

Let's go, Romans 5. We have tons to do. In the book of 1 Peter, Peter basically writes, "Hey, I've heard you've been trying to read the writings of Paul. Good luck with that." We're going to see some of that today for sure. This is a very complex text. There are markers in all of our lives. I think the markers are usually similar although we're at different places in life. And what I mean by markers is we kind of graduate from high school and we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And then we get into college and we graduate from college and we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And then we fall in love and we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And then we get married and we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And then we break into our field and we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And then we get married and we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And then we have babies and there's this anticipation and once again we feel like we're on the cusp of something. And on and on I could go here. It kind of plays out. We're all over the place on that journey. Not all of us are all of those things.

Some of us didn't go to college. Single people tend to panic. It's okay if you're not in love right now. Everybody just breathe. It's probably part of the reason you're single. We've got these markers, and with each one of these markers there really is a feeling of anticipation, there really is. I mean, you graduate from high school and you move away from home, you head off to college, there's anticipation there that something is about to happen. And regardless of how good of a time or how bad of a time you had in college, eventually you're ready to move on. And you're ready to move on because it's just unfulfilling. Maybe it's just me and I spent seven years in my undergrad but I was ready to go. I was like, "What do you have to do to get out of here? Oh, pass math." And then you get out and then you break into your field, and now you're on the cusp of it again, man. There's this anticipation. "I've got all this education, I'm in this field, let's get to work." And then yeah, that something is elusive. Right as you grab it, it slips through your fingers.

So then you fall in love. God knows our society, that's the big one. You've got to meet the one, the mythical "one." And you fall in love and get married and anywhere from a week to a year, year and a half later there even begins to be some, "Seriously? This is it?" in that relationship. And I know some of you just now looked at your girl and went, "No baby, no. That is not us. That is not true," and you're a liar. And it's not bad, it's just how it is. That's why there are several Hebrew words for love and most of them don't roll around emotion but steadfastness. Real love isn't, "Ahhh." Real love is, "I'm not going anywhere." Anyway, that's another sermon. Now, you have to do something with this. Whether that's religiously or emotionally or secularly, you have to do something with the reality that we're always on the cusp with great expectation and we're always failed. The pursuit of depth and joy and meaning and fulfillment has been an exhausting one for those of us who pay attention. Because the harder we work at it and the more we pursue it, the more elusive it seems to get. And as you get older, you start realizing you're running out of time. And you don't even have to be 60, 70, 80 years old to start realizing you're running out of time. When you start hitting some of these big markers, when you graduate, you get into the workforce, you get married, you buy that house, you have that first kid, I mean, you can be like 27 and be there and already you're starting to run out of big markers, aren't you? At 27, 28, 29, you're already past some of the big markers. Now you're not booming rich, you don't have cash falling out of your pockets all the time but you've already hit most of the main markers and here we are.

So you've got to do something with this. And you can ignore it; that's actually one of the options. But you've got to do something. And here's what I've seen most of us do. The first one, by far the most popular one, is to blame someone for our lack of unfulfillment. And this is great because we live in a densely populated area, so there are plenty of people to

blame. "So I'm unhappy, I'm frustrated, I'm unfulfilled, so it's my daddy that jacked me up. If he would have just loved me, if he would have just hugged me, if he would have just told me, 'By golly son, you're the greatest,' then I would not be the wreck I am now. Or no, it was my mom. She was too controlling, she was manipulative. It's my mom's fault. If it wasn't for my mom, I wouldn't be so screwed up." And I'm not saying you don't have legitimate historical family issues. Most of us do. But I'm saying you can't blame your lack of fulfillment and joy on them. Or the real big one is to blame your spouse, because that's easy, because she's there or he's there. And so the problem with your marriage is that you guys weren't really soul mates to begin with and you have a soul mate out there, you've just got to find her or find him. By the way, you'll find them standing right next to the unicorn. So as soon as you find the unicorn, you'll find your mythical soul mate.

