

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
July 13, 2014**

**Romans 5:12-19**

**Reversal of Power**

- 1. Paul speaks of the Reign of Death**
- 2. A Reversal of Power**

**Hymns: 181 – 396– 378 – Closing: 323**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

In your study of Scripture, have you ever looked at Genesis chapter 5? It is a sombering section of the Bible. Today, before we turn our Bibles to Paul's letter to the Romans, I'd like you to open them up and look at Genesis 5. As you look at that section of Scripture, your eyes will most likely be drawn first to numbers. Genesis 5 is a genealogy. It is one of those sections of Scripture that doesn't seem all that exciting to read through – a list of names is never gripping; but what makes this genealogy fascinating are those ages. Hundreds and hundreds of years of life; it blows our minds that people could live that long, and it raises all sorts of questions. If you've ever looked at this chapter of the Bible, it was probably because of those numbers.

But those numbers are not why you're looking at it this morning. What I want you to focus on is what you see repeated over and over again in those verses. It is a solemn phrase that rings throughout that chapter like the tolling of a bell on the top of a church - the type of bell that might toll for a funeral. That phrase begins ringing in verse 5, where we are told that "altogether Adam lived 930 years...and then he died." In verse 8, we hear it again, "Altogether Seth lived 912 years... and then he died." And it continues every few verses; that bell rings again with the words "and then he died." Over and over through that chapter, in unceasing rhythm, that toll of death rings out. "And then he died....and then he died...and then he died."

What we see, and hear, here in Genesis 5 is exactly what the apostle Paul is talking about in the section of Romans that we are focusing on today – a reign of death. Go ahead and turn now to Romans 5, and there Paul begins in verse 12 with these words,

**"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—<sup>13</sup> for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.<sup>14</sup> 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."**

Paul begins this very important section in his letter to the Romans, by speaking about a reign of death that came into the world. It was a reign that began when one man, Adam, who with his wife disobeyed God's command, and ensured that they both would die. But it wasn't just them. Though those after them did not live in the Garden with the command not to eat from the tree, Paul tells us that they all died. From Adam on, there was a reign of death. And that reign proves something: there is no one who has ever lived in this world that is not guilty of sin. That toll of finality that we heard in Genesis 5 has continued ringing at the end of every person's life, marking them as sinners, reminding them of death's reign.

Death reigns with terrible results. It elicits fear in the mightiest of men. It brings sadness and pain wherever it goes. It stands as an unavoidable deadline for every single person. How tragic that this reign of death could be ushered in by one man, but that is exactly what Paul lays out for us here. **"Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses,"** and that reign has continued, as we know and experience; and that reign is powerful, as we know and experience.

But as powerful as the reign of death seems to be to all of us who know its reality and experienced its effects, Paul says that there is something more remarkable than the longevity and dominance of death's reign. As long as death reigned and as far as its power reached, it is remarkable that there could be a reversal of power.

That unbelievable reversal is what Paul points to in verse 17, where he writes the glorious news that those who were once ruled over by the reign of death would one day reign in life. The script would be completely flipped. The unending tolling of that death bell would stop, and victory bells would ring out instead.

How is this possible? Paul lays it out for us in verses 15-19. Over and over again in those verses, Paul repeats the same truth with different words. He repeats them because it seems impossible the first time we hear it, he repeats them because our experience in this world would seem to tell us otherwise; he repeats it so that we know the truth – the powerful reign of the death has been reversed. He

writes, <sup>15</sup> **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!** <sup>16</sup> **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.** <sup>17</sup> **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.** <sup>18</sup> **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.** <sup>19</sup> **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."**

When Adam sinned, there was a reversal of power, from a reign of perfection and life to one of sin and death. Now again, Paul makes known that there has been a reversal of power – from sin and death to forgiveness and life. And again, it happens as a result of the actions of one man. This great reversal of power would come about through the work of the God-man Jesus Christ. And his work far surpasses the death-inducing work of Adam. Just consider

- Whereas Adam's fall to death was produced by the evil cunning of the devil, Jesus' victory to life was produced by the gracious love of God.
- Whereas the death was the result of weakness and failing, life is the result of strength and resolve.
- Whereas death came into the world by sin, life came into the world by perfection.

This great reversal of power could only be accomplished by God, and we give thanks because it has been accomplished by God. In Jesus' life, in Jesus' death, in Jesus' resurrection, the reign of death has given way to the reign of Life.

When Adam sinned, it sent the world into a downward spiral, and though we still experience some of the sadness and pain of death, we know the reign has ended and the power has been reversed. We see that truth when the Gospel is proclaimed at a funeral; we see that truth when tears of earthly sadness are accompanied by confident smiles of hope; we will see that truth when we stand in eternal victory. For whoever believes in this message of reversal, death does not ring as a final bell, instead it marks the beginning of a reign in life. Such a reversal

is only possible by the love, the power, the perfection of God; and through the wonderful gift of his Word, we know them all. Amen.