
Alright. If you have a Bible or a device with a Bible on it go ahead and meet me in Romans, chapter 5. That's where we are going to be today.

And before we get going, I just want to take a quick minute to just express how encouraged I am right now with what I might call the spirit of our church. I don't know if any of you can feel it over the last five or six weeks, but I definitely can. And it just kind of feels as if God is stirring some things up. And I'm just so encouraged by your spirit and your encouragement and your generosity.

I don't know that I could have said that a year or a year-and-half ago. To be quite honest there were some really dark nights of the soul. I was just kind of wondering, "God, what are You doing? And where are we going?"

I almost feel as if He is using the events of the last year-and-a-half to really refocus us, to prune us, to sharpen us. It's almost as if He is helping us to see that perhaps, in various areas of our lives and even within our church that we were building on sand, and that we need to build on rock. And He just kind of stripped some things away and refocused us. So I'm really encouraged and optimistic about the days ahead.

One of the common misperceptions that a lot of people can have about us or big churches in general (and I totally understand where this can come from) is to assume looking from the outside in that we are just about big crowds. That we just want to get lots of people to watch and lots of people to attend. And I'll be very, very honest and say that perhaps there was a time as a younger leader when I got too enamored with that. And I just want you to know that I'm enamored no more. I'm not interested in big churches, big crowds, or anything like that.

Now, with that said I will say, unapologetically, I want to reach as many people as possible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ because everyone needs hope and people are dying facing a Christless eternity. So we'll go hard, and we'll go aggressive to reach people for Christ. They don't have to stay in our church, I just want to reach them for the kingdom.

And yet, at the same time, we want to recognize that we don't just want to build crowds. I want to help form you into the image and likeness of Jesus, which, as a team, we're getting really focused on. How do we equip you?

And the primary word there is *formation*. It's the recognition right now that whether you believe in God or you don't, whether you realize it or not, you're being formed into something and someone. And spiritual formation is, "I'm going to be formed into the image and likeness of Jesus." We just, more and more, want to reach people and then help them in that formation.

So I just want to thank you all. It is the joy and the honor of my life to serve as one of your pastors. I don't ever want to go anywhere. I hope you don't kick me out. I want to be able to serve the rest of my days here and I'm really excited about what God is doing.

If you're just now joining us, I want to welcome you at all of our locations and those of you joining us online. We are in week five of an 11-part series of messages as we are walking our way through the New Testament book of Romans. And we're calling this *Recalibrate*. And the reason why is because we've said that all of us have these internal compasses so to speak.

And these internal compasses help us make sense of this crazy world that we live in. And it's the lens by which we see social and political issues. It's the lens by which we see the economy and relationships and human sexuality.

Now, here's the thing. Our compasses are being calibrated all of the time by someone, the people you hang with, or something, the content you consume. Whether you realize it or not, we are all being calibrated by something.

The question is, are we being calibrated by the right things or the right voice? And we are bombarded with all kinds of information 24/7. Information is not bad. I'm really glad and thankful for technology, but we are not, as human beings, built to process this much information and we're over-heating so to speak.

I came across this stat a few weeks ago. Somebody on our staff team actually shared this with me. From the beginning of time to 2003, we collected five exabytes of data. Now that's all of the Encyclopedia Britannica, all of the knowledge, all of the written books, all of the internet from the beginning of time until 2003, five exabytes of data.

Now I didn't know what an exabyte was, so I had to google it. And I found that one exabyte equals one billion gigabytes. Doesn't help me. It just sounds like a lot. So from the beginning of time to 2003, five exabytes of data. Here's what we've found. Now we create that amount of data every two days. And that stat was from 2010 so it's probably even more so today.

You add all of this bombarding of information that we just can't possibly process to the fact that we've just gone through a once in a generation global pandemic, one of the most divisive political elections in history, some of the most intense racial tensions since the 1960s, and a continual upheaval and debate around social issues—we've had quite a year-and-a-half.

We've all been knocked off course to some degree, trying to make sense of this crazy world that we live in. And it's left us angry, confused, defensive, anxious, and depressed. And if the needles of our internal compasses were visible, they would likely be spinning.

Now we've said that the real enemy behind all of this craziness is not the Democrats or the Republicans, it's not Russia, China, Isis, or even Tom Brady (well, it might be Tom Brady). It is the enemy who has been subtly working behind the scenes in this world since Genesis, chapter 3, creating all kinds of deception and misinformation in our heads and around the world.

