

## Sermon Manuscript: "Translating the Gospel - Part 2: Sin in a World that Believes it's Good"

Text: Genesis 3; James 1 Series: "Reaching the Heart of Our City" Pastor Dave Sattler October 2, 2011

Sources: NIV Life Application Bible, Commentaries: Bock, Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis, Biblical Theology of Sin by Keith Fraser Whitaker

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### Review & Introduction < Series Slide > :

- I'm Dave Sattler ... one of the pastors here continuing our series, "Reaching the Heart of Our City."
- Luke 19:10 gives us the mission of Jesus, "The Son of Man came to seek & to save what was lost."
- In John 20:21, Jesus said to His disciples, "(Just) as the Father sent me, (now) I am sending you..."
- ILL - Some days for me life & mission with God feels particularly fruitless.
  - Many people whom I love and have invested in just haven't turned their lives over to Jesus or seen spiritual breakthroughs like I've hoped for ... and it can become disheartening.
  - There are days I wish I were the Holy Spirit and could make people choose Jesus!
  - Recently, God used a couple of meetings with "formerly lost people" to encourage me.
    - ☒ 2 people (Montana / Cam) I have spent much time with over the years, said:
      - "I am not that person anymore. God is making me someone new!"
- That God has used me in some small way to point my friends to their Redeemer is such a joy.
- I don't know that I have experienced everything there is on this earth, but here's what I know: when God uses us to bring others closer to Him, this is the most satisfying of all human endeavours.
- When we step out in mission, the Lord infuses life and meaning into our church attendance, Sunday School classes, offerings, worship, our Bible reading, our prayer life ...
- Today is the 2nd of 3 messages meant to help us translate the Gospel.
- ILL - In the early 90's I preached a few sermons on a Mission Trip in Mexico through a translator.
  - It was quite an experience ... especially when we got a rhythm going.
  - My interpreter was so passionate and the people so responsive I wasn't sure he was properly translating what I was saying!
- < Slide > Here in 2011 on the west coast of Canada, we need to see ourselves as "translators."
- A cool thing about the Christian Story is that it's completely transportable: century to century, culture to culture, person to person...
- Like missionaries in a foreign land, we must figure out how to dialogue about the Christian Story using the language and culture of our day.
- Last week, we covered Creation & Restoration - how God created us all for relationship with Him and how God is restoring us back to Him, the only place we find meaning, intimacy, & destiny - primarily Good News - great Hope - what all humans crave.
- < Slide > Today we zero in on the Fall ... "Sin in a World that Believes it's Good."
- Sin is central to the Christian Story, but how do we talk about it when our world doesn't believe in it?
- It appears that human accomplishment in the past 100 years has given humanity a heightened sense of its own goodness.
- Post-world-wars, families expanded, technology boomed, the economy grew.
- The power of humanity is still on the rise; we are continually able to create more, make ourselves better, faster, more efficient.
- The thinking is: if life is what you can make of it and I've made it - the "good life" is mine and I'm living it - then I too must be good.
- Couple this with the church's declining influence in society: when the high profile yet character-void evangelists of the 1980's were exposed by the media, the church's reputation took a huge hit.
- Consequently, many of our teachings have been tossed by the wayside.
- I've seen in the last decade that the concept of sin has largely slipped off the radar.
- Those who do give lip-service to it seem to have a "what-happens-in-Vegas-stays-in-Vegas" kind of attitude toward sin. We pretend it doesn't exist; or worse, we act like sin doesn't matter.
- < Read Genesis 3:1-13; 17-19 > pg.5-6 in blue Bibles. < Prayer >: "Lord, move me out of the way.

### Narrative Outline:

- Interestingly, Genesis 3 uses none of the Bible's more than 20 words for sin.
- This is the most important sin passage in all of Scripture and sin is never mentioned.

- Instead, we get a deeply human story - not a sermon or theological discourse, but a story.
- As readers, we're challenged with an intuitive exercise: Can we identify with the shenanigans going on beneath the surface of this story? I believe all of us can ...

