

**MADE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE MAN****Sermon for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2020****Romans 5:12-17**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, Romans 5:12-19: <sup>12</sup> **Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death also spread to all people, since all have sinned.** <sup>13</sup> **For until the Law sin was in the world. However, sin is not charged against anyone's account when there is no Law.** <sup>14</sup> **Yet death ruled from Adam to Moses, also over those who had not sinned in the same way as Adam did when he broke the Command (Adam was a type of Him who was to come).** <sup>15</sup> **However, the free gift is not like the transgression. For, if the many died as the result of the one man's transgression, much more, God's grace and the gracious gift of the One Man, Jesus Christ, have overflowed to the many.** <sup>16</sup> **The gift is also different from what came through the one man who sinned. For the judgment came from one man and resulted in condemnation, but the free gift came after many transgressions and resulted in justification.** <sup>17</sup> **For if, by the transgression of the one man, death reigned through the one man, much more, those who have received God's overflowing grace and His gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One Man, Jesus Christ.** <sup>18</sup> **Therefore, as through one man's transgression judgment came to all people, resulting in condemnation, so also, through One Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all people, resulting in justification, which brings life.** <sup>19</sup> **For as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of the One Man, the many will become righteous.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

The first step in finding a solution to a situation that needs correction is to properly identify the problem. You can't really fix something until you know what's wrong. You've got to be able to identify and describe the real problem; otherwise, you end up wasting time and effort on faulty solutions geared toward *treating symptoms* rather than what's causing them.

Now that we are in the season of Lent, this is a time for us to once again focus all our attention on considering the evils of our fallen condition as we prepare ourselves to better understand and appreciate – and better apprehend for ourselves – the salvation achieved for us by our Lord Jesus Christ in His passion, death, and resurrection: the event we call the *atonement*, which is the very heart of the Gospel. That, we know, is the solution to our problem of sin. However, we still will not be able to really apply this graciously provided solution unless we can adequately *describe* the problem. As an illustration, suppose we woke one morning with a nasty, itchy rash on one arm that got worse as the day went on. So off we go to the doctor who prescribes medicine that will cure it. But after a week or so of spreading this medicine on our skin and not seeing any sign of relief, we go back to him and say, "This stuff isn't working. I've been putting it on the rash twice a day, and nothing's happening." The doctor replies, "Well, that's because your rash is caused by bacteria in your system. You're supposed to drink the medicine, not apply it to your skin." The mistake made was to use the medicine to *treat* the symptoms rather than the *problem*.

As foolish as that sounds, it often happens that Christians use the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the same inappropriate way. We try to use God's Word and His message of salvation to treat the symptoms of the fallen human condition rather than their ultimate cause because often we don't understand what the real problem is to begin with. Of course, we know that the problem is our sin – that's why we confess our sins. But what does that mean? What really is our sin problem? Is it, as many believe, simply the accumulated list of the bad things we've thought, said, and done, together with the good things we should have done but didn't do? Or does the problem of our sin run a lot deeper than that?

In today's Old Testament lesson, we have the familiar story of our first parents' temptation by Satan and their subsequent fall by disobeying the Lord and eating the forbidden fruit. This is the beginning of the sin problem from which we all suffer, but there is something we need to point out. We need to note that the first breaking of a commandment was not from Adam and Eve's perspective, simply a wanton act of rebellion. They didn't wake up one morning and say, "How can we be evil and disobedient and make the Lord angry with us today?" No, there was some priming and build up by Satan. They had to be prepared through his deceptions. So it is that as Satan begins his conversation with Eve, he is planting the seeds of doubt in her heart and mind. *He asked the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden!'"* (Gen. 3:1). Then he implies that the LORD God is not the great benefactor she believes Him to be, that He has not been entirely honest with her and that He's been holding out on some blessings – the grace of being like God, no less. "*You will certainly not die,*" Satan says, "*for God knows that in the day when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Gen. 3:4). Eve begins to think, "How easy is this, and the results will be so good. How might it be wrong? Especially since the LORD God had lied to us and tried to scare us with that warning about dying. It's a good thing this snake here has set us straight on that score."

