

# Series: Convictions That Define

## Sermon #2: Foundations: Sin

Romans 3, 5

Kevin Maurice --- May 23, 2021

Good morning, Grace. I am really glad to be here with you today because I have the privilege to teach on something that is foundational to who we are as a church and as believers. We'll be in the Book of Romans this morning. You can open up your Bibles and turn there and join me. I'll be there in just a moment.

This year at various points we are stepping out of our teaching calendar and exploring our core convictions—the heart of Grace and who we are—because there are convictions that guide us. As a church, as believers, there are things that matter most. And so, today we'll study together to see what the Bible says about one of these convictions. And it's one of the more difficult teachings that define who we are as Christians. Because the Bible is not a series of disconnected stories, each one with its own moral or theme or character. The Bible is a single story about what's wrong with the world and humanity and what God has done to put things right through Jesus Christ. That's the story of the Bible. And as Christians, we call this story the good news or the gospel.

But to truly understand and appreciate the good news of Jesus, we must first comprehend and grapple with some bad news. At a certain age, I think we all recognize that there is something wrong, something off, with the world and those of us who occupy it. You don't need to read much about history, you don't need to spend too much time around other people, before this truth becomes crystallized, that yes, something is amiss.

And so, this is a big question: **What's wrong with the world?** And the answer to that question—although it's a short, simple, little word—is complex and profound in its meaning and consequence.

Briefly, before going any further, in order to know and study the nature of mankind, we need to understand the nature of God. The Bible tells us that God is perfect. He is absolutely good. And the word for this is “holy.” And God is described in Scripture as “holy, holy, holy.” It's the only attribute of God that's elevated and repeated three times in succession.

The Bible also declares that God is just, He is merciful, God is loving. But we're never told that He is "mercy, mercy, mercy" or "love, love, love." The Bible says that He is "holy, holy, holy."

And so, God is perfect. But the truth that we'll study today is that we are not.

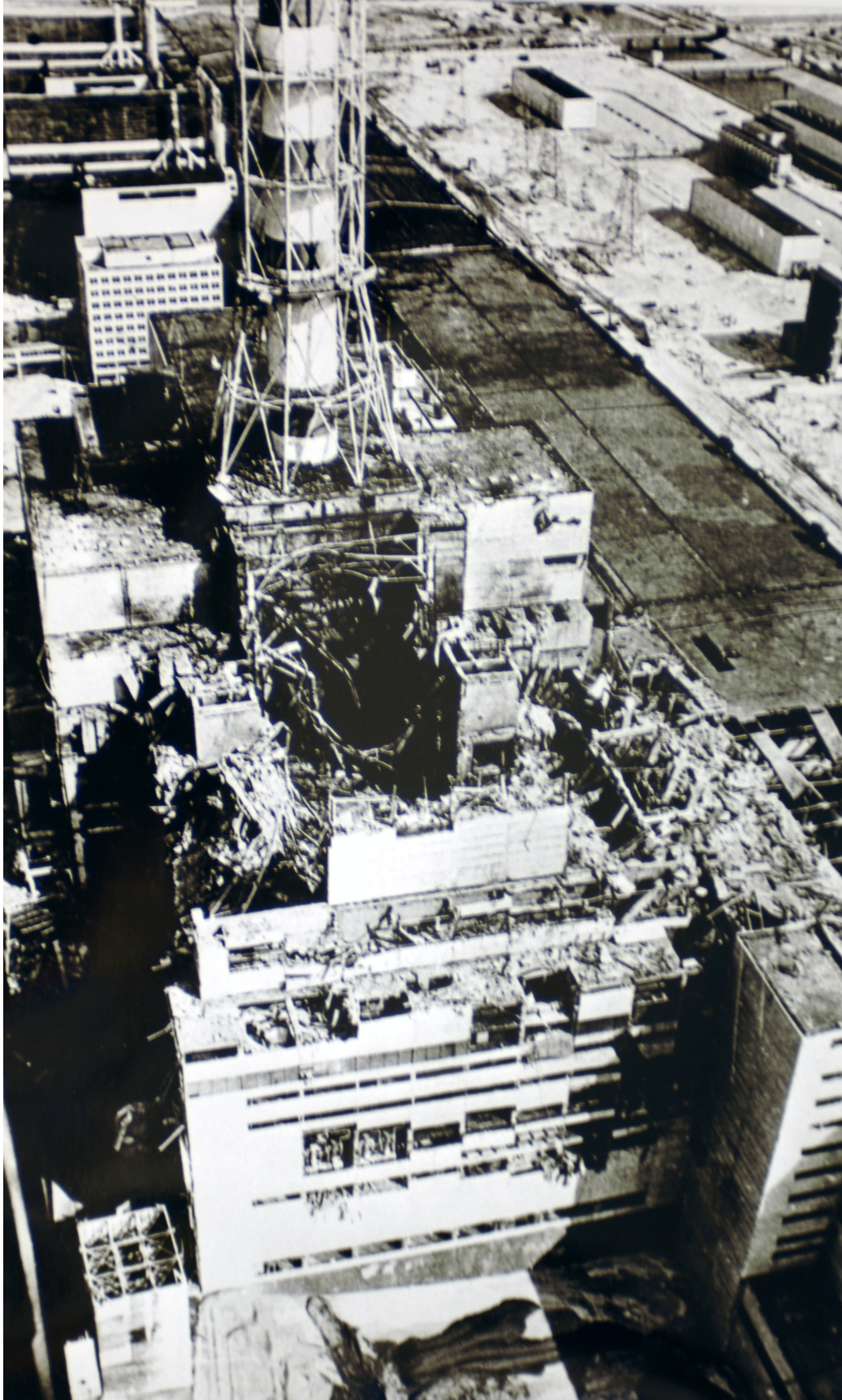
Let's turn now to the Book of Romans. We're going to jump between several chapters today, but we'll begin in Romans chapter 3, starting in verse 10, which tells us that **"No one is righteous, no not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they've become worthless. No one does good, not even one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:10-12, 23)