Unicorn...Oompa Loompa... "the one." So you can keep believing that but...more on that later. So we blame them. "If my wife would just do this...if my husband would just do this, then I would be fulfilled, then I would find fulfillment." And that's just a very popular way of handling discontentment, because there will always be people around you to blame, always. There's some definite drawbacks to that, but we'll talk more about that later on. For some people, that's now how they're wired. They don't blame everybody else. There are some people who just blame things. Like, "If we could just get to a certain level of living, then we'll be fulfilled. If we get a certain job or a certain promotion or we get a certain size house, certain kind of clothes..." It's one of those funny things. Any time you're close to an urban kind of dwelling, you've got a lot of \$30,000 millionaires. You've got pretention. You know, "We want to look a certain way. We want to play a certain way. If we could just get to that place, then we'd be there." So they blame it on things. "If I could just get to a level of having things, then I'd be good." And then some people, they're not made like that at all. They don't want to blame people and they don't want to blame things, so they blame themselves. And this is a wildly popular group and this is the function of most religious people. They blame the lack of fulfillment on themselves. Here's how it works. They go, "I've made bad choices, I've made bad decisions. If I'd just try harder, if I'd just do more, if I could just set my goals and get after it, if I could just be more disciplined, then I would be fulfilled, then I would find fulfillment. I mean, I don't even know what the best me is yet. I have a tendency to be lazy, I have a tendency to forget about this, but if I could just hone all my energy and I could just do it right and do it well and get it done consistently, then I'd find fulfillment." And the funny thing about that cycle is you do really, really well for about two days usually on average. Like your desk is just perfect for two days. You straighten everything up like twice a year, a hyper-motivated, "Yes!" and then a couple days later you're back to kind of your rhythm. And so they blame themselves. "I've got to do more, just try more. If I could just get this done, if I could just start doing this, if I could just..." And that's the other thing to do. "Okay, I'm doing something wrong, that's why I'm not fulfilled.

So if I would just do what's right, if I could just this done and this done, then I would find fulfillment." And that's a real popular one too. And then another one is there is a group of people in our society who just gave up altogether. They just gave up trying. And what ends up happening is there's some real bitterness on that end of things when you have finally just said, "Fulfillment, lasting joy, meaning..uh uh. That's an idealism that belongs to the youth, but it is in no way reality." And the stereotype would be them sitting at Starbucks reading philosophy books, sucking on an espresso, reading Immanuel Kant and the rest of the Stoics. There is that group that says they just gave up. They've just said, "You know what? This is all that there is. I'm just going to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Let's do it today." And so what I want to try to do in our really minimal time this morning is I want to try to get to the bottom of what's happening here. Because if we were honest with one another and I never pretend that that's even possible but if we could be honest, I think we would honestly be able to look at that and go, "Yeah, we're guilty of that and yeah, it's not working." And I'm not speaking to you as a pastor or religiously; I'm saying that if you are a human who thinks and your mind isn't just on cruise control then I think you can see these are ways we're trying to handle something that's gone wrong in the human spirit and we're trying to fix it by doing these things and these things are not working well for us. So I want to get to the bottom on why these things aren't working well. And to do it, I need to be in Romans 5. Now, I know some of you are going to

say, "I thought you were preaching through the book of Luke, Matt. This is why we're not getting through the book of Luke." Now, I am getting to Luke via Romans 5, and let me tell you how. In the book of Luke, Luke lists the genealogy or the lineage of Christ and Matthew does the same thing. And there are two different lists, there are two different people. There's reason for that. I'm not getting into it this morning. But the real key element here is that Matthew takes the line of Jesus back to Abraham, but Luke takes it all the way back to Adam. And so there's something about the man Adam and the man Jesus that we get to kind of put them on a board this morning and see, because they're going to be compared. And it's in that comparison that we get to the problem of this yearning in each of us that we haven't been able to find any fulfillment in and that's created at some level of frustration in us that we always feel like we're on the cusp of something but unable to actually get there, wherever "there" is.

