

Welcome to week number two of Rockin' the Gospel where we are looking at five hit songs from five different eras that touch on some of the most important truths when it comes to the biblical message of salvation—the gospel. The word “gospel” simply means “good news,” but the good news begins with the bad news.

We just had Valentine's Day. Let's say you're out for a nice, romantic dinner. The atmosphere was perfect. Romantic music is playing. There's flowers and candlelight. The food was delicious. The mood was set, and all the sudden several firefighters run in, they grab you, throw you over their shoulder and run you out of the restaurant. You scream, “What are you doing?”

They yell back, “We're saving you?”

“From what? Are you crazy?”

Salvation isn't good news if you don't need saving. Now, say there had been a gas explosion in the kitchen while you were out for your nice romantic evening and the restaurant was engulfed in flames. You were knocked to the floor. You can't see anything. There's smoke everywhere. Your ears are ringing. You feel the heat closing in. Then the firefighters rush in and carry you out, that would be truly good news. Now, they're heroes.

What I'm here to tell you today is the building is on fire. There's smoke everywhere. It's hard to see which way to go, unless you have someone to save you. Time is running out.

Last week we looked at who started the fire. The devil is real. He is your enemy. He wants nothing more than to see you spend eternity in hell with him. Your destruction is his sole mission. Satan lit the match. He started the fire.

But Satan was not acting as a lone wolf. He had some partners in crime. Adam and Eve threw gasoline on that fire. They turned the spark into an inferno.

This brings us to this week's basic gospel truth—the other half of the bad news. The first is that we have an enemy and the second is we are all sinners. We can't blame Satan for the mess we're in. We can't blame Adam and Eve. We can't blame our mom and dad, or anyone else because we have all been throwing gasoline on the fire ever since. I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. Everyone in this room is a sinner. Turn to your neighbor – “you're a sinner.”

I've mentioned my nephew, Michael, before and our common love for music and we are always sharing our new music discoveries. Last year, Michael sent me a link to the video for this song. My first thought after watching it was, “Wow, this would be perfect as a sermon illustration.” In fact, it's one of the things that gave me this idea of doing this series.

In this week's song, the singer confesses his lifelong struggle with sin. No matter how hard he tries, he can never escape the failures of his past. He feels like he is always caught in the middle of right and wrong, and even though he has tried to choose right, he finds himself choosing wrong again and again.

Can any of you identify with that? I know I can. The apostle Paul could. Romans 7:15 says, *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”* That hits close to home.

The music video for this song is brilliant because it makes it very clear that this isn't just his story. It's my story. It's your story. It's all of our stories. We are all sinners.

The singer's name is Jason DeFord, and his song details his personal struggles with right and wrong and especially his ongoing battle with addiction. In fact, he was high when he recorded the vocal track for the song. He is a Nashville based rapper who performs under the name Jelly Roll. Some of his earlier releases have names like *“Pop Another Pill,” “Whiskey, Weed and Women,” “Sobriety Sucks”* and *“The Whiskey Sessions,”* so it should come as no surprise that both drink and drugs have been a lifelong battle for DeFord.

In 2021, Jelly Roll drew upon his Nashville roots and released a country album called *Ballads of the Broken*. It's a telling admission, because we're all broken in some way. One of the tracks on that album is a song called *Son of a Sinner*. It became a smash crossover hit last year. It reached number 1 on the Billboard Country Airplay chart and number 4 on the US Hot Rock and Alternative Songs chart, where it stayed for more than 20 weeks.

The video features Jelly Roll sitting at a bar lamenting his struggles, but watch what happens as the song continues.

(Watch Video Clip)

Isn't that powerful? The character sitting behind the bar changes as the song continues. An elderly man, a young woman, black and white. This person. That person, and then another. It turns out it's every man. It's every woman. This struggle with sin is universal.

The Bible makes the same exact point. In Romans 3, the apostle Paul writes about universal problem of sin. He quotes from Psalm 53, *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away.”*

Paul wholeheartedly agrees with this diagnosis. In Romans 3:23, Paul offers this summation, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* It's both a declaration and a definition. The declaration is that we are all sinners. Every single one of us. We might quibble about whose sins are worse, who sins more, but every single human being will admit that we have failed to live up to even our own standards.

The problem is that I'm not the standard by which I'll be measured. You're not the standard. God is. And there is the definition of sin. We have fallen short of God's glory. We fall short of His perfect standard. I'm not being measured against anyone else in the church. I'm not being measured against my parents, or my sister, or my best friend. I'm not being measured against a

guy on death row, or the winner of the humanitarian of the year award. No, the standard of measure is the glory, the purity, the holiness, the perfection of God.

And we all fall short. So. Far. Short. That's actually what the word sin means – to miss the mark. And when the mark is a perfect bullseye, none of us can hit that every single time. What makes sin sin isn't what the civil law says or any courtroom may decide. Sin isn't wrong because the church says its wrong. Sin isn't bad because of your family upbringing or what society collectively thinks is right or wrong. Sin is sin because of who God is and what it does to our relationship with Him.

