

## **From Death to Life, From Adam to Christ**

During our study of Romans last week, we ended with some comments regarding the impossibility of the human mind to be compared to the mind of God. It would therefore follow that we can't always understand what God is doing and why He's doing it. We wonder how God could allow thousands of People to die in an earthquake. We wonder why God would allow a baby or young child to die. The reason many of these things happen is far beyond the human mind's ability to understand, and these things happen simply because God is far more intelligent, powerful, loving, and merciful than any human being could ever be. And let's not forget that God, among other things we're not capable of, knows the future. He knows the end result of all things that have happened, are happening, and will happen in the world.

Let me give you an example. Some people become livid with anger toward God at the death of a baby or young child. Understandably, for a parent, losing a child is probably the most devastating loss that can occur in anyone's life. Sometimes the pain of such a loss lingers for years and years. Some people who claim to have been Christians before such a loss, turn against and even hate God for what He did to them. We share the grief of anyone in such a situation and the sense of loss is simply overwhelming.

But let me offer you a possible view of this situation if we fast forward 30 years from the tragic event. Is it not possible that the child could have been raised in a dysfunctional home where there was serious physical, mental, or sexual abuse, and consequently may never have made the decision to believe in Christ? In such a case, if the child had grown to maturity, they may never have seen Heaven. However, any baby or young child is immediately taken to Heaven at their death. We see that fact confirmed in the Bible in 2 Samuel 12:23 where David's 7-day old baby boy had just died, and David says:

*But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me.*

Because of David's close, intimate relationship with God, God had let David know that the baby was with Him in Heaven and that David would one day join his son there. We cannot know the mind of God and if you don't mind taking a slight diversion here from the book of Romans, perhaps we can get a better understanding of this reality if we go to the book of Habakkuk. In chapter 1, **Habakkuk looks at a situation and he can't understand it either; it just doesn't seem to make any sense to him.** We'll read selected portions from the chapter. You're welcome to follow along in your Bibles, but personally I can tell you that when someone else is reading Scripture, I find there are less distractions if I just close my eyes and listen carefully. But please do whatever you're comfortable with. So let's look at chapter 1, beginning at verse 1 of Habakkuk:

*1 This is the message that the prophet Habakkuk received from the Lord in a vision.*

*2 How long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen!*

*“Violence!” I cry, but you do not come to save.  
3 Must I forever see this sin and misery all around me? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight.*

Has anyone ever felt like that?

*4 The law has become paralyzed and useless, and **there is no justice given in the courts**. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, and justice is perverted with bribes and trickery.*

*5 The Lord replied, “Look at the nations and be amazed! Watch and be astounded at what I will do! For I am doing something in your own day, something **you wouldn’t believe** even if someone told you about it.*

*6 I am raising up the Babylonians to be a new power on the world scene. They are a cruel and violent nation who will march across the world and conquer it.*

*7 They are notorious for their cruelty. They do as they like, and no one can stop them.*

**Habakkuk responds:**

*12 O Lord my God, my Holy One, you who are eternal—is your plan in all of this to wipe us out? Surely not! O Lord our Rock, you have decreed the rise of these Babylonians to punish and correct us for our terrible sins.*

*13 You are perfectly just in this. But will you, who cannot allow sin in any form, stand idly by while they swallow us up? **Should you be silent while the wicked destroy people who are more righteous than they?***

*17 Will you let them get away with this forever? Will they succeed forever in their heartless conquests?*

How many of us have thought these same thoughts? How could a good God allow a man like Hitler to come to power? How could He allow a plague to kill millions of people? How could He allow a small child to be killed by a drunk driver? We get these questions all the time from people who don’t want to believe in God and **who must think that God needs their opinions in order to do the right thing**. Let’s continue now to see what happens in Habakkuk 2, as Habakkuk says:

*1 I will climb up into my watchtower now and wait to see what the Lord will say to me and how he will answer my complaint.*

*2 Then the Lord said to me,*

**God answers Habakkuk:**

*“Write my answer in large, clear letters on a tablet, so that a runner can read it and tell everyone else.*

***4 “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked; but the righteous will live by their faith.***

*5 Wealth is treacherous, and the arrogant are never at rest. They range far and wide, with their mouths opened as wide as death, but they are never satisfied. In their greed they have gathered up many nations and peoples.*

