

THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION

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TO MAKE US RIGHTEOUS: ROMANS 5:12-21

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We celebrate the incarnation during the Christmas season because the incarnation changes the course of our lives. We learned last week (John 1:1-18) that the incarnation is a revelation of glory displayed in grace. In the incarnation – Jesus taking on flesh, being fully God, and being fully man – we see the pinnacle of God’s glory displayed in him adopting us to be his children (John 1:13)! When we ask the question, “What is the purpose of the incarnation,” we can answer that the incarnation exists for the glory of God displayed in God saying of us, “My son and my daughter!” Because of this truth, our celebration of the incarnation should be an incredible display of joy. We were once orphans and now we are sons and daughters of the living God.

In today’s passage, we learn another dimension of the incarnation. We’ll learn in today’s passage that Jesus is the new and better Adam so that he might rewrite our history and give us a new future. We could say that the incarnation exists to make us a righteous people for God.

I hope that as we understand this truth more deeply, we would experience the blessings available to us in Christ: peace, access to God, and joy in good times and bad times.

Let’s explore this passage together.

Preliminary Details

Let's start with some background information about Romans.

First, Paul is the author of the letter as indicated in Romans 1:1 (although the person who wrote the letter is Tertius as indicated in Romans 16:22). Paul discusses his Jewish pedigree in Philippians 3 in detail, and we learn about his conversion in 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 12, Galatians 1, Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and trained as a Pharisee (Philippians 3:3). His zeal for God and the OT led him to persecute the church (Philippians 3:6) but God graciously saved him only a few years after the crucifixion (perhaps around AD 36).

Second, the purpose of the book of Romans and Paul's ministry is found in Romans 1:5: to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Jesus' name among the Gentiles.

Third, Tom Schreiner points out that a major theme of the book of Romans is God's righteousness (See Schreiner's table of contents, vii). The righteousness of God is revealed in faith (Romans 1:17) and although it leads to judgment for both Jews and Greeks (Romans 1:18-3-19), it also leads to salvation for both Jews and Greeks (Romans 3:21-Romans 4:25). This righteousness produces in us hope (Romans 5-8) and continual kindness for both Jews and Greeks (Romans 9-11). Finally, this righteousness should transform us (Romans 12-16).

Fourth, a proper understanding of our text today depends on some understanding of Romans 5:1-11. In these verses, Paul describes the result of our justification by faith (Romans 5:1). It Fourth, a proper understanding of our text today depends on some understanding of Romans 5:1-11. In these verses, Paul describes the result of our justification by faith (Romans 5:1). It gives us access to God and

creates in us incredible joy that can even be experienced when suffering (Romans 5:1-3). Our hope rests on the incredible fact that Jesus died for us even while we were his enemies (Romans 5:6-11).

Threats to our Salvation: Romans 5:12-14

Now, in verses 12-14, Paul addresses the topics of sin and death: two potential threats to our hope in Jesus. Notice that these are the dominant themes in verses 12-14: the concept of sin is repeated six times and the idea of death is repeated three times, and Paul's point in these verses is to show us the power and seriousness of sin.

Sin corrupts our nature (12). Paul tells us that sin “came into the world” in verse 12 through Adam. Thus, in one sense, we have inherited a sinful nature from Adam. Yet, the power of sin is not only expressed in us having sinful natures. It expresses itself in us sinning, a lot. Notice the end of verse 12: “because all have sinned.”

Sin leads to death (12). God told Adam and Eve that when they eat the forbidden fruit, they will die (Genesis 2), and although they did not experience a physical death on that day, they died a spiritual death. They were separated from the God of the universe exiled from his presence. Sin is this serious; it leads to death (12).

Sin spreads (12). This is indicated by the word “so” in verse 12. Church family, if we are going to interpret the epistles well, we must take special note of the little words: the conjunctions. I still remember the School House Rock song, Conjunction Junction. Conjunctions connect ideas and explain to us the relationship between ideas. For example, “and” connects ideas – Asher and I went to the store, “but” contrasts ideas – we did not buy apples at the store but avocados. The word “or” implies a choice. The word “so” is also a conjunction, and it

describes the idea of “result.” Sin and death came into the world through one man resulting in sin and death spreading to all humanity (5:12). Sin’s power is evident in that it spreads, church family, and this fact is evident to us. It is commonplace to see children engage in the sins of their parents because the DNA of sin is to spread. Paul tells us that sin and death came into the world through Adam and spread to all humanity (5:12). Sin is this powerful.

Sin leads to a death that reigns over all from Adam to Moses (14). Paul’s point here is important. Every single person – whether they have the Bible or not, or in the context of Paul’s argument whether they heard God’s command at Mt. Sinai or not – die. Sin has spread to all people indiscriminately, church family, because Adam sinned (12) and because we sinned (12).

Thus, sin and death appear to be potential threats to our salvation. Verse 14, however, provides us with hope amid tragedy. Paul tells us in verse 14 that Adam was a type. Now, the concept of types and shadows is essential for us to understand. The main characters, events, and institutions of the OT that point beyond themselves to greater realities and one of those types is Adam. Amid the destruction of sin, there is hope. Adam is a shadow of who is to come.

