

February 14, 2018

The Seven Deadly Sins
Taking Sin Seriously
Genesis 3:1-7

Opening words: Here is a statistic you should never forget! 100% of people have sinned. That statistic did not come from the Barna Research group, or the Gallop Research group. That statistic came from the word of God, the Bible. Romans 3:23 says, *"All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God."* That fact is not open for debate. Sin is real, and we are sinners. Sin is not just reserved for the bad people we see on the evening news. Sin did not just happen in another time, or place. Sinners are not just found in the Bible. Sin is real, and sin is as close as your next breath. There is no way around it, you are a sinner! Here is the Good News:

Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. It is a time to rediscover the person God intended you to be from the very beginning. Lent is not just a time to identify your sins, it is a time to take steps to eliminate your sins. Never forget it, we are striving toward perfection. That thought is at the very heart of my newest sermon series, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. I begin this sermon series this evening, Ash Wednesday, and will conclude it on Sunday morning, March 18. Let me call this evening's message *Taking Sin Seriously*. It is an overview of what is to come. Our scripture reading for this evening is Genesis 3:1-7.

Genesis 3:1-7 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Jesus of Nazareth once said, *"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."* That verse comes from the story of the adulterous woman, John 8:7. This is the good news for this evening: No one here is going to be stoned. This is the bad news for this evening: The reason is, each one of us is a sinner! And all of God's sinful people said, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves this evening in the Old Testament book of Genesis. The word Genesis can be translated to mean several things. Genesis can mean "birth." Genesis can mean "genealogy." Genesis can also mean the "history of origin." Perhaps that is the best translation of this evening's scripture lesson. The first eleven chapters of Genesis give us the origin of many things. For example, the first chapter of Genesis tells us how the world was created. The Tower of Babel, in the eleventh chapter, explains to us why different languages exist in the world. Our scripture lesson for this evening, the fall of Adam and Eve, tells us the origin of sin. You know the story.

God created a man out of the dust of the ground (Ge. 2:7). God also created a perfect place for the man to live. The Bible tells us it was a garden both pleasing to the eye, and full of food (Ge. 2:9). God gave man dominion over that perfect place, with one restriction. The man could not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The punishment for breaking that law was severe: death (Ge. 2:17). Everything in man's world was perfect, except for one flaw. Man was alone, so God decided to give him a helper (Ge. 2:18). Taking one of the man's ribs, God created a helper for the man, a woman. According to Genesis 2:23, the man was pleased with her. Isn't it too bad the story doesn't end with the second chapter? Sadly, the story continues.

We are told in the third chapter of Genesis, the serpent was the most crafty of all the animals that God created for the man. He is the one who convinced the man's helper, the woman, to eat from the forbidden tree. It was the helper, the woman, who convinced the man to eat the forbidden fruit. For generations, men have been blaming women for the fall. If the truth be told, they are both responsible. Things would never be the same again. The man and the woman, Adam and Eve, lit a fire that has burned since that day. Generations later, we live in the aftershock of the fall. Each one of us is marked with their original sin. There is no escaping the truth. Like Adam and Eve, we are sinners. Each one of us is responsible for the sacrificial death of Jesus, who died as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. If you will admit you are a sinner, say, "**Amen!**" Can I state the obvious? Your admission of being a sinner makes you different from many in our world. There was a time when people felt guilty about their sins, but no more. It is painfully true. Did you know, according to a 2014 CBS report, only 2% of Americans think they are going to hell?

