



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 5: 15-21

Romans

“Grace Abounding”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The text today is Romans 5:15-21. It’s a continuation of this portion of chapter 5 that began in verse 12. Paul is explaining the work of Christ; how it is that he saves people, and he’s doing it by way of analogy, by comparing Christ to Adam. Adam is an illustration of Christ in this regard, and he began that in verse 12 and we went through verse 14 last week, and now we continue with verse 15.

“But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this opportunity. It is a great opportunity to be able to come together with fellow believers, fellow Christians, fellow children of God and open the Word of God and study it. It is our food, spiritually. It is what nourishes our soul. There’s no growth apart from the reading and the study of your Word. And so as we continue this morning with a study of this text, as we consider its meaning in some depth, we pray that you bless us and nourish us with it.

Build us up in the faith; equip us for the week to come. We face uncertainties, Father, as we leave this place. We don’t know what tomorrow brings, what this afternoon may bring. Trials may come our way. The only way to be prepared for that is to be grounded in your Word, and in your truth, and in the promises of Scripture, and as we study today, we pray that you’d ground us in these things and help us to understand the great truths of this text.

It is a great text. It is a difficult text. It’s a complicated text. It’s a very theological portion of Scripture, but it is so important because it is a theological text. It is that which we are grounding our faith in. It’s what is the basis for these things that we treasure. And so we pray that as we study, you give us an understanding of it, and help us to understand better your grace, and how that grace was extended to us through your Son. What he did for us; the kind of person he is; all that he accomplished on the cross.

We look for you to guide us, and teach us, and direct us, and build us up in the faith. Bless us physically as well, Father. We are a physical people, dependent on the things of this world. You’ve made us such, and so we pray that you’d provide as you instruct us to do, to pray for our daily bread, and we take that in a variety of ways. Not only for the food we eat, but for the employment that we have, for the health we enjoy – we pray for all of these things, and pray for those who lack them.

We pray for those who are sick, those who are recovering from medical procedures. We pray for those who are without employment, those who are discouraged from the experiences of life – and they do become hard. We pray that

you'd give encouragement, that you'd give health, that you'd give opportunities of employment. And Father, in so many other ways, we pray that you'd meet our needs, and you are a God who does that. You're a God of super-abounding grace, of abundant mercies.

And so we can approach the throne of grace, and we can come to you this morning with our concerns, and our needs, and our cares, and know that you hear our prayers, and you answer in ways that are beyond our understanding. In fact, you do it exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, and we thank you for that. Bless us this evening when we return to this place to worship our Savior and remember what he did for us, and remember that he's coming again; we look forward to that day.

So bless us now, Father. Bless us as we sing our final hymn, and prepare our hearts for our time of study together, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Sometimes when I'm doing a funeral service, I will quote the words that both Joshua and David spoke from their deathbeds: "I am going the way of all the earth." I am going – the Hebrew word is *derek* – the way, the road of all the earth. All mankind is on a road that leads to the grave. That is a sobering statement, and nothing is more undeniable than that.

Everyone is going to die. You may be young, healthy, attractive, with your whole life before you, but beauty will fade, health will fail, and you will die. That's the reality, and the world has no solution for it, and it has no hope against it, and so people do the best they can. They try to hold off the inevitable. They eat right, they exercise, they fund medical research, or they just try not to think about it, but the reality is still the same. In the long run, as someone has said, we are all dead.

And taken by itself that is a dreadful, fearful thought – to know that someday we will be taken away from everything that we know, and everything that we love – it will all come to an end. But that's where our lesson comes in, because against that grim reality of death, Paul gives the promise that we will reign in life, and explains how that has happened. Christ did it, and he did it by defeating two great enemies, two tyrants: death and sin. Death reigned, Paul said, and sin reigned in death.

