

How are we? Good? We'll be in Luke 18 today. I don't know if you noticed this, but for the last two weeks, I've actually been back in Luke. I think this is a bad illustration, but it's all I've got. I was born in 1974 and had missed the Star Wars wave. Apparently that movie came out, and it was the greatest thing ever invented. And everybody flocked to the theaters and saw it 20 times and got R2-D2 tattoos. It really just got out of control. And so I missed out on that. And it wasn't like now where a year after a movie comes out, you can just go to the video store and get it. That's not how the world worked back then. You had to wait 8 years until it came out on HBO, and that was pretty much your only shot at it. So I hadn't seen Star Wars yet, but my dad was really geeked out about it. So he got us up to see *The Empire Strikes Back*. And so I sat through that thing in the theater, and I came out a fan of the dark side. There were several reasons I came out that way. First of all, they were just ruthless, and then they just won everything in that movie. If you remember, Skywalker gets attacked by an ice monster and then gets shoved into the carcass of a Tauntaun. Then the Empire lands and there's this big battle, and what happens? The good guys get the trash kicked out of them. And so everyone flies out, they leave the planet of Hoth, Luke heads to visit Yoda, Han ends up at the Cloud City. So at Cloud City, you've got Han, Leia and the whole crew walking up, the doors open up and there's a banquet table with Darth Vader at its head. Han's not having it, he pulls out the blaster, Darth Vader blocks the blasts with his hand and just takes the gun away from him. And so that's when I was like, "Here we go. I like that guy." Now they're about to freeze Han in carbonite, Luke lands, he's going to save Han, but it doesn't look like he's going to make it on time. They're about to drop Han into the carbonite, and Princess Leia says, "I love you." And what's his response? "I know." Even at 8 years old, I was like, "Man, that is smooth. I wrote that down in my Transformers notebook." So they freeze him in carbonite, Luke shows up, Boba Fett gets Han and takes him to Jabba the Hut, then Luke enters the room and here you go with the big showdown. Vader and Luke get after it in just an epic battle, one that's talked about to this very day. And you know how it ends. It's mocked endlessly. Luke gets his hand cut off, and then Vader unpacks it, "I am your father." And then how does Luke respond? This is why I turned dark side. Luke just started crying, he's like, "Nooo." I remember being like, "If this is our hero, kill this fool." And what ends up happening is he doesn't want to rule the universe with his father, so he just drops down the chute and then he's just hanging onto this antenna thing at the bottom of the Cloud City. And then the Millennium Falcon picks him up, he drops into it, they fly off and then what happens next? The credits roll. Basically that movie was the good guys getting the trash kicked out of them for two hours, and then it was just over. Well this sermon is going to be a lot like that, so let's get to work.

Last week, we started this five week series about the resurrection and its implications, and then we've got to move into what's behind all of that. So we've got to do a little background. I'm well aware that some people don't believe in sin and think it's a fabrication on the part of religion in order to control. But even the most relativistic atheist would say that there's something wicked and evil when you have a scenario like what occurred two years ago where a 34 year old man kicks open an Amish elementary school and puts a bullet into the back of the head of eleven 4th graders. Even the most hardened relativistic atheist in that moment says that's wicked. Even the guy that would say there's no standard of truth, no universal rule that says what's right or wrong, looks at that scene and says, "Something has gone wrong here." The one thing that we can all agree upon, whether agnostic, atheist or religious, is that something has gone deeply wrong with humanity. The largest section of books in Barnes & Noble is self-help. So something's gone wrong, everybody knows it, everybody has got a theory on what that is. Biblically, historically and every way possible, we say that's sin. "Well, I don't know. I think religion is part of the problem." Religion in the Scriptures is a sin. Outward-in theology in the Scriptures is sinful. "Do these things to appease God" is viewed as wicked as murder in the Scriptures. Sin is the issue.

