

# Romans 5:12-21

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Date: 11 July 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, Neil Diamond. You know who Neil Diamond is? If you've watched the football, you've heard his songs from Sweet Caroline, with the crowd singing along and the players joining in and even Gareth Southgate on Wednesday night.

And Neil Diamond, he wrote Sweet Caroline. But he struggled as a songwriter I was reading this week. And he said, I was getting nowhere fast. And he says, the problem was, I didn't know who I was. It was only when I worked out who I was that I had a script to follow and a song to sing. It's a great line, isn't it? It was only when I worked out who I was that I had a script to follow and a song to sing. How about you? Have you worked out who you are yet? Do you know who you are? In traditional societies, in days gone by, your identity was fixed, wasn't it, by an accident of birth. Nowadays, we're told it's much more fluid. In a postmodern world, it's a matter of choice. And so, you are told, kids in school, life is a blank canvas. And you can be free to choose your identity. You can be whatever you want to be. Define your own identity. So break free of all those old stereotypes of gender and race and class.

[ 1 : 36 ] Be whatever you want to be. Be whoever you want to be. It's up to you. You've got to find your own identity. And I'm sure in one sense, that's profoundly liberating. But on the other hand, it's profoundly unsettling.

Do you know who you are? I was thinking this week, some people find their identity, don't they, in their star signs. Somebody said to me the other day that they were a Pisces. I'm a Pisces. What are you?

I said, I don't know. I don't know what I am. And they said to me, well, if you want to know what I'm like, I'm a Pisces. I said, what that means. But they were saying to me, weren't they, they took their identity from their star sign.

This is how Pisces behave, and I'm a Pisces. Some people take their identity from their psychology. They'll say, well, I'm an introvert. I'm not very sociable, but I get things done.

Others look to their race. Others look to their nationality, don't they? I'm an Englishman. I'm an American. And many people look into their family tree, don't they?

[ 2 : 50 ] It's really popular. It's a pastime. You can trace your family tree. And so the TV program, if you've ever watched it, Who Do You Think You Are?

There's something about that, isn't there, which we know instinctively that no man is an island entire to itself, to quote the poet John Donne.

Who am I? And the question, and the answer to that question is, you can't answer that question, Who Am I, without reference to other people. You're not an island. And so John and Martin do marriage prep.

Well, when I used to do marriage prep with different people, you would talk about the families that people come from. You'd talk about the good things, and the baggage, and the quirks about their family of origin.

And so we have, as human beings, a family of origin. The Addams Family.

[ 3 : 54 ] Which I think I'm the first person to get that joke, really. The Addams Family. Nobody seems to make that joke. There may be a reason for that. You know the Addams Family? Uncle Fester and all those people? The Addams Family is a family of monsters, isn't it?

Well, let me tell you this today. That's your family. And Paul is going to bring before us this morning our family tree. And he's going to talk to us about the first Adam.

And then he's going to talk to us about the last Adam. And he's going to play the game of compare and contrast. And these two Addams will help you and I this morning understand who we are.

And so I want to speak about three R's. Our ruin in Adam, 12 to 14. Our rescue in Christ. Our reign in life. So first of all, our ruin in Adam. And I want to say to you as we begin, it's much worse than you thought it was.

The word Adam means man. Humanity. That's what it means. And so let's picture him. Picture him there right at the beginning. Right in the Garden of Eden.

[ 4 : 59 ] Before Eve had been brought out of him. He's in the Garden alone. He is the totality of the human race. Adam was literally mankind. And in a deep sense, I was in Adam.

I was represented in Adam and so were you. He is the source of our humanity. And what has happened is that source has got polluted. And that is what Paul is doing here.

He's not explaining to you the origin of evil. I am more and more sure that the Bible does not give us the answer to that question. Where did evil come from?

I don't know the Bible gives that answer. Paul isn't going to tell you today where evil comes from.

But he is going to show you and tell you where sin and death came into the human race.