He's urging us, as Romans 1 says, to exchange the truth of God for a lie. Urging us to worship—and I think one of the most helpful definitions of worship is not singing, worship is taking the affection that is already in your heart and aiming it. And he says, "I want you to aim your affection toward created things rather than Creator God."

Our enemy has a name. His name is Satan. He is not a myth or a pre-modern superstition, but a real, intelligent force of evil who is hell-bent on the ruin of souls and societies.

And his primary strategy is deception. More specifically, deceptive ideas that he plants in our heads and that appeal to our disordered desires, which we are then tempted to normalize into our lives. And he whispers in our heads, hearts, and consciences a variation of this question, "Did God really say?" "How do you know?"

"I know it meant that then, but it means something different today. And you don't need to be confined by that sort of oppressive, repressive system of belief. Distance yourself from God. Do your own thing. You do you. Follow the voice in your head and the inclination of your heart. Besides, Christians are a bunch of hypocrites anyway."

He isolated Adam from Eve and Eve from Adam because in isolation we are always weaker and then he fed them a counterfeit ideology, which is a lie. And that's the way that he continues to work. One of the primary things that he'll get you to do is he'll get you isolated.

This is why relationships of all kinds, whether it's a marriage, or a friendship, or a parent/child relationship are messy. It's hard because we have an enemy working against us. And he wants to isolate you from this other person. If he can't do so physically, he'll do so emotionally. And he gets you isolated and then he'll start feeding you ideas.

This is COVID. We were fish in a barrel. Through all of the social distancing that took place, and then all of the ideas that were coming through our screens and phones, he fed us these ideas that got into our heads, slowly seeped into our hearts, and then came out through our fingertips and thumbs via comments on social media. And it just derailed all of us.

So we're going to the book of Romans to recalibrate our lives back to True North. As humbly and confidently as we can we're saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. In the name of Jesus enough. We're going to follow Him. We're going to allow Him to be True North in our lives."

What we've done is as we're studying Romans for a little context, we're laying it beside the narrative from the Old Testament of Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as they were exiles in Babylon. And we've said, "This is really symbolic," I mean it literally happened, but it is also symbolic for what is happening now.

So the city of Babylon is long gone. The spirit of Babylon lives on. Daniel and his friends were exiles in Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar was trying to shape them into the image and likeness of Babylonian culture by immersing them in their ideologies.

The same thing is happening today. As Christ followers we live in what we might call digital Babylon. It used to be in order to feel an intense sort of pressure as a Christ follower that you needed to go to the campus of a university or maybe an urban city. Now all you need is an iPhone and Wi-Fi access and it's right there in front of us.

In fact the Barna Group did this study and they said that we spend, talking specifically about Christians now, we spend upwards of twenty-eight hundred hours a year consuming digital content on our screens—twenty-eight hundred hours a year.

But only 153 of those hours are what we might call Bible based or Christ centered content. The rest is a digital cocktail of YouTube, Instagram, Netflix, Snapchat, and TikTok. And I'm not against any of those things. In fact, I think many of those things can be good. The question is,

what is calibrating your compass? Be honest. How much of the time are you allowing other content to process who you are being formed into?

So Daniel and his three friends were told to bow to a ninety-foot idol. Today we are being told to bow to ideologies. And an ideology is a secular attempt to find a metaphysical meaning to life, a way to usher in Utopia, without God. And I think that ever since the Enlightenment and ever since the sexual revelation ideology of 50 years ago we have been promised fulfillment.

Here's my opinion. Here's what is happening right now in society. All of society is realizing that it's not giving us the fulfillment that we thought, and everybody is freaking out. And we are like, "Well, what is true?" And I think this is why people are more open to truth that can be delivered in love than ever before, and we shouldn't be asleep at the wheel.

See, one definition of ideology is when you take part of the truth and make it the whole. This is the reason why American politics is so divisive. Both the left and the right take part of the truth and make it the whole and in so doing we imprison our own minds and hearts with lies that drive us to anger or anxiety.

This is why in a few weeks when you get together with extended family for Thanksgiving and the subject of politics comes up it's going to end in either anger or anxiety, because it's so divisive. It takes part of the truth and makes it the whole. We are enmeshed in ideologies that are lies. And this is the reason why Jesus said this in John 8:32:

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will"—what?—"set you free."

Jesus came to not only be the dispenser of truth, He came to actually be the truth, to reorient our lives and our internal compasses around truth. To be set free from the lies and the falsehoods and the half-truths of the enemy.