Our generation does not take sin seriously. The question is, why? I came up with two reasons. Maybe it is not one or the other. Maybe it is a combination of the two. Maybe we don't take sin seriously because of the news? We are overexposed to the harshness of this world. About a week ago, my family gathered at my house for dinner. In addition to Kathryn and me, there was Anna, Sarah, Vic and Pippa. As we ate, the news was on in the background. The list of reports was not pleasant. There was a story about some local violent crime. There was the nightly report of local sexual offenders. There was another local murderer, who was going to prison for decades. (Our country seems to have money to put people in prison, but no money to send people to college.) It wasn't the best background for a family dinner, so everyone demanded it be turned

off. You know the truth. In comparison to that list of bad characters, we look good. How easy it is to see the sins in others. How hard it is to identify our own sins. Maybe the news is the problem. I believe there is some truth in that statement. Or maybe, the problem is more. That is an option, this is another option:

Maybe our generation doesn't take sin seriously because of the church itself. No group is better at self-inflicted wounds than the church. The highly publicized sex scandals by the clergy have been a public relations nightmare. The unpublicized conflict between the laity within local churches is staggering. How many people do you know who have left the church because of some church conflict? In our time, people just don't go to church. People are mad at the church. Can you really blame them? Why should society listen to the church about sin, if the church's leadership and membership are the greatest sinners? The problem grows deeper. In a churchless society, our Christian theology begins to erode. I see it regularly.

How many people that you know think they are saved by works, not grace? I believe, that is why volunteerism has become such a big issue in our time. With every act of kindness, they are a little closer to heaven. Many believe, God is a master bookkeeper, keeping track of our rights and our wrongs. The goal is to die with more good deeds than bad deeds. Our sins can be blotted out by our number of community service hours. There is a logical side to this case, but it is just wrong. I have said it a million times. We are saved by grace, not works. It is Basic Christian Theology 101. It is obvious to me. Our generation doesn't take sin seriously. However, historically, the church is different.

Historically, the church has taken sin seriously. In the fourth century, a monk named Evagrius Ponticus categorized all of mankind's sins. According to him there were eight classifications of sin. Pope Gregory I revised his list in the year AD 590. He said there were seven classifications of sin. We call that list "the seven deadly sins." Through the years, preachers, both known and unknown, have examined that list. Now, it is my turn. Which one of these sins haunts you?

1. Lust
2. Gluttony
3. Greed
4. Sloth
5. Wrath
6. Envy
7. Pride

I start Sunday by looking at the deadly sin of lust. Historically, the church has taken sin seriously. However, this is more important: God takes sin seriously.

When I was in seminary, I took several required preaching classes. One by one, students stood in front of their peers to practice their new trade. I heard many sermons, but one illustration I heard still haunts me. I will be honest with you. It is not an easy story to tell, it is not an easy story to hear, but it does illustrate the point that God takes sins seriously. It is an old preaching story, so you may have heard it.

A father had a young son, who welcomed him every day when he returned home from work. The boy loved his father and the father loved his son. Daily, the boy asked about his work. Each day the boy became more curious. The father's job was not exciting, but it was important. He was a bridge operator. Normally, the bridge was up, so the ships could pass under it. However, when the passenger train came, he dropped the bridge, so it could reach its final destination. The boy loved hearing about his father's job and one day asked if he could go to work with his father. At first, the father said, "No," but in time he said, "Yes." The next morning the father took the son to work. At first the boy was fascinated. However, he was just a boy and in time he grew bored. In time, the boy wandered outside. His father watched him through the window. The father got involved in his work and couldn't watch his son every second. For several minutes, he forgot his son was there. Soon, the signal was given. The train was coming, and it was time to drop the bridge. The father looked for his son, but the boy wasn't in the office. He looked for his son, but the boy wasn't in the yard. He looked for his son and saw him on the bridge. No, to be more exact, his son was in the large cogs that raised and lowered the bridge. The father stood to run to the bridge to save his son, but the train blew its whistle to say it was near. The father was in the worst possible situation. If he pulled the lever to lower the bridge, he would kill his son, saving the passengers. If he didn't pull the lever, he would save his son, killing the passengers on the train. On Good Friday, God pulled the lever, so we could live. You know the truth.

God takes sin seriously. In forty-four days, we will gather at a cemetery to underscore the point. Jesus died so we could live. As we begin this season of Lent, may we never forget what Jesus has done for us. Do you remember the words of Jesus of Nazareth? He said, *"If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."* No one will be stoned this evening, because each one of us is a sinner. May we take our sins seriously as we begin this season of Lent. And all of God's sinful people said, **"Amen!"**