Now, I know I'm in a post-modern world, so here's how we've done it. We've talked about sin in regards to breaking the law. So what I've done in the past is go, "Let's just talk ten commandments. How many of you are liars? How many of you covet?" And I move through all of the commandments to show that all of us, every one of us, whether we were born on cocaine or whether we've never partied and our mom gave birth to us on a church pew, all of us have broken the ten commandments. No one's clean. You don't make it through any of them. All of you, myself included, are guilty of the fracturing of entry-level morality, not complex Christian ethics, just entry-level, on the wall in kindergarten morality. And so I've done that a bunch, and what's how we talk about sin, as breaking the law. But here's the problem with how the church has historically talked about sin. Sin is not just doing wrong. The book of James says this, "He who knows the good but does not do it sins." So sin is not only doing what's wrong before the Lord, but it's also not doing what you know you should be doing. And then on top of that, here's how we've talked primarily about sin here. Sin, in its essence, is taking anything other than God and making it ultimate. Sin can be the exaltation of a really good thing. Making your spouse ultimate, making your children ultimate, making the pursuit of money ultimate. If you make anything other than God ultimate, that's idolatry and it's sin, even if that thing that you've elevated is a good thing. And so that's how we've historically handled sin here.

Now I think mostly what we do when we hear that is really nothing. I think we just very tritely go, "Yeah, I've broken the laws. Yeah, I have other things ultimate..." but we never feel the weight of and most of us walk in the grief of our sin. It's just this thing. We have this knowledge that it's there, but it doesn't tend to bother us. And I think the reason that is is two fold. I think there's a misunderstanding when it comes to the idea of goodness. Despite the fact that you can't survive the ten commandments with failing and everyone knows that there are other things they pursue with greater vigor than they pursue their relationship with Christ, we just buy into intrinsic goodness. We go, "I'm a good guy. Yeah, I know I do this, but really I'm a good guy. Now Roger my neighbor? Dirt bag. But I'm a good guy." In any way, you want to compare yourself and make yourself a good guy. You see, you're taking the idea of goodness and you're defining it differently than God does. And we get questions about the exclusive claims about Christianity like, "What about good a Muslim? What about a good Hindu?" There's no such thing as a good Hindu or a good Muslim or even a good Christian, not in the way that God defines goodness.

Let me show you what I mean by this. Look in Luke 18, starting in verse 18. "And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." So Jesus says here, "Your definition of good and the Godhead's definition of good are two different definitions, and they aren't compatible." Let me try to explain it like this. My three year old boy Reid is strong. He really is. And I'm basing this on the fact that he really has destroyed everything in our house. I'm not kidding. The boy ripped off the refrigerator door. How do you do that? I can't do that. He's ripped down blinds. He just is a little force of destruction, and let me confess to you that I kind of like it. Like sometimes I'm like, "What did you do to the refrigerator door? Man, that is awesome. Give me five and get in the corner." So he's strong. His teachers tell us that he's very smart. So my boy is strong and he is smart, and if he is with his peers or in his room by himself those two things are true. But the second I walk into the room, he is no longer strong and he is no longer smart. The second I walk into the room, he is weak, he is small and he is ignorant. So while he is in the room by himself, he might be strong and he might know how the world works, but the second I walk in the room, that's no longer true. That boy, for all his effort, cannot pin me. And even when we're playing, I don't give it to him. You gotta earn that. You get your bluff in early and you just hope they don't get to be stronger than you before you kick them out of the house. So if I get pinned, I got pinned. There ain't no, "Oh, you got me, buddy." So my boy might be strong by some measure, by some standard. When a bigger, faster, stronger, smarter status comes in and the bar is raised, then his weakness, foolishness and ignorance is revealed. So my boy is only strong if I'm not in the room, and you are only good if there isn't a holy God.