This is why, I don't know if you've ever thought about this before, but when Jesus came and walked among us—He lived here for 33 years and three of those years were His full-time, earthly ministry—He came primarily as a Rabbi, a teacher. Jesus came to deliver us from lies by giving us truth. He also came in the flesh. He didn't just send down all of this information via some methodology, Jesus came and actually was the embodiment of God in the flesh.

One time Jesus said, "If you want to know what God is like, just look at Me." That's what He said. So He came, God in the flesh, to give truth. Why? Because truth in relationship is transformational. So all truth, no relationship, then, "I can't hear you." All relationship, no truth, "That won't change me." And Jesus comes to deliver truth in relationship.

The book of Romans is a summary of what has gone wrong in our world and the Gospel message that Jesus has come to deliver us gives us freedom from these lies. So it's a clarification of the Gospel message that the world so desperately needs to know. It so rarely ever sees it or sees it lived out because, as we've seen from Romans 2 and 3, Christians are in just as much need of it as anyone else. The root of hypocritical, judgmental, mean-spirited, overly political Christians is that we've allowed our compasses to be calibrated by the wrong things. That sums up chapters 1 - 4.

Now, as we come to chapter 5.... I don't know if you remember me saying this a few weeks ago, but I said that Satan's number one play, the number one thing that he wants to get you to do is he wants to get you to reject God. And here's how he'll do it. He'll throw pain at you. He'll throw COVID and cancer, he'll throw trauma and abuse, he'll throw suffering, trials, and temptations at you and get you to pin the blame on God and walk away from Him.

I think we would all agree that this world is really, really messed up. What we get confused with is—why is it messed up? And Paul is going to give us a few answers here. What he's been doing in the first four chapters of Romans is laying down the foundation for what the Gospel message is. Now in chapters 5 and following, he's going to start describing the difference this should make in our lives. In particular, the perspective that we have on pain and suffering. More specifically, where does it come from? And maybe more importantly, what does Jesus do to redeem it and ultimately deliver us from it?

Tim Keller, someone who I've been quoting a lot in this series said it like this. He goes, "How well we understand and believe the Gospel will be demonstrated by the attitude and the perspective we have when we face suffering."

*So Paul starts off chapter 5, verse 1, look at it with me. He says:
"Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us."*

I want you to notice this word right here. It's a transitional word. The first four chapters of Romans is a section and now this is a big transition. He says, "Therefore," meaning everything I've already covered in the first four chapters; therefore we can come to this conclusion right here.

What I want you to know is, this might be something for you to jot down in your notes; the book of Romans is built on four *therefores*. Kind of like when you build a house. The most important part of building a house is the foundation, more specifically the footings of that foundation. It's what gives your house security. Romans is built on four therefores. They are the footings of the foundation of the book.

So, if you remember back in chapter 3, we came across the first one. Paul finishes laying out his case against the law and he says, "Therefore, we conclude that we cannot be justified by works. It's going to take something else to save."

There is another huge one that we're going to get to in a couple of weeks. I can't wait to preach it. Chapter 8, verse 1 says, "*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" We have total access.

There is another huge one in chapter 12, verse 1. And then we have this one right here, chapter 5, verse 1. Paul is basically saying, "Because we've been declared righteous by faith, therefore we look at pain and suffering differently."

If you get a good handle on the therefores, you'll have a pretty good handle of the content and the message of Romans. And he says these two words here. Maybe a helpful exercise sometime would be just to read through the whole book of Romans and circle the words *made right*. They are all over the book.

We are made right, not on our way or being made right, fingers crossed, hope I've done enough to get in—no, it says that we have been made right. It's been done. Jesus has done everything that is needed for our justification.

Now, are we still being formed into the image of and likeness of Jesus? Absolutely. Still have a lot of work to do in that area? You bet. But I do it from a place of confidence and security because my salvation has already been done in Jesus Christ. I'm not in and I'm not out.

And the result of this is peace. Not a subjective feeling that floods our hearts with serenity, but an objective reality that is based upon Jesus' finished work on a cross. And feelings are important. I would never tell you that they are not, but feelings don't tell you everything. Your feelings can lie to you. Your feelings can come and go.

