

Sermon Notes

Paul has just made a bold claim: we have all reason to rejoice about the story—the “tag line”—*God* has already written under our life (5:1-12). Was Paul too bold? What about the life here and now? And: How can the life and death of one person have consequences for everyone who put their faith in him? Paul “backs up” his statements with a “sketch”, summarising the entire human history as the contrast of two persons: Adam and Jesus.

➤ Sin kills

5:12 summarises what sin does: it brings death, ever since Adam disobeyed and God’s warning (Genesis 2:17) became reality. Without access to the life only God can give (symbolized by the tree of life in the garden of Eden: Genesis 2:10), Adam and every human being will earn the “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23): death. Adam’s walking away from God could be compared to inviting cancer to live in you: death will be the inevitable consequence. Hence, death is not a “friend”, not “the best invention of life”, neither “natural” nor does it have any dignity. While we are right to *comfort* one another stating that ‘somebody passed away peacefully’ (where this has been the case) or that ‘death came as relief to him/her’ (where somebody has been suffering for long), we should know that death is nonetheless the consequence of sin and not in line with God’s will.

➤ Morality *cannot* save

In 5:13-14 and 5:20 Paul inserts brief references to the giving of the law. His point is: the law was never intended to give life, only to “increase” sin in the sense of making it visible (in a similar way that a diascope makes the content of a tiny slide visible). Consequently, keeping the law—or simply put: living good lives—is no solution to the problem of sin.

➤ Sin is *no* match for Grace

In 5:15-21 Paul spells out the contrast between the consequence of Adam’s trespass and Christ’s righteous (= restoring us to the relationship with God through his atoning sacrifice) and obedient (see John 10:17-18) “act of grace” (*charisma* in Greek). On the cross, where sin and death encounter God’s perfect righteousness and life, there can only be one victor. Sin loses by a margin too large to measure: it is no match for the “superabundant”, incomparable, immeasurable grace revealed and released in Jesus. Likewise, Jesus’ death on the cross did not simply undo the consequences of sin, but ushered in a kingdom in which we are not only free from the reign of sin, but will even “reign with Christ” (5:17.21).

Questions for Discussion

- 1 Everyone experiences loss of people close or known to us. Would you say that
- 2 Does Paul’s view on the death we face since Adam—death as consequence of sin—match your view of death? How did this passage challenge, change or confirm your view of death?
- 3 As Christians we still suffer under the realities of sin, death and evil, but we are *not* called to waste time bemoaning the evil around us or to retreat in fear. Rather, we are to call out and encounter evil with the power of the cross. Are there concrete situations coming to your mind where this is especially needed?
- 4 Make sure you end with prayer, declaring Jesus’ victory over persons and families in our midst who are currently mourning someone, but also over situations where you or members of your group are facing evil.