

The Curse of Sin and the Blessings of Obedience

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[0 : 00] Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel.

! Like the first fruits of the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your fathers.! But they came to Baal Peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird. No birth, no pregnancy, no conception. Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left.

Woe to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I have seen, was like a young palm planted in a meadow. But Ephraim must lead his children out to slaughter. Give them, O Lord, what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal. There I began to hate them because of the wickedness of their deeds. I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more. All their princes are rebels.

[1 : 14] Ephraim is stricken. Their root is dried up. They shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death. My God will reject them because they have not listened to him. They shall be wanderers among the nations. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word.

Would you please be seated? As a pastor, one of the questions I'm often asked, especially by new Christians, baby believers, is where in the Bible should I begin to read? And so I answer that I feel like, well, they should begin in one of the Gospels. Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. It's very quick-paced, and it gives the reader a good idea of what Jesus did. Another one, the one where I actually recommend that they go first, is the Gospel of John, because I think John is the most in-depth of the Gospels, containing some of the most profound passages in all of the Bible. And in the Gospel of John, you get a better idea of what Jesus said and who Jesus was. And that's not to take anything away from Matthew or Mark. All of the

Gospels are equally wonderful, and I think that believers should spend a lot of their time and study in the Gospels. You should study all of the Bible, but I think it's good to always be going back to the Gospels and filling yourself with those. But having said all of that, one of the most important chapters that I think that must be read and understood in the Bible is Genesis chapter 3.

Genesis chapter 3. If you don't understand Genesis chapter 3, then it's going to be hard for anyone to understand what the rest of the Bible has to say. Genesis chapter 3. For many of you, you know, it records the fall of man into sin. You can't understand the solution to the problem unless you understand the problem itself. You can't provide the cure until you've properly diagnosed the ailment. You can't understand God's remedy for the world if you don't understand the malady under which this world is now functioning.

And to put it quite plainly and to cut straight to the point, if you don't understand the origin of sin and its impact on this world, then you've misunderstood everything that you think that you've understood.

[3 : 58] If you go back to Genesis chapter 1, you see that in the beginning, God created everything.

And God declares, after he's created everything, in verse 31 of chapter 1, it says there that God saw everything that he made, and behold, he said, it was very good.

Now, today, when we read that passage, when we read God's declaration that everything was good, it should cause alarm bells to go off inside of our minds, especially when you read that for the very first time. Because the world that we live in is not very good. Because the world that we live in is not good at all. In all things that mankind has to disagree about, and all the things that we're in conflict about, I think the one thing that most of us, if not all of us, can agree on is that the world isn't

as we think it ought to be. Now, there's different groups with different ideas, different solutions, and how they think that the world can be made better. But all of us know, deep down inside of us, that the world isn't as it ought to be. And if we look even deeper inside of ourselves, I think we'll come to the realization, too, that we're not as we ought to be. When we look at the physical world around us, we observe that it is filled with death and decay. Everything is decaying and headed towards death. This is the law of entropy. It's the second law of thermodynamics, that matter continually tends to break down towards disorder. The physical world around us, as we observe it, is breaking down before our very eyes. That's a frightening thought to think about.

Right now, as we meet, there are comets curling through space, and they are traveling at uncalculable speeds, right? Something like 366 miles per second, how fast these things are moving.

And there's one trillion of them in the Milky Way galaxy. One trillion massive chunks of frozen rock that are just zipping through our solar system with the likelihood that one of them could potentially, at some point in time, collide with this planet. It could quite literally blast us all into non-existence. [6 : 54] I used to think about that as a kid, and it would keep me up at night, terrified. We have also observed world systems, world powers throughout history that have risen to great prominence. People thought that they would never come to an end, yet they fell into non-existence.

Case in point, the Roman Empire. Nations rise, we've observed, and nations fall. And then other nations rise, and then other nations fall, and the cycle goes on and on of decay and ultimately death.

We observe this from outside of us. We also observe it from within us. As you get older, you notice that your body is more achy. It's more easily experiences pain. As you get older, you slow down. You have less energy. You need more rest. And so we can all understand, as we see through the rest of the world, that we are all undergoing this decay, this slow death, this slow erosion.

And so when we come to the end of Genesis chapter 1 and read that everything was very good, we take a look at things as they are now, and we realize that they aren't very good anymore.

They're not good anymore at all. And so we're faced with the question when we read that, and when we observe what we see, the question is, what happened? Why isn't it very good anymore? Let's look at Genesis chapter 3, verses 1 through 8, and we understand why. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of the tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, we can eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. When the eyes of both were opened, they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden. So there we have it. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, everything went from being very good to becoming very bad. The New Testament functions as a commentary of the Old

[9 : 59] Testament. And in Romans 5.12, the Apostle Paul says more into detail exactly what happened here. Romans 5.12, he says, therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sin. So we see that through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world, and death through sin. When Adam sinned, we all sinned as well, because we are his progeny.