He's going to describe the invasion of sin and death like a virus. So you've got a computer. And a virus has entered into that computer.

[ 6 : 03 ] And so sin has entered into our world. And it's corrupted the files of everything. And it's wrecked all the programs. And it's destroying the lives of every person who's ever lived.

And so I think most people today recognize that there's something wrong with the human race. The atheist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. He's reported to have said that man is a being to whom something has happened.

Man is a being to whom something has happened. Something has happened. And Paul is going to tell us what that is. Look at verse 12 of Romans 5.

Therefore just as sin came into the world through one man. And death through sin. And so death spreads to all men.

Because all sinned. For sin was in the world before the law was given. But sin was not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses.

[ 7 : 06 ] Even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam. Who was a type of the one who was to come. Let's say you're fed up of life in London.

You're fed up of the restrictions. You're fed up of being in this city. And so you think I'm going to move to the other side of the world. I'm going to move to the other side of the world.

And I'm going to start again life there. And you go there. And you get married if you're not married.

And you have children if you don't have children. And your children stay there.

And then they have children. And their children have children. And then somehow they come back one Sunday. These kind of people. Generations afterwards.

And we meet them. And they say well that decision that my great great grandparents took. To move to the other side of the world. It changed the course of our family for generations to come.

[ 8 : 03 ] Didn't it? It changed the course of our family tree. Some of you have made those decisions. It's changed the line of your family. And Paul is saying something like that happened in Adam.

To humanity in Adam. And so on that program. Who do you think you are? I haven't watched it very much. But on that TV program. They go into the background of people. Don't they? And they find people in the family tree.

Who always seem to have been at a concentration camp. Or something like that it seems to me. Or they find somebody who was really, really wealthy. And they owned land.

And they had titles. And buildings. And property. And there was great wealth. But then some black sheep in the family came. And they lost it all. They gambled it away.

The fortune was taken away. And the result is, well, the person lived in kind of relative poverty at the start of their life. And so here's what's happened to the human race.

[ 9 : 02 ] You and I were made in the image of God. You've not evolved from an ape. You have fallen. You were devolved.

Human beings were made the pinnacle of God's creation. We were made in the image and the likeness of God. We were placed in an environment that is perfectly suited for human flourishing. Perfectly suited for human flourishing. That's what creation was. That's what this world was. We've messed it up.

But it's still there, isn't it? That scientists talk about the anthropic principle. It seems as if this world is finely tuned and finely made so that human beings can flourish.

We've not discovered anywhere else in the universe like that. This world is so perfectly suited for human flourishing. So rich in one sense. We've been given a position as human beings of wealth and privilege.

[10:04] We are God's masterpiece, according to the Bible. We are God's vice regents. We're to rule over creation in his name. We were given unimaginable wealth and privilege.

But through the action of one man, we've been ruined. And we've been dragged down into death. Do you see what it says again in verse 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. Now, forgive me, I'm going to get a little bit technical. The tense that Paul uses there is the aorist tense. And the aorist tense, it points to one single, non-repeatable action in the past that has ongoing application for the future.

And so when he says that sin entered the world through... And death entered the world through sin. This is the way that death came.

[11:09] Death is never friendly. Death is never natural. He died a natural death. No, he didn't.

Death isn't inevitable. Death isn't part of being human. Death is an intruder. That's why death hurts so much.

That's why death is so painful. It's an intruder. And death has come into the world. It's not natural. And it's come into the world because of sin. And he says, because...

Adam sinned. Aorist tense. All sinned. So in this passage, just stick with me on this. Paul is not saying we're all sinners. He has said that, of course, in Romans chapter 3.

He's taught us that nobody's perfect. We're all sinners. And I think everyone agrees with that, don't they? And he's not giving us that ancient heresy, that Welsh monk called Pelagius.