Here's what I want to do this morning, I want to show you what sin does to you, and does to your relationship with God by showing you what it did to the very first people who sinned. Just as Jelly Roll's story is our story, Adam and Eve's story is our story as well. The same thing that happened to them, happens to us.

## **I. Sin Makes God Seem Less Loving**

Number 1. Sin makes God seem less loving. Sin colors our view God so that we can't see His care and compassion. Sin make Him appear more impersonal than He really is. We begin in Genesis 2:16 after God has created Adam and places him in the Garden. Then God gives Adam some instructions regarding his place in this new creation. It says,

*And the LORD God commanded the man saying, "You may **surely** eat of **every** tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat[d] of it you shall **surely** die."*

If you look in your Bible LORD is spelled big L O R D. That means the Hebrew word here is *Yahweh*. *Yahwah* is the personal name of God.

Yahweh, who is God gives Adam these very intimate and personal instructions. God was appealing to Adam on a relational basis. This isn't some uncaring, but powerful boss laying down the law for the little guy without regard for his personal circumstances.

This is a loving father saying, "Here is what I've provided for your fulfillment and pleasure, but don't do this one thing because I love you."

Capitol LORD is *Yahweh*– the personal name for God. "G-o-d" is *Elohim*. This is a title for God. Elohim is the God of power who created all things. Yes. God is powerful, but He commands Adam and Eve, not merely because, "He said so" and He has the power, but rather from a position of relationship because He loves them.

Now, we go to Genesis 3 for the rest of the story. Here is where we are introduced to Satan in the guise of a serpent who tempts Adam and Eve to eat from the one tree that God, "Don't eat." And we can't blame Eve for what happens, because Adam was right there with her. Vs. 6 says, "*she also gave some to her husband who was with her.*" He was there the whole time. He

saw and heard all of this. But he didn't speak up. He didn't defend his woman. He did what far too many men do when it comes to spiritual leadership— He sat on his butt and did nothing. He said nothing. Here's what happens.

*He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 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.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 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.*

Notice that Satan doesn't refer God by his personal name. He simply calls him God —*elohim*. He doesn't want Eve or you to think of God as a relational, personal Creator, but merely as someone in a position of power and authority.

And he's trying to create doubt in Eve's mind. He's causing her and Adam to question God's word. "Did God actually say?" "What do those words actually mean?" "Maybe there's a different way of interpreting this?" "Perhaps you could look at God's words in a different light." "There's a more enlightened understanding."

Satan is trying to create space between Eve and her Creator. And Eve falls victim to his way of thinking. When Eve answers the serpent, she doesn't call God by his name. She simply calls him "God." She now sees God as an impersonal power. She is no longer looking at God relationally. She merely sees him as the source of rules and restrictions. He's now something that's getting in the way of what she wants. Sin makes God seem less loving.

Sin always tries to get us to see God differently, so we will see God's truth differently. He wants us to shade the meaning just a little bit, get us to take one thing out here, and add one little thing there. We become that much more relationally distant from the lover of our souls. That's what sin does. It separates us from God and His love.

## **II. Sin Makes Our Freedom Seem Smaller**

Secondly, sin makes our freedom seem smaller. When we don't see God in His love; we don't see Him as trying to give good things to us. We see Him as trying to keep good things from us.

Let's rewind. Go back to 2:16-17. God's provision is given in the most generous terms, "*You may **surely** eat of **every** tree...*" Other translations say, "*You may freely eat...*" The freedom was as big as it possibly could be. You can eat freely of every tree. Any tree. Not some trees. Not most trees, but from any of them. The entire garden is wide open for your enjoyment. It's all yours.

The only tree God held back was for their protection. To partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would not increase their freedom. It would mean the loss of it. This is like a parent leaving for a night and telling their children, "You can eat anything you want in the kitchen, but stay out from under the sink."

The most freedom that humanity has ever had was in the Garden before the fall. No culture, no country, no followers of any philosophy have enjoyed the freedom enjoyed by Adam and Eve.

However, when Eve starts listening to the snake, she says this, "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden...*" What's missing? She's left out two words. Gone is the "surely" and gone is the "every-" the very terms that emphasize her freedom and God's generosity. "*We may eat of the fruit*" is simply not as deep and rich as "*You may freely eat of every tree.*"

Sin will become more attractive to us the more we downplay the generosity of God and freedom we have in Christ. Satan makes sin look more desirable by getting us to question the goodness and generosity of God.

When God doesn't seem as good, sin looks better. Here's the truth. Sin can never compete with God. It will never be as joyous, as loving, as generous, or as beautiful. In reality sin is nasty, manipulative, selfish and ugly, and so sin will always try to get you to see God as less than He is so that you feel trapped. Sin makes our freedom seem smaller.

### **III. Sin Makes God's Rules Look Bigger**

So sin makes God seem less loving. It makes our freedom seem smaller, and thirdly, sin makes God's rules look bigger. Sin makes the laws of God seem more restrictive than they really are.