If you took your life and laid it out on a piece of paper and you took the prophet Isaiah and put his life next to yours and just kind of measured morality, you're going to get smoked. It's not even going to be close. If you put them down and go, "One of these gets doom, one of these gets eternal life," it's not like the jury needs to deliberate for six hours. They just go, "Uh, Isaiah gets life, and this other guy goes." But when Isaiah, who makes you look like the sophomore B-team of morality, sees God in a vision in Isaiah 6, he falls on the ground in terror and says, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King." He's going, "How wicked, how dirty, how horrible am I?" because he saw a holy God whose transcendence and beauty was so great that Isaiah thinks the only proper response is that that King incinerate him. Or how about John who had the nickname "the apostle whom Jesus loved." The history tells us that they got tired of him preaching the gospel, so they wanted to make an example of him and torture him. And what they decided to do was boil him alive. So they boiled some oil and threw him in alive, but that cat just didn't die. So that freaked them out, as it would freak you out. So they just exiled him to Patmos. Can we just agree that the seriousness of his faith probably goes beyond ours? I would say John's faith is well beyond ours, at least what we understand ours to be. The Bible tells us that in Patmos he has a vision of the Lord. It's where we get the book of Revelation. And the angels and Jesus show up, and the Bible says he falls on the ground like a dead man. You're not good. This is how holy and spotless the Bible says God is. The Bible says that all of your righteous deeds look like filthy, smelly rags to Him. And I think the first reason we don't feel the weight of our sin is we think we're intrinsically good. And I'll tell you why that's such a big deal if you're like, "Who cares if I don't feel the weight of my sin. Shouldn't that mean I'm growing and doing well?" Actually if you don't feel the weight of your sin, you don't glory in the atonement of the cross of Christ. And if you don't do that, you don't worship fully, and you were created to worship fully. So actually by not understanding the depth of your depravity and feeling grief over how wicked your heart is, the very purpose for which you exist is negated. It's monumentally important that you understand this. So this is the first reason. I think we think we're intrinsically good. I think we can look around at the world and go, "I'm a good guy."

Here's the second problem, and it comes in two pieces. Go to Ephesians 2 with me. If you've never really memorized any of the Bible, Ephesians 2:1-10 is a great ten verses to memorize. It is in essence what we believe. It is the gospel. I want to show you this. The second reason I think we don't feel grief and don't feel the weight of our sins is that we think we're just breaking some subjective moral law. Here's what I mean. Does anybody speed? Sure, speeders and liars, every one of us. I just never feel really guilty about speeding, because it's a victimless crime. Isn't it? If you hit somebody, now you've got a victim. But if I'm going 35 in a 30, I don't feel like there's a victim involved in that. And so I don't go to bed at night going, "I went 34 in a 30" and rend my garments. I don't do that. It's a victimless crime. I think the bulk of us view sin as the breaking of a moral code that's impersonal, that there's not a victim involved. But I want to show you that it's not the breaking of the Law that's the issue, and then I want to show you that there actually is...I don't want to call God a victim because the Scriptures are clear that in the end, He'll pour out vengeance and wrath upon all the sons of disobedience. But there is someone that sin wounds. So let's look at Ephesians 2. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Here is the most common misunderstanding of the nature of sin, and it's why our children very quickly become disinterested in spiritual things. We make sin simply the breaking of rules, which makes God the policeman in the sky with a radar gun just waiting to catch us. Sin is not just an outward action, but it's an inward essence, it's the state of our nature that leads us to those actions. We say yes to those actions because our essence, our nature is fractured. And I don't know how anyone with children can doubt this. Kids do not learn evil; they're born with it. They're born with the ability towards it.

I'll give you simple examples that every parent, regardless of parenting style, has walked in. At Chik-Fil-A last year, my son attacked another boy. I guess this just happened, and he bit him. Now I think that's weak. I've tried to teach him that men don't bite; we work the jab until they open up and then we come across. We're working on it. It turns out that the