[12:13] He's not saying that we all copy Adam. That's what some people think. He's not saying that we choose in our own time and in our own lives to make the same mistake as Adam. He's talking about original sin.

Not ongoing sin. What he's telling you is that there's a sense in which every single human being was implicated in that one act of disobedience.

And as 21st century people, we find that really kind of unacceptable. We might be taken aback a bit this morning by what this passage is saying to us.

You might say, I wasn't there. I had nothing to do with it. How can I be implicated in that? I don't get it. You might say, I didn't listen to the snake.

I would have done better. I didn't initiate the rebellion against God. So what does Paul mean when he sinned?

[13:14] When he says all sinned? And tonight, you might know England play Italy in a football game. And if you're English, you will say, if England win, we won.

And you might say, if they played badly, we were terrible. Or you might say, we just didn't play to our best. You might say, you probably will say, we were robbed.

We deserved it. So were you playing? Are you playing tonight? Are you playing tonight? No, let me tell you what you'll be doing.

You'll be sitting on the sofa, won't you, probably? Eating. Drinking. But you identify with your team. And so when your team loses, you lose.

And when your team wins, you win. And Paul is saying something very similar. Adam is the representative head of the human race. And when Adam sinned, we all sinned.

[14:22] And we lost badly. Let me give you a biblical illustration. You've got David and Goliath. You know the story of the shepherd boy David and the great giant Goliath. And Goliath is a Philistine.

And he challenges. And if Goliath wins the victory, the Philistines win. But if little David, with his five stones and his sling, he wins, then the Israelites win.

It's a battle which is representative. And so when David the shepherd boy falls Goliath, the Philistines lose and the Israelites win.

That's the picture here. That's what Adam has done. Adam represents the whole of humanity. And when he fell, we all fell. We were all dragged down by his disobedience into death.

And that is the tragedy of the human race. That you and I are children of Adam. C.S. Lewis in Narnia, he says, Aslan says to Caspian, he says, You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve, said Aslan.

[15:31] And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth. And so that's the tragedy, isn't it?

You can go today, well, you can't, but you can in normal times. You can go to Egypt, and you can go to Rome, and you can see the ruins of a mighty city, of a once mighty civilization.

But that is what we are as human beings. We are magnificent ruins. That is what we are.

We were made by God, made for God, made in his image and in his likeness. But we have fallen, and we've been defaced. We are magnificent ruins.

That's humanity. And that's the tragedy of it. And every day, the human race keeps growing.

According to UNICEF, there's about 350,000 babies who were born in the last 24 hours.

[16:34] And thanks to Adam, every single one of them is a sinner. It's lovely to have Reuben Wells with us.

Reuben Nicholas. I keep calling him Reuben Wells. It's terrible. Reuben Nicholas with us this morning. He's been ill this week. He's in the hospital. We were worried, and we prayed for him.

Reuben is a lovely little bundle of original sin.

Reuben Nicholas hasn't yet committed a sin, but he is a sinner. He's only lacking the opportunity. Any teacher will tell you.

Any parent will tell you. Nobody teaches their children a sin, do they? And Paul is arguing in verses 13 and 14, we don't become sinners because we sin. And that God has given us a law, and we break the law, and so that makes us sinners.

No, we don't become sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. Do you understand that? David found that out.

[17:48] He's a middle-aged man. He's in his 50s, and he's committed great sin, and he confesses it. And he says, I know my transgressions. I know what it is to transgress. I know there's Ten Commandments, and I've broken them.

I know my transgressions. My sin, he says, is always before me. He was an adulterer. He'd taken another man's wife, and then he'd murdered the husband, Uriah. He'd had him killed.

And he confesses that, and he goes beyond that. And he says this in verse 5 of Psalm 51.

He says, behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. And what he's saying there is the sin that I committed in my 50s has its origins there.

And that's Paul's argument that the law, when it was given at the time of Moses, all it does is it gives you a name for sin. So that you can say, well, that's murder, and that's adultery, and that's coveting.

