

Alive in Christ: Alive by Grace!

A sermon based on Romans 5:18-21.

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

Let's eat, kids! Let's eat kids! Perhaps you've seen the meme, the photo...how important having proper grammar is, because with that one short phrase, they joke, commas can save lives!

Of course, that's in jest, but there's some truth here, isn't there? One mistake can have huge ramifications. The Hubble Space Telescope, for instance, after it was sent into orbit in 1990, was found to have had its primary mirror ground down a little too much (we're talking 2 microns, less than 1/100th of a millimeter), which resulted in terrible quality of photos being sent back (which was kind of its whole purpose, right). Well, the cost to fly a team to space to fix it was \$1.5 billion (roughly the same cost of the entire telescope). One tiny mistake. Huge ramifications.

In 1986, the world watched in horror as the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded, just 73 seconds into its flight. The entire crew of seven perished. The problem? An O-ring. It wasn't designed to operate at low temps, and that morning was unusually cold. The O-ring seal failed at launch, leading to the explosion of the entire shuttle. One tiny mistake. Deadly ramifications.

In 1942, shortly after the Prohibition, the Cocoanut Grove in Boston became the most-happening nightclub in town. Anyone who was anyone went there. It had a capacity of 460, but most nights, that was merely a suggestion. The Saturday night after Thanksgiving, with an estimated crowd of well over 1000 patrons, a busboy lit a match near a highly flammable palm tree, which burst into flames, quickly engulfed the entire club, killing nearly 500 people. But the main culprit for so many of the deaths? Door hinges. The exit doors only swung inward, not out. Trying to escape, people were pressed up against the doors, and no one could get out. One tiny mistake. Huge, deadly ramifications.

Going even further back, one piece of fruit. It was good for food. It was pleasing to the eye. It was desirable for gaining wisdom. So, she ***"took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."***

We know the story of Eden so well. The devil tempted Eve. Eve succumbed, ate the fruit, and sin entered the world. But, in an unusual twist, the Apostle Paul, here in Romans 5, cast the blame for sin on someone else. Did you catch it when we read it earlier? ***"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners."*** Who gets the blame here? The man – Adam!

Do you understand why Paul might go there? You might be thinking, "Well, Paul is trying to make a parallel here, so it would make sense to talk about the sin of one man in contrast to the righteousness of another man." But think a little more. What was Adam's role in that situation in Eden? He ate after Eve did, right?

But where was he? Eve ate the fruit and then gave ***"some to her husband, who was with her."*** Adam was standing right there. The God-given head of the family, the one who should have been watching out for the spiritual safety of God's gift to him in Eve, the one who should have spoken up to discourage Eve, guard against that temptation, and chase the serpent away...was there...and did nothing. No,

thinking about it, he didn't do "nothing;" he let Eve make the sinful decision and then joined in that sin himself.

Friends, one piece of fruit. One tiny mistake. Huge, deadly, eternal ramifications. ***"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners...just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men..."*** Paul writes.

"Way to go, Adam! Because of you, we have all this today...not only unabashed and proud rebellion against God but also, even worse, condemnation for all. Thanks a lot!"

We can't go there. Yes, through Adam and Eve, sin entered the world. Just the very fact you and I are, that we exist, that we've been born, that we are all connected to Adam and Eve, we're sinners. But the blame stops there. Everything else is on us.

"But, but, but...it was just one little mistake. I couldn't help but let my eyes wander as that attractive person walked by, but it was only a second!" "It was one little curse word. I'm sure no one heard it anyways." "It was only one time I didn't listen to my teacher when he/she told me what to do. That's pretty good, right?" "That was the only time I ever lied to my parents. They made sure I would never do that again." One little mistake, but what does God's Word say? ***"Whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*** Like Adam, we are sinners deserving of death.

"But, I'm not as bad as..." "I know I can be a little disrespectful in the way I talk about the government, but you should hear my friend...or even just turn on the TV and listen to the media and fellow government leaders taking it to each other. I'm pretty tame compared to that." "I know I share some, let's call it, "news" of the issues others are having in their lives, but unlike others (I could name a few) who are in it purely for the gossip, I'm merely sharing this because I care about that person." "I've had a bit too much to drink, gotten drunk once or twice, but compared to those people who are at the bar every night, closing the place down, this is nothing." Not so bad mistakes, but what does God's Word say? ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** Since when has God's standard of perfection stopped being the bar for our living? Like Adam, we are sinners deserving of death.