So it is that by the time they actually eat the forbidden fruit, the bad seeds planted by Satan had already taken root. In fact, you may say that eating the forbidden fruit was only the fruit of the corrupt tree that Satan had planted with his lies. Their first mistake was to let the bad seed grow: the bad seed of the thoughts that we can't trust God, that we have to take care of ourselves and look after our own interests, and that we can get the desires of our hearts by going against what the Lord has said. Their evil actions came from hearts that they had already allowed to become corrupted by lies and distortions. To see the other side of it, you can see how Jesus contends with Satan's seeds of temptation and deception in today's Gospel. He never gives them a chance to grow. Every time Satan makes an innocent-sounding suggestion, Jesus replies to him, "*No, you're wrong; Scripture has said.*"<sup>1</sup> He takes His stand on the Word of God and refuses to entertain other ideas. That's the way to beat temptation.

Regrettably, that's not what Adam and Eve did. Having allowed Satan's bad seed to grow in their hearts, our first parents became bad trees bearing bad fruit containing bad seed that we can look at in two ways. One is that by having become *internally* corrupt, they naturally produced acts of sin. They were no longer good people who sometimes committed evil acts; no, they were at that point, evil people doing what comes naturally to those who are evil: doing evil things. These two people also produced another kind of fruit: not just their sinful actions, but also their *offspring*. Their children too were the fruit of evil trees. They were spawned from bad seed. They were natural born sinners. Or, to be more precise, according to Scripture they were naturally conceived sinners who, just like their parents before them, produced only one kind of fruit in the same two ways: they produced sin, and they gave birth to more sinners. Thus the race of man was plunged into darkness and came under the curse of death and decay. Paul writes, "**Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death also spread to all people, since all have sinned.**"

This is what we call original sin. It's the inherited corruption and guilt we all carry within us, and that taints with sin everything we think, say, or do. As Jesus once said, bad trees simply cannot produce good fruit.<sup>2</sup> Neither can they produce good children. Parents, if you don't like the way your children are behaving, you know where they got it from, and a word of warning here to children: when your parents are angry and yell at you because of some misdeed you did, it's best not to remind them of this. You're likely to end up suffering more for the sake of this inconvenient truth!

Unfortunately, a lot of people in the Christian Church deny the doctrine of original sin. They say that we all have "free moral agency"; that is, we all have the ability to choose good or evil. They hold that we really aren't corrupted but only weakened. Some say that we are born in a state of *moral neutrality*, and that sinful behaviour is something we learn, and that we can unlearn by turning to God's Law and trying to live by it. This is where the Gospel gets pulled in to treat symptoms rather than the real problem. The idea is that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the motivation that enables a sinner to overcome temptation and to stop sinning. It's the extra added boost the weakened will needs to choose and to do good.

Scripture knows nothing about it though, and what this approach ends up doing is simply to fertilise a bad tree with the result that you get a big, strong, green, leafy, great-looking bad tree that produces even more bad fruit.

No, this original sin we have is real, totally corrupting sin that carries with it real guilt and consequences. This is what Paul is talking about today. He's showing how that not only sin's corrupting effect adheres to us, but also the penalty of that first sin is passed down through the generations. His argument is quite interesting. He asks us to consider all those people who lived in the time between Adam and when God gave the Law to Moses many years later. He says, "<sup>13</sup> **For until the Law sin was in the world. However, sin is not charged against anyone's account when there is no Law.** <sup>14</sup> **Yet death ruled from Adam to Moses, also over those who had not sinned in the same way as Adam did when he broke the Command.**"

We know that in eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve broke the law – which was the only law that was on the books – and as a result, they came under the penalty of the law, which, as the Lord had said, was death. But what about their descendants? They didn't break the only law that was punishable by death. They couldn't; after all, their parents had been banished from the garden where the forbidden tree was, and yet, though they didn't commit the death penalty sin, they all died. That's what Paul is saying: "**Yet death ruled from Adam to Moses, also over those who had not sinned in the same way as Adam did when he broke the Command.**" All mankind from Adam to Moses sinned and died, but the question is, "On the basis of what crime did God charge them that they should have to pay the penalty of death?" The answer is Adam's sin. Because the seed of all people was in Adam when he sinned, all through Adam sinned. Therefore, the curse of death was passed to all; we are guilty of Adam's sin.