[18:49] All the law does is give us a name for our sin. But long before the law was given, people were behaving like that. How do we know that? Well, because we know that death reigns, don't we, from Adam to Moses.

And death is the wages of sin. Do you get the point? It's like the poison of sin has got into the bloodstream of the human race. And we're all sinners by nature. We're dead men walking.

Well, that's not good news, is it? That's very bad news. But here's the second point. We've been totally ruined by Adam. But the second thing I want to do is I want to talk about our rescuer.

Look at verses 15 to 19. It's not all doom and gloom. Look at verse 14. He says, Adam is the pattern of the one who's to come. There's one who's to come.

He's the one who, in the Bible's term, is going to crush the head of that serpent in the Garden of Eden. He's the one who will bring blessing to the nations. He's the seed of Abraham. He's the son of David. He's going to rule over the kingdom forever.

[19:50] Adam is the type of the one who is to come. And so Eugene Peterson helpfully says, I think, Adam who, but Adam who got us into this mess points ahead to the one who will get us out of it.

And so Romans 5 is not about Adam. It's about Jesus. And that is why it's here. It's here to show you and I how much we need Jesus. Jesus is the one man, the one man who can change everything.

Is that too much to believe? You probably know the famous speech by Churchill. And Churchill is praising the bravery of the pilots and the gunners in the Second World War.

And he says this, his famous words. He says, never in the field of human conflict was so much, has so much been owed by so many to so few. Never in the field of human conflict was so much been owed by so many to so few.

The Apostle Paul says this, he says, never before in this field of human conflict, in this field of sin and death and Satan, have so many owed so much to one man, Jesus.

[ 21 : 09 ] And so you see, he's not one amongst many. You can't put him up there with other religious leaders and other gurus. He is the last Adam.

There isn't another. The hymn, when all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.

That's Jesus. We'll sing as our closing hymn. In him, the tribes of Adams boast more blessings than their father lost. Look at verse 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. How much more?

In the 1970s, there's a Rubens painting that was hanging in King's College, Cambridge, that the IRA famously defaced.

[ 22 : 08 ] It was a priceless painting and the IRA wrote over it. They wrote imaginatively I-R-A. That's how we knew it was then.

But there was a note placed by the side of the painting where it used to hang. And these words were written on it. It says, it is believed that this masterpiece can be restored to its original condition.

It is believed that this masterpiece can be restored to its original condition. And that's why I'm a pastor.

That is why I'm a preacher. Because I believe that this masterpiece, you, can be restored to its original condition. Do you believe that?

Instead of dying like an animal, you can reign in life as you were meant to. And through Christ, that is now possible.

[ 23 : 06 ] No matter what you've done, no matter what your past is, no matter what you're trying to hide, restoration to its original condition is possible. So how does Jesus rescue us when we're ruined by Adam's sin?

How does he rescue us? Well, we're told in Romans, aren't we? Romans 1, do you remember? We've seen that the wrath of God is being revealed against ungodliness. And wickedness. And so there's something that's happening right now.

God's anger is being stored up. Chapter 2 says, human beings, when they live without God in control of their lives, are storing up for themselves wrath.

It's like the wrath of God is rushing towards us. It's being revealed from heaven. And every day when we live without Jesus as Lord, we're storing up God's wrath.

It's the fire, the bushfire running up the hill. And if you're ever in one of those fires, where is the only place, the only safe place to stand when the fire is coming towards you?

[ 24 : 12 ] It's totally counterintuitive. What do you have to do when the fire is rushing towards you? Well, you light another fire. It seems so strange, doesn't it? It sounds so strange, but the logic is really simple.

Because if you've burned up the piece of ground that you're standing in, when the great fire comes, there's nothing to burn. And so you'll be safe.

If you've taken refuge in the part of the ground that's already been burned up, you'll be safe. And the coming fire, as terrifying as it will be, it won't harm you.