*6 But the time is coming when all their captives will taunt them, saying, 'You thieves! At last justice has caught up with you! Now you will get what you deserve for your oppression and extortion!'*

*8 You have plundered many nations; now they will plunder you. You murderers! You have filled the countryside with violence and all the cities, too.*

*9 "How terrible it will be for you who get rich by unjust means! You believe your wealth will buy security.*

*12 "How terrible it will be for you who build cities with money gained by murder and corruption!*

*13 Has not the Lord Almighty promised that the wealth of nations will turn to ashes? They work so hard, but all in vain!*

*14 For the time will come when all the earth will be filled, as the waters fill the sea, with an awareness of the glory of the Lord.*

*15 "How terrible it will be for you who make your neighbors drunk! You force your cup on them so that you can gloat over their nakedness and shame.*

*16 But soon it will be your turn! Come, drink and be exposed! Drink from the cup of the Lord's judgment, and all your glory will be turned to shame.*

*18 "What have you gained by worshiping all your man-made idols? How foolish to trust in something made by your own hands! What fools you are to believe such lies!*

*19 How terrible it will be for you who beg lifeless wooden idols to save you. You ask speechless stone images to tell you what to do. Can an idol speak for God? They may be overlaid with gold and silver, but they are lifeless inside.*

*20 But the Lord is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him."*

Sounds like, in God's good time, there will be judgment for those who do evil, doesn't it?

**Then Habakkuk replies in chapter 3:**

*2 I have heard all about you, Lord, and I am filled with awe by the amazing things you have done. In this time of our deep need, begin again to help us, as you did in years gone by. Show us your power to save us. And in your anger, remember your mercy.*

*3 I see God, the Holy One, moving across the deserts from Edom and Mount Paran. His brilliant splendor fills the heavens, and the earth is filled with his praise! What a wonderful God he is!*

*4 Rays of brilliant light flash from his hands. He rejoices in his awesome power.*

12 You marched across the land in awesome anger and trampled the nations in your fury.

13 **You went out to rescue your chosen people**, to save your anointed ones. You crushed the heads of the wicked and laid bare their bones from head to toe.

14 With their own weapons, you destroyed those who rushed out like a whirlwind, thinking Israel would be easy prey.

15 You trampled the sea with your horses, and the mighty waters piled high.

16 I trembled inside when I heard all this; my lips quivered with fear. My legs gave way beneath me, and I shook in terror. I will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us.

17 Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty,

18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation.

19 **The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.**

I like what Eugene Peterson does with this verse in the contemporary translation, *The Message*. I wouldn't vouch for it being taken directly from the original Hebrew text, but I do think it gives us the same feeling in contemporary language that a reader in Habakkuk's day would have felt. He translates the just read verse 19 to read:

*I'm counting on God's rule to prevail, I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I'm king of the mountain.*

So in chapter 1 we see Habakkuk unable to understand **why God is allowing all these bad things to happen**. Habakkuk just can't understand anything God is doing. Finally Habakkuk backs up and says, "I'm just going to know that You are of purer eyes, and in that I'm going to rest." Habakkuk then says at the end of chapter 3, "If the figs don't grow and the fields don't produce, and nothing goes right, I'll still rejoice in the God of my salvation." There's a song that relates to this verse and it goes like this:

*"When you don't understand,  
When you can't trust His hand,  
Trust His heart."*

In other words Habakkuk is saying that when you can't understand things with your human mind. You are to back off the quicksand of your own misunderstanding and you get on the rock of the Word and the character of God. Is God just? Yes. Is God wise? Yes. Therefore, we should be comforted in the character of God and we must understand that we will never be able to unscramble all the mysteries of His infinite (immeasurable) mind in this life.

If we see a tragedy occur, such as people starving around the world, good people dying young, or any of so many other countless tragedies, many of us simply can't understand it. We can't understand how a good and loving God could allow such things to happen.

We may not understand but God does. There are times when it may be necessary for God to use tragedy to bring the ultimate good. It may be necessary for God to break people in one way or another before they will turn to Him. We cannot possibly explain or understand the infinite mind of God. Why? Because we're not God. We simply need to trust in His divine will.

