Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

As I explained before we read our Canon’s articles, our focus today is the doctrine of **Total Depravity**. So, what is this doctrine all about? And why does it matter? Well, one of the commentaries that I am using for my sermon preparation started off with an illustration that gets to the core issue of this topic. Now, like every illustration, it is not perfect. Not every aspect of the illustration fits, perfectly, with the doctrine we will be discussing. But it will help us to see the main issue. So, here is the illustration and it involves two scenarios:

Here is **scenario 1**: Imagine that it is your birthday and a family friend takes you to a car dealership and points to a brand new Lamborghini and says if you want it, it’s all yours. He will pay for the car and the insurance and a year’s supply of petrol; you just need to decide if you want it or not. Now, that would be some gift, wouldn’t it! You don’t deserve a new Lamborghini, but if you want it, you will get it.

And here is **scenario 2**: Imagine that you have had a heart attack. You were rushed to hospital and CPR was performed, but the dreaded flatline came up on the screen, and the head doctor called the time of death as 2:34pm. Gloves were ripped off and the doctors and nurses started to leave the room, but one orderly who had been watching walks over and does one more chest compression. And suddenly, blips start sounding from the heart monitor, and you take a deep breath! You are back, from the dead, as it were! Now, that would be an even greater gift, wouldn’t it? You didn’t deserve it; you didn’t choose it; you didn’t do it yourself, but you are alive!

And this, if you will pardon the pun, is the heart of the matter with the doctrine of Total Depravity. **Romans 6:23** describes salvation as the “*free gift of eternal life*.” And the question is: is the gift of salvation something that we can accept or deny, like the Lamborghini gift, or is it a gift that God must work within us because we are not able to choose it ourselves, like the ‘resurrection gift’?

And this matter is worth our consideration for at least two reasons: First, if we want a full appreciation of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, then we must understand how desperately we need Him. In other words, Jesus will only be a *great* Saviour if we understand the *greatness* of our sin and misery. And secondly, this is a matter of biblical integrity. Many, and probably most, Christians, today, believe that we humans are freely and independently of God, able to choose to be saved. But we are going to see that that is not what the Bible teaches.

Now, our text is a small part of chapter 15. In this chapter, Paul responded to those in the Corinthian church who denied the resurrection. And as we come to our text, he wants his readers to see that the resurrection is an essential part of salvation. And he does this by linking Adam to all humanity and to death, and then believers to Christ and eternal life. And as we unpack that together, under four points, we will see that **understanding our corrupt condition magnifies the sweetness of salvation in Christ**.