### 1. < Slide > Seed of Doubt (G3:1-5)

- "Did God really say (that)?" the crafty serpent asked, planting a seed of doubt in the woman's heart.
- Reality is all of us love to question truth and challenge authority.
- ILL - This has been my experience from the earliest of childhood recollections.
  - My parents certainly did not approve of some choice words the older kids on my street used.
  - However, I soon realized those forbidden words actually tasted pretty good ... they packed some punch ... when I tried them on the neighbour lady, she reacted dramatically.
  - This was fun to watch; my street-mates seemed to love it too. And they loved me: I was in!
  - My plan crashed & burned shortly though when I had my mouth washed out with soap.
- A seed of doubt questioning the oppressive authority of those above us often becomes a window of opportunity to exercise our independence.
- "(If you do this), you will be like God," the serpent said.
- We love this kind of elevation, the ability to control our own destiny - to be our own boss.
- However, shameless self-promotion always leads to pain and mess.
- Something I see in North Shore culture is this concept of "waiting around for a better offer".
- I see it in my own life: I am reluctant to settle on anything because I, with my great expertise might come up with something better; or a better offer might simply come my way.
- I believe this attitude results in a deep unsettledness in our hearts.
- It holds us back from making commitments to appointments, causes, and people.
- Let's put ourselves in God's shoes for a moment.
- None of us enjoy rejection - like when we invite a loved one over for dinner and we go to great lengths to prepare - and they bail on us last minute with no valid excuse.
- Truth is that's what we've all done to God.
- Sin is circumvention - doing an "end-run" around God's plan.
- To be human is to circumvent - to go our own way. We are all born with this desire; we love it, but that doesn't make it right. In fact, it's incredibly destructive to us and those all around us.

### 2. < Slide > Shame & Hiding (G3:6-8)

- Here we see the unravelling mess of sin.
- In the aftermath of their fall, Adam and Eve felt shame and "they hid from the Lord God ..." (G3:8b)
- Shame is one of the darkest human conditions.
- It hinders us from living the adventure for which we were created
- Shame = paralyzing; it makes us avoid authentic relationships with the Lord and others.

### 3. < Slide > God Still Present (G3:8-11)

- Even after their outright rejection of His leadership, God was still around.
- In fact, we see one of the most present, dialed-in pictures of the Lord here in all of Scripture.
- (The Lord God) was heard "walking in the garden in the cool of the day ..." (G3:8)
- Cf. Romans 5:8: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- This is the glorious hope of the Christian Story - God doesn't abandon us in our sin.
- Perhaps this morning you find yourself in church and this has been your story.
- Maybe you've done something to someone or messed up big-time and today you're living with major feelings of fear, guilt, & shame. Though few can tell, you are living in hiding ...
- Perhaps you've entertained the thought that God must surely have abandoned you.
- We want you to know the Lord is not like this.
- While He does not turn a blind eye to sin, God does always offer His presence - relationship - and a way out no matter what you've done.
- He's always pursuing: "Where are you?" God says. "I am for you. I am with you. Turn to me."

### 4. < Slide > Blame (G3:12-13)

- To God, Adam said, "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit, and I ate it."

- Under tremendous pressure, Adam executed a beautiful double blame-shift ... high degree of difficulty! He blamed the woman and then blamed God for making the woman.
- Lest we're quick to pin the "buck-passing blame-shifter" title on Adam, let's be honest: aren't we all living in that dream world?!
- ILL - In his classic Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis argues this is wired into the human race:
  - Even if we don't believe in moral absolutes, we are all quick to judge others who don't measure up to our standards; often the things we love to point out in others is what we most struggle with ourselves.
  - < Quote > Lewis calls this pride and says: "Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind." - Mere Christianity, p.122.
- Self-sufficiency is the great sin of our day.
- Admitting we're wrong is counterintuitive to western thinking.
- We master our own destiny; and if we're brutally honest, we even think we're doing a good job of it.
- And, most of us can self-medicate with activities and stuff that help us forget or side-track us from the reality that we are all so broken and needy.
- Our "success" had made us proud.
- Our pride has tricked us into thinking we can live independent from God; it plants us out on an island - alone where we think we love to be, but actually loathe more than anything; though we love to flirt with the concept, none of us were made to be islands and we can't survive like that.

## 5. < Slide > Curse & Death (G3:17-19)

- Finally in story, we see sin's far-reaching consequences.
- "Cursed is the ground because of you." (G3:17)
- We are left to pick up the broken pieces of our wrong decisions.
- Though we like to think we can go it alone, there is no life for us apart from our Creator.
- This all leads to death - "to dust you will return." (G3:19)
- Rejection of God's leadership results in relational separation from Him and eventually death.
- Romans 6:23 reminds us "the wages of sin is death."

## Application:

- Thankfully, the story doesn't end there ...
- But, without the "bad news" (sin), there is no need for God's rescuing, no use for salvation.
- To conclude, I have a few points for us to mull over as we come to grips with the bad news of the Christian Story - for ourselves and for the people in our lives whom God has in mind for us to reach.