So, what's wrong with the world? The short answer is "sin." God is holy and we are not. Today we are going to study the doctrine of sin, and as we do this, we'll navigate the Scriptures and survey **three major truths**. First, that we inherited sin. Second, how sin separates us from God. And third, how sin leads to death. So, because of our sinful heritage, we're alienated from our Creator and we're on this trajectory of decay.

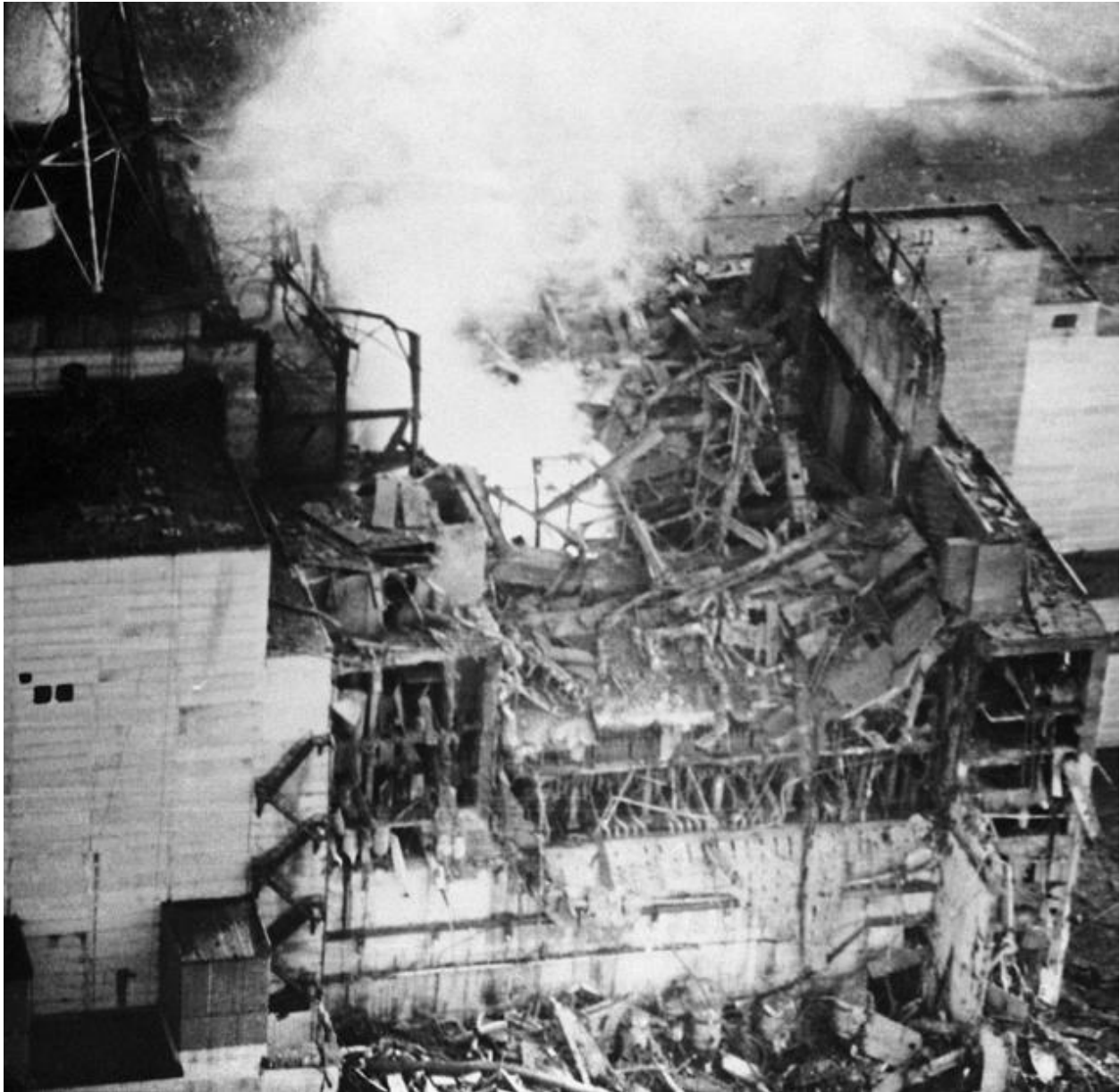
Our first truth this morning is that we inherited sin. The human race—our primary attribute, our universal shared trait, is that not a single one of us is good or righteous or seeks for God. So, how did we get here? Romans chapter 5, verse 12, says that **"Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. And in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned."**

The Bible tells us that our sinful nature is inherited. Sin is hereditary. And we call this the doctrine of original sin. And in the narrative of Scripture, we refer to the event when sin contaminated the world as "the Fall." In the Book of Romans here, it's tracing a direct line back to the Book of Genesis and into the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve, the first created humans, chose to defy God's authority. They reject His very clear command and they disobey Him. And so, together now, we are all heirs of that guilt and corruption from that first sin.