boy had a toy that my son wanted, my son asked for it like he was trained, the boy said no and so my son bit him. Okay, so we giggle because that's what kids do. Let me tell you what just happened in my son's heart. My son wanted something that wasn't his, and in his essence he decided that in order to get it he would attack, hurt, dominate, brutalize and steal. And he did not learn that at home. My wife and I fight...we're married. I'm sinful, she's sinful and when you put two sinners in a house, occasionally there's issues. So we fight, but here's what I can tell you. In 12 years of marriage, we have never screamed at one another in our house. I have never in anger pushed her or bit her. She has never in anger pushed me and bit me, never. So where did my boy get it? Where did your kid get it? It's in their heart. They have a broken nature. This is not an activity issue; this is a nature issue. Another one is, "Mine. That's mine." Where did the hoarding thing come from? I tell my kid all the time, "Nothing is yours. What's yours? I'm still having to clean your bottom. There are rules of the universe. If you can't go to the bathroom by yourself, you don't get to own anything. You don't have a job. Everything is daddy's, and in my grace, I let you play with my stuff." "I got that for Christmas." "Who bought that for you for Christmas?" This is why we started Recovery here at the Village, because my kids were going to need it. Where does that come from? Lauren and I don't do that. Lauren doesn't come in and go, "Hey, can I use your laptop?" "Mine! It's mine! No, it's mine!" If I've got four or five pieces of candy on my lap while I'm watching TV and she comes up and asks to have one, I don't grab them and shove them all in my mouth at one time. But kids will do that, won't they? How many of you have told your kids to stop but they hear "Speed up?" We could go on and on here. They're wicked little souls. And because it hasn't grown up yet, because you haven't modified the behavior yet doesn't mean that their essence, nature and heart isn't crying out murderous, wicked realities. They're self-centered, self-serving, narcissistic souls. And we train their behavior to not look like it, but in the end this is an essence issue. It's a nature issue. And so we're able to go, "Ah, it's just not that big of a deal because it's just a moral, impersonal action," but the truth is it's much more monumental than that. This is a soul issue, a broken, fractured soul issue.

And we also think that there's nobody that this breaking of a subjective moral law affects. The Bible has weird, weird stories in it, man. Some of them I love. Like when I really started to read the Bible, I was like, "I cannot believe this is in here." Like there was a prophet who was going bald, these teenagers made fun of him, he turned around and cursed them and bears came out of the woods and killed them all. I was like, "Someone preach that. That is awesome." Or God comes to the Prophet Isaiah and goes, "Take off all of your clothes and run through the streets of Israel naked for two years. You're going to show them where they're going into desolation." And Isaiah was like, "Could You say that again?" But here's the one that blew my mind. God comes to an upright, beautiful man named Hosea and He puts it in his heart to love a woman named Gomer, who apparently was a beautiful woman. But she was a prostitute. So Hosea starts to love her, starts to woo her, romance her, honor her and he woos her out of that life and they get married. So for the first couple of years, things go really, really well. And can you image? All the church folk must have been calling them in to show videos of them, because they had this great story. "Yeah, I was a hooker, but then I came out, I met Hosea, he was so great, he loved on me, he really just showed me the love of God. It was so spectacular." And He's going, "Well, God put it on my heart, and praise His name." I guarantee they're showing that video. And then Gomer freaks out, and despite the fact that she's married to a good, loving, romantic, caring man, she goes back to her life of prostitution and she begins to sell herself to men. I just try to think about that as a husband. Do you think there might be some rage involved on Hosea's part? There would be some rage involved. Do you think there would be grief involved? Some of you know. Some of you have been cheated on. You know how it feels like your gut just dropped out. Do you think there's some sobbing in there? God paints a picture with the lives of Hosea and Gomer to tell Israel, to tell you, to tell me, "This is you. You're the whore. I'm the good, loving, gracious God and you are a whore." If you'll think about watching that play out on a movie, how many of us would be there looking that and screaming at Hosea, "Leave her! Get out of there! She's crazy!" I mean, how many of us would be screaming and would get angry at Hosea for staying with her, for trying to woo her, for trying to love her back? How many people would enter that framework with the advice of, "This chick is insane. Get out. Divorce her and get out." God's going, "You are Gomer, and I am Hosea and even in your adultery I pursue. Even in your idolatry I'm steadfast." But the Bible's very clear that though God is unchanging, He definitely feels certain things about

sin. Deuteronomy 9 says that God is angered by it. Genesis 6 says He feels grief. 2 Corinthians 19 says that He is storing up wrath. Do you know how sin works? You don't have to admit it, but you know how you'll do this thing and then you just kind of feel like you got away with it. Like nobody busted you, nobody knows, you've pulled it off, you've covered your tracks. And so you do it again, then you do it again, then you do it again... Then it gets easy and it takes you farther than you ever thought you could go, and then before you know it you're further down. And eventually it absolutely blows up on you. That's the idea of wrath. Wrath is a steadily building opposition against. Which means God in His patience goes, "Okay," and He'll let you run to a point. Exodus 32 comes right out and says God will punish sin. And then Matthew 10:28 says that ultimately God's right, just response to sin is eternal damnation or the idea of hell, *Gehenna* in the Greek.