So let's look at this. Romans 5, we'll pick it up in verse 12. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin,..." In the Christian narrative of creation, Adam and Eve are placed in the garden, God creates the world rhythmic, beautiful, everything functioning, everything being able to be enjoyed without it going to a sinful level. So, what that basically means is that wine is good wine and it doesn't turn into alcoholism ever. Food is great food and it never turns into gluttony. Adam and Eve are running completely naked through the garden never turns into lust, sinful lust. But then when sin enters into the world it fractures that rhythm. And the Scriptures just said here the objective evidence of the fracture of the soul of mankind was that death entered into the world. There was no death before the fracture occurred and that death began once sin entered into the world. It's key that we know that. I don't think this is just physical death although it is physical death. It's physical death, it's spiritual death, it's emotional death. What that means is that no longer can the human spirit get to the heights that it was created for.

So you can experience joy. I always giggle when I hear pastors talk about people who don't believe in Jesus like they're just sitting in a rocking chair sucking their thumb going, "I hate all of life." It's just completely untrue. You can not know Jesus and have good sex. You can not know Jesus and enjoy good food. You can not know Jesus and laugh a lot with your family. Those are all completely possible. What this text is saying is there's an element of death in mankind that, now outside of his Maker and a relationship with his Maker, he can no longer get to those heights of meaning and depth. And that's also in this word, "death," here. Let's keep going. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." Now what's said next brings a lot of light onto what he just said, and it's also difficult to hear, so let's look at it. "...for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses..." Now remember Moses was the one that received the law. "...even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come." Now I know I don't even need to explain that. It's just simple. Just as I read it, you were like, "Of course." Here's what just happened. It's very deep and honestly I think it tags into the problem that most Evangelicals experience. He just said in this text that in the sin and death of Adam, sin and death was introduced to all of us. Then he goes on to say, though, that sin in this context is not the outward moral acts that most of us have learned that sin is. How many of you grew up in church? No need to be ashamed if you didn't. You're probably better off than the rest of us. If you grew up in church and went to children's church, you learned God's rules and that God was somewhat frustrated and angered by the breaking of His rules. Correct? And we used to even sing songs about it, how God hate liars. And it's like, "We're singing about God hating us...this is really weird. God really hates us. Sing it again!" It's just a really strange kind of concept and idea. Now, breaking the moral law is indeed sin and does need to be repented of and laid at the feet of Christ. However, the sin in this text is not a reference to outward moral acts but rather something you're born with. He just said in this text that the sin that brings death to you and I reigned before there was the law. Which means before there was a right and wrong, before there was a "do this...don't do that," sin still reigned in mankind. According to this text, sin is not something that occurs in your life and in my life when we have the conscience to choose right vs. wrong, but sin is a broken state of the human soul that exists from the moment you breathe air. That's what he's saying. He says death reigned even in those who did not commit the type of sin that Adam committed. What's the type

of sin that Adam committed? God said don't eat the fruit of the tree. Adam went, "I'm going to eat the fruit of the tree." Just a blatant, "I'm going to do it anyway." Just a blatant, "I'm going to go against conscience. I'm going to go against God's law. I'm going to do what I want to do." But he's saying that death reigned even in those who didn't sin like that.

So that sin then is not just an outward action but a state of the human heart. And you start looking at the rest of Scripture now? This starts making sense. Like when He says, "There's a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death." Well, if when we're born, if the second we breathe air, we're intrinsically broken...David said, "Surely I was brought forth in iniquity," which means, "bent." "Surely I came out of my mom's womb bent." And I know we've joked about this about a billion times since I've been here, but yesterday morning, my daughter shoved my two-year-old son down, snatched the remote that she doesn't even know how to use out of his hands, screamed, "Mine!!!" and then turned to me and started crying. She didn't pick that up from her environment. Lauren and I don't do that. In fact, I can be just as honest as I can be before you and God. Lauren and I have never yelled at each other. That's not how we play. We ignore each other for a couple of days. That's how it plays out at my house. We don't yell or scream.