That is the story of human history, but Christ conquered both, so that we who are joined to him will live. The defeat of such great enemies shows the greatness of

Christ, and it shows the greatness of grace that worked through Christ; in fact, was the reason for the great blessings that he accomplished for us. And Paul praises grace throughout this text of Scripture. He praises it both as abundant, and then he even exceeds that.

He praises it as super-abundant, which is very appropriate here, because Paul’s interest in the last part of chapter 5 is to explain how salvation can be so great; how salvation can be worldwide; how the death of one man, Jesus Christ, can account for the salvation of multitudes. How it can be a valid salvation; how it can be valid for God to consider people righteous based upon the righteousness of another man.

Paul’s explanation is simple: Christ brought salvation into the world in the same way that Adam brought death into the world. If we can understand the role of Adam in the fall, then we can understand the work of Christ in salvation. Both happened by the same principle. And so Paul began his explanation of the method of salvation in verse 12 with the example of Adam, in order to illustrate Christ. Adam was a representative.

In the Garden, he stood in our place, and he acted on our behalf, so that his action was considered to be ours. His sin and his guilt were reckoned to be ours; they were imputed to us. They were put to our account. And Paul spent time developing that in verses 13 and 14, this idea of representation. Now, that’s the meaning of Paul’s statement “death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

Well, how is it that all sinned when Adam sinned? All sinned when Adam sinned because Adam is our representative. As the New England Primer put it in that simple rhyme, “In Adam’s fall we sinned all. Xerxes the Great did die, and so must you and I.” But God was not content to leave his creation in ruins, and so he sent his Son into the world to be a second representative and recover what Adam lost.

That’s what Paul explains in the remaining verses of chapter 5. What Adam did, Christ did; but where Adam failed, Christ succeeded. We see that in the comparison and the contrast that Paul begins in verse 12, but completes in verse 18. In between these two verses there are parenthetical portions that explain what Paul has been speaking about, but we get the sense of Paul’s meaning here. We get the force of his argument when we combine verse 12 with the middle part of verse 18.

It reads “Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all because all sinned” – that is, all sinned in Adam, our

representative – “even so, through one act of righteousness, there resulted justification of life to all men.” In the same way that Adam ruined the race, Christ redeemed the race. He did that as our representative.

And that should not seem strange to us, this idea of representation, because as we demonstrated last week, the Bible and our experience are filled with examples of this principle. Our government operates on this very principle. We send representatives to Washington in our Congressmen and our Senators; they stand for us in that place. They make decisions that affect us. They are our representatives.

And we see this throughout the Bible. The high priest of Israel represented the people before God. He stood before God with the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders, and the names of the tribes of Israel on his breastplate. He stood in their place. He was Israel, in effect, before God. Ancient armies fought battles by means of representatives. That’s how David and Goliath fought each other; each represented his nation.

When Goliath fell, all the Philistines suffered the defeat, just as all Israel prevailed through David’s victory, because the battle was fought by two men in the place of their people. The same principle applies to Adam and Christ. What Adam did led to certain results for his people, and what Christ has done leads likewise to certain results for his people. So in this sense, Paul calls Adam a type of Christ, an illustration of Christ.

That’s how our text last week ended. Verse 14, “who is a type of him who was to come.” And yet while there are similarities between the two, there are great differences as well, and so to prevent any misunderstanding of Paul’s description of Adam as a type of Christ, he develops these differences in verses 15 through 17 before completing the comparison.

And by introducing these contrasts, by introducing these differences, he shows how superior the work of Christ is over that of Adam, and how great the grace of God really is. First of all, what each did was different in kind; that is, it’s different in its very nature. Adam committed a sin, and Christ gave a gift; verse 15, “the free gift is not like the transgression.” The free gift here is defined in verse 17 as “the gift of righteousness,” which is justification, the great theme of this book.

It is what Christ gives to the believer. He gives the gift of righteousness and justification, and his gift differs from Adam’s sin in a number of ways. Adam’s sin

was rebellion. It was an act of self-assertion, while Christ obtained the gift of righteousness in just the opposite way; he did so by obedience. Not by self-assertion, but by self-sacrifice. So there is certainly a difference between what each man did.

