

By the will of God, the first Adam was brought into the world. God created him out of the dust of the ground and breathed life into his lungs. He put Adam in the perfect Garden to live, gave him the perfect woman as his companion, and made them stewards of all creation.

He also gave Adam His Word. He told the man everything to do in order to keep things perfect: namely, “Eat from every tree except that one.” That was all Adam needed to hear. That was the entire catechism in the Garden of Eden. The rest came naturally. There was no sin. It was a perfect world; holiness was the status quo. Adam and Eve were righteous. They had wills free of sin; and free of sin, they just naturally did holy things.

But, it didn’t last. Adam and Eve listened to the serpent; and rather than be content to know only good, they disobeyed God to know—and be—evil. The consequences were devastating. “To dust you shall return,” said the Lord, and our epistle fleshes out the words. Adam and Eve, created for eternal life in body and soul, would now die in body and soul. Where they’d been holy, they were now unholy; and where they’d just naturally done the righteous thing without a second thought, they would now do the unrighteous thing before they knew what they were doing. No more free will: they were enslaved to sin. Where they’d been created under God’s blessing, they were now under His judgment: because of their sin, they could no longer be in His presence.

The curse was not just upon them, but upon their children. By nature, their descendants would not want to be in the presence of God. Left to their own minds, they’d bow down to golden calves and stone gods, greed, and every kind of philosophy; but they would not bow down to the one true, living God. Rather than run to His throne for mercy, they’d prefer Babel and Gomorrah to justify their sin. Rather than cherish holiness, they would pursue sin and death. And that could’ve been it. That could’ve been the end. You messed up, this is the consequence, you get what you deserve. When you’re dead, you’re done.

But that wasn’t it. That wasn’t the end. God did not abandon those who betrayed Him. Even before He declared the consequences of sin, He spoke the promise: He said that the Seed would be born of the woman, that He would crush the devil’s head. The promise was made. The Second Adam would come.

By the will of God, the second Adam came into the world: not formed from dust, but conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Begotten of the Father from eternity, He was born into a world messed up beyond comprehension. Why did He come? To shut it all down? No. He came to keep the promise.

The almighty Son of God became human, just like you. He became human to stand with you—to stand for you, really. You heard Him at work in the Gospel lesson today, tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He was not there to set the example, to show you what you should be doing. You already have the Law. You already know what you should be doing—the problem is that you don’t do it as you ought. No, Jesus was in the wilderness to do what Adam failed to do.

When the devil spoke in Eden, Adam failed to speak God's Word in return. In the wilderness, Jesus didn't fail: He spoke His Word to block Satan. Tempted by the serpent, Adam sinned; so Jesus went into the wilderness and resisted all temptation.

Throughout His life, Jesus lived without sin. The Second Adam did what the first Adam failed to do. He was holy—yet He was the Friend of sinners. He was their Savior, and He lived His life for them. He also died His death for them. His crucifixion was not just the hateful act of sinners against the Son of God. Behind the curtain of man's cruelty, God was at work to save. At the cross, Jesus suffered God's judgment for the sin of the world. He died in the place of sinners. And He rose again three days later to reverse the curse.

This is the joy that St. Paul spells out in Romans 5: Adam sinned, so Jesus came specifically not to sin. Adam broke the Law, so Jesus fulfilled it. Adam trespassed, so Jesus stayed in bounds. Adam disobeyed, so Jesus obeyed perfectly. Adam brought death, so Jesus conquered death and restored life. Adam racked up the debt of sin; Jesus paid the debt so that He might offer grace freely. Adam did the crime, bringing judgment on humanity; Jesus took the sentence, producing a verdict of "Not Guilty." Do you see the importance of this one man, the "second Adam," Jesus, the promised Savior and serpent crusher? It is his singular, unique, one-of-a-kind life that makes all the difference.

Because Jesus did what he did, you can have what he has, and there's only one way to get it. Every last thing that Jesus the Second Adam achieved can be yours, completely credited to your account, if you will receive them as gifts. Let me tell you what the Second Adam-centered life is not. It is not a matter of: I've got to try to be like Jesus in order to be saved. It is precisely the opposite. The verdict has come down already. You are 'Not Guilty.' Christ-centered living begins with accepting this declaration. It is not, I've got to be like Jesus in order to be saved. Here's what it is. I'm saved, so I'm free to be more like Jesus.

The one man did it. "It is finished." So much of what we call a 'spiritual life' is a matter of learning to rest in that settled fact. It is certain that death ruled because of one person's failure. It's even more certain that those who receive God's overflowing kindness and the gift of his approval will rule in life because of one person. Jesus Christ.