

The Easter Gift

Romans 5:18-21

Every year thousands of people climb a mountain in the Italian Alps, passing the "stations of the cross" to stand at an outdoor crucifix. One tourist noticed a little trail that led beyond the cross. He fought through the rough thicket and, to his surprise, came upon another shrine, a shrine that symbolized the empty tomb. It was neglected. The brush had grown up around it. Almost everyone had gone as far as the cross, but stopped there.

As we have seen in our study of Romans, the message of the cross is essential for salvation. Romans 3:24-25 says, **"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood..."** Romans 5:8 says, **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** But the message of the cross is not complete without the resurrection. If we only go as far as the cross, we are still left in despair and heartbreak. The Apostle Paul is incredibly blunt in 1 Cor. 15:14 when he writes, **"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty."** He goes on a few verses later to say, **"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable."**

You see if Jesus had only come to earth, He would merely have been a visitor, God on a holiday. If He had only died, He would merely have been just another religious teacher, like Buddha or Mohammed. But He didn't just come to earth, and He didn't just die on a cross. He rose from the dead!

That is the excitement of Christianity, that is the uniqueness of our faith! Alfred Ackley wrote it powerfully in song:

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today;
I know that He is living, whatever men may say;
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,
And just the time I need Him, He's always near.

He lives, he lives Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives? **He lives within my heart!**

We've heard the story many times, and we heard it read again this morning. I hope we never tire of hearing the words, He Is Risen! I hope we never cease to be amazed, to be awestruck, at the incredible fact that death couldn't hold the Lord of Life. And, most of all, I hope we never miss this simple fact, Jesus is alive today.

The resurrection is not an optional belief for Christians. It is an indispensable fact. In Romans 1 Paul writes about the gospel of God **"concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead"** (Rom. 1:3-4).

In Romans 4 as Paul wrote about the righteousness of God that was accounted to Abraham in verses 23-25 he wrote: **"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him**

who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

And in Romans 5:10 we read, **"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."**

When we say **"He is Risen,"** we don't mean just that at a moment in time Jesus came back to life, but we also mean He is Alive Today. Right now. At this very moment. We can be saved by Him because He lives!

That brings us back to our passage at the end of Romans 5 today. For five chapters Paul has been laboring to make clear and compelling for us the truth that sinners are put right with God not on the basis of any inherent righteousness in us but on the basis of the righteousness of Christ received by faith alone. In Romans 5 12-17 we have seen that God saves us this way through Christ because it corresponds to the way we were condemned through Adam. Adam's sin resulted in death for all who are in him, but Jesus Christ's obedience resulted in justification of life for all who are in Him.

In verses 18-21 Paul summarizes his point:

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

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

Paul sums up 5:12-17 in verse 18 and repeats it in a slightly different way in verse 19. The main point is: If you are in Adam, you're under the reign of sin and death, headed for eternal condemnation. But if you are in Christ by faith in His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, you are free from sin and death and will reign in life through Him, because Christ's gift is greater than Adam's sin.

This is the Easter gift. In these four verses I just want to make two points and an application. First,

1. The Gift brings Justification in place of Condemnation (5:18-19)

For the Apostle Paul, Easter celebrates a gift--God's gift--a special, life-transforming gift we call grace. Eight times in the second half of Romans 5, Paul uses the words "grace" or "gift." God's gift is the righteousness of Christ. God's gift replaces condemnation with justification, it replaces death with life.

And we desperately need this gift because death reigns. It all began back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve in paradise, and everything RIGHT in the world. They are right with God: They talk with Him face to face, soaking in His love and trust. They are right with each other: They have a loving, trusting relationship, totally open and affirming. They are right with their world; even the animals come to them without fear or danger. They are right at the core of their being: no sickness, no selfishness, no death.

Then they sinned. Adam disobeyed God's loving command. Mankind rebelled against God. No longer were they right with God: They hid in fear and shame. No longer were they right with each other: They were ashamed of their bodies, blaming each other for

their sin. No longer were they right with the world: there were weeds and painful labor. There was sickness, pain, and death.

