

Reading: Romans 5:12-21

Theme: Amazing Grace Abounding.

Last week we saw how the Law was given and functions as a magnifying glass, that opens up and exposes the trespass, the offence of not only Adam, but of all mankind through the history of the world. We also saw that the Law could not and was never intended to be a means of salvation or of being justified, ok with God, but it exposes to us our hopeless position in a way we would never have seen if it had not been given. We saw such among many other things as we looked at the first part of v20.

We are still considering v20-21 toward the end of our studies in Romans 5. One writer says that these 2 verses can be regarded as a summary of all Paul has been saying from 1:16 up to this point and that Paul gathered all into the brief, but mighty statements in these verses. I've quoted and mentioned other writers and commentators on other parts of this chapter who say in effect that this or that is a key verse, the most important verse - which goes to show the richness of Paul's inspired writing. I do not intend to show the proof of that writer's statement, just to highlight that these verses in many ways do summarise the way of salvation Paul has argued for from 1:16.

As part of that summary, Paul had written that the Law was added so that the trespass might increase, be shown for what it really is. If Paul had left it there then we would be left in a horrible situation - the horror, filth, monstrosity of our sin not only being shown, analysed and magnified, but we'd be left aware we were polluted by it and guilty of such. Using again my example from last week of house dust mites, it is one thing to read they are in every bed, but another thing to picture them magnified or even to think of them in their thousands crawling all over our bed and us when we are in it!

Thankfully Paul does not stop there, he continues: *“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more”* (NIV), *“But where sin*

abounded, grace did much more abound” (AV). This is our main theme this evening and it is a glorious theme, which hopefully will not just stretch our minds, but, God willing, stir up our hearts and lives in amazement, gratitude and praise.

In preparing this part of the verse, I realised that v21 is really an explanation, and opening up on this statement and I want to begin to look at the remaining section of these 2 verses using 3 headings, but only 2 of them today:

1. The Dark Tyranny.

Towards the end of 1989 many of us witnessed history in the making as people clambered upon and started to dismantle the Berlin Wall. As a result of that, in many parts of the world, the dark oppressive tyranny of Communism either collapsed or started to collapse. Suddenly there was freedom in many lands that had not known freedom for such a long time.

We have seen how Paul has written that through a function of the Law, the trespass increased. Its darkness, its grip, its captivity on all people was shown, displayed. Its vileness was exposed and yet people could do nothing to free themselves for they were under the tyrannical reign of sin. We've noted this before, but we need to see and recognise it as a reality for **our own lives**. We all are sharing the guilt of Adam's original sin and infected by it and we also have sinful hearts and desires which are all under the reign of sin. Martin Luther wrote a book called *“The Bondage of the Will”* and he showed from the Bible that our bodies, hearts, minds, emotions and desires are all under the reign and dominion of sin.

Paul here seems to personify sin and portrays it as some cruel dominating dictator and tyrant. That is a good picture of what sin is. We are not *“sinners”* because we occasionally do something wrong and really are ok and are fine most of the time. All people are under sin's reign, dominion and power, whether we realise it or not; we are

slaves to it, but willing slaves! We are not free to do as we please. In us all there is an unseen, but powerful force that influences us to sin and its ways. When Adam fell, we lost that freedom of choice and we are all born under sin's dominion and we have a magnetic, gravitational pull towards it and it highly influences the course of our lives.

People do not like this teaching at all. Back at the end of the 1800s and into the 1900s, the ideas, the philosophies said something like *“Give people better homes, pay, health care, better conditions of work and there will be a social revolution, with no need for prisons, police or courts and mankind will live in a paradise on earth!”* Thankfully and rightly there have been vast improvements in social conditions mentioned, but the crimes, the violence, the way people behave has not changed. What has gone wrong? Those ones assumed mankind was essentially good at best, as amoral at worst and improving their surroundings and conditions would result in them living better lives. The Bible clearly says that this is not the case, because we are all under the reign of sin and sin will lead to chaos, disharmony; self-centredness, wars, hurting, greed, murder etc. Those ideas quickly evaporated with the arrival of WWI, the Bolshevik revolution and many other things that happened early on in the 20th-century. Sin will always come out. Yes, there are those who have true concerns for their fellow human beings, who seek to do good, but so many safeguards then need to be built in to make sure the good does occur. Sadly, we know people will cheat and rob charities of their money, that humanitarian aid is often siphoned off to line people's pockets even within the countries of those who need the humanitarian aid the most.