"But, look at what I've done. I know I've sinned, but shouldn't all the good stuff I do outweigh it?" "I fight with my spouse. I've said some nasty things. But I've always made it up to her...the heartfelt apologies, helping out with more of the chores, the gifts, the flowers, the paying more attention to her." "Alright, there was that mistake at work. I passed it off on someone else. I felt real bad about it, but I've stayed late, have worked even more diligently, have been trying to help out others where I can."

TV personality Chuck Todd, on Good Friday, sent out this tweet: ***"I'm a bit hokey when it comes to 'Good Friday.' I don't mean disrespect to the religious aspect of the day, but I love the idea of reminding folks that any day can become 'good,' all it takes is a little selflessness on our own part. Works EVERY time."***

You know, political leanings aside, looking past the hugely disrespectful things he said, because hasn't that been you? "I can do enough good. I'm a good person. God has to see that." But what does God's Word say? ***"There is no one who does good, not even one."*** ***"All have sinned."*** Like Adam, we are sinners deserving of death.

Paul reminds us of those unfortunate realities. He writes about Adam's one "trespass" bringing sin into the world. That word "trespass," it gives you this picture of crossing a line that says, "Do not cross!" That's totally relatable up here where trespassing could get you killed, "Do not trespass. Trespassers will be shot. Survivors will be prosecuted." That's us. That's what we deserve for crossing the line into sin, even for only a moment.

Paul writes about Adam's "disobedience" making us sinners. That word, disobedience, in the Greek, literally means "with hearing." I think it has the idea of "you heard what was said, but chose to do the opposite anyway." Like telling Mara, "It's time to put away toys and get your pajamas on," I know she heard me but she knows I'm checking emails on my phone and so she can ignore me. That's disobedience in spite of hearing and knowing what is expected. We know what God's Word says. We know what God expects of us, but we still ignore him. We disobey him.

Friends, you and I have so many mistakes...so many sins...deserving huge, deadly, eternal ramifications...condemnation...eternal death...no different from Adam.

Alveda King, the niece of Martin Luther King Jr. lived that truth. No surprise there. She wrote about how a few years after the assassination of her uncle, her life began to go into a rebellious tailspin. Besides making poor choices in her dating life, she had taken to going to nightclubs regularly, getting drunk, driving home by herself. She recalls one night especially, when it was pouring. She heard a loud thunder clap and a live electrical wire broke loose and fell across her car. Still tipsy, she was about to grab the door handle when, she claims, God spoke to her, quoting Psalm 46, "Be still, and know that I am God!" Looking back at the moment, she recounts, "**I experienced the grace and mercy of God.**"

Friends, this story could be one of so many other near death experiences people have had...where they've concluded, "I'm only here today because of the grace of God." Maybe you know a few. For some, those experiences have even been their "come to Jesus moment."

You have room for one more story of a near death experience? Look in the mirror. And it wasn't a come to Jesus moment, but a Jesus came to me moment. And it's only by the grace of God.

Again, Paul writes, "**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. 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.**"

That's our story. It began with one man, Adam, introducing sin, a banner we've been carrying in our lives. It ends with one man, Jesus, doing away with sin because of grace.

Our story is marred by disobedience. His story is characterized by obedience. Remember how disobedience – literally "with hearing" – is hearing but ignoring? Obedience is literally "under hearing." That's putting yourself under what you heard.

That was Jesus. He was obedient in his life. Paul writes, "**When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.**" Jesus put himself under the Law. He put himself under God's commands. He perfectly obeyed in our place.

And he was obedient in his death. Again, Paul writes, ***“[Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”*** There on the cross, Jesus took our sins and died the death Adam brought into the world...the death we deserve...eternal death.

And, through that one act of righteousness, that obedience, we’ve been justified. We are declared not guilty. We are not guilty because we have been made righteous. All our wrongs – all our sins – are gone...removed...destroyed...forgiven. And saved from death, we have life – eternal life...because Christ was obedient...because of his grace...because of his life, death, and resurrection.

But, how can I be sure that’s me? How can you be sure that’s you? What do our verses say? Again, ***“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.”*** As “many” as were made sinful through disobedience...that “many” Christ has made righteous through his obedience. So, are you a sinner? Then you’ve been made righteous.

“Where sin increased, grace increased all the more,” Paul writes. Where you’ve sinned, God’s grace increased, that is, literally, it’s exceeded beyond...super went beyond what was necessary. No matter how bad your sin, no matter how many mistakes, no matter how much trespassing and disobeying you’ve done, God’s grace is bigger and covers it. Always.

And now we are righteous saints. We get eternal life. Yes,, one sin lead to huge ramifications. Our sins lead to deadly ramifications. But it was only near death for us. Christ died for those sins. And now he lives. And we do, too. We will, forever in heaven. And now, we rejoice in God’s amazing grace all the more. Amen.