

In the name of Jesus, our Redeemer, dear friends,

If you paid attention at all to the Olympic games from last summer, you remember perhaps the greatest story for the United States—the women’s gymnastics team. If you saw the drama and excitement of all that, think back to Simone Biles and Laurie Hernandez and the competition for the balance beam. Now, while that may not be the standout event, you can certainly appreciate the difficulty of trying to jump and flip on top of a beam that is only 4 inches wide. Those two young ladies were fantastic and ended up with medals. But if you watched, you saw—or if you’ve ever watched any balance beam competition, you have seen—gymnasts have a difficult time on that 4’ high beam. You’ve seen arms flailing trying to stay upright, trying not to fall completely off. You’ve seen them look awkward and not hit things just right for the judges and sometimes, yes, they hit the ground.

As you go through life, trying to handle everything, do you ever feel like that? Most of us are trying to manage enough stuff and trying to do it well—and sometimes we feel like we’re being judged too! We like balance in our lives. But hard to get it just right.

High school students—don’t you try to balance school and study and social life and family stuff and God and who knows what else? The same goes for you college students, although you add in more serious relationships, more jobs, internships and things like that. As we get older it doesn’t change. We want to balance recreation, career, family and friendships, helping others. Later in life we may balance retirement get-aways, family obligations as a grandparent, increased volunteer work, additional involvement at church and more. Life can really feel like a balancing act—and we just want things to even out and not come crashing down!

Long ago a great crime was committed by a young couple that brought everything in their life crashing down. And it did the same for everyone who would come after them—and that includes you and me. We heard about that in the first lesson today from Genesis. Adam and Eve fell off the balance beam and the judge—God himself—disqualified them from eternal life and all of us along with them. That’s what sin does. But God was not content with disqualifying and damning them and everyone else. In his grace, he immediately had a plan and an initial promise that he would send someone to restore balance. This morning in the words of Paul’s letter to the Romans (in chapter 5), we’ll see

THE GREAT BALANCING ACT OF GOD

We’ll see **1. THE LIFE THAT BROUGHT DEATH** and
2. THE DEATH THAT BROUGHT LIFE

Let me say first that the words of God given to Paul are amazing. The balance of his Holy Spirit-inspired writing is surpassed only by the content of what is written here. We are now in a courtroom. Here too there is a judge who is watching and listening. An awful crime has been committed. And now the facts of the case are presented. These are included in your worship folder on page 7.

Here are the facts:

Sin entered the world through one man (Adam) [v.12]

Death (entered the world) through sin [v.12]

Death came to all (people) [v.12]

And then, like a lawyer driving his point home to the jury, Paul repeats these facts in different words:

By the trespass of the one man, death reigned [v.17]

The result of one trespass was condemnation for all (people) [v.18]

Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners [v.19]

This is the case that has been made: Adam sinned back in the Garden of Eden by disobeying God's one command: **You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:17)**. You might not think that the biting into a piece of fruit by some guy and his wife thousands of years ago would make a difference for anyone else or for as long as it has, but it does.

God put that tree there—not to be a temptation—but to give his special creatures the constant opportunity to show their love for their Creator. Every time Adam and his wife, Eve did not eat from that tree, they showed God that they loved him and wanted to please him. This was their worship. But they did eat from it one day and because they did everything has changed. They wronged God. They became sinful. And two sinful people have sinful children, and so on...and so on...and so on. It's like they opened the door and let in the most horrific, malignant, fast-spreading cancer you could imagine and it has swept through the entire population of humanity.

And so the case has been made. The facts have been presented. But you also have seen the evidence, haven't you? As you look in on this trial, you can't help but think of what you know is true. You've seen damning sin in everyone you know. You've seen it in the self-centered cry of the baby who needs nothing at the moment, but wants you and won't stop wailing until you come. You've seen it in the selfish fighting over toys in the smallest children. You've seen it in the bickering of young kids. You've seen it in the rebellious youth who lacks respect and in the poor decisions made by young adults. You've seen it in adults who lie and cheat, who abuse and neglect others. You've see it even in Christian people who are supposed to know better yet disregard God and the things that he says. You've seen sinfulness show itself in myriad ways from birth until death in every person. And you've seen it in yourself—a lot.

