

## The Three Men of Easter

*To the Romans..., Pt. 12*

Well happy Easter, everyone. It's not a "normal" Easter Sunday, I know. It's better than *last* year! Remember last year? You weren't even here. I was preaching to a camera and a couple of sound booth guys. At least *some* of you are able to be here this year. But of course, many of you still aren't. The pandemic is not over yet. I'm tired of it too, but "tired of it" is not a scientific method of beating disease. But we're getting closer. So we keep up the difficult work for a bit longer and look forward to improvements in the coming months.

So welcome to those of you watching at home. Did you at least put on fancy new pajamas to sit on your couch for church? I am choosing to picture you all sitting at home in your Easter finery – I mean, suits and ties, colorful dresses, even flowery hats and those fancy white gloves. It's insane because that's not our church culture *at all*, but it's my imagination, I can do what I want! But welcome to church, whether you're in the building or tuning in by some digital means.

So we are a scattered congregation once again. But that's ok, because as I recall the original church - the earliest followers of Jesus – were scattered as well on that first Easter Sunday morning. Talk about not ideal

circumstances. Days earlier they had seen their beloved teacher tortured and murdered and for all they knew, their turn was next. So, many were in hiding. A few ladies were going to the gravesite to treat the body – they went early, probably to avoid much attention. But none of them yet knew in that moment that an event had occurred that morning which would change the world forever.

And the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is still the reason why we have hope in the world today. It's what gives us hope in a deadly pandemic. It's what gives us hope when our body and our health falls apart, pandemic or not. It gives us hope in broken relationships. In financial collapse. In the face of depression and crippling anxiety. It's our hope when dreams die. It's our hope when people die...when death begins to knock even at our *own* door.

And make no mistake, death *is* the greatest problem for all of us. Oh, we can try to deny it, cheat it, outrun it, stuff it down and distract from, but it is always there. While I was in my doctoral program, I finally discovered what's wrong with me. It turns out that I'm an existentialist. I would say that I have been since at least elementary school even though I could not have defined it. An existentialist is someone who can't get away from the philosophical pursuit of the meaning of life.

You remember the philosophy kids in college? They were the one's moping around arguing about everything instead of learning real skills to do a real job. That's what essentialists do – essentialists like my wife the CPA. Life is a spreadsheet, and if you can get the columns to add up – and with enough work, the columns always add up – then you can lay your head on your pillow and sleep soundly.

But for an existentialist, the columns never add up! Because there's one factor in the debt column that always trumps everything in the assets column. Death! I mean, what do we say, the only two constant things in life are death and taxes. But they've pushed the tax deadline back again this year...*because* of the deaths. So I think death wins.

Karl Barth was generally regarded as the most important theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – your pastor is a Barthian – and he said this about death in his famous commentary on Romans. “Death is the supreme law of the world in which we live...Death is engraved inexorably and indelibly upon our life....In it the whole riddle of our existence is summarized and focused....we can say no more than that **if there be salvation, it must be salvation from death.**” Herr Barth was an existentialist too!

All the other problems pale in comparison. Who cares how brilliant you are if when you die, your brain rots and in a generation or two, no one will remember - not just your ideas - they won't remember *you*. “If there be salvation, it must be salvation from death.” But I have good news! In fact that's what the word “gospel” means, *the* good news. There *is* such a salvation. And the Resurrection of Easter Sunday is what makes it possible.

And this is the central message of the Bible over and over again. And for the whole of 2021, we've been looking at that message in one of the most straightforward and systematic presentations of the gospel that you're going to find – Paul's letter to the Romans. In fact, today is our 12<sup>th</sup> message in the series and somebody reminded me this week that I had said we weren't going to go as long as “that preacher in London did”, but that in fact, this Romans series was getting very long. And I reminded that person, that the London preacher in question presented a message from Romans every Friday night for 13 years! So we are practically *sprinting* at this point.

Now, I know there are generally a number of visitors on Easter Sunday and we're so very glad that you've joined us. And I just want to say, don't worry, you won't be lost if you're just joining us. In fact, you've picked a great day to join us, because in many ways, today's passage from Romans is central to the whole text. Now, our inside joke is that I pretty much say that every week. But this time I mean it. In fact, let me read you a quote from "that London preacher" – Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones – about the passage we're going to be reading today. The second half of Romans Chapter five.