I must admit that I have nothing but pity for people who say things like, "*God wouldn't do this,*" or "*God wouldn't do that,*" or "*I can't accept a God who would allow such things to happen to good people.*" They're diminishing who God is. They're rejecting God because He doesn't think like they do. Why would anyone want God to be like them, with the same hidden weaknesses and inability to make things perfect? I thank God that He doesn't think like me. If God thought like me, He'd be as messed up as I can be, and what do you think that would mean for you? Well, I'll tell you what it would mean. One day I could love you and the next day I might hate you. One day I might trust you and the next day I might distrust you. One day I may want you around me and the next day I might not want you around me. So you had better hope that you die on one of the days you are favorable in my sight or I might just have you shipped off to Hell because I'm in a bad mood. You too should be grateful that God doesn't think like you or me or any other human being. Because God is God and thinks the way He does, He can be perfectly consistent, perfectly fair, perfectly loving, perfectly merciful, and perfectly just. No one can even begin to approach these characteristics of God, and because of who He is we should trust Him completely. One other thing these people are forgetting is that Satan and the presence of sin in the world are the cause of many of those "*bad things*" that happen. These people are blaming God for things Satan is doing.

There's a story about a young boy who was working a jigsaw puzzle on the floor with his father sitting next to him in a chair reading. After about 15 minutes of being frustrated with the puzzle, the boy looked up at his father and said, "*Daddy, I just can't do it. The pieces just don't fit together.*" His father moved down next to him on the floor and within a few minutes was able to put the entire puzzle together. The boy looked at the puzzle and then looked at his father and said, "*Daddy, how did you do that?*" The father said, "*Son, the difference is that I see the whole picture and you can only see the pieces.*"

That is exactly what we need to realize. With our finite minds we can only see the pieces of the puzzle of our lives. God sees the whole picture, that which is best for us in the long run. If people turn away from God, God may have to do something drastic to get that person to seek after Him. That's what He had to do to me. When I had all the money I could ever want I never had any use for God. In fact I was an atheist. He had to break me, take everything that I valued away from me before I fell on my knees in total despair and begged for His help. He gave it and we can save that story for another message. But at the time I couldn't understand why such terrible things had happened to me. Now I know it was the only thing that could have turned me toward God and Jesus Christ, and now that I have that personal relationship with Christ, I wouldn't trade it for all the money and/or power in the world. Now I have true wealth and power because my riches are in my heavenly bank account, and because I am one with Christ I have all the power of God available to me if I am faithful to His will for my life. That's all I need and in fact it's all



anyone needs.

Now we've diverted from where we were in Romans 5:12 for some time and we need to get back to Adam and original sin. God had some options when Adam and Eve sinned. He could have just killed them. *"That's it, I've had enough from you, WHACK, you're dead."* But if God had done that we wouldn't be here, would we? God could have said, *"I've tried it with 2 human beings and that was two too many."* But God didn't do that and we believe He didn't do that because God is God. His characteristics include grace, mercy, and forgiveness. So it was just natural for God to have a *"plan B"* in place to cover the possibility that Adam and Eve would not pass the obedience test. And when that happened, God set about to prevent human beings from going to Hell in a state of sin, because Adam and Eve were just the first human beings to disobey God. People continued to disobey God all through the Old Testament times from Adam and Eve on. And God continued to provide for the forgiveness of their sin right up to the point where Jeremiah wrote the following in Jeremiah 8:15--9:5:

*We hoped for peace, but no peace came. We hoped for a time of healing, but found only terror.*

*16 The snorting of the enemies' warhorses can be heard all the way from the land of Dan in the north! The whole land trembles at the approach of the terrible army, for it is coming to devour the land and everything in it—cities and people alike.'*

*17 "I will send these enemy troops among you like poisonous snakes you cannot charm," says the Lord. "No matter what you do, they will bite you, and you will die."*

***18 My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken.***

*19 Listen to the weeping of my people; it can be heard all across the land. "Has the Lord abandoned Jerusalem?" the people ask. "Is her King no longer there?" "Oh, why have they angered me with their carved idols and worthless gods?" asks the Lord.*

*20 "The harvest is finished, and the summer is gone," the people cry, "yet we are not saved!"*

***21 I weep for the hurt of my people. I am stunned and silent, mute with grief.***

*22 Is there no medicine in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people?*

***1 Oh, that my eyes were a fountain of tears; I would weep forever! I would sob day and night for all my people who have been slaughtered.***