But the great difference that Paul stresses is the results that both produced. Because of Adam’s sin, the many died, Paul says; but because of Christ, the grace of God abounded to the many. In other words, Adam’s sin brought death to many, while Christ’s gift brought life to many. Not the same many – Paul is not suggesting that Christ represented and recovered all of those that Adam lost.

That would be universalism, the salvation of every individual without exception, and the Bible clearly does not teach that; teaches just the opposite. What Paul is teaching here is just as Adam brought death on all those who were united to him, which was all mankind, so too Christ brought life to all those who were united to him, which are the elect, those that he says the Father gave to him, and they are many.

The word that Paul uses to describe those whom Christ delivered, those whom he represented, is a well-chosen term. They are many; they are no small number, and God’s grace overflowed to them. It was abundant, Paul says. It was abundant in its amount, and it was abundant in its power. It came in no small measure. It took men from death to life – that takes great power. That takes great grace, and that’s what God supplied in his Son.

And what Christ overcame to do that also shows the greatness of his grace, because it followed a multitude of sins, as Paul explains in verse 16. “The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.”

So the contrast here is between the one and the many; the one sin of Adam brought all mankind down in the fall. That is how deadly sin is. One sin ruined the whole human race. To appreciate the greatness of grace, we must appreciate the greatness of sin – how virulent it is, how deadly it is. It wrecked the whole human race, and justice followed one. The whole human race was condemned upon one sin.

But grace, on the other hand, didn’t follow just one sin. It triumphed over a multitude of sins. Adam didn’t sin just once. He went on to sin every day, all day of his 930 years, and what he passed on to his posterity resulted in a vast, innumerable multitude of sins. We inherited from Adam the guilt of his one sin – that is, his sin in

the Garden, when he violated the prohibition against eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

But as a result of that, as a consequence of that, we also have a corrupt nature that results in continual sins every day, and that’s true of every individual in this world. The world, therefore, has become a great cauldron of iniquity. But God answered that with a salvation that is greater than all our sins, with a gift of infinite and eternal value. That one sin would be answered with judgment is right – it’s justice. But that a vast number of sins should be answered with forgiveness and the free gift, that’s miraculous.

That’s grace. That’s not all. Paul goes on to explain in verse 17 the grace that overcomes a multitude of sins also overcomes death itself, and replaces it with life. What he states here is similar to what is stated in verse 15, where the results of sin and the gift, or the obedience of Christ, are contrasted – that is, life is contrasted with death. But in verse 17, it’s not quite the same, because here it’s the greatness of life through the abundance of grace that is emphasized.

And again, the one man Adam is contrasted with the one man, Jesus Christ. The result of Adam’s sin was that death reigned, like a tyrant, and that’s the sense of this word “reign.” It pictures death as a king, as a potentate, as a tyrant who held sway over all mankind. His power held us in its grip, and so, as Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote, “The world is a place of cemeteries.” It is a place of death, and gloom, and end. That’s what Adam brought on the human race: sin, death reigned.

But thankfully, the other side of the contrast is life, and the life that is given is life in abundance. Verse 17, “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” So death reigned because of Adam, but now, because of Christ, we will reign in life. That’s the greatness of grace; it replaces death with life.

And the abundance of grace and the superiority of Christ’s work and what it produced is indicated in both verses 15 and 17 with the words “much more.” Twice Paul repeats that phrase – “much more.” They signal that Christ’s achievement is not merely a counterbalance to Adam’s fall so that Christ only recovered what Adam lost, and so we are now raised to that original position, where Adam was in paradise, so that we can now each face individually the very test that Adam failed.