"I make bold to suggest, indeed to assert that in many ways this section from verse 12 to the end of the chapter is the very heart and center of the epistle to the Romans. First, it is a summary or summing up of all that has gone before. The apostle states it all here in a new way. But it is not only that, it is also the beginning of, and introduction to, all he is going to say right until the end of chapter 8. It is the most crucial section of the entire epistle. Failure to realize this accounts for most of the vagaries in interpretation."

Well, we certainly don't want any "vagaries in interpretation". So let's take a look at those verses that we'll be exploring this morning; but quickly a recap of the first half of chapter five. For the last two weeks, we've examined the first eleven verses to learn more about what the cross means – and it means a lot

of things – but we saw that it is the solution to our guilt, and what we need to survive - and even thrive - in the midst of the sufferings this life inevitably brings our way. That's part of what Jesus death accomplished.

But in the second half of the chapter, Paul shifts the focus from death to life – "reigning in eternal life" he says. And that's a powerful message anyway, but especially on Easter Sunday. So let's take a look at it, **Romans 5:12-21**, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned – 13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account where there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come."*

*"15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16 Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!"*

*“18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 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. 20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Wow, so much to unpack. Just that last verse, “sin”, “death”, “grace”, “righteousness”, “eternal life”, “Jesus Christ our Lord” – nearly every word packs a punch. By the way, Dr. Lloyd-Jones spent *fourteen* sermons on those verses alone, we’re going to do it all today in one. And the way I want to go about it is to talk about Goldilocks and the Three Bears. You remember this story; just because she had luxurious blonde hair, this Karen didn’t think property rights applied to her, so she just barges into the bear family home and starts trying out furniture. And of course, Mama Bear’s was...too soft, Papa Bear’s was...too hard and Baby Bear’s was just right!

Well, Paul mentions three men in these verses – I’m calling them “the three men of Easter” – and I want to show that one is too soft, one is too hard...and one is just right. And I won’t keep you in suspense, the “just right” answer is always Jesus. Duh, this is church.

So we’ll break things down this morning across three headings. First we’ll see the too softness of Adam. Followed by the too hardness of Moses. And finally we’ll close out by looking at the Perfection of Jesus Christ.

So **first** of all, **The Too Softness of Adam**. What do we mean by that? Well, Paul starts by saying (**v.12**), *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through **one man**, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”* Paul says all of our problems can be traced back to one man. And it’s not Biden...or Trump...or you ex...or *whoever* you want to blame all your problems on. This “one man” has a name and that name is, Adam.

Adam and Eve, Garden of Eden, serpent, forbidden tree, all of that from the first three chapters of Genesis. Paul says this goes back to the beginning. In the beginning, God created men and women in His image, and that image include immortality – death was *not* part of the original plan. Then God said, “I give you dominion over all of this glorious creation, anything you desire is yours for the taking, *except*...there’s one tree, I need you to trust me on this, stay away from the fruit of that one tree. Because if you eat it...it’ll kill you.” People always debate what the fruit of that tree was - some people say an apple, but of course that’s ridiculous. Clearly it was a pear tree...because I don’t like pears.

No, there's no use debating the details of this story – even the debate about did it really happen historically – literal Adam – or was it a myth? People have spilled so much ink over that and it's not ultimately necessary. I have my view, but either way, the story is meant to tell us what the story is meant to tell us. Paul used it to teach us about the condition of the human race, and Jesus did too by the way.

And what it's meant to tell us is that the first humans were not content to be merely *in* God's image, they wanted what the serpent promised, (**Genesis 3:5** KJV), “...ye shall be as gods...” They wanted to *be* God. This is the nature of sin. It all comes back to that one thing, we want to sit in God's place. We want to be the rulers of our lives. We want to be the captain of our ship. Honestly? We want to be the captain of everybody else's ship too. And God said, “Sorry, can't do it. That's rebellion against the created order itself. That tears apart the fabric of reality, and while you think it's what you want, it will actually destroy you.”