Thirty-five years ago in the city of Pripyat in what was at the time the USSR, at 1:23 am, an explosion opened up this cavernous hole in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The reactor had melted down, the core was exposed, and it was essentially spewing deadly radiation into the air and the atmosphere and the ground, and really, into any living thing in a miles-long radius.



The scientists and workers in the plant who weren't killed by the initial explosion were so horribly irradiated that within seconds the atoms in their cells were in an advanced state of deterioration. They were coming apart at a molecular level from the inside out. Firefighters who were dispatched to Chernobyl to fight the burning rubble were unaware of the greater unseen danger of the nuclear fallout. They too were being pierced by radiation. Their skin began to burn under their suits, their organs started to decay inside of their bodies. Most of the firefighters died from radiation poisoning within one week.



Compounding the tragedy were families, men, women, and children, in the city, miles away, who left their homes. And they stood on rooftops and on bridges, and they climbed trees, and they did whatever they could to get a better glimpse of the light and the colors coming from the plant. They described it as beautiful. They didn't know that they were looking at their own demise. They were marveling at the very thing that would kill them within a few months' time.

Those lucky enough to survive the radiation poisoning were left affected in other horrendous ways that were physical and mental—defects, tumors, cancer. The fallout from Chernobyl would continue to leave its mark and its stain on anyone who had even the smallest encounter with the catastrophe.