So, yes, Adam started it all off, giving us this infection of sin, but we continue to add to our own pile of personal sins. We are as guilty as Adam. If Paul was the lawyer presenting the case, he's probably got you convinced of Adam's guilt and your own already. Not just because of the facts he presents here, but also because you have a conscience and because you observe the sin in others.

But it is not simply *the Apostle Paul* making a good argument for sin spread worldwide and our personal guilt before God. This is the Word of God, the Judge of all who says that you and I are sinful and as a result of sin, we deserve death—not just physically, but also eternally. The crime of sin demands that we are locked up for an eternal life sentence in hell. Balance is lost and the scale of justice clunks down heavily to one side as we see how the LIFE OF ADAM BROUGHT DEATH TO US!

If you're a fan of a professional sports or a particular team or two, you may recall some terrible trades. There is probably no worse trade than that made by the Boston Red Sox owner back in 1920. He needed money to finance a Broadway musical so he traded one player to the Yankees for a pile of cash—\$100,000 (and a \$300,000 loan)—which might sound okay except that that one player was Babe Ruth, who went on to hit 665 home runs for the Yankees, led them to 4 World Series titles, and is generally considered to be the best player of all time. Oh yeah, it also took the Red Sox another 86 years before they won another World Series—the Curse of the Bambino!

But there was a worse trade—one far more unbalanced and lopsided. Paul describes it here as he explains THE GREAT BALANCING ACT OF GOD. So away from the baseball field and back to the courtroom.

How will the great crime of sin be paid for? How will justice balance the scales? Listen:

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 [v.17]

The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men [v.18]

Through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous [v.19]

If you were watching a TV drama right now, this is where it would start to get really interesting! All of the sudden Adam is found NOT GUILTY! You and I are found NOT GUILTY! There will be no incarceration, no jail time, no eternal death penalty! Everyone is astonished! The Judge declares that we are free to go! In fact, we are far from being guilty. Our reputation isn't even tarnished by the trial! We are declared "righteous", "justified", and been given an eternal "life sentence" in heaven!

How could this happen? What is the evidence on the other side of this courtroom battle? Listen to some more biblical testimony:

God made him who had no sin (Jesus) to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).

When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins (Colossians 2:13).

We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7).

You know, what Jesus did to tip the scales of justice in our favor is pretty incredible! If you take the time on Wednesdays over the next several weeks to worship during the Lenten season, you get to hear the gory details...and they *are* gory details. The fact that Jesus, true God, came to live as a human being and live without the sin that corrupts us is amazing enough, but to see him suffer and die for you—someone who didn't deserve it—takes it to a whole 'nother level, doesn't it?

Jesus paid a steep price to balance things out. The required penalty for the crime of sin was a single life free of all sin and the giving up of that life on the cross. No one else was going to do that. No one else could. This was not like baseball where you can swap players (or cash that could buy a player) and hope that you get one who one can save the team. This trade—Jesus' life for our sins—had to happen *by him* in *just this* way. And he knew going in what it would take. But he did it because he loves you that much.

The result of this GREAT BALANCING ACT OF GOD is that sin is paid for and death no longer threatens us. Jesus has made us righteous, justified before God. Christ now rules in our hearts and we will reign with him in heaven.

In a life that is full of challenges that make it so difficult to achieve balance, we have no such concern regarding our life with God. And it was entirely God's grace. No crafty lawyer could have convinced God to alter divine justice. No defense that we could offer would have held up. Our freedom and life and salvation were earned by Christ and given as gifts to us. That is amazing and comforting and leads us to praise the God who balanced the scales of divine justice and has given us salvation. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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.