Why tell such a story, especially on Easter? Because it is our story--a story of how life ought to be, if we were right with God. It's a story of how sin and death have polluted every part of us and our world. It's the story of our fallen race, sin and death reign.

So here Paul compares Adam and his sin with Christ and His righteousness because until we understand the real problem of sin and death, we cannot understand how great is the gift of God, how amazing is His grace.

Look again at verses 18-19, **"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."**

Adam's sin resulted in death and condemnation for all who are in him, but Jesus Christ's obedience resulted in justification of life for all who are in Him. God's gift to us is that we can be right with God. It is a free gift, a gift of God's grace. It reverses the judgment of death upon the human race. It removes our condemnation. It gives us the righteousness of Christ. It is for all who are in Christ, as verse 17 says, **"those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."**

This gift is for those who receive it, for those who believe the good news that Jesus died for their sin and was raised to life so they could be right with God. By faith in Jesus Christ, God does not count our sins against us but instead He puts the perfect righteousness of Christ to our account.

The gift brings justification in place of condemnation and second,

2. The Gift brings Life in place of Death (5:20-21)

Paul contrasts the Law and its result with God's grace in Christ and its result. He is saying, Through the Law, sin reigned in death, but through Christ super-abundant grace reigns in righteousness to eternal life.

Look again at verses 20-21,

20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

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

Here Paul gives one great principle which sums up everything He has been saying. When God gave the law, the Ten Commandments, He wasn't trying to tell us how to go to heaven. No one gets to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments. You can't do it because no one ever truly "keeps" the commandments perfectly. And God won't accept anything less than perfection. He doesn't grade on a curve. It's all or nothing with Him.

No, God gave the Ten Commandments so that we might realize the depth of our own personal sinfulness. Without the law we would go merrily on our way, patting ourselves on the back, congratulating ourselves on how good and clever we are. But let a person just once take a good look at the Ten Commandments, and a honest look at his own life. When a man does that truly and honestly, the only result can be, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." The more we understand of God's law, the greater our sense of our own sinfulness.

“But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” This translation is a bit misleading because it uses the word “abounded” in both sides of the statement. But they aren’t the same words in the Greek. They are actually completely different. We might say it this way: the first abounded is like addition, you could say, “where sin was added.” But when he says “Grace abounded much more,” it is like multiplication. On the one hand, sin increased one by one by one. On the other hand, God’s grace in Christ Jesus was multiplied over and over and over again. It reminds me of those famous words of Corrie Ten Boom: “There is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still.”

Julia Johnston wrote it powerfully in her hymn,

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,
yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured,
there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that is greater than all our sin.

The resurrection is proof that God’s grace is greater than our sin. Sin brought the reign of death. But the risen Lord Jesus Christ brought the reign of grace through righteousness to eternal life. In 5:17, Paul says that grace causes us to reign in life, but here he says that God’s superabundant grace reigns to eternal life. Listen how Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 15:

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Christ is the first fruits and those who are Christ’s at His coming are the full harvest. Christ’s resurrection is an accomplished fact of history. But still in the future is another certain event, Christ’s ‘coming.’ The fact of Christ’s resurrection is the assurance that we also will be raised from the dead and live with God forever.

What does Easter mean to you? Easter celebrates God’s gift of his Son--to make us right with God, and alive forever.

What do you do with a gift? Receive it. You can do that today:

Recognize your need, and despise the sin and death in your life. Believe that Jesus is God’s way of overcoming sin and death and making you right with Him.

Open yourself up to the Lord Jesus Christ taking over your life. Romans 10:9-10 says, **“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”**

How do you receive God's gift? Believing and confessing, you reach out and take it. You go to the cross believing Christ died for your sin. You go to the empty tomb believing Christ was raised to give you eternal life.

Let me ask you honestly, Is sin reigning in your life or Is the risen Christ reigning in your life?