

## First Sunday in Lent – March 1, 2020

### Romans 5:12-19

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— 13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when 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 was 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 the 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 the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 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.

How much experience do you have with judges and trials and courtrooms? Perhaps you have served on jury duty and received a taste of how the system works. Perhaps you've been involved in a case yourself, whether on the side of the plaintiff or the defendant. But unless you have a job that is heavily involved in cases and trials, we are not always aware of the scale of our court system in this country on the state and federal levels. When it comes to the totals, the numbers are staggering. Each year more than 100 million cases are filed in state courts with another 400,000 filed in federal courts. There are approximately 30,000 state judges and 1,700 federal judges to hear those cases. Whether or not you have been impacted in your life, the legal system is a very critical part of how our country functions. This morning though we want to talk about a different judge and trial and courtroom, one that has a far larger impact on each of us in our lives. On the basis of our text we will look at what it means to be **On Trial in God's Courtroom**.

If we are looking for the history of trials and courtrooms we can go back to the beginning as we heard in our first lesson from Genesis 3. The first courtroom was the Garden of Eden, with God as the judge and Adam and Eve as the defendants. As far as cases go, this one was open and shut and made for a quick trial. While Adam and Eve tried to make their case by shifting blame, with Adam blaming Eve and God (3:12) and then Eve blaming the devil (3:13), the evidence was clear. Adam and Eve were guilty of eating fruit from the one tree they had been told not to eat from. While today such a crime – eating fruit from a tree that is off limits or belongs to someone else – would not lead to any serious punishment or jail time, Adam and Eve's crime had serious consequences. They had been perfect and without any sin, but now had lost that image of God. So now they would suffer pain, difficulty and hardship in every aspect of their lives. They would be banished from the Garden and the tree of life. They would now face death as the ultimate punishment.

Even worse was that their sin did not just impact their lives. Verse 12: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” Sin and death come into this world for all people because of Adam and Eve. The verses of our text pile up phrase after phrase to emphasize these consequences: verse 15: “the many died by the trespass of the one man;” verse 16: “the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation;” verse 17: “by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man;” verse 18: “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men;” verse 19: “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.” The consequences are clear. There is condemnation for everyone because of what happened in the Garden of Eden. Because of the actions of Adam and Eve everyone is born into this world with a sinful nature. We call this original sin or inherited sin. The sinful nature leads to sinful thoughts and words and actions. Like Adam and Eve it is an open and shut case in God’s courtroom. The condemnation for sin is death.

Our human reason may lead us to protest and cry out that this is unfair on a number of different levels. One lesser charge that is leveled at times is why does Adam get all the blame? Why is he the one man through whom all this condemnation is passed down when it was Eve that the devil talked to and then ate the fruit first? Adam was to be the loving head of their marriage and yet he failed. He was with her and did not stop her and ate the fruit too. It was just as much Adam’s responsibility, if not more. Consequently, he is the one man through whom sin entered this world.

A greater charge that is leveled is that this is not fair. Adam and Eve sinned, not us. Why should we have to pay for their sins? Why should we have to die? Verse 12 hints at the answer: “in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” Everyone dies because of their own sin. No one innocent is being put to death because of what Adam has done. Paul even addressed a similar charge in vv. 13 & 14. There were some who wondered, what about those who did not break God’s first command to Adam and Eve and then did not have God’s other commands until the 10 commandments were revealed at Mt. Sinai? God’s answer: “Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses” (v. 14) because “sin was in the world” (v. 13) whether there were laws written down or not.

In the end, is inheriting a sinful nature fair? Probably not. But no one should think that they would have done any better than Adam and Eve in that situation or would be able to live a perfect life with the devil always there to tempt us. If we were on trial before God in his courtroom it would be that open and shut case. Have a sinful nature? Guilty. Break God’s commands with our thoughts, words and actions? Guilty again. The condemnation would be certain and the punishment obvious – death in this life to go to hell to pay for our sins for all of eternity.

But this is not where God leaves the story. Our judge had different plans, right from the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Yes, through one man sin and death and condemnation would come to everyone. But through another man, the offspring of the woman (Ge 3:15), God would give the world a gift through our Lord Jesus Christ. The verses of our text also pile up the descriptions of this gift. Verse 15 mentions “God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ.” Grace is God’s undeserved love. When on trial all we deserve is condemnation. But God wants to give us something else as a gracious gift. That result is in

verse 16: “the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” Justification is a court room term – an acquittal, a not-guilty verdict. It’s not that God is letting us off the hook or simply ignoring our sins. Jesus took our place. Verse 19: “Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” Jesus kept the law perfectly without any sin. He then died to take on the punishment for our sins. God is not letting anyone off the hook but is putting the burden for everything on Jesus. The results of Christ’s sacrifice are in verse 17: “those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Instead of death reigning, life will reign. Instead of a condemnation to hell, we are set free for an eternity in heaven. Another aspect emphasized in these verses is the comparison between the trespass and the gift. Adam’s action was one sin. Jesus’ action covers over a multitude of sins for all people of all time. God’s grace is abundant (v. 17). It overflows to the many (v. 15). God’s gift is so much greater because of the blessings it brings to the world.

We could continue on with more details from these verses that describe the gift our God has given us, there is so much here. But let’s turn to some application. On this first Sunday of Lent we always see Jesus’ temptation in the desert as the gospel lesson. We are reminded again how Jesus was always obedient and never gave into the devil’s temptations. We too face temptations to sin, from the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. On the one hand, we never want to take God’s great gift, our justification, and use it as a license to sin where we give into whatever temptations we want because we think that in the end God will forgive us. That would be despising this great gift. On the other hand we do keep in mind that we are not like Jesus. We have a sinful nature, we will fall into temptation, “the spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Mt 26:41). But our failures do not drive us to despair because we know that we have been made righteous through the one man, Jesus Christ. The devil cannot play the role of prosecutor and get us convicted because we have been set free from any condemnation. God has given us this great gift. We will continue to show our love and thanks as we struggle against temptation and serve him in our lives.

With over 100 million cases per year in our country, our court system works hard to address all the issues that are raised. But on the Last Day when Jesus returns to judge the living and dead and announce the results, those who stand trial will number in the tens of billions. Because of God’s grace we know where we will stand on that day—justified and declared not guilty because of Jesus’ sacrifice and obedience for us. But sadly it will not be that way for those who rejected this great gift. Let us continue to share the good news of what Jesus has done with others so that they can receive the benefit of this great gift and join us in heaven, righteous and rejoicing for all eternity. Amen.