We've all come from Adam and Eve, and so we inherit what theologians call original sin. We are born sinful. When Adam sinned, he brought death on himself and everybody else as a result. And so we are all born to die. All of us have been subjected to the curse of sin, not just human beings, but all of creation as well. In Romans 8, it says that all of creation groans under this curse of sin.

So now you might say, well, that doesn't sound very fair to me. You know, if it would have been me instead of Adam and Eve, maybe things would be differently. And I'll tell you very plainly and very honestly, no, it wouldn't be. No, it wouldn't be. You would have got us in the exact same place that we are today. Same is the case for me. God made it abundantly clear to Adam and to Eve before

any of these things happened, that if they obeyed him, they would live, but that if they disobeyed him, they would die. Let's look. Genesis 2, 15 through 17, this was no mystery to them. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die. A good beginning, we see, was ruined by sin. Which brings us to Hosea chapter 9. The nation of Israel, if you'll recall, had a pretty good beginning. They were enslaved by the Egyptians. God sent a deliverer to them, a man, Moses, who would rescue his people from slavery used by God to do that. And he did so in such a powerful way that nobody in their right mind could say that God did not love these people, that God did not cherish these people. And so God continued, if you remember, to lead them through the wilderness with a promise that he would bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey, the promised land. And all along the way, God drives home to his people this very important principle, this very important point, that obedience to him must be followed, that they must obey him. Not because

God loves giving rules, but because God loves his people. And he knows the disastrous impact that sin will have on them. That's why he continues to remind them to be obedient to what he has called them to be because he loves them. So in Deuteronomy 11, 26 through 27, we have a summary of God's instruction to the Israelites. And you'll notice that it mirrors the same instruction that he gave to Adam in Genesis chapter 2. Let's look at that. Deuteronomy 11, 26 through 28. See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today to go after other gods that you have not known. And then in Deuteronomy chapter 27 and 28, God goes into greater detail, fleshing out what the blessings and the cursings would entail. But it boils down to this basic, simple principle, which is the main idea for this morning's message. That obedience to God brings blessing and life, and disobedience to God brings sin and death. Obedience to God brings blessing and life, disobedience to God brings sin and death. And so this is the point that I hope to drive home to you this morning as we walk through this passage of scripture by seeing what this main idea, what this principle meant for Israel back then, and seeing what this principle means for you and I today, both collectively as a church and individually as followers of Christ. So first of all, we see that Israel had a good beginning, right? God says that. Verse 10, like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel like the fruit of the fig tree in the first season, I saw your fathers. A good beginning. Grapes and figs are often used in the Bible to symbolize sweetness. So God uses this metaphor to describe his relationship with his people in the beginning. It was sweet. My grandparents' generation used to say that when a young man and a young woman liked each other, it used to say that they're sweet on each other. And meaning that they can't keep their eyes off of one another, that they've always got to be around one another, that they're mesmerized with each other. And if you think about it, it's kind of sickening, isn't it? When you see people like that, when they're at the restaurant, they're sitting on the same side of the table. It's like, what's wrong with you people? And maybe you do that, and that's the case, then that's great.

But it does, it's kind of sickening, is it? Unless it's you. Unless it's you're the one who's in that relationship, you know what I'm saying? Where you're experiencing that sweet relationship. When it's you, you don't care about what anybody else says. You don't care about the guy who doesn't think you should sit on the same side of the table, right? Because all you think about is that person who is sitting next to you, you are so sweet on them. You're willing to do anything for that person because you're so infatuated with them. And so we understand that obedience is easy, and it's sweet in the beginning. And we'll talk more about that in just a moment. But Israel was described by God as being like the first fruit of the fig tree. So he also describes them to this first fruit. In the Hebrew, this word used to describe a fig that ripens early in the spring from the previous year's sprout. And so it was a rare find. It was very good and very tender to eat. And so what God is bringing attention to here is the rarity with which he found a people, the rarity with which God would call a people to be his own. And so here in verse 10, what God is drawing attention to is not Israel's intrinsic excellence that made him love her, but rather the uniqueness, the rarity of his choosing anybody to be his own people. And he says that even more so in Deuteronomy 7, 6 through 8. If you are a people holy to the

[17:32] Lord, your God, the Lord, your God has chosen you. You didn't choose me. I chose you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It

was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. And so God called Hosea also to mirror this kind of love. Remember at the very beginning verses one through four, we talk about Hosea's marriage to Gomer and it symbolized God's relationship with Israel, Jesus' relationship with his church. And if you remember Gomer, there was next to nothing about this woman that would make her desirable as a lifelong companion because of her career choice. And you remember that God calls

Hosea to go and to marry her. Could you imagine if that was your son and he brought home that woman and said, Hey, mom and dad, you know, her history, uh, I'm going to marry her. You would forbid it.