In Psalm 2, it urges us to do that, isn't it? It says, Psalm 2 says, blessed are those who take refuge in the Christ. Blessed are those who take refuge in him.

Have you done that? Have you fled for safety to Jesus Christ? Because what happens is, at the cross, the wrath of God is poured out upon him.

[ 25 : 19 ] And so being in Christ becomes the safe place. It becomes the refuge, the burnt up ground. The cross is the only place where the full fury of God's anger has already been spent.

And so if you're in Christ this morning, you are safe. You're not safe in church. It's a sick joke, isn't it now?

People talk about creating a safe place for people, but the church often, and has been proved to often not be safe. But Jesus Christ is safe.

And if you are in Christ, you are safe. Because you are in the place where the wrath of God, the anger of God will never be felt. Because it's already been there.

And so the question for you and I this morning is, where are you? Are you in Adam, or are you in Christ? Thomas Goodwin, the old Puritan, said there's but two men standing before God.

[ 26 : 27 ] There's only Adam, and there's only Christ. And those two men, Adam and Christ, have every other person who's ever lived hanging from their belts. And so which one are you connected to?

The first Adam or the last Adam? And by birth, we are all connected to the first Adam. By birth, we all belong to Adam.

The first Adam. But by faith, we are taken out of Adam's family. And put into Christ's family. And we're lifted up with him.

And so you're either in Adam under condemnation, or you are in Christ on top of the world. And so ruined in Adam, rescued in Christ, and then thirdly, quickly, reigning in life.

Look at verse 21. So that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[ 27 : 28 ] And so do you see what he's saying? He says when it's sin versus grace, grace wins hands down every time. All sin can do is threaten you with death. That's the end.

Passing laws against sin just produces more lawbreakers. But grace invites us to life. It invites us to a life that goes on and on, world without end.

And that's good news. And so God has given me a new identity in Christ. And so I want to say to you, don't let people label you. Don't slap labels on yourself.

Nationality is good. Nationality is a good thing. But you're not primarily English. You're not primarily Welsh. You're not straight. You are a Christian.

And in Christ, there's no male, no female, no slave, no free, no Jew, no Gentile. You are not to be defined anymore. Your identity is not to be found in your race.

[ 28 : 38 ] It's not to be found in your gender. It's not to be found in your sexual orientation. If you are a Christian, you are a Christian. If you are a Christian, you are a Christ one. You're in Christ.

That's your true identity. So let me ask you, what does it look like to be a Christ one? To be in Christ. I'm going to finish with an illustration.

It's a little bit long, but I think it will help you to see. So imagine you're at the airport. Imagine you can go to the airport, just freely go to the airport. Remember those days? And you want to get a flight.

Where do you want to go to? Where do you want to go to? Let's go to Spain, all right? Let's go to Madrid. We'll go to Madrid. Madrid. And you're at the airport, and you're wanting to go to Madrid. Now let me tell you this. Ask you this. Would it help? Would it help you to be inspired by the plane? Would that help you? You know you go down, don't you? You turn off the A4, I think, onto the A3, and there's that field where there's plane spotters.

[ 29 : 39 ] They stand there, don't they, in that field, looking at loads of them, anoraks. And they're in that field. Or maybe you go to the viewing gallery. And you look at the plane that you're going to catch, and you work out, that's the plane I'm going to...

We're looking at it. Will that get you to Spain? No. That would be an interesting thing to do. And you whisper to yourself, oh, I'd love to catch that plane.

But it's not going to get you there. What about following the plane? Then it takes off, and you get in your car, and you go as fast as you can. Let's try to follow the plane.

You know it's going to Spain. You know the direction it is. And you'll follow it. But eventually you come to the channel tunnel, or the English channel. You study the plane.

You find out how it was made. You find out all the kind of dynamics. Will that get you to Spain? No, you've got to get on the plane, haven't you? There's no good being under it.

