

“The Problem of Sin” Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

Intro: Solving problems

Here’s my prayer for us this morning, that the Holy Spirit would help us...

The Point: Come to grips with the problem of sin and find the cure in the gospel.

I. Sin is problematic because of its complexity and universality (7:15-22).

We live in a fallen world.

- Verse 15

So many people buy into the idea of karma. It’s prominent in Eastern Religions and in popular American culture. Karma is the idea that whatever good or bad you put out there will be ultimately be returned upon you. But the Scripture paints a different picture. You have The Preacher making assessments like we see in verse 15, but more importantly, the trump card Christianity throws down on the table is the gospel. The gospel shatters the notion of karma because those who look to Christ do not get what they deserve. They receive the undeserving grace of salvation.

- This is the world we live in. Bad things happen to good people. Great things happen to evil people. Like the Preacher we see this.. He says, “I have observed *in my vain life*”
- Tone of despair... vain life... (comment...)
- We wrestle with this.. Why did *they* get that promotion? Why did *she* get cancer?
- Why do the good die young while the wicked live until they look like a shriveled up prune? Why?
- We find a similar dilemma in Psalm 73. Flip back there with me if you’d like...
 - Look at the first four verses: “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. (Psalm 73:1-4) And he goes on to describe the favorable life of the wicked and says in verse 12:
 - “Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.”
 - Let’s stop there. Some people get so discouraged, so jaded, so cynical by the injustice present in our world that either throw their hands up in the air, and say forget about it, there’s no point to life, no justice, there must not be a God and if there is one, he or she or whoever they are, must not give a rip about us.. Or, if they don’t throw up their hands, they throw up their fists up and want to contend with God. God, how could you let this happen? Don’t you see? Don’t you care? Aren’t you good? Psalm 73 hints at this type of sentiment: why do the wicked prosper? And just when he’s the point of wearisome despair... **Verse 16-19.**
 - “But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!” (Psalm 73:16-19 ESV) That’s the plight of the wicked. What about the righteous?
 - Check verse 23. The Psalm ends like this: “Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works” (25-28).

- What's the solution for navigating life through injustice and suffering? Seeing life from God's perspective...
- Trans: Why is the world this way? Because of sin... and the doctrine of sin is unpacked for us in this passage. Verses 16-17 show us...

The Complexity of Sin...

Overly Religious - - - *There is sin in being too righteous (16)*

- **Look at v. 16.** This may sound totally surprising, almost blasphemous. Is it possible to be too religious? too wise? Well, Jesus reserved some of his harshest critique for the religious leaders. His problem with them was that they tried to establish a righteousness on their own. They tried to perform their way to God's approval. They were into religious routines and moral practices devoid of a sincere and pure heart before God. They thought they could justify themselves in the sight of God through moral reform, failing to understand that we cannot change ourselves from the outside in, but that God must change us from the inside out. Christians fall into this trap.... God will be pleased with me, accept me, love me, forgive me, if *I do x, y & z*.
- If you are pursuing God like that, you are cruising for destruction. That kind of self-righteousness will have a damaging effect on your souls, V. 17 speaks of another destructive face of sin.

Irreligious - - - *There is sin in being wicked... (17)*

- **V. 17.** Irreligion... Antinomians... Rejecting God's plan and actively choosing the path of folly. This one is obvious. There is a danger for us to fall into both paths.
- Luke 15 (Prodigal Son): this is the younger brother. Most people forget about the elder brother. There are two divergent paths from true righteousness. The preacher (in Ecc.) & Jesus (in Luke 15) provide a third way.

The better way: wisdom in the fear of God (18-19)

- Check **vv. 18-19**. The fear of God is a repeated theme in Ecclesiastes. Fearing God leads us to wisdom (Prov. 1:7)
- Verse 19 is telling us that just because Mayor McGlynn or Senator Brown or Governor Patirck hold the positions they hold does not make them the wisest people in the commonwealth of MA. Now, I'm not hating on them or their political views, I'm just siding with the Preacher and saying that the person who lives with biblical wisdom experiences a rare kind of strength. That wise person may be more important and more effective, than the combined wisdom of ten civic leaders."
- Trans: Before we get too positive, (this is Ecclesiastes after all, providing a realistic view of life under the sun) the next verse provides a balanced perspective to the possibility of the wise life. Basically, it's going to tell us that even the wise are not without sin. Everyone lacks righteousness in and of themselves. In the last few verses of this section, we find...

The universality of sin (20-22):

- Listen to the powerful claim of **verse 20**.
- He concludes this section on ___ by giving a couple of practical words of wisdom, which really serve to validate his claim
- The universality of sin is seen in that we are not only sinned against, but we practice the very sin that we despise. Verses 21-22... unpack quickly...
- **PIC: Dunkin Donuts 6:00am on Friday morning...**
- The Bible paints a bleak picture (to put it mildly) of man apart from God's grace.
- "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually". (Genesis 6:4)
- "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)
- Jesus calls fallen man "a slave to sin" in John 8.
- Paul says we are dead in our sins and trespasses (eph. 2) and very pointedly in Romans 3:10: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom. 3:10-12)
- If we don't understand this plot move, we will never understand the climax of redemption... Creation FALL Redemption Restoration. What am I saying? The cross of Christ will never make sense to you if

you believe you are inherently good. If we are inherently good, there is nothing from which you need to be saved.