Christ Destroys the Threats: Romans 5:15-19

Now, in verses 15-19, Paul compares Adam and Jesus: the shadow to the real substance. First, Paul describes how Adam is unlike Jesus in verses 15-17. He tells us that the free gift is not like the trespass in verses 15 and 16 since they lead to completely different ends. Adam represents humanity and leads us to death. Verse 15 tells us that we die through Adam’s trespass and that this death is an act of judgment bringing condemnation (16). We will all one day breathe a last breath

on this planet that proves that we are sinners, and if Adam was the last word, we would all enter an eternal death marked by judgment and condemnation. We would rightly be separated from the God of this universe. Adam leads to hell. That much is clear in verses 15-16.

Whereas Adam leads to death and hell, Jesus leads to life and heaven. Notice the language of 15-17. There is a twofold repetition of the word “grace” in verse 16 and Paul describes this grace as “abounding” as a “free gift.” These concepts indicate something utterly glorious. Adam and the sin and death that characterizes those in him can be undone, reversed in Jesus. Let me stop right now and ask, “Would any non-Christian here today, come to Jesus and receive this free gift?” Your history can be rewritten, and your future defined by Jesus because Jesus died for sinners. Would you receive his free gift of righteousness, today?

Notice the phrase “much more” in verses 15 and 17. Sin leads to death, judgment, and condemnation truly. This sequence is a firm reality, but the reality of grace abounding as a free gift is a firmer reality. We could put it this way: the judgment of sin is certain, but the gift of life in Jesus is even more certain. Jesus provides us with a new identity and a new future.

Now, a good question to ask is how does Jesus rewrite our history and give us a new future? He does this by giving us his righteousness as a free gift of grace (17-19). You see, what we require to see God – righteousness – we do not have. Rather as repeated six times in verses 12-14, we only possess sin. We are not right in our relationship with God but have transgressed his law. This is our inheritance from Adam, but Adam is not the last word. Whereas Adam represented humanity and lead us to death, Jesus stands up and represents us and leads us to

life. Adam was declared to be a son of God but was tempted and failed. Jesus was declared to be God's son and was tempted and succeeded. Church family, as we saw many times throughout the Matthew sermon series, Jesus rewrites our history for us. Where Adam failed and we failed, Jesus was righteous, and in reliving our history, he gives his righteousness as a gift to all who trust in him!

So why does the incarnation exist? It exists to rewrite our history: to give us righteousness as a gift.

The Law is a Shadow: Romans 5:20-21

Finally, in verses 20-21, Paul addresses the purpose of the law. The purpose of the law is multifaceted. In other words, we could describe its purpose in many ways. Its purpose is to increase the trespass (5:20). You see, the law functions to show us that we have a major problem. Jews often thought that the law's purpose was to bring God's people back into his presence, but Paul explains that the law's purpose was never to fix Israel's problem, but to diagnose Israel's problem.

Several years ago my wife and I along with two friends were going to Florida on vacation. Outside of Bowling Green, my car broke down. It was towed to the Toyota dealer in Bowling Green for them to run a diagnostic test. They told me that a rod in my engine ripped off and put several holes in the engine block. They then charged me \$200 for the diagnostic test. It would have been silly of me to say, "200 dollars to fix my car, thanks!" The mechanics were not fixing my car; rather, they were diagnosing its problem. The law is a diagnostic test: this is its purpose. That is why Paul explains that its purpose was to increase the trespass (5:20).

Like Adam, the law points beyond itself (21). In the law, we see our sin multiplied; we see our failure illustrated in countless ways; yet, the purpose of this is to point us to a greater reality. Paul says, “so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (21). We have inherited a sinful nature from Adam and the law exposes our sin, but in Christ, sin no longer reigns over God’s people even though they continue to sin. Rather than sin, righteousness now reigns, and we possess this righteousness not based on merit, but as a gift.

Application

Jesus, as the new and better Adam, rewrites our history by living our life and dying our death. He gives us his righteousness as a gift so that righteousness now reigns, not sin nor death. Notice the language here. Jesus is the alternative man to Adam (5:19). If Jesus wasn’t a man, none of this would be possible. Our history would still be written by Adam and our future would still be hellish to the core. Hell would be our inheritance. But because Jesus humbled himself and took on flesh, the history and future of everyone who trusts in Jesus can be redefined by his righteousness.

Church family, the context of these verses is justification by faith (5:1). We are made right with Jesus because we believe that he died for us and the result of this belief is access to God and incredible joy (5:1-4), and according to 5:12-21, our sin and our death do not threaten our future. Why? Because Jesus is the better Adam who gives us his righteousness as a gift!

So, my hope today is that we would experience the peace, access, and joy that belongs to us because Jesus died for us. Do not let the curses of sin and death rob you of these benefits any longer church family

because in the words of verses 15 and 17 how much more effective is the work of Jesus than Adam. It is this reality – the gospel – that will motivate us to walk in righteousness and not in sin. We are in Jesus, so let's have hope despite the curse of sin and death and let's be motivated to put sin to death.

Perhaps there is a non-Christian here today. Would you come to Jesus by trusting that he died for you and by turning from your sins? Would you come to the one who can rewrite your history and your future by giving you his righteousness as a gift? Would you come to Jesus today? If so, please reach out to us so that we can care for you as you begin this new life in Jesus.

Prayer

Help us, O Lord, as we meditate on the incarnation this season, to have incredible hope in Jesus, and to enjoy our access to God despite the curse of sin and death. As we understand the gospel more deeply, we pray that we would walk in righteousness, not in sin. We love you and praise you and pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

