

Brokenness

Creation to Conclusion Series, June 5 & 6, 2021 | Exodus 32:1-6
Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

ISRAEL SINNED AGAINST GOD.

When Pharaoh finally agreed to release the Israelites from slavery, the Israelites had to grab everything they could carry and flee in the middle of the night.

After living as slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, the people of Israel cried out to God.

God sent them a deliverer, Moses, who told the king of Egypt to let his people go.

When Pharaoh refused, the LORD sent a series of plagues on Egypt. In the tenth and last plague, the angel of death passed through Egypt at midnight, and the firstborn sons of every Egyptian died. Pharaoh's own oldest son died.

In the middle of the night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and told the Israelites to leave.

The Hebrew slaves quickly grabbed everything they could carry.

They went to their neighbors (just as Moses had told them) to ask for clothing and jewelry. The Egyptians gave them everything they asked for—earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and outfits.

Then the Israelites headed away from Egypt, into the arid wilderness.

Less than two months later, the Israelites camped at the base of Mount Sinai.

God appeared on Mount Sinai with thunder, smoke, fire, shaking.

God spoke to the people and gave them the foundations of the law.

God called Moses up Mount Sinai to receive further instructions.

Later, the LORD called Moses back up Mount Sinai to spend more time with him. This time Moses was gone for 40 days and 40 nights. Down below, the people became anxious.

In Exodus 32:1 the Israelites pressured Aaron to make gods for them:

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

Moses, their leader, was out of sight and out of mind.

On the other hand, Aaron the priest was right there.

The anxious people demanded certainty about their leaders and certainty about their gods.

Then in Exodus 32:2-4 Aaron made a graven image to represent the LORD:

So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that

were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

Aaron instructed the Israelites to give him their earrings. This was part of the jewelry that the Hebrew slaves had asked their neighbors for as they fled Egypt.

Aaron took the jewelry, melted it down, and cast it into an idol in the shape of a young bull.

Then he told the people of Israel that this statue represented their "gods."

In Exodus 32:5-6 the Israelites held a feast:

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

For Aaron, the young bull somehow represented the LORD. Aaron built an altar and proclaimed that the next day would be a feast to the LORD.

The next day the people got up early. It was like Christmas day for them!

They offered sacrifices to the golden calf. Then they held a feast. They partied, and the Bible implies that the party was wild and completely debauched.

Idolatry. Immorality. **Israel sinned against God.**

This episode illustrates the second chapter in salvation history: brokenness. Sin is at the root of all our brokenness. What, then, do we learn about sin?

SIN INVOLVES DISOBEDIENCE.

The Israelites disobeyed God's second commandment.

Just 39 short days earlier, God had thundered from the top of Mount Sinai the words recorded in **Exodus 20:4:**

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

Then they demanded a carved image to follow!

The Israelites disobeyed God, which is the starting point for sin.

Of course, the Israelites tried to make right and wrong a subjective matter.

The Israelites made excuses. They were in the middle of the wilderness and didn't know where Moses, their leader, was or what had happened to them. They were tired and worried.

Aaron tried to confuse the matter. Aaron made a golden bull and told the Israelites that it was their "gods." Then Aaron called the golden bull, "the LORD." Confusing.

When Moses returned from Mount Sinai and confronted Aaron, Aaron first blamed the people, "They made me do it!" Then he claimed that he didn't know what he was doing. The people demanded gods, he took their gold, he threw it into the fire, and out came this golden bull!

Everyone involved tried to make the rightness and wrongness of their behavior a matter of interpretation and opinion.

However, it's not. Right and wrong are both objective matters.

APPLICATION: We don't get to make the rules ourselves.

God determines right and wrong.

He tells us in the Bible what's right and what's wrong.

There are times we run into questions we never seem to have faced before, but there is almost always guidance that can help.

There are times when we don't like what the Bible says, but that doesn't change what's right and what's wrong.

There are even times when we argue that what the Bible teaches is out of date or out of step.

However, we don't get to make the rules ourselves.

Sin always involves disobedience. Beyond that...

SIN PRODUCES BROKENNESS.

Worshipping the golden bull left a wake of broken things.

On Mount Sinai, the LORD burned with anger and thought of destroying the Israelites.

The LORD had written down the law on a pair of stone tablets. In anger, Moses threw the tablets down and broke them.

