

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (Opening)

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Introduction

I love a good story. But it really has to be good, and it has to get my attention.

A good story will get your attention on the first few pages, or at least in the first chapter. Then the story has to have a good plot line; maybe several plot twists, unexpected changes in how we expected things to go. Then, finally, there has to be a good ending.

If you think about it, every story has all three of these aspects: a good attention getting start, a plot line with (hopefully) some twists along the way, and a good ending.

Movies, plays, books, basically any good story has these three parts. A beginning, a middle, and an ending. Some stories, like the Lord of the Rings, had three sections, and each section had all three parts, to a point. The first two didn't really have an ending, per se, but did come to a point where you could put the book down and find the next one without too much angst.

Even TV shows follow this format. There's the hook at the beginning to get your attention so you'll stay through the show. Then after the theme song and opening credits, they move the plot along, then, the ending, where everything is resolved. Sometimes there's a tag after the ending just to close things up a little more, or have one final punch line if it's a sit-com.

Beginning, middle, end. Three perfect pieces that make stories perfect.

Even the Bible follows this pattern. The first three chapters of Genesis is the beginning, the hook if you will. The end is the book of Revelation, where the end of the world and the end of time is revealed to John. The middle, well, that's everything in between these two, with plot twists all over the place, and ups and downs galore.

Paul knew the beginning, and most of the middle, but he hadn't read the end of the story; it wasn't written down by John until after Paul had died, but Paul knew some of what would be revealed to John. Paul knew the whole story, beginning, middle, and end.

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul sums up the entire Bible in three short paragraphs; not just the basics, but the entire story line for the Bible. The bad news, the solution to fix the bad news, and the end result.

Romans 5:12-21

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also

might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Beginning

So, like any good story, Paul starts at the beginning. We know God created everything, and He said it was good. But the evil one didn't like that it was good. He had to do something about it. Let's pick up the story in Genesis chapter 3.

Genesis 3:1-7

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Paul says in Romans that sin came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. I know it's a minor point here, but sin wasn't suddenly created when this happened. Sin had never happened in this world, but it had happened before. Obviously, the evil one had already disobeyed God, so sin existed. Sin existed in the spiritual realm, and the evil one decided it was time to export it. The evil one introduced the opportunity to sin to Adam and

Eve, and they fell for it; they chose poorly. Because of that, sin was introduced into the world, and because of sin, the punishment for sin. Like I said last week, there's only one punishment for disobeying God: the death penalty. So, since Adam and Eve sinned, they now deserved death. The penalty wasn't immediate, but it was set. Eventually they would die because of their sin.

There are many places that Paul points out that sin only exists where there is law, because without the law, we don't know what sin it. But even without the Law of Moses, Paul says, sin existed, and the proof of that is that death existed. We choose to sin, so we have to accept the punishment for that choice.

The Middle

So that's the beginning of the story. Everything was perfect until something messed it up. The evil one decided to throw a wrench in the machine and see what happens. He couldn't deal with God's perfect plan. But God obviously had another plan, one that would repair the broken machinery and make it work right again.

God fixed things by offering the free gift of His grace; all we need to do is accept the death of Jesus in the place of our own death, and accept Jesus as our Lord. Accepting Him as our Lord implies obedience, because if you don't obey, He's not the one in charge, so He's not the Lord.

Paul uses an interesting analogy in the second paragraph of our text for today. He compares Jesus to Adam. Adam brought sin into a righteous world, and thereby caused death. Jesus reversed the process. Because of His death, He brought righteousness into a sinful world, through the grace of God.

In the last part of Romans 5:14, Paul says that Adam "was a type of the one who was to come." What does that mean?

The Greek word translated as type here is the word tupos [**too**-pos]. A tupos is like a mold or the result of using a stamp on metal or leather. When you hammer the stamp into the material, it transfers the reverse of the image into the material. That's the basic process used to make coins. You have the negative image of the coin on what we call the die for the coin. When the metal of the coin is struck with the die, the positive form of the image comes out in the coin.

Paul is saying that Adam was like the die of the coin, and there would be one coming in Adam's future but Paul's and our past, who was the antitype or the result of the striking of that die on the coin blank. There would be one who would be the reverse of Adam, a spiritual mirror image, of sorts.

How was Jesus the mirror image of Adam, and how were they alike? When you mint a coin with a die, the image looks the same, but it is reversed. So there is a similarity and a difference. Jesus was like Adam in several ways. First of all, He was a man; He was fully human, going through the same struggles we went through as humans growing up. But He was more than human, because He never sinned. We all have the choice to sin or not, and we choose to sin. Jesus faced all the same temptations we do, and never sinned.