And I think a lot of people think that the primary purpose of faith is to give you therapeutic feelings of peace, which then leads others to the conclusion, "Well, Christianity works for you to give you therapeutic feelings of peace, but I've got meditation or yoga or long walks or eating kale or drinking bourbon or rubbing essential oils on my nose, that's how I get peace." But we don't just have feelings of peace, we have actual peace. And verse 2 tells us why: "Because of our faith..." and faith is not wishful thinking. Faith is when you are leaning the weight of your life upon Jesus Christ. He says, "... *Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we...*" and notice these next two words, "... **confidently and joyfully** look forward to sharing God's glory."

It is a privilege that is undeserved. But because of Jesus, He brought us into it and there you stand. It's kind of like, let's say that the Indy 500 rolls around in May and somebody who has a suite at the Pagoda invites you in. And so you show up and you get the little lanyard, and you go up in the elevator and you're in the suite—that is an undeserved privilege. You didn't buy the ticket. You didn't earn the ticket. You got in because you knew someone.

Now, you are in, meaning that you can actually enjoy all of the benefits of the suite. He's not going to say, "Hey, just sit over in the corner, keep your head down, don't talk to anybody." No. It's like, "Here's a plate. Go through the buffet line. Enjoy your experience here." You can stand confidently and enjoy that, but you do it from a sense of humility meaning, "I'm only here because I know someone." Nobody is going to tap you on the shoulder and say, "Hey, there's been a mistake. You need to go sit in the bleachers in turn four. Snake pit—the snake pit is your seat." Nobody is going to do that. This is where you are.

And he says in a very similar way, "Christ has brought us in." Something way better than the Pagoda. And he goes, "Hey, man. You're in this undeserved privilege and there you stand, head up, no shame." I need to do a series on all of the stands in the Bible. It's amazing. "And there we stand with joy."

And I think this brings up a really, really important question that I think can meddle its way into our feelings and distort our view of God. Here's the question:

How do you think God feels about you? Right now?

And what I mean is like right now, today. How do you think God feels about you? And your answer to that question will either clarify or distort the Gospel message.

I'll go first. Here's how I often think God feels about me, even though I've been teaching the Bible for over 20 years, and I think I've got a pretty good handle on the Gospel, there are still times—it happened even this last week—that I just sort of have this feeling that, "Yes, I know that God loves me. I'm just not sure He always likes me." Can I say that out loud?

Here's why. I just keep screwing up. There are times when I just kind of feel like God is looking down and He's just shaking His head going, "When is Brockett going to get a clue? He should love his wife sacrificially, but he's selfish. Every time he should be patient with his kids he's not. Every time that he makes a stupid decision with money, every time he thinks an impure thought and dwells on it too long... Brockett, when are you going to get your act together?" And I just sort of walk around and I feel like I'm walking on egg shells. I know that I've got my position secure in Christ, but I don't really feel like it. I feel like I'm in and out. And I've struggled with this since I was a little kid.

I've shared this with some of you before and I shared with our staff here recently. There was a time growing up when I was so insecure about where I stood with God. My family had a key to a neighborhood pool. And there was one summer when I would go down to our neighborhood pool, I was there all by myself, and I literally baptized myself 16 times. I'm not even joking about that. I would get in the water like, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ. God, did you see that I'm dunking myself? I don't know if it took." I would do it again. And I am sure that there were neighbors who were going, "What in the world has gotten into him?" That's how insecure I'd been about this.

I think oftentimes this just distorts our view and our understanding and Paul is going to great lengths, he is pulling human language to its limits to say, "Listen. Our God is a tender Father who couldn't love you more."

I love how author Max Lucado says that. He says, "God loves you so much. He's not going to love you any less. He just loves you for who you are."

And I know that this idea of God as *Father* is hard for some of you because you had a really crummy example of an earthly father. Maybe your earthly father bailed on you or abused you or

hurt you, and that has sort of distorted your view of your Heavenly Father. And I just want you to know that I totally get that. I empathize with that. And I hear that. And I just simply want to say to you, "Let your Heavenly Father redeem it. See your earthly father through the lens of your Heavenly one. Not the other way around."

Paul goes on in verse 3 and he says:

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance."

Now, rejoicing is different than happiness. And we oftentimes get these confused. See, happiness is contingent upon what you want to happen happening. It's in the word. But joy is different. It has nothing to do with happiness. And I think oftentimes we think, "Well, if I'm not happy as a Christian, then something must be wrong. God must not be real. I must not be doing it right."

But remember that the Bible tells us that Jesus was familiar with sorrows and acquainted with grief. And He was perfect. And He never sinned. And yet He went through the exact same things.