Fortunately, that’s not the meaning, because if that were the case, then if we were placed back in that position where Adam had been, we’d fail just as Adam failed. If a perfect man could not succeed, we cannot succeed. Paul is speaking of much more here. Christ did much more than that. He raised us up beyond the position that Adam held, to the highest place. He gained for us the full victory. He gained for us what Adam failed to gain, and he made us kings.

That’s the sense of what Paul writes here. Is it not that Christ replaced the reign of death with the reign of life, but it is something far greater than that, far more wonderful than that. It is that we will reign in life. Christ has delivered us from death so completely that we have changed places with death, and we now rule over it. It doesn’t have dominion over us; we have dominion over it. The king of terrors has been dethroned. It has been defeated. It is under our feet, and we will reign in life, and reign forever.

Now, that is a great hope. In fact, I cannot think of a greater hope than that. Man has no answer to death. Man can’t turn it away. Man has no hope against it. Man in this world can do nothing against it. And yet, it has been conquered, and we will reign in life – that is our hope. But it’s not a hope for everyone. It is only for those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness.

That is how the blessing becomes the possession of those for whom it was designed. It is received, and that suggests faith. We don’t earn it, and we’ve seen this all through our studies in the book of Romans. One of the great themes of this book is faith; it’s justification through faith alone. We don’t earn our salvation. It is a gift that we receive, and that’s what’s suggested here in this word, “received;” receiving the abundance of grace.

So in these important ways, the grace of God in Christ surpasses the failure of Adam. Adam committed a sin, Christ gave a gift. Adam brought condemnation, Christ brought justification. Adam’s sin resulted in death, but Christ’s gift produced life. Those are the differences. Now in verse 18, Paul returns to the similarity between Christ and Adam by completing the comparison that he began in verse 12, and showing how Christ can save a multitude, and do so in a valid, just way.

“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” Just as union with Adam resulted in ruin, so too union with Christ resulted in rescue

through justification. Now, justification, as we know, occurs at the moment a person believes; it occurs at the moment of faith.

But Paul’s meaning is that for all who are in Christ, represented by him, their justification was made as certain with Christ’s death as our condemnation was certain when Adam sinned. That’s the assurance we have that we will have life. It’s based on what Christ has done. It’s based on Christ alone, and that’s the assurance, that we will be justified – all of his people will be justified – and we will have life. Not grounded in ourselves, but grounded in his finished and perfect work.

Paul explains this further in verse 19. “For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.” The expressions “made sinners” and “made righteous” don’t mean that people actually become morally bad, that they are made sinning individuals, or that they become morally good. That did happen, and that is true, but that’s not what Paul is saying here; that’s not his meaning in these words.

What he means when he says “made sinners” or “made righteous” is constituted as sinners or constituted as righteous; placed in the category of being righteous. This is Paul’s meaning, and this is really what he’s doing is referring here to the condemnation and the justification in verse 18, putting it in these words. And as we’ve seen in our past studies in the book of Romans, justification doesn’t mean to be made righteous, as though we are actually transformed.

That’s happening through sanctification, but sanctification is based on justification, and justification is a legal act. It doesn’t change our spiritual constitution. It doesn’t transform us. It changes our position, our status with God. It is an act of God as judge in which he declares us to be righteous – to be in right standing with his law. But how can God do that? How can he make such a declaration? After all, the fact is we are sinners.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” John tells us, so how can he make such a declaration? Well, he does it based on the work of Christ for us, as our representative. He stood in our place as our substitute, so that what he did, and his righteousness, are imputed to us, just as Adam’s sin was imputed to us. This idea of imputation is very important. Donald Grey Barnhouse explained it from an illustration that was given to him when he was just a young boy of about 15 years of age.

He heard the testimony of a man who had been saved out of a hard life of drug addiction, and he was very impressed with what the man said, very impressed with the change in the man, and he asked him about his experience. So the man explained what had happened by taking Barnhouse’s left hand and saying, “This is you.” Then he put a large hymn book in it, and he said, “This book represents your sin.