Now, why is sin so personal in intimate to God? I'll try to explain it this way. One of the real distinct doctrines of Christianity is the idea of the Trinity, the Triune God – one God/three Persons. It hurts the brain to think about it. Let me try to explain just a little piece to you. I did it last week, but I want to explain to you why this is so personal to God. Most of us think of God the Father being the big one and then a little Jesus and a little Holy Spirit running around going "You're great...You're great...You're great..." and God's going, "I am great. I am the Father." The Bible paints it very differently. The Bible paints the Father glorifying the Son and glorifying the Spirit, while the Son glorifies the Father and glorifies the Spirit, and the Spirit glorifies the Father and glorifies the Son. So you get what C.S. Lewis called "the dance." You get the Father lavishing majesty, exaltation and glory onto the Son, while the Son glorifies the Spirit, while the Spirit glorifies the Father. And so you get this community within the Godhead that overflows onto the canvas of creation. Every other religion in the world would state that god, whatever god is, began the earth, began the universe with an act of power. There couldn't be love, because there would be no one to love before He created. There couldn't be anything like community, because nothing existed but the singular god. Well in our faith, what we believe to be truth is that God is triune in nature and that out of this community, out of this love, which is why we believe that love is the essence of the universe, this love, this community pours out onto the canvas of creation, creates man and woman in His image, communal, so that we might be invited into the dance. So we have been invited into an intimate, personal relationship with the God of the universe. So if our relationship was meant to be personal and intimate, our rejection of that relationship is absolutely personal and intimate. So every time you say, "No thank You," every time you're indifferent, every breaking of the Law is you saying, "Forget You. No thank You." It is a constant rejection of your Creator. It's immensely personal.

This is hard stuff, but here's what happens. The Bible says this has effects on all our other relationships, but primarily with our relationship with God. Here are some of these things that begin to happen. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin are death. That means sin falling on us, breaking the fabric of the universe ends up putting a regulator on all things. So here's how death works itself out in our world. It works itself out in physical death; we see that all the time. But it's really death to everything. It's death to food, it's death to joy. You may have picked this up if you're old enough, but you'll eventually hit a ceiling no matter what. It doesn't matter how much money you make, you're always going to want to make more money. And it doesn't matter how nice trinkets are, you're always going to want more trinkets. And it doesn't matter how much sex you have, you're always going to be frustrated. You just hit this ceiling. That is the reign of death over all things. Let's go back to Ephesians 2:3. This time I want you to hear it personally. And listen, I know you can go to other places. I love you too much to pander to you. God is storing up wrath for you. Are you tracking with that? So you can be as cool as you want, blow this off as much as you want, you can play this however you want to play it, but you don't slap a lion in the mouth. You don't punch an apex predator in the mouth and expect to come away unbruised. He is storing up wrath for you. Every idle word, every idle thought, every rejection of His name, every time you heard truth and said "Forget it," every time you are storing up wrath for you. Isaiah 59 says we have been alienated from God. This creates all sorts of insanity on earth.