And Paul says here, "Hey, listen. We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials." Here's my observation, I don't run into problems and trials as much as they run into me. This last week we were on fall break and the family drove down to Branson, Missouri, which is usually where we go on fall break. And we pulled into a gas station to use the bathroom.

So our whole family gets out. We go inside. And I was the first one out. And I'm walking toward where our Suburban was parked but I couldn't see it because there was a large RV that had pulled in right behind us and blocked us into the parking stall. It blocked us and the guy parked right next to us.

And as I was walking up the driver of the RV was out of his vehicle and the guy who has parked next to us—they were in this heated conversation because the guy was obviously upset that the RV had blocked us in. And I'm like, "Yeah, I'm with him. How are we going to get out of here?" I didn't understand why he pulled in and blocked us in.

But by the time I got up there they had sort of resolved it. He gets into his RV to pull away and as he's pulling away, I notice that he was pretty close to our Suburban. And as he pulled away, he turned the corner and I hear this large crunching sound, I see our whole Suburban lunge forward. He totally destroyed our back bumper, and he didn't know it. He just took off through the parking lot. And I go running after him rejoicing, right? No. These problems and trials are helping build endurance. No. I'm flagging him down going, "Whoa, you hit our Suburban." Right?

But Paul says that in these problems and trials (that's never our reaction when it first happens) but he's given us this perspective of rejoicing. And Paul is not a masochist. He's not rejoicing

in pain for pain's sake but rather because no matter how intense he says, "It is producing something in you of greater value," listen to me, "than a pain free life."

None of us like pain. But pain is the only way to build endurance in this crazy world that we live in. And he unpacks it further in verses 4 and 5. He goes:

"And endurance develops..." what? "... strength of character," how many of you want that? Man, I do. "... and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."

This is the first mention of the Holy Spirit in Romans. And I only point that out because Paul chooses to point it out when he's talking about pain and suffering. The Holy Spirit is the installment of God's love in our hearts.

Some of you know the name for the Holy Spirit in the original language is *Paraclete*. It means *helper*. And His main role is to remind you, in the midst of pain and suffering, of God's presence with you. Jesus doesn't give us security from the trials of life. He promises us security through the trials of life. And He says, "One day I will deliver you from them. But right now, I'm with you."

See, trials produce endurance and endurance is the ability to keep going even when... how would you finish that sentence? What are you walking through right now? Endurance is the ability to keep going even when the clouds of depression reemerge, even when the cancer doesn't go away, even when the marriage isn't reconciled after you've gone through all of the counseling, even when the person who hurt you doesn't seem to care. He says, "No, I'm still with you. I'm still with you."

There was a time when I was in college when I prayed a really, really dangerous prayer that I don't know if I've been able to muster the courage to pray it since then. But here's the prayer that I prayed. I prayed, "God," it was in the morning, and I was on my way to class, "God, would you teach me humility?"

Such a stupid prayer. It's like, "Why would I pray that?" I don't know what I was thinking. I think it was like in my morning devotions I read something on humility, and I really wanted it. "God, would you teach me humility?" And man He did.

In the following weeks I flunked a couple of tests, my car broke down, I caught a cold that turned into an infection, and my girlfriend broke up with me under the excuse of, "Well, I'm just not really ready for a serious relationship." And then this is what she said, and I quote, "I just want to date Jesus for a while." She literally used that on me. And then two weeks later she's dating somebody who lived on my dorm floor. I didn't even know Jesus lived in my dorm. I'm still not over it, right? That hurt.

1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 7 speaks to this, "Listen. Here's what character is. You meet somebody with character, I guarantee you they've gone through pain and suffering and trials." You can't develop character without them. Character means that you go through the furnace of some sort of affliction and the impurities are burned away.

And in suffering, I don't fully know what God is doing. I'm not going to stand up here and pretend that I do. But maybe God is trying to prune out a bad habit. Or He's trying to free you from dependence upon an idol. Or He's just trying to help you see that Christ and Christ alone is sufficient.

And how can we really know what He's doing? Well, Paul addresses it in verses 6-8. Check it out. He goes:

"When we were utterly helpless," we're talking like infant status, can't even feed ourselves, "...utterly helpless Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners." Which would be everybody. We're all in the same boat. "Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good."