[ 30 : 41 ] There's no good being around it. There's no good being alongside it. There's no good watching it. You need to be in it. And if you're in it, well, you're going to arrive safely in Madrid.

And if you are in Christ, you will arrive safely in the world to come. And that is the Christian's hope. You're not just inspired by him. You're not just following him like you follow someone on Twitter.

You've got to be in him. And on board with him. Well, if you are in him, if the plane arrives in Madrid, where are you?

Well, you're in Madrid. And if you are in Christ, what has happened to him has happened to you.

And so did Jesus die on the cross for sins? Well, then you've died with him to sin.

And did Jesus on the third day rise again for newness of life? Well, you have risen again. And you are raised with him. And if you're in him, where is he now?

[ 31 : 47 ] Well, he is seated in the heavenly places at the right hand of the majesty on high. And so the Christian, you are with him. And you are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Such a privilege to be a Christian.

Let me extend the illustration a bit further. You get on the plane, you're sitting there, and there's a businesswoman come on. She's been on the plane hundreds of thousands of times.

She knows exactly what she's doing. There's people like that at the airport, aren't they? They arrive just in time. They know how to get through security. She gets to the airport in the nick of time. She grabs a coffee, and she sits down on the plane.

And they start with the safety instructions. She barely lifts an eye. She's just reading. She could recite the instructions by heart. But then next to you on the plane is this old guy, and he's never been on a flight in his life.

He's petrified. His grandchildren have saved up so that he can join them on holiday, on a family holiday. And he arrives at the airport four hours early. He's been up in the viewing gallery. He's looked at the plane.

[ 32 : 51 ] He can't understand. He looks in disbelief at how a kind of great lump of metal can get into the sky. And on board, when the instructions come, he's got the card in front of him, and he studies it.

He memorizes it. And when there's a little bit of turbulence, he seeks assurance, clenched hands on the plane, asking, is this okay for everyone around him? He presses the bell.

The air stewardess comes. Who had more faith? Who had more faith? Well, the woman has.

She's got total trust in the plane. She's got total trust in the pilot. There's the old man, full of panicking. Full of doubting.

Kind of hangs on all the way to Madrid. Who made it to Madrid? Who made it to Madrid? Both of them. They both do.

[ 33 : 51 ] Because they're both in the plane. And so the amount of faith you have got has nothing to do with whether you're going to make it to Madrid. Now, can you see it?

It doesn't matter how much faith you've got or not got. It isn't how strong your faith is or how weak your faith is. It just has to be that your faith is in Christ. And what he has done.

For you. And if that is where your faith is placed, in Jesus Christ, you'll get there. You'll get there. Even if your faith is full of doubts.

It is placed in Christ. So where are you this morning? Are you on board with Christ? Have you seen what he's done for you? Are you on board with Christ? Or are you still in Adam?

Plunging to certain death and destruction. It's Adam or Christ. So let me plead with you. Let me plead with you as I finish. To put on Christ.

[ 34 : 53 ] Remember when you used to choose teams in school? You stood there kind of nervously. Jesus is inviting you onto his team this morning. But it's the winning team.

It's got nothing to do with merit. It's got nothing to do with how good you are. You're not going to be the last one standing there embarrassed because everyone's been picked ahead of you. Jesus is inviting you to go on his team. It's not a matter of merit.

Am I good enough? Am I skilled enough? It's all down to him. He's done the work and it is all of grace. So what's keeping you? He invites you to be part of his new humanity.

To reign in life. Not die like an animal. Because for us through the disobedience of one man. The many were made disobedience. Also through the obedience of the one man.

The many were made righteous. Jay Gresham Meecham was the founder of Westminster Samaritan. It's where Johnny Gibson works. And when he was dying he sent a telegram to his friend and colleague John Murray.

[ 35 : 57 ] And he said, I am so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it. And is that where you put your faith? In the active obedience of Christ.

Through this one man. The world can be changed. And your world can be changed. Let's pray.