Now, this whole original sin thing may seem to be a bit unfair. We were corrupted and condemned by the temptation and sin of someone else. We are the fruit of bad seed who can do nothing else but produce bad fruit containing bad seed, and we're condemned to be chopped down and thrown into the fire for it. We are the spawn of bad seed. That's the problem we have. But having identified and described the problem accurately, we are now able to understand and apply the solution, and what we discover is that the same mechanism that seems so unfair by which we were corrupted and condemned actually works to our

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:17

advantage in Christ Jesus. He is the Man produced by the Good Seed: the long-promised Seed of the woman whose Father is the holy God. He was planted in this world to produce a different kind of fruit: good fruit with good seed that saves us from sin and its penalty. As we saw from our Gospel today, when tempted by Satan He did not fall. He lived a perfectly righteous life full of good fruit: *the fruit that ensures life*. Nevertheless, He was condemned as bad seed on our behalf. Like rotten fruit, He hung on the tree scorned and rejected by God. And now, just as eating the fruit of the bad tree condemned our first parents, those who eat the fruit of the cross are given life and salvation, for they are receiving to themselves Christ Jesus and His atoning sacrifice. This is what Paul is saying: **“Therefore, as through one man’s transgression judgment came to all people, resulting in condemnation, so also, through One Man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all people, resulting in justification, which brings life.”** <sup>19</sup> **For as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of the One Man, the many will become righteous.”** Just as the sin of Adam condemned all who were in him, so the sacrifice of Christ is counted to the credit of all who by faith are in Him. Just as the sin of Adam was imputed to those who are his seed, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who are born again of heavenly seed: which seed is the message of the Gospel when it is heard and takes root and grows. That is, when a person trusts in Jesus and the sacrifice He has made, the good fruit produced by Christ is counted as having been done by the believer. This is the only plan of salvation we have been given by God’s superabounding grace, and it’s what actually gets to the root of the problem.

As we enter the season of Lent, we follow our Saviour to His cross, where He sheds His blood for us. Being completely obedient to His Father, and paying the penalty for our sin, Jesus has earned heaven for us. All our sins have been forgiven. To Him be all glory and honour now and for ever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, heavenly Father, since every good gift comes from You, we approach You in prayer in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Though we are ashamed because we are unworthy, we come with faith and confidence in Your fatherly love and mercy.

We thank You that You have given us Jesus Christ as our high priest. He knows our weaknesses, for He bore them. He knows our temptations, for He endured them, and learnt obedience by what He suffered. Grant that we may show our loyalty to You by absolute loyalty to all Your words, even when they seem baffling.

Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world, cleanse us from our sins, and teach us obedience. Take away from us all desire to follow any will but Yours. Fill us with faith and love, that we may gladly believe and follow Your Word. Give us such trust in our heavenly Father’s protection that we always rejoice as we walk in His ways.

Holy Spirit of God, when we are led into the wilderness of testing, deliver us by Your power, and save us from the evil on every hand. Give us Your strength, and by the example of Jesus show us the victorious power of God’s Word.

Strengthen and bless Your Church. We praise You for the privilege of being co-workers with You to save people. Help us not to waste the grace of God that we ourselves have already received. Open the door of opportunity for us. Fill us with a faith that claims Your grace each day and then moves us to proclaim it to others. Because Your Gospel can make many people rich, give us joy in our witnessing, no matter what sacrifices we suffer.

Uphold our homes by the Gospel. Empower all parents to be true followers of Jesus, the light of the world, so that their example of faith and obedience may help their children also to know and follow Jesus.

Pour out Your Spirit on our country, O Lord, so that in their life and work all citizens may seek to show forth Your praise, power, and glory.