“The weight of it is on you. God hates your sin. His wrath must bear down against your sin and against you, and you could have no peace in this life as long as God’s wrath is on you.” Then he took Barnhouse’s other hand, and he said, “This hand represents Christ. There’s no sin on him. The Father loves him. He is the spotless Lamb of God.” So with his two hands outstretched, one with a heavy hymn book and one empty, Barnhouse said he realized that he had sin and Christ had none.

Then the man put his hand under Barnhouse’s left hand and turned it and the hymn book over onto the empty hand, and he said, “This is what happened when Christ took our place on the cross.” Then he quoted 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his own body on the cross.” The man asked Barnhouse, “Whose sins – whose sins did he bear?” Barnhouse thought for a moment; he said, “Well, our sins.” “Whose sins?” the man pressed him. And Barnhouse answered, “My sins.”

Then he read him Isaiah 53:4-6, which end “The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.” That is where our sins went – on him, where they were punished in him. Just like that hymn book was transferred from one hand to another our sins were transferred from us to Christ. That’s imputation, which follows from representation. Adam’s sin was imputed to us. Our sins were imputed to Christ, so that his righteousness could be imputed to us.

Martin Luther spoke of this as “a sweet exchange between Christ and the sinner.” He took on himself what he was not, and gave to us what we were not, so that we are not accepted by the Father as being what Christ is – being like his Son. When he sees us, though we are sinners, he doesn’t see our sin. He doesn’t count our sin against us. He sees Christ. He sees the righteousness of Christ.

That’s how Christ fulfilled the promise of Matthew 1:21, to save his people from their sins, and it reminds us of two great truths: the mercies of Christ, and the sufficiency of his atonement. Both truths give great hope. Because our sins were transferred to him and punished in him, they have been removed forever, as far as the east is from the west. We can never be condemned.

Now, Satan brings charges against us every day; he accuses the saints day and night, we're told. He stands before the throne of God and calls attention to the sins that you and I have committed – “See, there they go again. These aren't good people. These aren't righteous people. Did you see what happened there?” But every count, at every charge, Jesus Christ is there to say, “I paid for it. I paid for it all. It's all been taken care of,” so that we can never be condemned.

Our sins can never be raised against us to bring a charge against us and bring us down. Christ has paid for it all. That's God's promise, and he cannot lie. He cannot lie. The believer in Jesus Christ is forever secure, has eternal life, and the real hope of the glory to come. Now, that should put all of our trials, our tribulations in right perspective, and we will suffer trials and tribulations.

We will have hardship. We've talked about that before. It's part of life; they will come. But those difficulties, those trials can never uproot us from our position with God, and they can never take away our inheritance in heaven. We have assurance of our salvation, which is eternal, because of Christ; because he is sufficient, and his work of atonement is sufficient. It's complete, and that's one of the things that Paul is driving home in this text. We have the assurance of eternal salvation.

And the cross should remind us of the mercies of Christ. If he would have compassion on us, love us, and die for us when we were sinners, as Paul pointed out at the beginning of this chapter – if he would leave his throne in heaven, and all of the glories of his fellowship with the Father, the unhindered, uninterrupted, eternal bliss that is beyond our comprehension – to come into this world, to enter into this cauldron of iniquity in order to save us, well, what will he do now?

And what won't he do now for us, having saved us? There's nothing that he won't do for you, and his mercies are great. They are infinite, and they are for you, his friend, his brother, his sister, his children. You remember that incident in Luke 7 when Jesus came to the town of Nain, and as he approached the gate of the city he saw a funeral procession that came out. It was for the son of a widow.

Luke writes that Jesus felt compassion for her; it was her only son, and he saw her sorrow, and he was moved by it. That tells us a great deal about the person of Christ, the kind of person he is. He was moved by the grief and the sorrow of this woman, and so he acted on her behalf, and he raised her son from the dead. It gives

us a glimpse of the kind of Savior that he is. He gives us a glimpse of his power, which is omnipotence.