You would certainly have a lot of questions. God told you to do what? And we see there's a reason why God asked Hosea to do this.

Because she represented Israel and she represents us today. Born under the curse of sin, born in a state of spiritual death. But God being rich in mercy has chosen to make us alive together with Christ. Like most beginnings, things start out well. We all go through that honeymoon phase. Most honeymoons don't end in a divorce. And that's because in the beginning, obedience is easy. And so in the beginning, it was easy for Israel to obey God. And from what we can tell from Hosea's relationship with Gomer, that their marriage started out well. But as we've seen in those cases, things didn't continue to go so great. And that's true for many churches today.

[20 : 06] Many churches start out with joyful anticipation when they're first planted, when a new pastor maybe comes. There is typically a lot of joy. There's this honeymoon phase. Everybody's excited about what's going on. There's lots of optimism. There's lots of hope for what God will do. Joyful anticipation abounds in those situations. Also for the baby Christian. I love being around new believers because they're so on fire for the Lord in the beginning. They just want to know as much as they can.

They want to read. They want to pray. But eventually, things start to plateau and then eventually decline. What causes that? Well, we see, secondly, Israel's good beginning was corrupted by sin. It's that simple. Sin.

God continues when they came to Baal Peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame and became detestable like that thing that they loved. The frame's glory shall fly away like a bird. So here God is talking about the fact that Israel's honeymoon with him was short-lived, as scripture well documents. It wasn't long after they'd left Egypt that they were ready to go back.

Remember that? Take us back. We don't want to eat this food that you're giving us. Let's go back. As if Egypt would welcome them back, right? We just lost all of our warriors in that river to your...

[21 : 41] God, we do not want you guys back here. After all the plagues, right? Go on your way. To this point in Israel's history, God could have chosen numerous instances, not a river or sea, sorry, where he could have chosen to point out the fact that his people disobeyed him.

There were multiple encounters. There were multiple times that God could have used in this scripture to point them back to. And he uses this example from Baal Peor, where this happened before the nation was divided in two.

This happened before the times of the kings of Saul and David and Solomon. This was the final failure of Israel before they took possession of the promised land.

And God goes into this. He uses this example to remind his people about the depths of their depravity that sin had led them into and his swift punishment of it.

So since he brings our attention to it, let's go back and read it. Numbers 25, 1 through 9. While Israel was in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab.

[22 : 50] These invited the people to the sacrifices of their God, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

And the Lord said to Moses, Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the Lord, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel. And Moses said to the judges of Israel, Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor.

And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family in the sight of Moses, in the sight of the whole congregation and the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

When Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them.

The man of Israel and the woman threw her belly. Thus the plague of the people of Israel was stopped. Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were 24,000.

[23 : 55] The implication here for Israel in Hosea chapter 9 is that God will judge them.

Their spiritual harlotry, their physical harlotry was something that God judged fiercely. His justice would dictate that the Israel of Hosea's day was also in the same grave danger, the same grave situation where they were about to experience the judgment of God for their sins.

Hosea says that they became detestable, like the thing that they loved. And isn't it a biblical principle that the thing that we love the most becomes like a God to us as we worship it?

Jeremiah 2.5 says that they walked after emptiness and they themselves became empty. You know, when you become a Christian, you do not become immune to sin.

It doesn't work that way. The Bible says that you're set free from sin in Christ, that you don't have to sin anymore. However, the sin nature still remains and we can identify with Paul in Romans 7 when he writes about the struggle between his old sin nature and his new nature as a born-again believer.

[25 : 24] The principle for Israel then holds true for us still today. God will not revoke your salvation, but sin, if you let it, will cool your relationship with God and it will hurt you and it will hurt those who are around you.

So that's why we must be abiding in Christ. Abiding in Christ has never ruined anyone's life. It might cost you your life, but it certainly will never ruin your life.

But sin, hear me, sin always will. Sin will always ruin your life. And so we see thirdly that sin, Israel's sin, brought a curse.

These verses, verses 12 through 17, are difficult to interpret, but what seems to be the case here is that Israel's sin has brought a curse not just upon them, but also upon their children.