So where did my daughter get that? My boy's a biter. We're having to work on that. Where does he get that? That's not how we discipline. Where does my son get, "I'm not getting what I want, so I will use violence to get where I want"? Where did he get that? Where did he pick it up? I swear to you, he does not get that by some kind of modeling in his environment. Now, I'm not dumb. Environment can strengthen those things that are already in us. But you're not born with a clean slate and then because of your environment, become bent. You're born with iniquity, with a bent and then your environment plays on the bent and can bend it even harder. But you're born bent. Who tells children, "You're the center of the universe and everything should rotate around you"? They don't learn that from their environment. They're born saying, "I'm god! I'm god, and you're all here to serve me. And where I don't get what I want, there'll be violence.." I mean that is in their little souls. And maybe it's cute when they're one, but it grows ugly fast.

So now this is going to start giving us insight here. If this is true and you and I are born broken—it's not something that happens as the conscience develops, but we're born bent, born broken, then lay our little methodology on top of this truth. If this is true, then our methodology is completely inadequate. If I'm bent and broken and everyone else out there is bent and broken, how is anyone else who is bent and broken going to solve or fix my bent and brokenness? It ain't happening. In fact, the only thing it's going to do is reveal the bent and brokenness in both of us. I mean, nobody knows how selfish they are until they get married. No one is a single dude living in an apartment going, "I am selfish. Me, me, me, that's all my mind thinks." Within six months of being married...I'm telling you, being married rips the roof off of your soul like nothing else. Everything dark and wicked in you gets revealed as soon as you say, "I do." And you can keep trying to hide it from her or hide it from him, but it comes out, doesn't it? I know a lot of you are thinking, "This dude needs some counseling. Is his marriage alright?" My marriage is great. But it absolutely showed me how dark my heart is. It absolutely did. And I had no idea going in. I thought I was awesome. "I am a catch." If this is true, then things are never going to be able to fill that little bent, broke thing, either. If anything, they're going to confuse it, because once things get elevated to the spot that God's supposed to dwell, now all of a sudden we are defined by what we own, what we have and what we do, which is probably the heaviest weight imaginable. And then to try to shut off the need for fulfillment, meaning and joy altogether will just push you into despair.

So if we're broken from the beginning, then this methodology that we're employing to try to fix it is hopeless. But let's keep reading. But wouldn't it be great if I just stopped there? "Alright, let's pray. We're gone." Oh, I was tempted. Let's go, verse 15. Here's where we start making sense of Christianity and I want to do my best to do that for you. "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses

brought justification.” Do you see what I mean by the complexity of this text? And I can’t hit all of this, but verse 17 is where I want to go. Listen, “If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life...” Righteousness then, right standing, right behavior is not acquired by us via word or deed but rather is imparted to us as a free gift from God through Christ. Let me tell you why that’s so important. A couple of years ago, the University of Texas was playing for the national title against the University of Southern California. My father-in-law is a huge Texas fan, and I don’t think my mother-in-law would let him watch the game because he’d go with the real highs/real lows all in the same game. And so I find that much more entertaining than the game itself. And so I was like, “Come watch it at my house, man. I’d love to see that.” So he came over and sat in my chair staring at the TV and I sat on the couch just watching him, eating popcorn and we watched that game. And here’s the best part of the game. There was a play where Vince Young, who was the quarterback of Texas at that time, took the ball and he turned the corner. And there was one guy to beat, and he juiced the guy—the dude’s eye fell out. He just juiced him and he scores a touchdown. And as he scores a touchdown, the crowd goes crazy. And the USC cheerleaders were along the back side of that goal line, and one of the cheerleaders got confused in the moment because of the crowd and the hype and she jumped up in the air with her pom-poms up to celebrate the fact that her team just lost the national title game. And the great part about it was there was a guy, an AP photographer on the other end zone who shot the length of the field, very zoomed in so there was a picture with Vince Young destroying USC, scoring the touchdown that beats USC, and a USC cheerleader celebrating it and it ran. That’s a legit picture, man. Do not Google “USC cheerleader” when you get home and put that on me. The picture exists. If you hadn’t seen, too bad. Your wife will be like, “What’s this?” “Pastor Chandler said that there was a picture out there...” I did say that, but I am not telling you to find it. In the end, this poor little girl is celebrating the wrong thing. I mean, she’s just celebrating the wrong thing. And one of my problems historically with how historically Christianity has played itself out in our country is, by leaps and bounds, we’re celebrating the wrong thing.