## 1. < Slide > One of the problems with sin is we love it.

- As with Adam & Eve in Genesis 3, sin slips in the back-door and takes over our hearts often under the guise of us "just being human."
- Cf. James 1:13-15: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."
- One of the problems with sin is we can actually become quite fond of it.
- Our desires consume us: pride makes me feel top of the heap; lust soothes my need to get what I want; power enables me to call my own shots and answer to no one.
- Even beautiful things God created like food, drink, sports, sex, and relationships get marred.
- Problem is these tend to become idols (driving forces for our existence) & God's given the back seat.
- And we justify, thinking, how can something that feels so good really be all that bad for us?
- Over the years, the Lord has been poking at idols in my life - good things - things I love, but have subtly placed in importance over Him.
- Perhaps some of your idols too have toppled recently:
  - Maybe your career has seen some setbacks, your body isn't what it used to be, your bank account isn't what you'd hoped for, you have some broken relationships ...
- Truth is God alone can satisfy; He alone meets the desires of a human heart.

## 2. < Slide > Most people don't believe they're sinful, but they know they're broken.

- I think the Black-eyed Peas were onto something with their song, Where is the Love? that begins with the now-famous line, "What's wrong with the world mama?"
- The night of June 15th, 2011, we all saw glimpses of how things aren't as they should be in our city.
  - Nathan Kotylak, promising young Canadian National water polo player crashed big time that night and his story was again in the news this week. I believe his story = our story too.
- Even if people refuse to admit their own brokenness, most acknowledge it in the around them.
- Unexplainable human tragedy happens all the time; natural disasters often strike the earth.
- We hurt each other regularly without even trying.
- So many times I have unintentionally really hurt people - even loved ones - and I have thought or said: "I didn't mean it that way." That always goes over well with my wife and kids.
- That's how deep sin goes: all of us hurt other people without even meaning to.
- As much as I hate to admit, I am still responsible for that too!
- Perhaps the biggest proof we are all broken is that humans can't conquer death; we can sometimes postpone it, but we can't stop it; death is inevitable for us all.
- Yet in our culture, we insulate ourselves from it.
- Most even try to avoid the topic all together (Q: "Death is not in my vocabulary.")
- Perhaps people do this as an attempt to not think about their brokenness ...
- We mustn't simply wander around our city announcing sin, but we must intentionally dialogue with people about brokenness - their own and the stuff going on all around them, even when few seem open to broach the subject they so desperately need to consider.
- This is how we translate the Christian Story.

## 3. < Slide > We get to walk with people in their brokenness.

- Like the Lord God pursuing Adam & Eve in the garden after the mess they'd created for themselves, I believe God is calling us to walk with people amidst their brokenness.
- This takes time, sacrifice, serious investment, authenticity to not bait & switch (befriend people as our "evangelism projects"), but really enter into a journey with people.
- This will require a new trust in the Holy Spirit to give us words & senses of intuition and relying on His work of convicting others with respect to sin.
- What keeps us from walking with people like this? Perhaps it's a misunderstanding of the Church and its mission; the Church is not a religious institution and we are not activists (for years, Christians have been known more for what we stand against rather than for who we stand with).
- Is it a fear of succumbing to sin? Well, Jesus the One we follow, hung with 'sinners.'
- Is it our subtle feelings of superiority - that we are somehow better than lost people?
- Ability to walk with people begins with a fresh sense of our own brokenness - being frank and needy about our own sin. Christians have a hard time with this.
- Somewhere along the way it seems we were taught to put up a good "together-looking" front.
- That is why I believe revival has been so difficult for the Western Church because revival begins with brokenness before God and others.
- Remember we are primarily "pilgrim-journeymen" with real broken people.
- ILL - This vision was the ethos of the original C & MA movement: Healing Homes.
  - Early Alliance leaders saw Christianity as the ultimate recovery movement and Christ as the only worthy "Higher Power" able to transform brokenness. So, they walked with broken people, believing this truth: "Christ in us, the hope of glory." (Col.1:27)
- The great irony of the Christian Story is that God takes human sin and actually uses it to display His transforming power by His divine ability to make all things new!
- And God's one plan is to bring people back to Himself through us!
- Let's be willing to "lay down our lives" for lost sheep.
- ILL - Our Prayer: "Lord, do whatever it takes to build bridges with our neighbours."
  - It's often our own difficult circumstances or weaknesses that open the door ... yet again confirming our need to be in touch with the depth of our own sin and need for a Saviour.