Now this next sentence is what brought me to Christ. I've told this story before. Sitting on a park bench, 17-years-old. *"But God showed us his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."*

I read that sentence as a 17-year-old boy, and it was as if the Holy Spirit just leveled me. Here's what Paul just said, *"On rare occasions a heroic person might sacrifice himself or herself for somebody who they really love."* Like a soldier who jumps on a grenade to save the platoon. Or a mother who sacrifices her life for her kids.

I know, without a doubt right now, that I would lay down my life for my wife and kids. I wouldn't even have to think about it. It's not even a question. Would I lay my life down for you? Probably not. I love you but I don't really know if I like you. Some of you are mean.

So Paul is saying that the equivalent here is not you laying your life down for somebody who you really, really love. He's saying, "The equivalent of what Jesus did for you would be like you laying your life down for a terrorist or a sex trafficker. Enemy number one." That's the idea. And I'm not even overstating it.

And he goes, "Who would do that?" And the answer: God did. He did it to reconcile us back to Himself because there was no other way. That's when the lights turned on for me. That's when I realized, "This is serious. This is a big deal." And I stepped out of darkness into light. Maybe some of you will as well. That's how much He loves you.

So when you go through problems and trials, this is why Paul inserts this in here. We don't know all of the reasons why we go through them, but here's what it can't mean. It can't mean that God doesn't care. It can't mean that He's punishing you for something because Jesus

already took that punishment on the cross. It can't mean that He is absent because He is fully present.

Paul goes on in verse 9:

*"And since we have been..." here are these words again, "... **made right** in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save..." not maybe save, not odds are good. No, He will certainly save "... us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored..." meaning we originally started off as friends with God and that got damaged due to sin, but now it's going to be restored.*

*How? "... by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies," meaning we were still in rebellion, didn't want it, "... we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now," he circles back to this word, "... we can **rejoice** in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."*

If His blood has secured my forgiveness, then His resurrection guarantees that God will redeem our pain and suffering and ultimately redeem the pain and suffering in our lives. Bank on it.

Here's one of my favorite definitions of faith:

Faith is when the unexplainable meets the undeniable.

The unexplainable: pain, suffering, trials, struggle. The undeniable: Jesus just walked out of a grave. Faith means when the unexplainable meets the undeniable. It's accepting what you cannot understand: pain and suffering, with what you can understand. Jesus walked out of a grave.

See, jettisoning a belief in God, that doesn't solve the problem of suffering. It just creates a larger one. Now, I don't really know why God allows all of the pain and suffering that He does in this world. But I know what it can't mean. It cannot mean that He has forgotten you. It cannot mean that He doesn't care. It cannot mean that He's punishing you. It cannot mean that He is no longer involved. He will come to complete what He started.

So Paul has told us how God can use the pain and trials in our lives to develop endurance and strength of character. Now he's going to explain why we have pain and trials in the first place. Here's the short answer: We are under a curse. Kind of sounds like *Lord of the Rings* doesn't it. We are under the curse of sin that got ushered in by our great, great, great-grandparents, Adam and Eve.

That's the bad news. The good news is that Jesus is going to reverse the curse. See, Paul has been talking about something, or is going to talk about something here that maybe you've heard of but never fully understood. It's the doctrine of what we might call: original sin

When I was growing up in church, I never fully understood this. Original sin? Is that like a sin that nobody else has ever done before? I'm the first one to make it up. Am I really that bad? But that's not what original sin is. Original sin is actually what came out of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. And so Paul is going to explain it to us. Check it out, verses 12-14. He said:

"When Adam sinned," here's what happened, "... sin entered the world." In other words, God did not intend for all of this to be as it is. So that actually is a partial explanation of why we go through pain and suffering. Sin brought it in. It wasn't God's idea. We brought it in.

"Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break." The Old Testament law hadn't been given to us yet.

"Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol," there it is, we're beginning to understand this doctrine, "... a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come."

What that means is that what Adam was intended to do—he was intended to face down the deceiver and defeat him, not give in—Jesus ultimately did. And I'll get to that in just a minute. So last week Pastor Ryan walked us through chapter 4, which was basically the story of Abraham to show how Abraham's life illustrates justification by faith. Here in chapter 5, Paul is going to go back even further to Adam to show how Adam's story sets up how we got into this mess and now the grace that we are under through Jesus Christ.

Something I think might be important for you to understand is the names *Adam* as well as *Eve*—they are not even proper Hebrew names—Adam's name literally means:

Human

And Eve's name literally means:

Life

Human life. Maybe you noticed that nobody else in the Old Testament is named Adam or Eve. This is the origin; this is the beginning of human life. In other words, how we got into this mess that we are now in.