Mankind is not free and certainly not neutral. The devil, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air reigns in people's lives - for he has blinded people's hearts and minds to God and the things of God. People live lightly, carelessly, indifferently to God and are more concerned for anything other than God and eternity. When the

good news of the gospel is told, they ignore it, reject or may become antagonistic to it and even deny or attack it.

Sin reigns, but its reign is maintained by a cruel system - “*sin reigned in death*” - sin reigned in, or in union with death. Many commentators point out that the use of the word “*death*” here is not to be restricted to physical death, but includes all the evil consequences of sin - physical death, human suffering, as well as spiritual and eternal death. Physical death occurs because of sin, but we are all dead spiritually to God (Ephesians 2:1) and have no spiritual life at all towards God and we are kept captive there by the devil.

What a cruel tyrant and ruler sin is, as it keeps us under its control, tries to prevent any hope of release reaching us and then sends us blinded, deluded into physical death and so to eternal death. That is the natural state and condition of all mankind - sin reigns to death over all, whether people recognise it or not. That is terrifying, but let’s move on to something amazing:

2. The Incredible Grace.

We have learned that sin was made to increase by the Law; its darkness, offensiveness, its guilt, condemnation - all are made clear and magnified by the Law. Its tyrannical dark reign is exposed. Mankind is gripped, dominated by sin and sadly no way of escape can be made or found by people. World religions came and went; World powers came and went - emperors and empires came and were swept away in death. All seemed to be vanity and hopelessness. Great philosophers came, they thought their thoughts and taught them, yet many took their own lives as they found no real answers.

Paul had seemed to reach a dismal position in the first sentence of v20 “...*that the trespass might increase*” (NIV). Thankfully, he doesn’t stop there. He moves on to a glorious message of hope, of joy, of comfort, of assurance “*But where sin increased, **grace***

increased all the more” Paul now contrasts dark hopelessness with glorious hope as he says that where sin increased, abounded (AV), grace increased all the more, did much more abound (AV). Paul uses 2 different words here in v20, but in English, in NIV, both words are translated as “increased” and so we may miss out on what Paul is saying. The first 2 words translated as “increased” in v20 are the same (πλεοναζω) and mean super increased, super abounded. We are used to supermarkets, but places went bigger and were hypermarkets. The last use of the word “increased” is a word totally different from the previous 2 and it has a ‘hyper’ at the start of a word that means “abound, exceed, increase, overflow, excel” (υπερπερισσευω). Paul says that where sin super abounded, super increased, grace hyper-abounded, hyper-increased, hyper-excelled and hyper-exceeded! The Amplified Bible translates this verse as “*But then Law came in, <only> to expand and increase the trespass <making it more apparent and exciting opposition>. But where sin increased and abounded, grace (God’s unmerited favour) has surpassed it and increased the more and super-abounded,*”

We are not to limit God’s work of grace in our salvation as something that just merely cancels out the reign and effects of sin. Here Paul is not comparing, but contrasting sin and grace. He wants us to realise there is no comparison between them, for it would be like trying to compare a ripple on shallow puddle on the road to a huge tsunami, tidal wave which can destroy cities and areas of countries. Here we are dealing with 2 different incomparable subjects - sin and grace. God’s grace cannot be compared to sin, as thankfully the grace of God has hyper-excelled sin’s tyranny and dark reign, in fact it has swept it away like a matchstick before a tidal wave.

Grace is **Gods Riches At Christ’s Expense**; it is the freeness and fullness of God’s love; it is God’s love in action. We cannot fully explain or understand grace, for it is getting that which we do not

deserve or merit, it is His unmerited favour, but it is richly and freely lavished on us by God.

It is of love and grace that God ever chose to rescue a people to Himself from the stinking mass of humanity. Mankind would turn from God, would take God's good gifts and blessings and pervert them; using them in self-centred, self-gratifying ways; would use their talents, minds, bodies, voices to sin with, to wallow in sin and to be the servants, slaves to sin. Yet God in His grace made the **only way** to bring people to be right with Him, to be at peace with Him and to free us from sin's authoritarian and tyrannical dark reign. God did this, not in a way that matched sin's increase, but He hyper-increased grace and gave so much more than we lost and forfeited in Adam's fall.