He’s all-powerful. He has power over death. He can raise the dead. As great a strength and power as death is, it cannot stand before Christ. If he can raise the dead, what can’t he do? What can’t he do for you? Do you have a circumstance that’s greater than that? You may have troubles that are great, but they cannot compare to death itself, and death must yield to Jesus Christ.

And it tells us about his character. He has compassion on the helpless, and he knows our condition. He knows that we’re weak. He knows what we go through. He’s mindful of every circumstance that you are in, and he acts on our behalf. Be assured of that. He acts on your behalf. The cross is the proof of that. It saved sinners from their sins, and it proves his love for us. It’s the greatest testimony of the love of God that there is.

By his one act of obedience in going to the cross, he has saved us. And I emphasize that he saved us at the cross. He didn’t merely provide salvation; he accomplished salvation there. His love is not only great, it is powerful. It is effective. He accomplishes his work in us, and he accomplished salvation there at the cross. Now, that raises a question, which Paul takes up in verse 20. He doesn’t actually state the question, but he does give the answer.

And the question is what, then, was the purpose of the law? Now, that question would have arisen naturally in the mind of a Jewish person, and all through the book of Romans, there is a Jewish person in the background. He is the foil for Paul’s argument, and Paul often raises objections which are objections that would come naturally from a Jewish man, and probably objections that Paul heard when he was debating men in the synagogues.

And so the question that arises from a person is what purpose did the law serve? It was the belief of a Jew that the law was given to produce righteousness, but Paul has stated that righteousness is a gift of Christ; it comes apart from the law. So why was the law given? And Paul answers in verse 20, “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase.” That must’ve been a shock to those who heard that.

The Law came in so that transgression would increase – instead of preventing sin and increasing righteousness, the law does just the opposite. It provokes sin and increases it. Now, Paul will develop that function of the law more in chapter 7, but he

introduces it here. He writes that the “the Law came in,” and the idea of that word “came in,” is “entered alongside.”

Not to replace grace, not to replace salvation through faith, not to replace the promise that was given to Abraham, who was saved through faith alone, but to assist that. And it did that by coming in beside sin to expose it; by stirring up man’s sinful nature, making his condition known, so that he would see his need and seek the solution. And the remedy that God gives is more than sufficient for the problem, because “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

The Greek word that Paul uses there is very interesting, very descriptive; it means something like “over-abounded” or “super-abounded.” Where sin increased, grace increased even more. Where sin is multiplied, grace is magnified. That’s the sense of what Paul is saying here. Just as the greatness of David’s victory was magnified by the height and strength of Goliath, so the greatness of grace is magnified by the strength of the sin that it blots out.

Grace super-abounds when great sinners are saved. This was John Bunyan’s text, and we know Bunyan for writing *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, but he also wrote his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. The title was taken from Romans 5:20 and 1 Timothy 1:13-16. Bunyan was born in 1623 to poor parents. He had little formal education. He said that he learned to read and write.

And he was a tinker by trade; he was known as the tinker of Bedford. He fixed things, like pots and plows. His early years were spent in sin. It doesn’t give a lot of detail about it, but he did write, “I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company, into all manner of vice and ungodliness.” Doesn’t say much about it, but that’s enough. But shortly after he was married, in his early 20s, he came under a deep conviction of sin, and after a long and torturous period, God brought him to faith.

It happened while he was walking in a field. He was afraid for his soul when the sentence entered his mind, “Your righteousness is in heaven.” As he thought about Christ seated in heaven as his righteousness, he realized it’s not his works. It’s not his efforts that create the righteousness that God accepts. His righteousness is Christ, and his righteousness is saved, and that’s all the righteousness that God could want, because the righteousness of Christ is infinite. You can’t have more than that.

It’s pure. It’s sinless. Your righteousness is in heaven, the sentence said, and he said, “I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself.” In other words, our righteousness is not based on how we feel, any more than it’s based on what we do. It is based solely on Christ – on who he is and what he has done.