And this is crazy—as of last week, eight days ago, underground sensors have detected fission reactions in the uranium fuel masses buried deep inside the debris. It’s still burning. A scientist described it like embers in a barbecue pit. It is still burning. It’s still contaminating, even today.

What happened at Chernobyl thirty-five years ago was a profound disaster. But what adds to the tragedy is that the devastation wasn’t just limited to the moment of the explosion. People miles away, the land itself, rivers and lakes, trees and animals, and even children, those not yet

born, were left scarred and polluted and contaminated, months, years, and now even decades later, because of what happened in an instant.

And in the beginning, a man named Adam and his wife Eve believed a lie and they made a catastrophic choice. And the fallout from that moment, the wreckage from the Garden of Eden, is greater than Chernobyl or Hiroshima, or any either tragic episode in the history of the world combined. They sinned; we inherited it. And it's changed everything. This is called total depravity, that there is not a single aspect of creation that is left unspoiled by our sinful condition.

But the truth is that you and I were not meant to be this way. We are eternal beings who will live forever, and we were created to enjoy and reflect the glory of God. But our souls are now warped. And we know the results of sin are numerous. Sin is the doorway through which all suffering and evil has ever been born. So, every injustice, every sickness, every painful struggle with cancer, every abused child, every marriage that's been wrecked by an affair, every murder, every war—it all goes back to that one choice, that first sin.

And so, our true problem in each of us is not the wrong or even the evil things that we do; the true problem is our inherent corruption. King David, after confessing sinful actions of adultery, murder, and deception—these are sins against fellow humans and against God—declares, **“Surely I was sinful at birth. I was sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** **(Psalm 51:5)**

And so, the truth of Scripture is this. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. And as human beings, our deepest issue—again, it's not the wrong choices, it's not even the moral transgressions that we make—at the root, at the core, the problem with the human race is relational. Because we inherited sin, sin now separates us from God. Sin shattered that relationship for which we were created. And so, all the brokenness, the evil that we witness and experience in the world, are symptoms of something that's much more sinister lurking beneath the surface.

So, yes, sin has corrupted every thought and desire and word and attitude and action because we've been separated from the primary relationship that was intended to give us meaning and significance. And so, now we're left searching for glory that we were made for from sources that are unable to provide it. Because man was hard-wired to reflect glory, our

security, our value, our purpose, from God. But because of sin, what's happened is that we've made this terrible exchange. It's God's glory for our brokenness.

And the Bible says it this way: **“Although we knew God, we did not glorify Him as God or give thanks to Him but we became futile in our thinking and our foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, we became fools, and we exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, and creeping things. Therefore, God gave us over to the lusts of our hearts, to impurity, to the dishonoring of our bodies among ourselves, because we exchanged the truth about God for a lie and we worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” (Romans 1:21-23)**

This is what Adam and Eve did in the garden. They're in paradise, they're spending time with the creator of the universe, God gives them everything they could need. But one day they choose to trade it all for a lie. Claiming to be wise, they become fools, and they exchange the glory of God for a bite of fruit and the desire for something more. And sin severs their relationship with God.

Now as Christians, when we think about or when we teach about sin, we often define it very systematically. We tend to reduce it to simple disobedience or moral grievance, or illegal trespass. And it is those things—absolutely. But it's also something more. Because when we talk about sin, what took place in the garden and what takes place in each of our hearts, let's be clear. It's the supreme act of betrayal. And we tend not to think of the Fall in relational terms, but it was. It was the destruction of a relationship.

My wife and I have two daughters and another little girl on the way. And on a few occasions in a tantrum filled with anger, our five-year-old has screamed at us that she hates us, that she wants nothing to do with us, that she wishes we weren't around. I wish I could say that it doesn't bother me, but it hurts. That really does. But she's five. And after a good night's sleep, the next day she'll usually apologize. Kate and I are able to shake it off and forgive. Our family is still whole. We love her and she loves us.

One of the hardest things that I've seen in youth ministry, though, is children who tell their parents that they hate them, and then they leave and they don't come back. And the relationship, for the time being, remains broken. I've seen friends whose marriages have been destroyed because one person betrayed the other in a very intimate way, or they just looked at their spouse and said, “You know, I'm done. I don't want any part of you anymore.”