You see, we have to understand the seriousness of sin. This is why Paul has spent so much time leading up to this point on the theology of sin. It's been all over these first five chapters. Most strikingly in **Romans 3:23**, “for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” This is the human condition. If you don't first diagnose the disease, you can't find the cure. When they were making this vaccine, they had to first figure out how the COVID virus works.

If you don't understand sin, you won't understand salvation. We think of sin as bad things we do, or maybe even good things we neglect – and that's a piece of it – but it is so much more than that. This is why to try and compare your sin to someone else's and think, “Well, I'm really not that bad”, is such a mistake. “You know, I may have my issues, but at least I didn't do *that*.”

Listen to how Karl Barth explains it, “The actual sins of the individual person are the means by which the general situation is more or less clearly known. Particular sins do not alter the status of a person; they merely show how heavily the general dominion of sin presses upon them. Sin is the sovereign power in the world as we know it; and it is wholly irrelevant what particular form it takes in the life of each individual.”

Sin is not just an action, or inaction, it is a sovereign power in the world as we know it. Look at how Paul describes sin throughout Romans: it “reigns”, it can be “obeyed”, it pays wages, seizes opportunity, “deceives” and “kills”. Paul personifies sin, describing it as an active entity that *does stuff* to you. So it's not just that you sin, it's that you are *in* sin. Sin has you. And the really bad news of that we'll get to in the next chapter, but famously, **Romans 6:23** reads, “*For the wages of sin is death...*”

This was God's warning back in the garden. Trying to be God – be all knowing, all powerful - actually winds up bringing death into our picture. This is the result of the action of our ancestor in the human race. You know, I used to say that when I get to heaven, man I *hope* I run into Adam. I'm going to gut-punch him! "You killed my dog!" But that's immature. Paul won't let us do that. He says, no, death came to all people "because *all* sinned."

Another Barth quote is helpful, "Only in so far as Adam first did what we all do, is it legitimate for us to call and define by his name the shadow in which we all stand." We all live in the shadow of death because of what Adam did, but only because we did it too. "Because *all* sinned". What Paul is saying is, way back there in the Garden, somehow you were in Adam and Adam was in you.

Now, we don't like this. This whole doctrine of "original sin" – that's what this is – is repugnant to our modern Western ears. Because we are so highly individualized in the West – some of you come from Eastern cultures, and you understand what I'm saying completely – but in the West we want to stand and fall as autonomous beings. Each person *is* an island, in our view. And so we hate this idea of representative guilt. I mean, if my grandfather committed a crime, that's not on me, so why Adam?

Well, it's because the Bible does not share our radically individualized worldview. I hate to shock anyone, but the Bible was not written for Americans! The Bible takes a radically different approach – that of human solidarity. That means that you have a communal relationship with other people so that when they win, you win and when they lose, you lose. In theology, this is called the concept of "federal headship".

The word "federal" comes from the Latin word *foedus*, or "covenant". A federal head is a person who, through a covenant relationship, represents or stands in for someone else. Some examples of this today would be in a trade union when a representative is given the authority to negotiate and sign a contract on behalf of the group. And once it's signed, everyone in the union reaps the rewards and bears the responsibilities. Or when a defendant gives legal counsel the "power of attorney" – what that attorney does in court is binding on the individual.

The best example is the power we give to elected representatives. That's why it's called the "federal government." They make decisions on our behalf. We don't vote on the laws, we vote on federal representatives to make the laws. But those laws apply to us. We may not like it – again because we're so radically individualistic - but that's how it works.

I've heard lots of people say over the last year – and this is the beauty of an election year, because I've heard it from both sides - “Well, Biden is not *my* President.” Or “Trump is not *my* President.” Um, yes his is, and yes he was. When the President does something, it applies to you, because he or she is your federal head.

We don't vote on going to war. The President (with the legislature) declares war. If America declares war on China, you can't say, “Well, *I'm* not at war with China.” Yes you are. You may not want to be, but if you're an American, and America is at war, *you're* at war. And if you want to prove it, try going to the country America is at war with and see if they don't put you in a prison. Unless you say you're defecting, which means you are renouncing your citizenship and are no longer an American.