We need to more than just note this truth, but absorb it, let it become part of our life, our points of reference and way of living. We are now, as believers, under the reign of hyper-abounding grace, which doesn't just deal with our sin, guilt and condemnation, but does so much more. Paul in this passage v12-21 writes of "*how much more...*" many times. That is the realm in which we are to consciously and thankfully live our lives in - the how-much-more of hyper-abounding grace.

Grace is behind the gospel and the gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation*" - it is not something little, small or insignificant. If we are a Christian this day, it is not because we've done our best or reached the standard; or done enough to earn or merit such. We are Christians only because grace has been effectively applied to our lives by the God of grace.

What a work God does in our lives through His grace. It causes us to be aware that there is no reason or deserving in anyone of us for any kindness, love or grace from God, but it moves us and causes us cry out in expectation to God for grace and mercy; grace grants us faith

to believe; it makes us who are enemies of God become sons and daughters of God; it makes us who are guilty, vile and condemned rebels to be justified, ok in our standing with God and in His sight. It makes us children and heirs, join heirs with the Lord Jesus. God by His grace gives us new life - life that will never-end and we have the hope of heaven and all its wonders; grace writes our name in the Lamb's book of life; it grants us the presence, person, power and help of the Holy Spirit.

Every blessing, every encouragement, every answer to prayer are all of God's grace. Nothing is earned or deserved by us, it is unmerited favour from God. Perhaps we can say "*That's great*", but then go away and feel we need to do this or that to earn blessings, to earn or maintain our salvation, to earn prayer being answered or keep protection for us or our loved ones. We may even think we need to feel saved for assurance.

What nincompoops we are if we think such things! We forget that God's grace triumphantly hyper-abounds over our failures, thinking and feelings. God's grace stands secure even when we feel or are weak, sad, pathetic failures. Even when we feel like giving up, God's grace is still hyper-abounding to us! Do not get me wrong, I am not saying that we do not try our best to live out the life Christ has given us and wants us to live, but at times we can be so short-sighted and feel our successes or failures, our feelings, our experiences are the measures of God's grace to us and we fail to enjoy the hyper-abounding grace of God to us in our salvation, in our life with Him and we do not rejoice in our salvation or rejoice in the Lord always. We do not thrill at the thought of all He is to us and all we are in Him. We do not triumph in our Christian lives, but limp along like Mr Ready-to-Halt in Pilgrim's Progress. I'm not advocating glib triumphalism, but we, I need to have a right biblical view of all the amazing things our Saviour Jesus has done, is doing for us and all these things are through the incredible, amazing grace of God.

John Bunyan wrote his testimony and called it “*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*”. Charles Wesley wrote that “*Plenteous grace with Thee is found*”. John Newton wrote of “*Amazing Grace*”. Doddridge wrote “*Grace ‘tis a charming sound*”, Kent wrote of “*Sovereign grace o’er sin abounding*”; E T Sibomana wrote “*O how the grace of God amazes me!*”. The apostle Paul wrote of the “*exceeding, incomparable riches of His grace*” (Ephesians 2:7)

All those wrote with a sense of wonder, amazement and were thrilled by God’s grace. Does God’s grace thrill you and me? As we see or have seen our sin, its darkness, the tyrannical reign it has or had over us and see the condemnation we deserved, we can marvel for the first time or afresh at how much more we have in Christ and the hyper-abundance of God’s grace. If we do, then it should cause us to praise and adore our God and Saviour

Perhaps we are still under sin’s reign, rule, command and authority. The good news I am able to tell you is that there is a way of release and freedom and you can be saved by the God of all grace - as is found in the gospel of the Lord Jesus, which is a gospel of hope for all, for whosoever will believe - for it is the gospel of hyper-abounding grace. I urge you to believe, to call on God’s saving grace to be given to you so that you are able to rejoice in so great a salvation and know the glorious reign of amazing grace in your life.

We will move on to see **3. The Glorious Reality** – the reign of grace, but that is for next week...! May God’s grace be experienced in a remarkable way in our lives throughout this week and may our lives and hearts delight in Him and praise Him.