Like when we're alienated from our primary relationship, the one that we were created for, we'll take our secondary relationships and try to roll them up to primary, and that makes things go really bad. Like women make horrible gods. Men make horrible gods. Children make even worse gods. And when you make your children your god, you get what I like to lovingly call the suburbs. I'm going to say this, and it's really hard. I've debated whether or not to say this, but I'm just going to say it. One of the things that we've picked up on in the last year is we've had several parents come to us and go, "Oh, I just don't know what happened to my kid. We raised him right, and now he's off in college, he doesn't want anything to do with God, he's not going to church, he's hitting the party scene." And then here's the thing that's just baffling to me. You trained him that way. You showed him by your life and by your decisions that church and the pursuit of holy things are secondary to his ability to play whatever sport you drove him all over God's green earth to play, whatever talent you tried to cultivate in him. I'll give you another example. When you elevate your family and make your family primary, then you are forced to judge your family by other families. So you have to be further along or at least equal to them. If your family is ultimate, then you've got to protect that. That way, you're in a competition with Billy down the street. God knows he can hit a curve ball and your kid can't walk and chew gum. So you've got to sign him up for a thousand different camps and drive him all over. And all of a sudden, raising kids becomes some sort of competitive sport, not for their good but for your good. Now listen, I don't have a problem with soccer. Soccer's a great game. I'm just saying you're a fool if you think the words out of your mouth are more powerful than the precedent you're setting with your life. My three year old already spots my hypocrisy. So do you really believe that because you tell them with your mouth how important God and the community of faith is but with your life you can live contrary to that, they're going to do what you say and not what you do? They're going to pick up your idolatry. This is what happens. This is what sin does. And then it rolls out. Like if my nation is ultimate. If the USA is ultimate, does that not force me to look down upon other nations, nationalities and cultures? It absolutely does. If we're the best, if we're ultimate, then that means that everyone else is secondary. And that's not too far away from racism. If you put anything else as ultimate, things start to break down. War happens because of sin, genocide happens because of sin, the problem in the Middle East is sin, the problem in the West, what happened to the economy was sin, what happened in a failed marriage is sin. Why everything is breaking down is sin. Greed blew up the economy. It was unabashed, unashamed, wicked greed. And some of you keep waiting for the day of enlightenment. It's not coming. Do you know how many Africans die diarrhea? Hundreds of thousands. I can go to the 7-11 and pay \$1.50 for the medicine that would save them. So why can't we get it to them? Because there's no money involved. Because if we can't figure out how to make money off of it, we don't do it. So with all of our progression in education, in technology, in research, in medicine, in funding, sin still pervades and wrecks it all. And the sin predominant in all of us is just absolute indifference. "That's not my problem. I can go to the store."

So this is the bad news – you're broken, I'm broken, everyone's broken, and this infects every relationship, every interaction and every domain of society. And then here's the bad news on top of the bad news. We can't do anything to fix it. Even if you try to be a better person, you're just perpetuating the actual problem. "So what are you saying, Chandler? That we're all doomed to hell?" That's exactly what I'm saying. . . unless God somehow intervenes. But it's complicated, because He can't just forgive us because then He wouldn't be just. So look here back in Ephesians 2. We'll pick it up in verse 3. "...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But ..." After that "but" is for next week.

This is one of those sermons that thins us out a little bit, but my hope going in is that we'll feel the weight of this, that you feel the weight that you have rebellion in your life, that you are pursuing other things as primary instead of your relationship with the Lord. My hope is that you would feel grief over that, feel fear over that and that you might run to the Lord because of it. I'm not trying to create worldly guilt here by any stretch of the imagination. Worldly guilt doesn't lead to anything but sorrow the Bible says. But if there could be godly regret, godly repentance, if we could comprehend that we have sinned against God the Almighty and that's a very serious, serious thing and if we could think for just a second that God is just, He is righteous and He will deal with us justly. If we could just sit under that for a second. And I know

that most of the would would say that there's no such thing as sin and there is no such thing as God's wrath and His anger, but the Bible teaches so contrary to that and I think our own experience has been contrary to that. I think we know that the wages of sin are death, I think we've made those decisions that the Bible says not to make and we've ended up where the Bible said we'd end up. I think we do know the weight of these things. Some more than others because for some of you, in God's rich, rich mercy He let you be exposed. He exposed your sin, He embarrassed you. That's what the Scriptures say, that your sins will find you out.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. Holy Spirit, I just ask that You would let us feel the weight of our sin, that You would let us feel grief over that and that we would begin to see Your grace in the cross anew. I pray that it would stir up our affections for You, leading to deep worship and a surrender of every area of our lives. And so let us feel the weight of how often we play the part of Gomer, how often we play the part of the prodigal son and run from You and how often we decide to live in rebellion. Help us. We need You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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