But you can't renounce your citizenship in the human race. Well...actually that's kind of what point three is, but let's not skip ahead! But Paul says here that Adam is our federal head, that we are “in Adam” and therefore we are responsible for the deal he negotiated on our behalf. Which resulted in death. Well, that's not fair! We don't like the deal. First of all, we don't want *anybody* standing in for us. But even if we grant that federal headship is sometimes legit, we at least want to pick our own representative. We should at least get the chance to pick someone who is competent and has our best interest in mind.

Ah, well, now we're getting closer to Paul's argument. As it turns out God wants us to have a better representative as well. Not that the first one was unjust – oh no, we'd have done the very same thing if we were in Adam's...fig leaf...Paul's contention is that we *did*. And we *do*. We continually try to take God's spot. And so we earn what we've got. See, this is why I call Adam the “too soft” approach. Adam represents the secular humanist approach. No rules, hands off, let me do what I want to do. “There shouldn't be any rules – or at least I should make them.” Sorry, God says that goes against the flow of nature. It's too soft, it can't support you.

Ok, well then let's find another representative, and the next one we interview is the stellar opposite of Adam. To channel Martin Luther, the human race is like a drunk man trying to get on a horse – we fall off one side then we get up and fall off the other. And so that leads us to our **second point, The Too Hardness of Moses**. If Adam represents no rules, Moses quite literally stands for *lots* of rules. Moses, the bringer of “the Law”. The Ten Commandments, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the priests, the do's and the don'ts. In short, Moses represents religion.

Now, we've talked about this a lot during the series, because remember, Paul's audience in Rome consists of two kinds of Christians – gentiles who came from a pagan background, and Jews who came from a devout religious background. And Paul says, "You know what, it doesn't matter." When it comes to the Law, it's literally damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Remember **Romans 3:9**, "*For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.*"

Paul will discuss the purpose of the Law even further in coming chapters, but over and over he is clear that religion is just another way to be lost. I am fond of this quote by Barth about the nature of religious people – especially the part about theologians and priests – it humbles me. "So far as human possibility is concerned, prophets and priests, theologians and philosophers, men of faith, hope and charity...are boils and ulcers which enable the disease from which all suffer to be diagnosed. If we expect anything else, we are ignorant."

See, religious people think that by doing religious things, they can get right with God. But Paul makes the case that the purpose of the law is actually to show us just how impossible it is to get right with God on our own. This is why the difference so often, between religious and irreligious people is mostly guilt. Both groups do the same things, just one feels *guilty* about it.

You see, in **v.20** Paul says, "*The law was added so that the trespass might increase...*" What does that mean? If you're aware of what you're doing wrong, you're actually more guilty. But aware or not, you're still under the same penalty. You say, "Well that's not fair."

Again, let's think about it. And I have a very personal illustration. Do you know what this is? No, it's not a Walgreens receipt for a pack of gum. It's a speeding ticket. I was awarded this 2/10 of a mile from my parents house as we were heading home from Spring Break last week. I was shocked actually, because I didn't think I had done anything wrong, I was driving along in a big pack of other cars – in fact, my first thought when I saw the flashing lights behind me was "He's heading somewhere, I better get out of his way." And so I pulled over...and he pulled over too!

Turns out, that six lane divided highway just past my parents house is 40 mph! I was shocked it was so low. And the officer understood, he was very nice - I was very nice - apparently it happens all the time, even to locals. But I had been going 56 in that 40 which put me over the 15mph grace period so he had to give me a ticket. Fair enough. Even though I had just been doing what everyone else was doing...I had in fact broken the law, and this week I went online and paid the \$198 penalty.



Now, if I *had* seen the 40 mph sign and chosen to speed anyway and taken the attitude of a 1930's gangster, "You'll never catch me, copper, see!" Would I have been more guilty? Yes. But what is the penalty for doing 56 in a 40 – whether I meant to or not? It's still \$198 dollars. The penalty is the same. And, again, the penalty for sin, Paul says, is death. Death for religious people, for non-religious people, for anti-religious people. Various degrees of guilt perhaps, but if at the end of your story, you're dead...you're a sinner.