In those types of broken relationships with a child or a loved one, that is much closer to what sin looks like. Those are glimpses, they're shadows, even, of what took place at the Fall. But even that—I don't know if we can fully understand or grasp the pain that absolutely holy and pure love would feel by being betrayed by the focus of its love.

And this makes me wonder what God must have felt, stepping into the garden, entering the scene the moment after the Fall, knowing that all He had made was ruined. Not just between Him and this first couple, but between Him and us—God in that instant knowing that I was now also separated from Him, that you were cut off from Him.

The word “sin” in the original Greek of the Bible is an archery term. And the word is *hamartia*—it means to miss the mark, and it conveys movement, and it's the trajectory of our hearts and of our souls. And we are on a flight path away from our Creator. And what happens as we drift further and further from God is that we also detach more and more from one another. Because sin also corrupts our relationships with other people.

The relationship with God that we were created for is so strong, it's so real. God's love is so pure, that Adam and Eve together felt no insecurity at all. But when that was broken, they knew it instantly. And all the glory that came from God was gone. And so, mankind began pining for other people to fulfill us. But because no one can do that, we turn on each other.

So, Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden, and their broken nature passes on to their children. The couple has a son and they name him Cain. He becomes a farmer. They have another son. They name him Abel. He becomes a rancher. And one day, each of the brothers brings an offering to God. And the younger brother's offering pleases God more than the older brother's offering. And God tells the older brother, “Don't be disheartened.” God encourages him, saying, “If you do well, won't you be accepted? But beware: sin is waiting, it's crouching, it is against you.”

And Cain takes that truth from God and, just like his parents before him, he trades it for a lie. God gave him a path, but Cain sees another way, and so Cain makes this exchange, and he murders his brother. And sin continues to spread and infect and irradiate all of our relationships here on earth. Because it separates us from God first and foremost, it then also disconnects us from each other.

Sin is the betrayal of the one who loves us most. And do you see what it is we're doing when we sin and disobey God, even in the slightest? We're exchanging Him for broken things. And in some area of our lives, we've done this, we've made this exchange.

And the Bible says we do this because we claim to be wise. Pridefully, we believe in some area that we know better than God. Maybe we don't see His plan, and so we make our own. Or truthfully, maybe we don't like His plan and we say, *I've got a better one. I'll take it from here.*

Our exchanges often manifest our personalities and our bents. And so—just full disclosure—personally, here are three ways that I've claimed to be wise and have exchanged God's glory and His plan for my own in the past six days.

God commands us to rest. The Bible calls it Sabbath, to intentionally stop working and to be with God. Very simple—stop and rest. It's in the Ten Commandments, it's good for us, and it's part of God's plan. But how quickly do we exchange it for a lie? *God, you don't really understand—I need to work today. I need another fifty- or sixty-hour work week. This project is too important. Rest is fine for other people, but not me, at least not right now.* What we're saying is, I just don't have time to obey. And we're telling God, *I don't know what You're thinking, but I know better.*

Or maybe, like me, you have a bent toward worry—about the future, finances, about your family. And you know the truth, that God is in control. You've heard the words, you've read the words in the Bible, "Do not worry about tomorrow." *But maybe if I just dwell on this a little more. If I just stress over the spreadsheets one more time before bed ... I'll just grind my teeth... that will help.* More anxiety, less prayer; more fear, less trust. And we're saying, *God, I know you said not to worry, but in this area, I have to. So, I'll trust You with the other stuff, the smaller stuff, but this is really big. I'll take it from here.*

Or if your hope in this world has increasingly become for security or comfort, your temptation may be to take the truth that God cares most about your eternal soul, and exchange it for the lie that He cares more about your temporal contentment and the things that you want. And so, *I'll give to the church later. Or, I can't serve right now. Or, I don't really think I'm going to be able to talk to my neighbor about Jesus, because those things would make me uncomfortable, and God wants me to be comfortable.* And what happens is that you begin to trade in your theology for a lesser god who only gives you the things that you want.