And realizing that, Bunyan said, “Now did my chains fall off my legs. Indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away.” God gave John Bunyan peace, and by Bunyan’s own confession, God saved a great sinner. That’s what grace does. Grace is not withheld because of sin. Grace is not conditioned on the good things that we do. Grace super-abounds when sin is great.

No power is greater than the grace of God. Nothing can overcome it. Not sin; not death itself. Grace will triumph over both. That is God’s purpose; that grace would reign, resulting in eternal life. That’s how the chapter concludes, verse 21, “so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Where sin ruled, bringing death, grace now reigns, bringing blessing and eternal life. But all of this comes, Paul says, through righteousness, which indicates that while grace is free, grace is always righteous. God cannot sacrifice his justice for his love. He cannot wink at sin. He cannot pass over it lightly or forgive it casually, as we might do. Someone offends us, and we dismiss it. God can’t do that.

God cannot do that because he is a holy God, and he must deal with sin, and deal with it according to his perfect justice. And he has done that in his Son, through his sacrifice, so that God can forgive sinners freely, because Christ has paid the full penalty for their sins in his own death. That’s what Paul explained back in chapter 3, you’ll remember. Because Christ was set forth publicly as a propitiation, God can now be both just and the justifier.

He can forgive the ungodly and do it justly, because the ungodly have had their sins punished in Christ. Our sins were given to Christ so that his righteousness could be given to us. That is the sweet exchange, as Luther put it. It’s what Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 5:21. “He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” And now, clothed

with righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, sin has been defeated. It no longer rules us.

We are now under the reign of grace, which means we are governed by glorious blessings, unconditional blessings. Grace is abundant; its very nature, it is abundant. It doesn't come in little drops; it comes in a flood. It super-abounds. It gives life, and every believer in Jesus Christ is spiritually alive. We have been spiritually resurrected – regeneration and justification. We are new creatures in Christ. We are under the constant nourishment and care of God.

What a change that is from the reign of sin. Lloyd Jones wrote, “Grace always gives, whereas sin always takes away.” That's the truth. Sin is a cheat that promises much. It promises us great things in life. Tells young people how to be happy. Promises a full and fun life. And yet those who pursue the way of sin and seek their joy and their pleasure in that way always end up with ashes in their mouths.

Sin robs us of love, it robs of joy and purity, and ultimately it robs of life itself. That's why death is the way of all the earth. It's sin's penalty. Christ has paid it. He's paid that penalty, and for the believer, life is the result – eternal life, Paul says; life that can never perish; life that can never be taken away. It is permanent. If it wasn't permanent, he wouldn't have called it eternal. The fact that he calls it eternal means that death cannot penetrate – it cannot be taken away.

And even though we will experience death physically, we cannot experience it spiritually. And even our physical death will be reversed in the resurrection to come. That is our hope. So while it's true that death is the way of all the earth, its sting has been removed. It is no longer the king of terrors – not for the believer in Jesus Christ. He took the sting in his own death. So our response to those who dread death and who lack peace in this world is look to Christ.

Look away from yourself and trust in him. He gives peace, and he gives life that is everlasting. Your sins may be great, but they're not as strong and they're not as great as God's grace. Christ's death is sufficient for the chief of sinners, and his mercies super-abound. So if you're here without Christ, come to him. Believe in him. When you do, you pass from death into life. You come under the glorious reign of grace. May God help you to do that, and help all of us to appreciate that reign of grace over our lives. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace – grace that abounds, and grace that super-abounds. The fact that it’s grace alerts us to the reality that we’re undeserving. We were sinners. We were enemies. We were the ungodly when Christ died for us. Thank you for that grace – grace that abounded and super-abounded at the cross, and never stops. It never ceases.

We thank you for the reign of grace. We thank you for Christ, and it’s in his name we pray. Amen.