More than that, Jesus was completely obedient to God. Even though He didn't sin, he accepted the punishment for sin, the death penalty. He willingly chose to follow God's will, and died for our sins, not His. And here's the kicker of what makes Jesus the antitype of Adam: He was raised from the dead by God. Jesus is the first to be born into the life of the resurrection.

Paul explains it more fully in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, in chapter 15.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Death is unavoidable. Only two people that I can think of avoided death; Enoch in Genesis 5:24, and Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11. Every other human since Adam has experienced death. But Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead to a permanent new life. Every other person who was raised from the dead before and since has died again, since they were raised in their earthly bodies.

Let's move a little further down in 1 Corinthians 15 and continue with Paul's explanation.

1 Corinthians 15:42-49

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Paul says that we are all made from the same mold as Adam was, and because of that we choose to sin rather than to do what's right. But

Paul also says that by obeying Jesus and accepting His sacrifice, we are stamped with the image of Jesus, which gives us a new life.

Back in Romans, Paul says that Adam brought sin into the world, but Jesus brought the free gift of righteousness which brings justification. Again, we have a choice. We choose to sin, we need to choose to obey Jesus in order to receive that free gift of righteousness that brings justification.

The End

To end the story, Paul makes a few more points. He compares the sin of Adam and the righteousness of Jesus again. This time he points out that since Adam brought sin, and thereby many were made sinners, Jesus brought righteousness, and thereby many will be made righteous. Paul doesn't say everyone will be made righteous for a few reasons.

First, Paul is making a comparison here; one to many, and one to many. It's a typical Greek style argument. He says that the first one from the dust, Adam, brought sin to the many, all of us. And as a comparison, Jesus, the second man, as he says in 1 Corinthians, is spiritual, not earthly, and provides righteousness to many.

Second, like in our reading this morning from Deuteronomy, we have a choice. Moses, in this portion of Deuteronomy, is addressing the Israelites before they actually go into the Promised Land. He says they have a choice. They could live like the people in the land that they were supposed to be dispossessing, or they could obey God and live. Moses recommended that they chose life.

Paul uses an interesting word in Romans 5:20. It's translated in the ESV as "abounded all the more". The implication is that since there is an abundance of sin, there needs to be an abundance of grace to cover that sin. An abundance is a lot. It's like an infinite number; it's so huge it can't be counted. But there's more grace than that. How do you get more than an infinite number? How do you have more than

“abundantly”? Paul uses the word super abundantly or hypoabundantly. More than the infinite amount of sin, there is an infinite amount of grace that’s bigger.

Paul closes out the story with the good news from the final chapter. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, we have the option to choose life, and when we do choose life, grace, the unearned gift from God that came to use because of Jesus’ death, and His resurrection, can reign in our lives. We can choose life, and be filled with His righteousness that leads to eternal life.

Like I said, Paul knew the end of the story, the basic part of what would be in John’s letter, what was revealed to him about the end. Paul understood what was coming. But John wrote it down. In the end of his letter to the seven churches in Asia, John explained how his vision ended.

Revelation 22:8-11

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, ⁹ but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

¹⁰ And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

John says that people will still do evil things, still wallow in their sins as long as they choose to; and a lot of people will choose to. But as Paul Harvey used to say, this is the rest of the story. Some will chose to follow Christ. Some will obey the King, and will receive His righteousness, because they know they don’t have righteousness of their own.

Conclusion

We can't do it on our own. If we could do it on our own, Jesus' death was for nothing. But Jesus died as a replacement for us. He took our place, and died because we sinned, and God accepted that sacrifice as sufficient. If we accept His sacrifice for what we did, then we can have His righteousness, and can be adopted as children of God.

But it requires something from us; we need to believe that it's true, and that it was for us that He died. We have to believe that He rose from the dead, and is living now, seated at the right hand of God. We have to accept His Lordship over us. Lordship is a concept that we don't easily understand, but we need to give Jesus total control over our lives. We need to be like Paul and become voluntary slaves to Jesus. That's what giving up to His Lordship is. We no longer have authority to rule over our lives. And that's a good thing because we've done so many things that were wrong. We made wrong decisions, and chose death. Since we're so bad at making our own decisions about our future, the best decision we can make is to accept that Jesus needs to be the ruler over our lives, and obey His commands.

It's about choice. It always has been about choice. Like Moses, I ask you to choose life. If you're not in Christ, if you haven't been baptized to take away your sins, if you aren't obeying Jesus as your Lord and King, then you're not choosing life.

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Closing)

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.