And listen, all three of those bents are mine. Those are three exchanges I've made, like I said, in the past six days. And they're not even that difficult to choose. What does this look like in your life? We all make these exchanges here and there. Sin is a terrible exchange. We choose sin and it separates us from God.

But it's not just something we do; it's part of who we are, because we inherited it.

And this takes us to our third truth this morning. Sin leads to death.

Remember Romans 5: "Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. And in this way, death came to all people because all sinned." Remember, it puts us on a trajectory, and it's away from God, and apart from God, away from Him, there is only death.

In 1956 the French author Albert Camus wrote a book entitled *The Fall*. The story is set in Paris. It's about this prominent lawyer named Jean-Baptiste Clamence. And he's successful and he's accomplished and he's young and good-looking and rich, and he gives to charity, and he thinks of himself as a really good person. But one night, Clamence has this terrible experience. He's walking across a bridge over the Seine River on his way home. And he sees this woman, and she's crying and distraught and is looking down into the water. He's minding his own business, so he walks right by her. But when he gets to the other side of the bridge, he hears a splash. She'd jumped in. And he hears some thrashing and struggling and some crying and screaming, and then he hears nothing. Silence.

And he thinks to himself, *Should I jump in and go after her? Or maybe I should run and go get some help? Or should I just walk away?*

And he walks away. And this inner turmoil begins to take place, and Clamence asks himself, *Why didn't I do anything?* And he begins to come up with these reasons: *If I jumped in, what if I also drowned, because I'm not a good swimmer. If I ran to get help, what if I was suspected of foul play? I'm a lawyer, I know how this stuff works.*

But what he realizes is that he simply didn't care enough to do anything. Because who would know?

Clamence is a person who's "respectable" by every societal standard, but he's confronted by this truth that he's not a "good person." And he says to himself, **"Underneath my virtue is nothing but duplicity."**

In almost every good thing he had ever done in his life, he realizes that it was in the hope that someone would notice, that someone would vindicate him and justify him as good. But who

he is in the dark when nobody's looking is not somebody that he likes. And all that he sees in himself is selfishness and vanity and pride. And he's wrestling with this. What happened to him? He doesn't ever remember choosing to be this version of himself. But it's who he is.

And one night he's crossing another bridge. He's looking down in the water and he's trying to fight back and suppress these memories and this sense that there's something wrong in him. And so, what does he do? He plays the comparison game. He says, *Well, I'm better than this person. And I'm better than that person. And I'm better than him, and I'm better than her.*

And he reaches for a cigarette, because he's French. And he thinks to himself, *You know what? I'm better than most.* And just as he lights that cigarette and he has that thought, he hears laughter behind him. And he whips around, but there's nobody there.

Now the author isn't trying to say that there was someone laughing who ran off. What he's trying to get across is that for just a moment, for a second, the veil was ripped away and Clamence suddenly became aware of the greater battle between good and evil going on, not out in the world, but within, and for his very soul.

Pastor Tim Keller says this about sin and where it leads. He says, **“We know, but sometimes we don't know because we don't want to know.”** We choose to suppress the truth of sin and death in our lives because we don't want to think about it.

One of the most common ways that we do this, just like Clamence, is by comparison. Because I don't have to consider my own depravity, I don't need to think about my death and my alienation from an almighty God as long as there's someone out there that's worse than me. And so, we compare our separation from God with someone that we believe is more sinful and therefore more separated than we are.

And this is so convenient, because we always get to choose who to compare ourselves to. And there are plenty of Hitlers and Pol Pots in the world, and even people on our own street who we think, *Oh, yeah, they're living more sinfully than I am.* And by doing this, we even excuse ourselves to sin in ways or degrees that we don't tolerate from others.

And so, we get to store up anger and even hatred toward another person or another group of people, and every thought becomes laced with malice and every word about them is just filled with this loathing. But we permit it in ourselves, because it's not that bad, or it's not as bad as what they're doing.

We find ourselves going back to the same websites each night. We keep lusting after pornography. We know it's wrong, but, you know, it's not as bad as actually doing something, right? And we compare. We say, *Look over there ... that person destroyed their marriage with an affair. I'm just looking. It's not as bad.*

And we lie a little bit here or there, in a relationship or in business or in conversations that don't really don't matter to us, because we tell ourselves, *Well, we're not liars about big, important things.* We suppress the truth. And the truth about sin, all sin, is that it ultimately leads to death. Romans 5 told us that.