Be with all those who suffer, and let them know Your concern and compassion. Be with those who grieve, and comfort them with Your promises. Be with those whose earthly pilgrimage is coming to an end, and fill them with the sure hope of eternal life in Christ.

O Father, watch over all Your people, and bring us safely through this world to the kingdom that You have prepared for all who love You. We pray all these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 3:1-21

<sup>1</sup> The snake was more cunning than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He asked the woman, “Has

God really said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden!’?”

<sup>2</sup> The woman told the snake: “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. <sup>3</sup> However, God has said about the fruit

from the tree that is in the middle of the garden: "You shall not eat from it and shall not touch it, or you will die!"

<sup>4</sup> The snake told the woman, "You will certainly not die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that in the day when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to look at and that the tree was desirable for making someone wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. Then she also gave some to her husband, who was with her and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened and they realised that they were naked. Therefore, they sewed fig leaves together and made loin coverings for themselves.

<sup>8</sup> At the time of the day when there was a breeze, the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden and hid from the presence of the LORD God among the trees in the garden. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup> The man said, "I heard Your voice in the garden and was afraid, because I was naked. So, I hid."

<sup>11</sup> He said, "Who has told you that you are naked? Have you eaten fruit from the tree from which I have commanded you not to eat?"

<sup>12</sup> Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What is this that you have done?"

The woman said, "The snake deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD God told the snake: "Because you have done this, you are cursed, more than any domestic animal and any wild animal. You will crawl on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> I shall make you and the woman hostile to each other and shall make your descendants and her Descendant hostile to each other. He will crush your head and you will crush His heel."

<sup>16</sup> He told the woman: "I shall greatly increase your painful labour and your pregnancy. In pain you will give birth to children. You will yearn for your husband and he will rule over you."

<sup>17</sup> Then to the man He said: "Because you have listened to what your wife has said and have eaten from the tree about which I had commanded you, 'You shall not eat from it!' the ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it through painful toil all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> It will cause both thorns and thistles to grow for you and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> You will eat bread in the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground. For you were taken from it. For you are dust and you will return to dust."

<sup>20</sup> The man named his wife "Eve," because she was the mother of every living person.

<sup>21</sup> Then the LORD God made tunics from skins for the man and his wife and clothed them.

Romans 5:12-19

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death also spread to all people,

since all have sinned. <sup>13</sup> For until the Law sin was in the world. However, sin is not charged against anyone's account when there is no Law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death ruled from Adam to Moses, also over those who had not sinned in the same way as Adam did when he broke the Command (Adam was a type of Him who was to come). <sup>15</sup> However, the free gift is not like the transgression. For, if the many died as the result of the one man's transgression, much more, God's grace and the gracious gift of the One Man, Jesus Christ, have overflowed to the many. <sup>16</sup> The gift is also different from what came through the one man who sinned. For the judgment came from one man and resulted in condemnation, but the free gift came after many transgressions and resulted in justification. <sup>17</sup> For if, by the transgression of the one man, death reigned through the one man, much more, those who have received God's overflowing grace and His gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One Man, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, as through one man's transgression judgment came to all people, resulting in condemnation, so also, through One Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all people, resulting in justification, which brings life. <sup>19</sup> For as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of the One Man, the many will become righteous.

Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Then the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. <sup>2</sup> He did not eat anything for forty days and forty nights and at the end of that time He was hungry.

<sup>3</sup> The Tempter came to Him and said, "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread!"

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "Scripture has said: 'A person does not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes out through the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then the Devil took Him into the Holy City and had Him stand on the ledge of the Temple. <sup>6</sup> He told Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down! For Scripture has said: 'He will command His angels concerning you. They will carry you in their hands that you may not strike your foot against a stone.'"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, "Again, Scripture has said, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test!'"

<sup>8</sup> Again, the Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> The Devil told Him, "I shall give You all this if You fall and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus answered him: "Go away, Satan! For Scripture has said: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God and shall serve Him alone!'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the Devil left Him, and angels came and served Him.