And to help us understand the first Adam and the second Adam, I've heard it explained this way. The movie *Star Wars* has been called *The Tale of Two Skywalkers*. And the first Skywalker, Anakin, who eventually became Darth Vader, he gave in to the lure of the dark side and he embraced it bringing death and destruction and chaos into the galaxy. The second Skywalker, Luke, faced the same exact temptations but he resisted, he was faithful to his Jedi way and in so doing he was able to reverse the curse that came from the rebellions from the first Skywalker and even redeemed him.

And George Lucas, who came up with the whole story, said that the central theme of episodes four through six was the redemption of Anakin by Luke. And I just lost all of the *Star Trek* fans. But maybe that's helpful for some of you.

And similarly, the entire story line of the Bible is about the redemption of the first Adam who gave in to the lure and the temptation and the darkness of this world by the second, Jesus Christ. That's what is happening in verses 12-21.

See, Adam chose to defy God's authority and reject what God commanded. And because of that we live in a world of death, destruction, and chaos. Here's what original sin means: even though we weren't there, God regards Adam's choice to be ours. That's the doctrine of original sin.

What it means, practically, is that every divorce, disease, and disaster, every painful battle with cancer, every stillborn child, birth defect, rape, war, and abuse goes back to this choice in the garden that God finds you and me culpable for. And if you are anything like me, you say, "How in the world is that fair? How can I be held responsible for something that I had no part in and I wasn't even there?"

I remember when I was studying this in college. I found that C. S. Lewis, the great writer and thinker, struggled with that question too. So that made me feel a little bit better. And I remember going back to my dorm with a group of students. We were just kind of learning this.

We were all in a circle and I'll never forget this. As we were studying this we were like, "Hey, when we get to heaven, we are hunting Adam down and we are going to kick his rear end all over the streets of gold. We're going to put kick me signs on his back. We're going to totally mess with that guy for the rest of eternity." We were like, "How in the world is that fair? Adam, you messed it up for the rest of us."

But in calling Adam our representative here's what God is saying. God is saying that He knew what Adam chose is what each one of us would have chosen had we been in his sandals. And I might say that I wouldn't but deep down, I know I would. I can't even keep donuts in my house without being tempted to overeat. So God knows our hearts really, really well.

You might say, "Well I didn't make the choice. It's hardly fair to be held accountable for something that I didn't choose." That's true. But you and I have ratified Adam and Eve's decision at some point in our lives over and over again. We've adopted their thinking when we say, "I know better." "I would rather." "I can always stop."

St. Augustine actually wrote about this 1,500 years ago. When he was walking home one afternoon with his friends, they saw a pear tree on somebody else's property. Here's what he said. He goes, "The pears didn't even look any good and we weren't hungry, but we stole them anyway." And he said, "We just fed them to the hogs." And he goes, "I've always been haunted by that afternoon. Why did I steal the pears when they didn't look good, and I wasn't even hungry?" And he goes, "Here's why we stole them. We delighted in doing what was wrong."

And honestly, deep down inside, we do to. There is a reason why it's temptation. It's because it feels good. We want to do it. We rebel against God because we harbor a quiet resentment of His authority in our lives. That's the really bad news.

But Paul gives us the really, really good news. Verse 15:

"But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ."

Aren't you thankful for that? He's basically saying, "Man, you are culpable for Adam's sin, but you are also the recipient of God's grace that He gives now to many.

*"And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being..." here are those words again, "... **made right** with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ."*

Man, that is so amazing. And then he goes:

"Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness..." He went to a cross, "... brings a right relationship with God and new life for..." who? "... everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous."

Being represented by Adam is a real bummer. That's really, really bad news. But it also set us up to be represented by Jesus, the second Adam, which is really, really great news. And Jesus came to reverse the curse that Adam put us under. So that means while we go through pain and suffering, we hold on.

You hold on through that. You don't give up. You don't wave the white flag. You don't walk away from God. You're like, "No, no, no. I understand what Jesus has said that He's going to do with the pain and suffering that I'm experiencing. He can redeem it in the moment and He's going to redeem it.... He's going to make everything that has gone wrong right in the new heaven and the new earth.