- This is a great stumbling block to so many in our culture. We are often moral cowards, lacking the courage to face the reality of the situation, OR we are severely deceived: “Oh, he’s a good person. She’s a good person. I’m a good person...” Nope. Nope. Nope.
- What does this mean? That we are bad as we possibly could be. No. That we have no capacity for a good deed? Well, no, but then again it depends on our definition of “good.” God
 - God made us a conscience, a moral judge...
- Listen, none of us want to hear this, but we all need to hear this. Why is this so vital?

PICTURE: Our little girl Kesed got sick last week... The symptoms were obvious. She started feeling warm...

Do you see this? Our sin: We have been to the party and spilt the fruit punch down our white three-piece suit, or white dress if you prefer, ladies...

II. Sin is problematic because it distorts God’s design for humanity (7:23-29)

Genesis 1/ Fall/ Sin & Distortion: God’s beautiful work of art.

Distortion #1: Corrupted Minds (23-25, 27-28a)

- Quest for wisdom: Far from me, deep, very deep” Horizontal and vertical distance. It still doesn’t add up...
- The realities of our fallen world and God’s ways in the midst of our fallen world are beyond our understanding. I would argue that we don’t really understand what we think we understand. “Some of you are thinking: “I don’t understand.” Others are thinking: “You don’t understand. You are talking in circles, not making any sense.” What I’m saying is that even the things we have the grace to understand we can’t plumb the depths of them. Our existence, the relationships we share, the works of God, we can understand all of these to a certain degree, but not at their deepest level.
- App: This is so hard for us to hear as those who live in Greater Boston, the Athen of America. So many hear are probably numbered among the intellectual elite... address pride... you aren’t as great as you think you are... Knowledge without wisdom and action and a life to God’s glory is wasted knowledge.

Distortion #2: Corrupted Desires (26)

- The Proverbs 6 woman... Lust...
- Pornography, Fantasies, Second & Third Looks at the “Hot looking girl or guy” walking down the street. Don’t play.

Distortion #3: Corrupted Actions (28b)

- “One man among a thousand...” In other words, another way to state what he said in verse 20: there is no one will lives a perfectly moral life.

Distortion #4: Corrupted Pursuits (29b)

- Look at verse 29... “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. Let’s start at the end of the verse and work backwards.” “we have sought out many schemes...” Genesis 3 to 2013...
- This is a summary statement for everything he has unpacked. How do we make sense of all of the wickedness in the world? Well, we have to understand that God is not to blame.
- This is one of the great accusations when people wish to put God on trial. We have this against you God, you are the source of evil in the world. Nope, we are. Well, if God was good, he wouldn’t allow so much evil and suffering in the world. Well, God is God and he is just to allow the consequences of our sin.
- The proper response when we see sin and evil in the world is not to hate God, but to hate our sin. We’re the issue.
- I hope this is one of the benefits of us cruising through Ecclesiastes. We have constantly been confronted with our depravity in the form of what we chase after under the sun. This statement in verse 29: “we have sought out many schemes” summarizes man’s quest to find satisfaction in anything and everything besides God.

- Just think about what we've seen in Ecclesiastes: sex, money, power, pleasure, prestige, reputation, success, work, wine, you name it. Remember, the Preacher is essentially short-circuiting all of our pursuits and saying, been there, done that, not going to work, not going to satisfy, not going to bring meaning to your life.
- Verse 29 awakens us to a depressing reality. We, as fallen people, are professional sinners. We constantly find new ways to make idols for ourselves. We seek out many, many, schemes.
- Have you wrestled with your depravity? Do you see it? Do you see your tendency to chase after a variety of enticing schemes?
- Is there a worship problem in your heart? Do you tend to be more attracted to ___? Do you find yourself more zealous for ___ than the things of God? Do ___ and ___ and ___ dominate your thoughts, your time commitments, your conversation? We all have a worship problem...
- These schemes under the sun, the many attractive pursuits that are available to us will leave us thirsting for something more. Why? Because they were never intended to satisfy us.

Trans: Some of you are straight up math wizards... I know two plus two, but don't expect me to drop some Turingian algorithms on you, but I will bring a theological equation to the table. Here we go:

Corrupted Mind + Corrupted Desires + Corrupted Actions + Corrupted Pursuits = a Corrupted Picture

Distortion #5: Corrupted Picture (29a)

- Here's the most tragic distortion of them all.
- "God made man upright..." Genesis 1-2...
 - Made in the image of God with a capacity for creativity, rationality, relationality, and morality. All of these capacities were true and virtuous. We were made in the image of God to reflect his greatness and to glorify him. The great tragedy of our sin is that we have failed to do the very thing we were created for. The image of God has been marred, tainted... Because of this, we fail to display the worth and excellency of God.

Conclusion:

Hope in the Midst of Despair...

- How do we respond to the pandemic of sin? God has provided a way for all the wrongs to be made right... Jesus, the cure for our sin. He redeems and restores. That's the gospel.
- Verse 29 is so good. When we take verse 29 and zoom out to understand the metanarrative (the overarching narrative over all of the smaller stories) we find that this world is not the way it's supposed to be. This is not what God intended for our existence in the beginning, and thankfully, it is not the way that it will be in eternity.
- Speaking of this verse, Derek Kidner says: "Since futility was not the first word about our world, it no longer has to be the last."
- God made us for himself. We have gone our own way, chasing a plethora of schemes under the sun, but God extends us an invitation to realign our life with him through Jesus... Have you realigned your life with God?
- And when we do, Jesus, by the work of the Holy Spirit, renews the image of God in us! Here is the answer the gospel provides to the problem of our sin.
- **"But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:20-24)**

Where we're going next Sunday: To kick off the week of the passion, we're going to zoom in on the crucifixion of Christ., but let me encourage us not to wait until next week to deal with our sin...