace. I usually don't even think of putting my feet on the seats when I travel in trains in Sydney. It never evened crossed my mind until I saw the sign, "Do not put feet on seats". From that moment on all I wanted to do was put my feet on the seats.

There was something about that rule which challenged me to break it. The rule's ok, it's good not to put feet on seats. But there arose a force in me that wanted to break the rule to show this rule who's the boss!

The law God gave to Adam and Eve was intended to preserve their lives. The Law given to Israel on Mt Sinai was intended to bring them life and prosperity. But, in the wake of sin, the law served to expose sin and call it out. Sin stumbles on the law and falls badly. So Paul can say in verse 20, “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase”.

The more laws there are the more laws there are to break. As we break more laws our trespasses increase and we show with increasing measure the true state of the natural, human heart. In this way, verse 16, Adam’s one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people who are law breakers and law makers. In this way, verse 18, the disobedience of Adam led to the disobedience of all people who were made sinners.

It’s incredible to think that some people reckon by trying to keep the 10 commandments they’re living in a way pleasing to God. Reality check! The 10 commandments show you how sinful you are and how much you are in need of a Saviour. Efforts to keep the law do no more than increase your trespass so the conclusion in verse 21 is inevitable, “sin reigns in death”.

Law—trespass—sin—death.

How mighty is the gospel? How mighty is God’s grace? Verse 18—one trespass resulted in condemnation, one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. Verse 19—through the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, through the obedience of one man the many will be made righteous. Verse 20—when sin abounds all the more, grace increases all the more. Verse 21—just as sin reigned in death, grace reigns through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God’s grace is an adequate response, indeed, an overwhelming response, to the condemnation people deserve for rebelling against God. God’s grace is even big enough to include me and include you.

**Conclusion.** The Christian person is no longer in Adam but in Christ. A person at peace with God. A person who hopes for the glory to come. The days of Adam are long gone. The gift of Jesus changes condemnation to justification. The grace of God overthrows the reign of sin with the reign of his precious Son. We lack nothing in Christ Jesus, so press living with Jesus as your King.