Moses burned the golden bull, then ground what was left down to dust, sprinkled it in water, and made the Israelites drink it.

The Levites rallied to Moses, and he sent them into the drunken crowd to kill revelers.

Eventually, the LORD sent a plague on the Israelites.

The consequences were catastrophic, but that's what sin does. It breaks things!

The Fall broke everything.

The Fall refers to the first time human beings ever sinned. It's recorded early in Genesis.

Before the Fall, the world was pristine and unspoiled; perfect, according to God's plan.

After the first human beings sinned, sin was immediately loose in the world.

Sin broke our relationship with God, and sin broke our relationships with each other. Guilt, shame, blame, hiding, and violence all came quickly behind sin.

Death entered the world with sin, because death is the penalty for sin.

However, death is just one step in a much bigger process. Along with death came sickness, suffering, mourning, and crying.

Everything was touched by sin, everything changed, and everything became broken.

Sin works like a spider's web.

Have you ever watched a bug caught in a spider's web?

After first, it doesn't look too bad. The bug is just touching in one or two places.

But as the bug moves and struggles, it gets caught in more of the sticky web.

Pretty soon, it's completely covered in web.

Worse, the movement signals a waiting spider that there's prey in its web.

Soon the spider pounces on its victim.

Sin works that way! It covers everything. The more we struggle, the more we're covered in it, and the greater the danger we find ourselves in.

Cancer is a great image for the way sin produces brokenness.

Cancer is what happens when the normal cells in our bodies become damaged or abnormal. Then they start multiplying uncontrollably and can spread to other parts of the body.

Cancer is a great image for brokenness itself. In this broken, fallen world, things just go wrong and get out of control!

Cancer can be a symptom of the brokenness all around us. When I received my cancer diagnosis seven years ago, people were quick to try to locate a reason, a rationale. Some people told me that I got cancer because I carried a cell phone or drank too much Diet Coke. The idea is that if we can figure out what causes cancer, then we can avoid those things and prevent cancer. I know there are times when we can say that certain substances cause cancer. However, sometimes it's true that sin simply pollutes the world and creates a metaphorical toxic sludge that coats creation. Our cells mutate and become damaged because of this toxic sludge we live in. At the end of the day, cancer is just one of those things that happens in a fallen world.

SHARE: The brokenness we all experience provides an open door to share the rest of the Gospel.

We're all broken in one way or another.

People experience that brokenness in different ways and at different times.

For some people, they end up in broken relationships. Others experience brokenness through mental illness. Some experience brokenness through accidents and disease. All of us eventually experience our bodies giving out as we age in a fallen world.

When we experience brokenness in a fallen world, we have questions. We wonder "Why?" and ask, "What's next?" Sometimes we're open to help and insight.

The questions we have when we feel broken give us, as followers of Jesus, a chance to pick up God's Story in mid-sentence. We have the opportunity to share the Gospel and help people find the answers they're looking for in Jesus Christ.

We can tell them the truth about our own brokenness and walk with them through their brokenness.

Even better, we can tell them that brokenness is just one chapter in salvation history. It's not the way the world was created; there is hope in Jesus, there is a community to share life with, and there is a future beyond brokenness. We have hope to offer that can change life, death, and eternity for people who are going through brokenness.

We have to point people to Jesus, to the Gospel, and to the arc of salvation history because...

SIN DEFIES OUR SOLUTIONS.

Nothing "fixed" the problem for Israel.

The Israelites suffered right then and right there. Many Israelites died as a result of their disobedience. However, just a short time later, the Israelites again completely disregarded what the LORD said. Their suffering didn't fix the sin problem really.

The system of sacrifices God gave them was supposed to illustrate the seriousness of sin and give the people a way to atone for their guilt. They were able to cover over some of their sins. However, let's be honest; they couldn't shed enough blood to pay the price for their sins. Plus, it never stopped them from sinning. The sacrificial system didn't fix the sin problem. Not really.

Even the cycles of revivals throughout the Old Testament never really did the job. The people of Israel would suffer, cry out to the LORD for deliverance, get delivered, and respond to God enthusiastically for a time. But they always fell again.

Sin leaves us in a "Humpty Dumpty" condition. Do you remember the nursery rhyme?