Romans 6:23 says it even more clearly: **“What we earn from sin is death.”** And this means—physical death? Absolutely. But it also means spiritual death, separateness from God, not just here on earth, but forever and always.

And so, you see, we're not sick with sin; we are dead in sin. And so, we don't just need to be healed; we need to be rescued and brought back to life.

I think I mentioned that this is one of the more difficult teachings of the Christian faith, right? But here's why it's so important. This conviction is so important; it is one that we must understand, because of what it teaches us about ourselves and because of what it reveals to us about God.

There's no way around this. The truth of sin is bad news. But if you read the Bible, the God that you meet in Scripture is broken-hearted over our death and our separation from Him. When you read the stories in the Bible, you come in contact with a God who seems absolutely obsessed with mending this relationship, so much so that He comes to us to do that. And church, that's the good news. That's the gospel. We are dead in sin, but God comes to us to make us alive in His Son Jesus.

The first half of Romans 6:23—we just read this—**“The wages”—“What we earn because of our sin is death.”** The second half of that same verse tells us, **“But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.”**

Romans 3:23: **“We've all sinned, we've all fallen short of the glory of God.”** Verse 24 declares, **“We are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.”**

Romans 5:12: **“Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.”**

Romans 5:19—it reminds us of the bad news and then proclaims our good news:

**“Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man”—that’s Jesus—“the many will be made righteous.”**

We inherited sin, but through Jesus’ death and resurrection, we inherit righteousness. Sin separates us from God, and so God came to us to reconcile us to Himself. Sin leads to death, but Jesus died for us the death that we deserve, so that we can be made fully alive, both in this world and in the world to come. And church, that’s the gospel.

I’ve told this story before, but in 1908, *The Times* newspaper in London sent letters to various writers and thinkers throughout England, posing the question, **“What’s wrong with the world?”** And the author G. K. Chesterton received his letter and immediately wrote back, saying, **“Dear Sirs, I am.”** That’s the truth. We’re sinful. We inherited sin and we choose it. But through grace in Jesus we inherit life.

And so, I want us to do something together this morning. It’s very simple. I want each of us to try it sometime today. If you’re at home, you can do this right now. I want each of us to take a piece of paper, and at the top, I want you to write that question: **“What’s wrong with the world?”** And I want you to pause and reflect, not on the things that are out there, but what’s in here, on the things that you’ve done in your life, on the things that you’ve said, on the choices that you’ve made, on the sin that you’ve inherited and continued to walk in. And that’s not an easy thing to do. But take some time. Sit with yourself, think through that.

And then, beneath that question, I want you to consider writing this confession: **“Dear God, I am.”** And those four words, Grace, that’s a conviction. The doctrine of sin is bad news. But it reveals to us the grand story of the gospel in our lives. And when we understand this, our appreciation of the cross and of God’s love for us and Jesus’ death for us will increase.

And I want you bring that piece of paper—hold onto it—tuck it into your Bible, put it in your wallet, leave it in your car or your purse—bring that back with you next Sunday. Next week we’re going to explore this incredible truth of what the community of God, what this church, what the Church, looks like when we understand who we were, dead in sin, and who we are now, made alive in Christ. I’m really excited. I cannot wait. So, please join us next Sunday.

Right now, would you please pray with me?

*Father, we thank You so much for who You are. And we thank You for Your word to us, that reveals the truth of who You are and also who we are. God, I pray that as we wrestle with the things within us that we've done, and more importantly, we wrestle with the sin that's in our souls, God, that we would look to You. We wouldn't try to fix ourselves or heal ourselves, God, but we would fall before You, knowing that You love us, You care for us, so much so that You died for us so that we wouldn't be separated from You forever.*

*God, I pray that You would continue to pierce our hearts with that truth, so that as we grow in knowledge of our brokenness, we would grow in appreciation of Your love. So, Father, we love You and we praise You, and we pray these things in Your name. Amen.*