Not even The Law – not even religion – can get you out of the penalty. This is why Paul says in **v.13**, "...for before the law was given, sin was in the world..." Because even before Moses brought the law, sin and it's penalty were already a part of the human story. In fact, if anything, Paul says the Law makes it worse. "That the trespass might *increase*." Part of the nature of sin means we sometimes don't even want to break the law until we know there *is* a law.

I went to see a movie last week *in a theatre* – it's been a while. And this theatre had been taken over by another chain since I last been there and they had made some changes. And I noticed one in the men's restroom.

They had put little signs up above the urinal that said, "Please refrain from putting solids in the urinal." And I thought, "That is the stupidest sign I've ever seen!" First of all, the kind of people – cretans – who would put solids in a urinal are not going to be dissuaded by a little sign.

But worse, you just dared every teenage boy in the world, who had never, before seeing your sign, *dreamed* of putting solids in the urinal – now they gonna put some solids in the urinal. Heck, I was thinking to myself, "What kinds of solids *could* I put in the urinal?" Paul says that's the nature of the law. By telling you *not* to, it actually stirs up something in your fallen sinful nature that suddenly really *wants* to.

And the reason for all of it goes back to the nature of that tree in the garden. See, there were a lot of trees obviously in the garden. But there are two in particular that the Bible gives notice to. One is the Tree of Life – Adam and Eve were welcome – encouraged even – to eat it's fruits. But have you ever paid attention to the *name* of the forbidden tree? Look at it in **Genesis 2:17**, "*but you must not eat from **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.*" See, there are two kinds of fruit on that tree – good *and* evil.

Now, we all of us recognize the “evil” fruit. Lying, stealing, cheating, drunken, messing around...we’ve got a whole list. All these things you’re abuela warned you about. But that’s not the only fruit on that tree...we’re not so quick to recognize the “good” fruit. But remember, *both* fruit came from the *same* tree and when you eat it, you die.

I like to put it this way, Jesus was constantly surrounded by people from both sides of the tree. On one side you had the prostitutes – pretty easy to see which fruit they were eating; every society has looked down on prostitutes. But on the other side were the Pharisees. Now, they were the elite, moral role models of their day. These religious leaders were the societal “good guys”. But their “good” fruit came from the same forbidden tree.

You know, in my Bible, Jesus is always very nice to the prostitutes...and the only people he ever yelled at were the Pharisees. In fact, take it further. Go read the story of Easter week – read the passion narratives from the gospels – in the end, it’s the prostitutes that fall at his feet and worship Jesus as Lord, and the Pharisees who nail him to a cross and murder him.

No, religion is just an offshoot of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Just another way of trying to put yourself in God’s place. Still sinners, still subject to the penalty of death. Listen to what Martin Lloyd Jones has to say about the “good moral man” who resents the suggestion that he is a sinner. “I would say that the greatest sinners in the world are self-satisfied, self-contained, good moral people, who believe that, as they are, they are fit to stand in the presence of God.”

No, Moses and his Law are too hard. All they do is show you how bad you really are. It’s a measuring stick that proves you don’t measure up. In fact, the very measure makes you want to reject the standard. So finish out Paul’s thought in **v.20**, *“The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, **grace** increased all the more,”* Grace is what you want. Grace is what we need.

But neither Adam nor Moses will give you grace. Listen, it’s popular to moan about “secular cancel culture”. But I grew up in the church; we were doing “cancel culture” before cancel culture was cool. Everybody needs grace, but nobody wants to give grace. Not the secular and not the religious. Not too soft Adam and not too hard Moses. So what do we do?

Well thank God there's a third man of Easter. Really he's the *only* man of Easter. **Third** and final point, **The Perfection of Jesus Christ**. He's just right. Paul concludes this section with, (v.21) "*So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Grace brings eternal life. Do you know the difference between justice and mercy and grace?

Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is *not* getting what you deserve. But grace...grace is not only not getting what you deserve, but being rewarded for what you didn't deserve. If death is what we deserve, the penalty of sin for Adam and Moses alike, what would grace look like? Not only do we get eternal life, but in v.17, Paul actually says that we "*reign in life*" through what Jesus did for us. "Reign" is the language of kings. It's not just that the gospel promises you pardon from death – which, let's face it is awesome – but it says that you will be like a king.