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

This nursery rhyme conjures up for us a picture of a person-like egg, sitting on a wall. Then Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall. We don't know why.

When Humpty Dumpty fell, he shattered into lots of tiny pieces. Plus, all the tiny little pieces would have been squished into the yolk and the white, which would now be mixed.

Try as we might, putting a mess like that back together again would take a miracle.

Sin's like that. Sin leaves us so broken that we can't put ourselves back together again.

Sin defies our solutions.

Let's cycle through a few implications of that statement very quickly.

Stop trying to "earn" salvation. Most of us know this intellectually, but on a gut level we somehow think that we can be good enough for God to think that he got a pretty good deal in us. Stop trying to earn salvation.

Stop expecting perfection of yourself. By that I don't mean to imply that we shouldn't try to live righteous lives. If you are a follower of Jesus, God has declared you holy, a saint. However, YOU ARE IMPERFECT and always will be. We all are. We are sinners saved by grace. That should come as a relief. Stop expecting perfection of yourself.

Stop waiting to be good enough for God. I have known people who have gone to church for decades. They have heard the good news that Jesus died to save sinners. However, they quietly believe that God won't accept them until they get some things right. So, they hold back from God. I hope that's not you. Stop waiting to be good enough for God.

Since we can't solve our own sin problem, God had to save us.

Ironically, God chose Israel to be the people through whom he would save us.

After everything they had done, God still chose them. That's good news.

God saves broken people, and apparently God uses broken people for his glory.

That fact by itself should be good news to all of us because...

WE ALL SIN.

One of the things that amazes me about Israel's sin with the golden bull in Exodus 32 is that they did it right there in the shadow of Mount Sinai.

Just a few short months earlier, they had watched God deliver ten plagues to the most powerful nation on earth at the time.

Less than two months earlier, they had seen God part the waters of the Red Sea so that they could cross on dry land.

God appeared to the people as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

God's glory was rumbling and thundering on the top of Mount Sinai at that very moment.

But at the base of Mount Sinai, the people turned away from the LORD to sin.

Part of me can't believe they did that, but part of me recognizes myself in what they did.

In Romans 3:23 the apostle Paul reminds us that this is a problem we all share.

He wrote: ... *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...*

Just like the people of Israel, we all sin. I am just like that. And so are you.

Israel's story is our story.

Psalm 106 expresses the hope that even though we sin repeatedly, God will save us.

Psalm 106 looks back at these days we have been studying today, to the days of the Exodus. Verses **19-23** talk about the time when the Israelites sinned by worshipping the golden bull:

They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. Therefore he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

The Psalm goes on to say that the Israelites sinned repeatedly in the wilderness. Repeatedly, that brought them great brokenness. Repeatedly they turned to God because they could not save themselves. Repeatedly God saved them.

Very near the end of the Psalm, the Psalmist asks, "What about us? We too have sinned. Repeatedly. We too are broken. We too are unable to save ourselves, even though we've tried. Will you save us?"

Then the Psalmist closes by saying, "Of course he will. Blessed be the name of the LORD." That's who God is!

FIT: Brokenness is only one chapter in salvation history.

It's a difficult, difficult chapter, but it's only one chapter in salvation history.

Chapter one says that God created a perfect world and created us perfectly.

Chapter two says that we sinned and broke that perfect world, and ourselves, and our relationship with God; we broke it all. We tried to fix our brokenness, but we couldn't.

Chapter three says that when the time was right, Jesus, the perfect Son of God and Son of Man, came into the world to die in our place to pay the price for our sin.

Chapter four says that we are now part of the Church where our brokenness is being healed by the Holy Spirit, where we share our brokenness with each other, and where we invite the rest of the world to join us.

Chapter five says that when Jesus returns, he will heal our brokenness and the brokenness of the world finally and completely. There will be no more mourning or suffering or crying or pain. All of that will be gone, and we will spend eternity with him.

That's the grand arc of salvation history. Where does that leave us today?

In Psalm 51:10, King David prayed that God would make him clean and new again.

King David was probably the greatest king God's people ever had.

However, David was still a sinner. Just like us. Beyond that, David experienced profound brokenness in his life because of his sin.

Still, David prayed that God would save him.

David confessed his sin openly to God and then prayed in **Psalm 51:10**,

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

As we come to Communion today, may that prayer be our starting point.