Baal was considered to be a god of fertility and the Israelites worshipped him as such. And so God was going to reverse their fertility. Many of the surrounding pagan religions that Israel got mixed up with also practiced child sacrifice.

[26 : 48] And so a consequence of Israel's sin and this curse was that it would lead them to sacrifice their own children. And so might I just say here that abortion today, to me, is a modern-day form of child sacrifice.

Those children are killed for convenience by their parents. You know that a nation, you know that a nation is utterly corrupted by sin when the most vulnerable in their society are left unprotected and uncared for by the people who should love them the most.

Sin has curses. Verse 15, God says, Gilgal was an old town.

It was near Gilgal that the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River, and it was there where they built a monument in the beginning, commemorating the goodness of God and bringing them to the promised land.

It was a monument that they built to encourage them always to fear God. It was a monument commemorating their good beginning in this promised land.

[28 : 09] Gilgal was the place where their first circumcisions in the new land took place, an act of outwardly acknowledging in obedience their identity to God as his chosen people.

However, it wasn't too much longer where they were there again at Gilgal, that very place where they had done these things, this good beginning was the very place where Israel first demanded their own king.

And in doing so, they exchanged God for Saul, and the rest is history. Their sins were compounded, and God being just and holy couldn't overlook it any longer, and the people were no longer seeking his forgiveness because they'd forgotten him, and all that was left for his people to receive from him was the punishment for their sin.

Sin brings a curse. Adam and Eve brought a curse upon the whole earth when they sinned. Some families today feel like they're cursed because of the sins of their fathers and mothers.

Children feel doomed to repeat the same mistakes, to follow the same curse. Some churches I've heard from pastors who have been discouraged, or people who attend there have been discouraged, they talk as if their church is cursed.

[29 : 34] Sin has this effect. Sin brings cursing. Sin brings a curse. The good news is that that isn't where it has to end.

The good news is that there is someone who we can turn to who knows a little something about reversing the curse of sin.

Number four, the gospel is the good news that the curse has been reversed. as we're coming upon Christmas season now one of my favorite songs that we sing during Christmas time is Joy to the World and I love one of the verses in there and it's familiar to you but maybe you haven't thought about it but it talks about the curse of sin no more let sin and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground he comes to make his blessings flow how far?

as far as the curse is found as far as the curse is found far as, far as the curse is found how far do we find that curse?

far as it's everywhere we live on a planet that is under the curse because of our sin against God it's everywhere we can be thankful because one has been sent to reverse that very curse Galatians 3.13 how does he do that?

[31 : 20] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree how do we receive this one?

we turn to him in repentance of our sin and we believe 1 John 1.9.2-1 then if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we say we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us my little children I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin but if anyone does sin good news we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous so here's the thing we have all sinned we have all sinned we have all fallen short of the glory of God we are all born under the curse of sin and all of us as a result is without excuse now think about it this way if a criminal enters the court right?

to plead his case with his defense attorney and before his defense attorney can say anything the criminal comes in and he stands up and he says you know what? I would like to confess my guilt that defense attorney is probably not going to be very happy is he, right?

because whatever case he had built for his client had been thrown out the door but this is the way it works for us Jesus, our advocate only takes the cases of those who come in and confess their guilt I'm guilty I've sinned I've sinned against you God and I understand that I'm under this curse of sin and the result of that curse is death spiritual death that I experience now spiritual death that I'll experience forever in hell and when we turn to Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior we see here that he becomes our defender how so?

because he took the curse for us as a believer you know and understand that when Jesus hung on the cross as he bled and as he was dying as he became the forsaken of God it was your sins it was my sins that held him there he became the curse for us why?

[34 : 00] so that we could have eternal life so we go back into the court system right? we know we're guilty but our advocate steps up for us our defender he says hey I'm going to pay the price for their sins and he can because he's righteous because he's never sinned before all that the law required he was able to obey he was not born under the curse of sin he is the second person of God God himself in human flesh Jesus Christ righteous and the Bible says that when we believe in him he takes our sin and he gives us his righteousness and you've heard me say it again and I'll say it again because it's such good news when God sees you as a believer in that case it's not just as if you've never sinned but it's as if you've always done the right thing like Jesus did so God sees a righteous person not because of who you are not because of any intrinsic value that you possess but solely and only based upon what Jesus has done for you man that's good news is it not?

good news worth sharing good news worth rejoicing in and so if you're hearing that good news today and you realize that I am under that curse of sin and I understand the penalty of it and I want that curse reversed and the Bible says that very clearly and verily plainly what you do is you turn from sin you repent you call on the name of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and you will be saved now and forever 10,000 years and then forevermore you