*2 Oh, that I could go away and forget them and live in a shack in the desert, for they are all adulterous and treacherous.*

*3 "My people bend their tongues like bows to shoot lies. They refuse to stand up for the truth. And they only go from bad to worse! They care nothing for me," says the Lord.*

*4 "Beware of your neighbor! Beware of your brother! They all take advantage of one another and spread their slanderous lies.*

*5 They all fool and defraud each other; no one tells the truth. With*

*practiced tongues they tell lies; they wear themselves out with all their sinning.*

This is Israel that God and Jeremiah are speaking of, God's chosen people in the Old Testament. What a sinful people. It was necessary to punish the people for their disobedience as any good parent does who knows what's best for their children. But does God get so angry with them that He takes away their opportunity for repentance and salvation? No, that is always possible for them. In fact, Peter says it so well in 2 Peter 3:9:

*The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. **HE DOES NOT WANT ANYONE TO PERISH**, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.*

God is like a grieving parent whose child is self-destructing on drugs. He's saddened by what's happening to His children (Hosea 11), but always providing the opportunity for a way back if the person will only choose it and hoping that everyone will. Then Paul goes on in Romans 5:13,14 to say the following:

*Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. And though there was no law to break, since it had not yet been given, 14 they all died anyway—even though they did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. What a contrast between Adam and Christ, who was yet to come!*

Now I don't believe it's necessary to spend much time here unless someone has some specific questions, because verse 13 simply illustrates that before the Law of God was given to Moses, before specific rules were given for obedience, people still died. Therefore, people didn't die because they broke one of God's rules. They died because of the sin nature within them. So we can gather from that, that God does not punish us for individual sins that we commit, He punishes us for the sin nature that we possess as human beings. And if we don't get rid of that sin nature through faith in Jesus Christ, then we carry it with us to our death and there is no way anyone with a sin nature is going to get into Heaven. So guess what the remaining alternative location might be? And God doesn't want anyone to have to go there, but the choice is ours alone.

Verse 14 is a reminder that Adam was a type of Christ in that one man's act affected all people. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, death is inevitable. It awaits us all. You can fear it or you can anticipate it. It can be the beginning of an even worse death in Hell without God, or it can be the beginning of eternal bliss in the presence of the living God and those who live in His presence. The choice is yours.

The idea that death came into the world through one man's sin, according to Romans 5:12, apparently presents a difficulty for the modern mind to understand. Our world has a real problem realizing that before they sinned, Adam and Eve were immortal, which means of course that they wouldn't have died. But the point that Paul is so rightly

emphasizing is that for the human race, with its desire to live forever, and having been made in God's image to enjoy everlasting fellowship with Him, death can never be just a physical event, that is, just an end to a living body, the cessation of life. Sin separates the human race from God and death is the final separation. Once a person dies their chance to be reconciled with God is no longer a possibility (Hebrews 9:27). That's why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:56 that "*the sting of death is sin.*" The horror of death is not for your physical body to die or your physical life to come to an end. The horror of death is to die in your sins and be separated from God forever in the place the Bible refers to as Hell. Sin and death are a contradiction of all that human beings in their hearts know themselves to be, and because of this people live in anxiety, fear, and despair.<sup>1</sup> Think about it.

Now let's move on to Romans 5:15-21:

*And what a difference between our sin and God's generous gift of forgiveness. For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this other man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift.*

*16 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 we have the free gift of being accepted by God, even though we are guilty of many sins.*

*17 The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, **but all who receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death** through this one man, Jesus Christ.*

*18 Yes, Adam's one sin brought condemnation upon everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness makes all people right in God's sight and gives them life.*

*19 Because one person disobeyed God, many people became sinners. **BUT BECAUSE ONE OTHER PERSON OBEYED GOD, MANY PEOPLE WILL BE MADE RIGHT IN GOD'S SIGHT.***

*20 God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful kindness became more abundant.*

*21 So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, **now God's wonderful kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.***

Death came to Adam and through Adam it came to all people. But death's power can be broken and Christ can break it. Christ can break the power of sin according to 2 Timothy 1:10:

*And now he has made all of this plain to us by the coming of Christ Jesus, our Savior, who broke the power of death and showed us the way to everlasting life through the Good News.*

Now unless you plan on preparing a theological paper on Romans 5, we need not spend a

<sup>1</sup> Caird, G.B., *New Testament theology* (Oxford, Clarendon Press), 1995. P.83



whole lot of time on verses 15-19. The important thing here is that you get the basic concept that God's grace and the work of Jesus overpowers the consequence of sin. God is a transformer of human life. Aren't you glad to know that in Jesus Christ you can become something different from what you were? Aren't you glad that salvation can produce a total change in you? It turns a pauper into a prince and a slave into a king; a dead person into a living person.