Because you *deserve* to be a king? No. But because that's the deal the king worked out for you. Remember Federal Headship? Adam worked out a deal on behalf of the Federated Union of Human Beings – "sin entered the world through one man" - and we said, "That deal stinks. We want another representative. We want another deal."

Ok, so Moses worked out a deal with management. And it was better – I guess – but it still left our main complaints unanswered. Imagine your work contract called for six 10-hour days a week. We'd say, "Not in America, go back to the table." And Moses did. And he came back from negotiations and said, "I've got good news...you get an additional 10 min coffee break." "But what about the six 10-hour days?" "Oh yeah, that's still there." Moses couldn't negotiate away death. The ultimate penalty.

But we got the best negotiator imaginable. The Boss' own son! And because Jesus was the new Adam, it means that he succeeded where the first Adam failed. And in his garden, he bypassed The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil altogether. And he ate the fruit from the Tree of Life. And because of the deal he worked out, you have access to that fruit as well. In fact, while in the garden of Genesis - the beginning of the Bible story – there are two trees, in the garden that appear in the final chapters of Revelation – the end of the Bible story – there's only *one* tree in that garden. The Tree of Life.

**Romans 5:18**, “*Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also **one righteous act** resulted in **justification and life** for all people.*” The deal your representative worked out – justification, life, what a great deal! – it wasn’t without cost. He just chose to pay it out of his own pocket. The “one righteous act” – that’s what we remember this week. Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty that was incurred by the original contract. He paid our fine. He did our time. He bought us out of the penalty of death.

And then on that first Easter Sunday morning, he reaped the reward for his sacrifice. The Spirit of God breathed life once more into Jesus’ physical body and he got up and walked out of that tomb for the last time. And because he did – our representative now if we’ll have him – we will too. The contract calls for “justification” – right standing with the Boss – but it also includes “life” – eternal life for ever and ever. Oh, you’ll likely still die the one time. But Jesus is our example – we are “in him” - and death is not the end of our story.

And now, at the end of Chapter Five, Paul is bringing to a close a whole section of his letter – a glorious section. He has laid out the gospel of justification by faith. That’s what all this is called. And we have to hold it in tension. The great church father of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Tertullian, wrote, “Just as Jesus was crucified between two thieves, so the gospel is ever crucified between two errors.” The just right comes between the too hard and the too soft.

Can you see the balance? On the one hand, God is holy, so our sin requires that we be punished. The gospel tells us “You are more sinful than you ever dared believe.” To forget or deny this leads to the root of a too-soft secularism. Anything goes. Everything is good.

On the other hand, God is gracious, so our sin is dealt with. The gospel tells us “You are more accepted in Christ than you ever dared hope.” To forget or deny this leads to the error of a too-hard religiosity. Nothing is permitted. Everything is bad.

You see this tension over and over. It’s laced through the flow of life. The hard says, “God is holy”. The soft says, “God is love”. The Gospel says “God is holy *and* love. The hard says, “Earn your own righteousness.” The soft says, “You don’t need righteousness.” The gospel says, “You can receive God’s perfect righteousness.” The hard says, “Go *into* guilt – work it off.” The soft says, “Go *away* from guilt – embrace who you are.” The gospel says, “Go *through* guilt – rest in Christ.” The hard says, “Sin just affects individuals – just do evangelism.” The soft says, “Sin is just about systems – just do social action.” The gospel says, “Sin affects *everything* – preach the gospel to change individuals and do social action to change systems.”

Do you see the incredible wisdom, the beauty, the majesty of the gospel of justification by faith. Isn't it just what our world needs? What our world has always needed? Now, starting next week – in Chapter Six – Paul is going to begin a new section about how faith in Jesus *actually* changes a person. What is the process? I hope you'll come back and join us on that journey. It will transform your life.

But it has to start with a decision. Do you believe? You have to sign the contract that Jesus worked out. And you do that by faith. Paul says there's two parts; If you "confess that Jesus is Lord" – which means confessing that you're *not*. And "believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead" – dare to believe that this miracle of Easter really did happen. Then Paul says, "you will be saved." You're in. Adam doesn't represent you anymore. Moses doesn't represent you anymore. You are now "in Christ". And that's just right.

Let's pray...