

In 1903 the president of Michigan Savings bank advised people not to invest in Ford Motor Company. He said, "The horse is here to stay, but the automobile is only a novelty—a fad." Wow. He never saw it coming.

In 1907 Captain Edward Smith of the HMS Titanic said, "I cannot conceive of any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that." Wow. He never saw it coming.

In 1938 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin conducted successful treaty negotiations with Germany's Adolf Hitler. He held up a copy of the new Munich treaty in a speech before Parliament and said, "This is peace in our time." Wow. He never saw it coming.

You are reading along in the book of Exodus, 31 chapters. It's an amazing story of God saving and wooing the Hebrew people into a trusting, covenant relationship with him and they you get to chapter 32. In six verses everything explodes. Nothing prepares us for this complete and utter disaster. Sin is like that, you just never see it coming. You can spend decades building a relationship of trust with your spouse, your parents, your neighbors or your business partners and then see the whole thing destroyed in just a few minutes. It is not unlike the first sin in Genesis. You read the beautiful story of creation. Then the planting of the Garden of Eden and the appointment of Adam and Eve. Everything is beautiful until the disaster of chapter 3. With one piece of fruit, the whole beauty of creation is destroyed.

I want to think with you about sin this morning. I don't want to talk about mistakes or inappropriate behaviors but specifically I want to use the word sin. Mistakes are actions and words that are misguided, incorrect or inaccurate. Mistakes carry no great moral burden. We can do better next time. We can correct ourselves. We don't pray, "Forgive us our mistakes as we forgive those who mistake against us." Mistakes are banal, trivial and forgettable. "Inappropriate behavior" is a term borrowed from psychology. It refers to behavior that is not suitable to the circumstances such as laughing when others are weeping or raging at the innocent. The cure for inappropriate behavior is therapy—psychological insight into your own emotional life. But what Israel did in Exodus 32 was not a mistake that you can remedy with some research online and a couple of self-help books—it was deliberate rebellion. It was not inappropriate behavior—it was ungodly, unfaithful and unholy. This is not something a counselor can sort out for you at \$125 an hour. This is a break in your relationship to God. Fixing it is going to require humility, confession, repentance, atonement and forgiveness.

The good news here is human freedom. God made us free. God is talking to Moses on the mountain top but he knows what is unfolding down below. Yet God does not intervene. He lets the people freely commit sin. Parents are not very good at remembering this. When kids grow up and make bad choices

or wander away from the faith or chose to find the places where demons dwell in this world, many parents blame themselves. They search through their memories to find and identify all the deficiencies in their parenting that are the source of all the troubles their grown children have. Many parents believe they have complete control over their children and that their techniques will pre-determine the entire course of life for their offspring. This is a guaranteed guilt trip. Many parents forget their children are free to choose their own behaviors. Children are responsible for themselves. They are free moral agents. Parents can save themselves a lot of sleep by drawing a clear boundary between your responsibility to teach and guide and your children's responsibility to choose wisely. Israel couldn't have had a better parent than God himself but God is not responsible for the disaster of the Golden Calf.

Here's the thing about sin—it's always favored by majorities. The Golden Calf was an overwhelming majority. Pastor and author Bob Russell was visiting his son. His son was test driving a foreign car but was frustrated because he couldn't get the speedometer to read miles instead of kilometers. That evening the family went out for ice cream. They had to take two cars to fit everyone. Russell followed as his son led the way. A police car came and pulled them over. He said to Pastor Russell, "sir you were driving 58 in a 45 mph zone but I will deal with you after I speak with the car in front of you." The officer then went to his son's car and his son said, "Officer, I know this is going to sound like a line, but this is the first day I've driven this car, and I can't figure out how to change it from kilometers to miles, so I had no idea how fast I was going. The guy behind me is my dad, and he doesn't know what he's doing either." Don't make driving decisions based on what the car in front of you is doing! Don't make moral decisions based on what people on Facebook or Snapchat are doing either. Make your decisions on the word of God instead. Israel had the word, they had the Ten Commandments but they like Adam and Eve before them chose to believe in the wisdom of the majority even when it contradicted the Word of God.

What is to explain Aaron's behavior? How could such a godly man who had stood by Moses' side before Pharaoh as well as on Mt. Sinai go so far astray? There is no man or woman who is above temptation and sin. Paul said, "Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12). This not a matter of environment or genetics. Adam had the best genetics anybody can have! Adam had the best environment anybody can have. Adam had the best parents anybody can have but he fell. Aaron fell. Despite being the brother of Moses and the first high priest of Israel he fell. There is never a moment in anyone's life when they are not susceptible to catastrophic failure. Sin doesn't make any sense at all, it is inexplicable foolishness. None of us should ever think we're too smart to be fools. Sin is inexplicable—a deadly power present in the most beautiful human lives. At the entrance of Seven Lakes State Park near Fenton is a lovely restored tall-grass prairie. As beautiful as it is,

the park is careful to explain it is the perfect habitat for Mississauga Rattlesnakes. So it is with sin—even the best of us is the perfect habitat for a rattlesnake. Octave Mirbeau, the French novelist from the early twentieth century said, “There is a diabolical streak in me, a troublesome and inexplicable perversity.” A wise Christian is sober enough to admit this.

Sin is a deceiver. Few people actually set out to do evil when they sin. Most of the time we actually think we are doing good. Eve looked at the forbidden fruit as a great good: It was a delight to the eyes. It was good for food. It would make her wise. Likewise Israel saw the Golden Calf as a delight to the eyes and an opportunity to worship the Lord and make offerings to him. They thought they were doing good.

In 2001 the great bicyclist Lance Armstrong made a strongly worded anti-drug commercial. Five years later in 2006 he gave sworn testimony in court that he would never use drugs because he had too much to lose like the faith of all the cancer survivors around the world who took him as inspiration. Then in 2012 he was stripped of all his trophies and permanently banned from the sport for running the single most sophisticated drug-doping programs in the history of athletics. Investigators said it was a doping program “run by individuals who clearly saw that they were above the rules.” Inspiring cancer survivors is a good thing right? But good things become Golden Calves when we use them to justify our sins.

Sin is a shock—we rarely see it coming. Sin is the responsibility of free human beings. Sin is open rebellion against God. Sin is inexplicable perversity that lies close to the human heart. It can lie dormant for years until one day we are ambushed by it. Sin is almost always acceptable by the majority standard. Sin deceives us into thinking we are doing good when we are really doing evil. So far the scripture has taught us to understand sin and warned us to resist sin but how can we triumph over sin?

We can only triumph over sin by starting to live in the future. Paul said this, “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (15:22)

Here Adam represents our human nature. Our human nature is marked with sin. Our human nature is dying because it has been separated from God who is the source of life. If we try to escape our sin by studying our human nature and learning its lessons, we will be defeated and disappointed at every turn. The only escape from sin is to put to death our human nature. Dead people don’t sin. The problem is they don’t breathe either. This is where Christ comes in. By faith, we need to put on the new nature of Christ. He is the future. Adam is the past. Only by faith can we live out of the future. So Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) You’ll never overcome sin by trying to get Adam to work harder. He’s a hopeless sinner—just let him die so that Christ can take his place in you. You need a new nature. The good news is you can have one.