Verses 20 and 21, however, need a bit of clarifying. Verse 20 says: *God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful kindness became more abundant.* You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. Are you saying that God gave the Law so that sin would increase?" That's right. God gave specific laws to identify specific transgressions. He wanted to give the sin nature a place to operate because He wanted to make it very very clear to all of humanity that they were sinners. The Law, and basically for our purposes when we refer to the Law we're referring to the Ten Commandments, made evident how desperately we all need God's forgiveness. Not only does the Law identify specific transgressions against which people see themselves as sinners, but the Law even stimulates sin. Imagine a child walking down the street and seeing a sign on a neighbor's lawn that says, "DO NOT PICK THE FLOWERS." That little kid wouldn't have thought of picking the flowers until he saw the sign.

I'm also reminded of the little old lady who went to the board of elders of the church objecting to the pastor reading the Ten Commandments in church because it puts so many ideas into peoples' minds. The Law showed people that they were sinners and if they still didn't get it, it even stimulated sin, so that people would see that they are sinners. I'm sure none of you are like me but perhaps you can relate to this. When my parents told me I couldn't do something it was usually the very next thing that I did. If Betty tells me I can't do something I usually do it anyhow but hope that she doesn't find out. And in all fairness, if I tell Betty she can't do something, that shows me a side of Betty that I don't often see. It is not uncommon for rules and laws to stimulate people to do things that those rules and laws dictate they not do.

The Law made evident how much we needed righteousness, and when we received that righteousness, we were changed and then the Law became the standard of behavior that we desire with all our heart to keep. To the sinner the Law becomes evident in sin. To the person that has been given the righteousness of Jesus, it becomes the desire of their heart. To the unsaved person the Law excites sin, to the saved person it restrains sin. Pretty amazing, isn't it? Then Paul summarizes this entire chapter in Romans 5:21: *So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Sin reigned in death; grace reigns in new life. Grace met sin head on and defeated it. Grace becomes the dominant power. Notice how the chapter ends: *through Jesus Christ our Lord.* It's all there in Him. And it's why the apostle, Peter, can say in Acts 4:12:

*There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.*

What's the practical consideration in Romans chapter 5? God has dealt with sin in all people, that sin which was initiated by Adam and Eve and picked up by every member of the human race, and He has dealt with it all in Jesus Christ alone. Jesus has made it possible for all people to be free of sin and death.

Christ identified Himself with all of us by coming to earth in the form of a human being. He suffered many of the things we suffer so that he might understand and relate to our condition. As a matter of fact he suffered much more than most people do. By doing so and living a life without sin, He became the perfect sacrifice that God required for sin. No one else who has ever lived has lived a perfect life without sin. Jesus therefore died the death that we deserve to die because of our sins. Therefore, those who believe through faith in what He did will never experience spiritual death, because we are now free to be identified as being one with Christ in the new life of His resurrection. We have been raised to new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, in effect, we who believe have died to a life of sin and death because Christ died bearing our sin and death, and now we're free to be part of a new life in the Kingdom of God forever. Those who place their faith in the work of Christ are now free to be identified with Him in a new life. It is as if we died with Christ and rose with Him to a new life. We know that our old self was crucified with Christ, for the destruction of our sinful self, so that we no longer have to be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). Paul is not trying to make us believe that Christians can't do anything wrong, but simply that they have been placed in a new situation where the old self no longer controls a person's pattern of life.<sup>2</sup>

Every one of us should kneel before God in humble consciousness that we are sinners worthy of death. Every one of us should realize that apart from the work of Jesus Christ we would be doomed to Hell forever. Where there was a dominance of death, God came with His grace and overpowered it. Death is overruled by life for all who believe in the work of Jesus Christ. If you haven't already done so, why not grab on to it, right now.

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<sup>2</sup> Caird, G.B., *New Testament theology* (Oxford, Clarendon Press), 1995. P. 159.