

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.^[a] ¹³In fact, sin was in the world before the law, but sin is not charged to a person's account when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a type of the Coming One.

¹⁵But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like the one man's sin, because from one sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification.^[b] ¹⁷Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. ¹⁹For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more ²¹so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Cat's Out

The English language has left us with a never ending supply of idioms. One of the more interesting phrases involves a cat and a bag. But that leaves me with many questions, "How did it get there? Who put it there? Why did they put a cat in the bag? How did it get out? Why can't you put it back?" If you can answer any of these questions please see me after church but in my research the answers seem to have been lost to history, and yet the phrase lives on. We all understand this phrase to refer to a secret getting out and it can't be undone, like stuffing a cat back in a bag.

Our lesson doesn't have much to do with cats or bags but damage done that can't so easily be undone. Adam didn't literally let a cat out of the bag but he did something far worse when he rebelled against God and plunged our world into ruin and death.

But that doesn't sound fair. Adam messed up and we're all held accountable? Those who didn't sin suddenly find themselves under the same curse, condemned to the same consequences as those who broke that single law. Paul argues that we receive what we deserve not only because we sin but because of our original sin. Paul then uses the universality of the results of Adam's sin to point out the universality of another and what he accomplished not by putting the cat back but by taking Jesus out of the grave. He opened another bag and brought about what we don't deserve.

But first Adam and Eve had it all, a perfect world, a creation made for them, a garden to take care of, a place described as very good. There wasn't a single thing that they were lacking. If anything the Genesis story pictures a benevolent God giving creation everything and only asking one thing. Don't eat of this tree. (*that's not that big of a deal. That's like taking your child to the library and telling them they can read any one except the unabridged dictionary*). But society wants to be seen as more gracious than God so they ask, "Why put the tree there in the first place? It's his fault." God put the tree there so his creation could respond to all God had done for them. But instead of graciously giving thanks to God, Adam and Eve thought he was withholding something good from them. They took and ate. They tried to blame one another and even God. They let the cat out of the bag. It could not be undone. There was no stopping it.

Sin brought death and Adam and Eve would die and so also those after them. But why? In Romans 4:15 Paul writes, "*Where there is no law there is no transgression.*" In other word where there is no speed limit you don't have to worry about speeding. Nobody is out on the salt flats with a radar gun waiting to pull you over because there is no law concerning speed there. So why did anyone after Adam die? The only law given at that time was a single command, "*Don't eat from the tree in the center of the Garden.*" But from Adam to Moses – death reigned. Why? Paul points primarily to original sin. It wasn't just that they actively sinned – sin had so corrupted their nature that it was passed on to them. They sinned because they were sinners. Not the other way around. We confess that we are by nature sinners. That means we sin because we are sinners and not that we are sinners because we sin. The cat was out, the nature was corrupt and there was no changing what we had become.

"Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned." All sinned. Paul moves from the 3rd person plural "we" to a more inclusive term "All." There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile all are sinners and death reigns over all. When Adam had a child he had a child in his own image. Death reigned. One man, Adam, led to the death and rebellion of many more. There wasn't any stopping it but there is a positive light at the end of the paragraph. *The Coming one*, not of Adam, without the help of humanity would open another bag.

But it wasn't my fault I didn't put the cat in the bag – nor did I let it out. At least that's the way I rationalize things in my head. And yet Paul says we are born in sin. In many ways it's true. Children are like little terrorists to cats and sometimes they put cats in bags. We have to teach them to be civilized little monsters. Domestication comes later. I've never had to teach my children to disobey, act out, hit, bite, or scream. It's as if it comes naturally to them.

That cat is out. And it's not just our sinful nature that connects us to Adam it's also that we actively sin. How many times have we fallen into temptation? And now we imagine that we can stand before God on the basis of our behavior. We're suddenly going to become spiritual warriors conquering our every temptation. Do we now imagine that it is through our obedience we will gain heaven? We've failed repeatedly. It's too late for that. And as a result of our actions we will die. But

we're not helpless victims. Nor is it good to imagine we are. The bible relates our human history not as innocent victim but as a perpetrator. We dare never underestimate our sinful nature and the evil that lurks within. People are capable of horrific acts of violence. Moreover - Blaming others prevents you from improving yourself or your situation.

But death can hardly be improved by those who are dead. You're not a victim, you and I are active participants and it's our fault. Even if we diminish our sin and our responsibility by claiming it's just a small thing.

Is death small a cute cuddly cat? Is it not something that is feral? Try catching a feral cat especially after it's been in a bag. Death is a major issue. Death reigned, that is, until "*the one who was to come, came*" Paul writes Romans 5:15 "*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ overflowed to the many.*" Paul is speaking in terms of abundance. Having clearly established the universality of the fall he moves to the greater: God's blessing is poured over all. While Adam's deed brings judgment, condemnation, and death to all people, Jesus death brings grace, justification, and life to all people. The gift is not like the trespass. It's better.

Jesus didn't put the cat back in the bag. He let out another cat. But this cat was more like a Lion from the tribe of Judah. Jesus overcame the devil using the same tools by which the world was overcome: through food, the Word, and a tree. Adam and Eve believed the Word of the devil as he lied to them. They took the food from the tree God had forbidden them to eat from. Jesus on the other hand countered the devil's word with the Word of God. He did not fall into temptation believing God wouldn't provide for him. He countered the devil with the Word of God. And then on the cross another tree he brought out another gift: his life for ours.

It would have been fair if he took us back to a blank slate and said, "Be perfect." But God's grace abounds and he places us up on a level where we have eternal life even though we cannot keep God's commands perfectly. That's why Paul says Christ gives us more than we lost because of Adam. He did the impossible in that he did away with death. He suffered what we deserved. He died the death we deserve. He was tempted in every way we are and yet he was without sin. Paul repeats this point three times because it is so important and the scope is universal.

Death reigns and it still serves as a constant reminder of sin. God's Word serves as a constant reminder that you are forgiven not because you are obedient, not because of your work, but all because of one person, Jesus. Paul uses "many," not to say that God only died for "some" people on earth, this would leave us holding on to a rope of doubt. God died for all. Adam's sin had universal and far reaching effects, so also did the death of one man bring life to all people. Gift of righteousness was just as universal as the condemnation of death on earth. That gift extends to us. He brings us life. We are forgiven for our failures, our rebellion, and our description of sin as something trivial. He restores to us a new life.

He did the impossible. You could say he stuffed the cat, our sin, back in the bag and buried it at the bottom of the sea. (Where it would never see the light of day again.) He restores us by pointing to the very things by which we were overcome. He gives us food, real food in his body and blood for us to eat and drink to be reminded that we are forgiven. He gives us his Word here he motivates us to live a new and holy life as we struggle against our nature and now live for Christ.

So our evangelism strategy doesn't involve running around asking, "Are you saved?" We tell people that, "God says... you're forgiven whether you believe it or not." If you don't believe you're calling God a liar and trying to stand on your own before God cannot save. We can approach anyone with confidence announcing the good news of what God has done. It doesn't matter who you are, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, healthy or sick because this Word is meant for you. Your sins are forgiven. You have peace with God and life eternal.

The cat's out, the secret has been revealed even if we don't know the origin of this idiom. Some say it refers to a bait and switch at the butchers. Instead of a pig you might get a cat. Check the bag. Another supposed origin was that the cat o nine tails was kept in a bag, but then why would it be difficult to put back in? I don't know the origin but I do know that we are saved because Jesus came and assures me of that in his Word. Amen.