Like take the Village. I love this place. We’re a banged up lot. And we have a lot of men and women in here who have come out of homosexual lifestyles. We’ve got tons of men and women here who have come out of drugs and alcohol. We’ve got tons of men and women here who come from very abusive, dark backgrounds. We’ve got felons here. We actually used to have felons on staff. I love that. I mean, I never left my wallet lying around, but I loved that they were there. And I enjoyed that and I don’t know that we could ever be at a place that in the end was pretty people. And pretty people’s funny because in the end I’ve found that most people are Camelot. They look really good on the outside, but on the inside there’s all sorts of betrayal, pain, death and sorrow. I love that. But here’s what you can’t get confused about. Don’t think that what we’re doing in here is celebrating the fact that we’ve figured out how to live life better. Because that’s not what we’re celebrating. I mean, we haven’t come up here and been able to go, “I’m not doing that anymore. Yay!” Some of that happens. But here’s how it happens. It doesn’t happen because we go, “Okay, Jesus loves me so I need to get better so I can walk with Him, so I can know Him.” No, that’s wrong. That’s off. In fact, that’s the same way most people are trying to battle unfulfillment, by working harder, trying more. That’s part of the problem. We’ve already laid that methodology on the truth of what’s happening in the deep parts of our heart. And trying harder, even religiously, yields very little fruit. Even if it did yield fruit, the fruit would be self-righteousness, wouldn’t it? It’s not what we’re celebrating. We’re celebrating the fact that while we were yet sinners, while we were at our worst, in the middle of our despair, through the cross of Christ, by faith that Christ absorbed the wrath of God towards those who were perishing, that when He sees us He sees righteousness, He sees Christ’s righteousness, Jesus’ good deeds, Jesus’ good thoughts, Jesus’ perfect life. And so now I’m free. Now I’m free from my shame. Listen, I know it. I know what’s back there. It’s dark and it’s foolish and it’s wicked, and I hate it. But God doesn’t see me that way so I can come cleanly to Him. I can approach the throne of grace with confidence. And now I can pursue God, not thinking that He’s out to get me or out to blow me up. I can ask the Holy Spirit to fill me, repent of my sin and chase Christ. And as I chase Christ, chains loosen. I don’t work hard to be good so that God will love me. I press into God because He does love me, which in the end loosens sin’s grip on me. Are you tracking on the difference there? Because it’s monumental.