And Adam and Jesus are alike in that their actions have implications for all of us, but their motivation was different. See, the first Adam selfishly disobeyed God and ate from the tree. Jesus, He laid down His life and was nailed to a cursed tree so that we might live. The first brought death to everyone. The second brings life to everyone. And Jesus came to undo what Adam did.

Have you ever wondered why, when Jesus was beginning His earthly ministry, it says in the gospels that the Spirit led Him out to the desert to be tempted by the Devil? I've always been so confused by that. I'm like, "Why?" It almost like He's being set up to fail before He can ever get started. And the reason why is because Jesus was going to go toe to toe with the deceiver

to do what Adam was intended to do but couldn't do, hold up under the deception and the temptation of an enemy.

So rather than being in a garden, Jesus is in a desert. That is symbolic of our exile from the garden due to our sin. Rather than to be tempted to eat from the tree of knowledge, Jesus is tempted to turn a stone into bread. Satan starts in on Jesus with the same deceptive question, just framed a different way, that he gave to Eve. With Eve it was, "Did God really say?" With Jesus he said, "Hey, if you're the Son of God." If? Right before this God had just told Jesus, "You are My Son whom I love."

Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve played to the desires of their hearts—to be like God. His temptation of Jesus was played to the desires of His heart as well, to obtain the kingdom of God through an easier way. The right thing in the wrong way, which is a pretty accurate description of sin. And Jesus stood up under it every time. How? His compass was calibrated to the Word of God. With every temptation He said, "It is written," calmly and clearly. And He was able to resist. And I'm so thankful that He did.

You know the first person to encounter Jesus in the garden after His resurrection was Mary. Mary thought He was the gardener. And I think that that is symbolic because a garden was the last place where He had friendship with us before we walked out on Him. And I think that it is as if Jesus is saying, "Mary, I came back for you in the very same place that you left Me." Jesus is restoring all that Adam messed up in this world. We are condemned by the actions of our representative who did what any of us would have done if we were in his situation.

Now we are saved through a representative who has done what none of us could do for ourselves. And that is the power of the Gospel message. The question isn't do you know it, the question is have you received it? Because it does have the power to save.

So I'll close with this. This last week as we were on fall break, we were eating at a restaurant and our waiter had an interesting accent. My wife asked him where he was from. And he said, "Well, I'm from Turkey." And he said, "I just moved to the states two months before COVID hit."

We were fascinated by his story, and we said, "Why did you move from Turkey to Branson, Missouri?" And he was like, "That's a good question." He was like, "Long story short, I was escaping religious oppression. I grew up Muslim, my whole family is Muslim." And he was like, "I was escaping all of that."

I was like, "Man, that's fascinating. Tell us more of your story." And so he said, "Well, I read the Koran and then I read the Bible." And then he said, "I wanted to get away from this oppressive religion."

I took that to mean that he was an atheist now. Then he surprised me when he said, "No, I became a Christian." I was like, "You escaped religious oppression. You escaped one religion and then jumped into another one." But he didn't see it as oppression. He saw it as freedom.

And I said, "What caused you to become a Christian?" Here's what he said, "The Gospel." The Gospel. He was like, "I read the Bible and I gave my life to Christ." No church upbringing. Didn't have this whole setting. It was the power of the Gospel that prompted him to step out of darkness and into light.

Here's the question I have for you, as you've heard it and as you've seen it, are you going to receive it or are you going to reject it? And every time you reject it, your heart gets harder and harder. You are unable to hear it.

So right now here are the two invitations on the table. Who do you want representing you? Do you want Adam to represent you, or do you want Jesus to represent you? You've got to RSVP. I want to give you the opportunity to do that right now, today.

So let me just pray over you right now wherever you are. If you're at one of our physical locations or if you're online, let me just pray and let's just allow the Spirit of God to be fully present with us right now.

Father God, we come to You right now weary, hurting, and broken. I know that there are real, tangible problems right now that we are facing, that we are struggling with—battles that keep defeating us.

God, I ask that today You would allow Your Spirit to help us to be able to see what is really going on in this world and rather than blame You for the pain and suffering that we are experiencing, that we would run to You knowing that You give us security through the storms, that You've got a long-range view, that You're trying to build endurance into us that leads to strength of character.

You've given us this hope that we can be confident in, that we are living right now in a cursed world, but Jesus has come to reverse the curse and we want to be on team Jesus. We want You to represent us.

So, Father, today we acknowledge that, we want to respond to the Gospel message. We want our compasses to be calibrated to Your voice. So right now we pray that You would meet us right where we are. We ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.