There is no doubt God gave them a command – *You shall not eat of this tree*. In fact, this is the first time the word *command* is used in the Bible. But we've already seen that this command comes from a place of love and relationship. God's commands are always because He either wants to give something good to you, or He wants to keep something bad from you. It is never the opposite. God never gives a command because He wants to keep something good from you or He wants to give something bad to you.

But Satan doesn't want us to see it that way. He will try to get us to see God's commands as more cumbersome than they actually are. Listen to how Eve describes God's command, "*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden.*" So far, so good, but does she stop there? Nope. She adds this, "*Neither shall you touch it.*" Where did that come from? God didn't say that. She's just making stuff up now, and Adam went right along with her. In their minds, they're seeing God's command as more burdensome than it is. God comes across like an angry parent here, "Don't you even touch it." Sin will get us to minimize his goodness and exaggerate the intrusiveness of his commands.

### **IV. Sin Makes Consequences Seem Less Significant**

1. Sin makes God seem less loving. 2. Sin makes our freedom look smaller. 3. Sin makes God's rules look bigger. Number 4. Sin makes the consequences seem less significant.

The final subtle shift in Eve's retelling of God's command is that the consequences are sound less severe. She makes the consequences of disobedience seem smaller than they are. Back in chapter 2 here's what God tells them, "*for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*"

If you translate the Hebrew literally, it says, "*dying you shall die.*" Sounds a bit redundant right? Remember, Hebrew uses repetition for emphasis. God is holy, holy, holy. Jesus would teach saying, "Truly, truly I say unto you." Paul, who was raised as a Hebrew of Hebrews said, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice." This isn't mostly dead like in *The Princess Bride*. This is dead dead. You will most definitely die.

But look at what Eve does here, and how she changes the meaning. She says, "*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.*" "You might die." "You could die." That is not nearly as strong as "*You shall surely die.*" Eve makes it sound like death is a possibility, but not a guaranteed certainty. Sin gets us to thinking, "Surely, it can't be as bad as all that." Hell is just a metaphor. Eternity doesn't really mean forever.

Satan wants you to see consequences of sin as smaller than they really are. He wants you to think that the consequences really don't apply to you. They might apply to other people, in other situations, but not to me. I can get away with this, because I'm smart, I know what I'm doing, I know when to stop or I have really good reasons.

You might be thinking, "Wait, she's just summarizing what God said. She's just putting it into her own words. Maybe you're reading too much into these small differences. Perhaps. Not one of these little changes is big by itself, but they are huge when we put them all together.

Satan uses temptation as a powerful airbrush to make sin look more appealing. He adds a little more curve there, takes off a few blemishes there, and smooths over that bit of ugliness, and all of the sudden, God seems harsh and uncaring, and sin looks good. But it's all built on lies. They may be small lies, yes, but when told together, they make a big difference.

The reason I don't think I'm reading too much into this is look at what Eve along with her husband actually did. They believed the lies. They ignored God's command. They gave in and ate of the forbidden fruit. That tells me they forgot that God's command was based on his love for them. They overlooked the incredible freedom He gave them and they obsessed on the one thing He withheld.

Their desire for sin's false promise was greater than their fear of sin's consequence. Their sin caused them to miss the heart of God. That's what sin does to us as well.

Towards the end of *Son of a Sinner*, Jelly Roll holds out hope that although God may hate him at first, He will eventually save his soul. There is hope for salvation, but it's more than a cross your fingers wish, a shot in the dark chance. Our hope of salvation is based on something real.

Here's where we get to the wonder and the miracle of the gospel, of the good news. Thank God Romans 3:23 is followed by Romans 3:24. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

Yes, sin came into the world and screwed it all up, but God sent Jesus into our screwed up world to save us from our sins.

Genesis 3:24 contains three very powerful and essential words in Christian theology. I want you to understand what they mean.

The first is redemption. It's the idea that we've been redeemed. This word means to be released or liberated. The idea is that because of our sin we owe a fine we can never pay. When you fall short of an infinite God, you incur an infinite debt. But God, in his love, through Jesus, paid the fine for us. No more guilt. No more penalty. No more fine.

The second important word is justified. We are justified. The Greek word used here simply means to render innocent. God hasn't just made the fine disappear. He dealt with the problem of sin itself.

An easy way to look at justified is this— Justified means just if I'd never sinned. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, He can make it just if I'd never sinned. When you are justified, God sees you without all the failures and mistakes. He doesn't measure how far you've fallen short. Rather, He sees you as if you'd hit the bullseye every single time.

The other essential word here is Grace which simply an undeserved gift. Many times with gifts, there is an exchange. I give you a gift. You give me a gift. I take you out to eat for your birthday, and you take me out for my birthday. That's not the kind of gift we're talking about here. This is something that is given, and not only did you exchange nothing for it. You've got nothing to give, even if you wanted to.

That's grace. God's Riches at Christ's Expense. He paid the price for our sin.

Here's what Paul writes later in Romans 5:1-2, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."*