Honestly, how weird is it culturally that we just came in here and sang for 30 minutes? Do you do that anywhere else? I mean, right before the board meeting does your boss go, "Look, before we get started, there is a great old *Led Zeppelin* song that I thought that we would sing before we went any further." Right before you wake board, do you gather everybody with you and go, "This is a song written by Jay-Z and I just think it's appropriate. Hit it." Do you do that? Is that how it plays itself out? So honestly, how weird is it that we just came in and did that? But did you hear what we were celebrating? "Lead me to the cross....Change me from the inside out." Did you hear what we were singing, what we were singing about, what we were celebrating in? There was nothing of our righteousness in there. In fact, one of the big songs we sing here consistently is, "I Boast No More." "The best obedience of my hands dares not appear before Thy throne, for grace can answer Thy demands by pleading what the Son has done. No more, my God, I boast no more." That's what we're celebrating. Okay, so there are tons of you in here who have been hanging out with us for a year, two years, three years. You don't believe what we believe yet, but you're somewhat intrigued by it. And I just want to warn you, that's how I started. I think at the level of things we're talking about here, I think you owe it to yourself to try to figure out what it is that stands in the way of you having faith in Jesus. Because can I give you what I think is a law in the universe? The opposite of love isn't hate; it's indifference. And even the fact that you're here is somewhat evidence that God has not been indifferent towards you. And so my question, specifically for those of who are continually in church and you're kind of hanging out and you're not really sure where you stand, is what is the thing that is stopping you? Is it content specific? Is it you just don't know something about sin or about the cross or about what Christians believe? Is it an intellectual issue? Is it just, "Uh, I just don't know about that" Is it an intellectual issue? Is it a cost issue? "Oh man, if I started believing that stuff, my wife would...my husband would...my kids would...my coworkers would..." Is it a cost issue? What is the issue? Because here's the thing. I think it's okay to have doubt. I mean, if Thomas can hang out with Jesus for three years, see Him in a room and go, "I don't know." If the disciples can watch Christ raise from the dead, hang out with him for forty days and watch Him ascend into heaven. If you can read in Matthew 28, it says, "And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted." Christ is ascending into heaven. He's floating up into the sky and there are people there going, "I don't know, man. I've got a cousin down in Jericho who does this. I'm not buying yet." Seriously, if doubt is okay in those instances, then I think doubt is okay. But you've got to do something with it. Why does everything get questioned but your doubt? Why not doubt your doubts? Why not work in, dissect, work towards figuring out what is blocking? Because if you can do that and then take it to your Christian friends and ask a question and go, "What is this? And how does this work? And what do you do with this?" then you can put it to rest. And you'll come to faith or you'll walk away but at least at some level you've dealt with reality at its deepest level. I mean, don't you owe that to yourself? So what is it? Is it a content issue? Is it an intellectual issue? Is it a cost issue? What is it? What is that thing that's making you either not walk seriously in your faith, not take your faith seriously. Or you don't have to do anything with it. You can keep blaming people. You live in a densely populated urban area. There will always be tons of people to blame. You can keep blaming yourself. The most miserable people I've ever met are religious people who have tried for years to stop doing something. You can give up. You can just give up seeking fulfillment, give up seeking joy, give up chasing it altogether. You can do that. That's an option. Or biblically you can confess that you're broken beyond your own ability to repair and put your faith in the cross of Christ, who became your sin so that you might become His righteousness and then from there begin to pursue God. That's that next step. That's that one that's available for you to take.

Let's pray. "Jesus, thank You for our time together this morning, which is really in the end, time to talk about You and what You do and what Your call is on our lives. I just feel weight this morning for those who believe in You in here but their whole lives are marked by perpetually trying to be better, trying to be good and they've really bought into the, "If I can just do this or just serve more..." Maybe it's legalism or maybe it's just an insane amount of religious busyness. They just feel exhausted. God, I just pray that You would enable them as You taught, to go into the ground and die so that they wouldn't have to remain alone. And then I pray for those in here who are doubters and skeptics. I thank You that You've brought them into this place, that You love them and that You're wooing them and drawing them. It was

only fifteen years ago that I sat in a seat just like this, as skeptical and as bitter and as frustrated with what I perceived to be Christianity as probably anybody else. I pray that You continue to woo them and talk to them. I pray they take this seriously this little checking out of the claims of Jesus and that they might be able to think through their intellectual issues and their content issues and their cost issues. I thank You for the cross and for grace. And I thank You that righteousness is not a behavioral pattern but a free gift. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen.

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