

Mortal Combat: Jesus vs. Adam

Romans 5:12-19 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned— ¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where 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 is 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 Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of 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 one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 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.

The fight for our souls starts very early on in human history. We don't know exactly how much time lapsed from the end of Genesis chapter 2 and creation to the first recorded temptation to humans in Genesis chapter 3, but it was probably only days. It's a bit jarring to go from a perfectly complete creation to all of the sudden a talking snake appears, lying to Adam and Eve, making God out to be their enemy, making the forbidden fruit seem advantageous to them, as if their goal should be to become God and that they could accomplish that if they would just take and eat.

If it wasn't clear from what he was saying, we know from other parts of the Bible that this serpent is the devil. He was a created angel of the Lord, but he sinned. His pride made him so power hungry that he led a rebellion against God in order to take the place of God. However, when you go up against God, you always lose. The devil was no exception. He was cast out of heaven, of God's presence. God bound the devil with everlasting chains, made the prison of hell for him. The devil does not rule hell or earth; he is merely the most notorious inmate in an eternal prison.

But God does allow the devil to tempt people. He allows this because God knows that Adam and Eve were made in his own image, that they are perfect with a perfect will and perfect reasoning. They're not inclined to sin. They're fully capable of resisting the devil.

So, when the devil came, did Adam & Eve know that they were locked into a mortal combat, a fight for their lives, their very souls? Did they know that their decision would affect all humans of all time? Were they caught off guard, almost as if it were a surprise attack – this talking snake with all his craftiness and half-truths? Is that why “the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”? (Genesis 3:6)

Immediately, you see all the consequences of their choice to disobey and rebel against God. They're ashamed of their nakedness. They no longer had perfect control over their bodies, could no longer look at each other with pure eyes, with the self-confidence of their worth and value that God had given them. They tried to hide from the all-powerful, everywhere all at once God, who used to walk with them in the cool of the day. They blamed others for what went wrong instead of taking personal ownership of their sins. There was now going to be pain in child-bearing, corruption in the marriage relationships - that a wife would remain with and long for a husband who ruled over her instead of a husband who would serve her and love her as God loves and serves us. Work was now hard and painful. And, yes, they would ultimately die – “for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:19) They lost this mortal combat.

Adam's loss in his mortal combat with the devil set the pattern for all of us. In Genesis chapter 5, we're told: “When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God... When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image...” (Genesis 5:1,3) The image of God, that perfection, was lost. Instead, sin, death, and suffering were all passed on. All of us are affected by and infected with sin and death, as Paul summarizes in our second Bible reading from Romans: “Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” (verse 12) “Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners...” (verse 19)

Adam lost that first round, but how many rounds of mortal combat against the devil have we lost? How many times have we known the right thing to do, but we didn't do it? How many times have we held on to anger and hate when we know we should give it up? How many times did we succumb to the pressure of sin? How many times did we commit sin without even knowing it?

As the losses add up, do we make excuses for why we lost so many rounds? Hey, I was set up to fail. I came from imperfect, sinful parents. I came into this fight at a disadvantage. My opponent, the devil, knew my weaknesses. He kept spamming the same move, the same temptation, the one that I'm particularly weak against, the same one I always fall for. And he's too "op" – too overpowered. He's a fallen angel, and I'm just a man. It wasn't a fair fight. How was I supposed to win? The devil cheated!

Can we win against the devil? Not by our strength, our training, or our lineage. Paul knows that Adam's loss in mortal combat in a pattern of loss we have all fallen to. "By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man... One trespass resulted in condemnation for all people." (verses 17, 18) Because of Adam, we are all losers in mortal combat against the devil.

But we're not here to sulk in an unwinnable situation. Back in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve lost to the devil, God didn't shake his head in disgust and throw his hands in the air, giving up the battle for us. No, he promised a new challenger, a new champion, a second Adam, if you will. The Lord said to the devil in the Garden of Eden after Adam & Eve sinned and even before all the long term consequences of their rebellion was announced: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) The singular male offspring of the woman, man in the flesh, would crush the devil's head, and all the devil would be able to muster would be a strike to the male offspring's heel. This champion chosen by God would be the champion to redeem Adam and Eve from their loss in mortal combat, and he would win to redeem all humankind from their constant losses to the devil and his temptations to sin.

Jesus is that champion come in the flesh to fight against the devil and his temptation. That mortal combat continued in our Gospel reading. "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." (Matthew 4:1) Jesus, the second Adam, fought for us. He flashed the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, as he parried and pushed back the devil and his temptations. At the end of 40 days, Jesus came out victorious. "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:10-11) Jesus wins!

We celebrate Jesus' victory over the devil not just for himself, but also for us. Paul explains: "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! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification." (verses 15-16) Jesus' victory over the devil brought us justification.

Justification is one of those words used in the Bible that maybe we don't always remember what it means. The word envisions a courtroom setting. To be justified means that the defendant is declared not guilty of the crimes they were accused of. Even if the person did the crimes, they are sent home with a clean record, just as if they had never done the crime.

How does that work? "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 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." (verses 18-19) Jesus subbed himself in for us in the flesh to fight against the devil for us. Having won, he gifted his victory to us, put it on our record. We didn't earn it or deserve it, but that's why Jesus came in the flesh. He came to fight this battle against the devil for us in our place. He graciously gave us his win so that we are not losers but are champions with him!

Own that victory. Own the victorious record he has given you. Own that you are justified by God, by Christ's victory, that to God it's like you've never sinned. When the devil comes back to you with more temptations, hold before his face the victory you have in Christ. Push Satan back with what Jesus has done for you. Spam that power move of quoting the Bible, God's Word, just like Jesus did. Quote Jesus' desert victory over Satan. Make him flee from you because Jesus is your champion and already defeated the devil and his temptations for you.

Jesus has won this round of mortal combat for you as well as for the first Adam. Jesus wins! You win! Amen!