1. And the first part or point is that **we were** **created very good**.
   1. And we see this in our text with the reference to **Adam**. And we meet in the first chapter of the Bible – Genesis 1. Let’s turn there together for a moment. In verse 26, God said, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*.” And then in verse 27, “*So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them*.” And then in verse 31, “*And God saw everything that He had made (which included Adam and Eve), and behold, it was very good*.”
      1. Now, one person I enjoy listening to on YouTube is **Jordan Peterson**. He does not claim to be a Christian, but he has a great appreciation for the teachings of the Bible. And some of his most popular videos on YouTube are a series of public lectures that he gave about some of the events recorded in Genesis. And recently, two Roman Catholic theologians wrote a book called, ‘Jordan Peterson, God, and Christianity.’ And I listened to the start of an interview between Jordan Peterson and the authors. And Peterson said, Even though Genesis cannot be literally true, it is wonderful truth. And my heart sank, when I heard that. For despite his appreciation of the Bible and his many useful insights, it is no wonder that he is not a born again believer. You see, what we read in the Bible is literally true. And it is only when the Holy Spirit brings us to understand and believe that that we are made able to respond to the gospel in true repentance and faith. So, my prayer is that the Spirit would bring Jordan Peterson to see that the Bible is literally true. God *did* originally create one man and one woman – Adam and Eve. They were our first parents.
      2. And as we read a moment ago, He created them “***in His own image***.”
         1. What does this mean? Well, think about the word “**image**.” If I held my phone up to you and put it in selfie mode, you would see yourself. And what you saw would do exactly what you were doing – wink, smile, poke your tongue out… But that selfie is not you, is it; it is an image of you.
         2. And in a similar way, we human beings are the image of God. We are not God, but if you look at a human being, you see a reflection of God. Not in a physical sense, because God is a spirit. But we are His **spiritual likeness**.
         3. And so just as God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons who live in fellowship together, who communicate with each other, and who have roles or tasks within the godhead, our being in the image of God means that we were created to live in relationships, and given the ability to communicate with others, and given roles and tasks to perform. This is why God made Adam *and Eve,* and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and to work the garden. So being relational and creative is part of what it means to be made in the image of God.
         4. And from **Ephesians 4:24**, we see that the image of God also has to do with “*true righteousness and holiness*.”
            1. So, Adam and Eve **loved** **God**, with heart, soul, mind, and strength, freely and fully. They **worshipped** Him. To **obey** His commands was a delight for them. All the work that they did was done, perfectly, and for **God’s praise and glory**. And they **loved each other**, selflessly.
            2. And all this is what being made in the image of God means.
      3. And so, having made Adam and Eve, God “*saw all that He had made, and it was very good*.” At the end of each of the first five days, God described what He had created as “*good*.’ But now, at the end of the sixth day, the crown of creation, God’s image-bearers, Adam and Eve, were in the Garden! So, now it was “*very good*”!
2. Sadly though, **this condition of goodness did not last long**. And we read of this earlier in **Genesis 3**. Adam had been told by God that he could eat the fruit of every tree in the garden except for the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But first Eve, and then Adam, listened to the serpent and disobeyed God, and ate the fruit. And so, as our second point, we see that **we chose to rebel**.
   1. Now, this was not the first choice that Adam and Eve made. Every day, they had chosen to love and obey God. But now they chose to disobey God’s clear command. And the consequences were devastating.
      1. A moment ago, I spoke about a selfie image – a perfect reflection. And I don’t know about you, but whenever I use the camera on my phone, the first thing I do is **wipe the camera lens**. Why? Because they are easily smudged and if you don’t remove the smudge, then the image is blurry and fuzzy. And if you have dirt on your lens, it might be hard to see any image at all.
      2. Well, this is what sin did to man as the image of God. God’s reflection in man was ruined and barely recognizable. It was no longer easy to see the reflection of God in man.
      3. Earlier, we used the words love, worship, obey, and praise to describe how Adam and Eve behaved. But after they ate the forbidden fruit:
         1. We see that they became aware of their nakedness and they were **ashamed**, so they tried to hide their nakedness with leaves.
         2. They also **hid** from God when they heard Him walking in the garden. Why? Because now they were **terrified** of God.
         3. And after God called them out, they **blamed** someone else for their sins.
         4. And then when God explained the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin, He told them that there would be **dysfunction** in their relationship as husband and wife. And this would also be the case also in every other relationship .
         5. And their **work** would not be perfect rule like God’s but sweaty, repetitive, hard labour.
         6. And **pain** would be an everyday part of life.
         7. And as God had warned Adam, their lives would now end with **death**.
   2. What a drastic change! And why did it happen? It happened because of **the choice** made by Adam and Eve. As Article 1 says, “Through the instigation of the devil and by his own free will, [Adam] deprived himself of [all the] excellent gifts” that he had been created with, “and instead brought upon himself blindness, horrible darkness, futility, and perverseness of judgment in his mind; wickedness, rebelliousness, and stubbornness in his will and heart, and impurity in all his affections.” And this was the new normal because of their choice to rebel.
3. Now, I don’t know if you have noticed, but the first two points were **we Were Created Very Good**, and **we Chose to Rebel**. But our focus has been entirely on Adam and Eve because they were the only ones there, then. So, why the We? Why have I included all humanity in the creation point and the corruption point? Well, this is where we move into our third point, which is that **Corruption Breeds Corruption**.
   1. Verse 21 says, “*For as by a man came death*…” And that man in view in verse 21 is Adam, as verse 22 makes clear. And what Paul is referring to here is what we were just talking about in our second point – death being a consequence of Adam’s choice to rebel. When God created Adam, He told him that if he ate from that tree he would “*surely die*.” But did Adam die the day he ate from that tree? He did not. And we will see why this is significant in a moment. They did eventually die, but what is important for us to note here is that the deathly consequences of Adam’s choice were not just for Adam. Look again at verse 22: “*For as in Adam* ***all die***.” And who is all? Every single human being.
      1. From time to time, you hear about someone trying to freeze their body so they can be revived when technology gets better, or scientists who are trying to come up with some tablet that prevents death. But what does God’s word say? “*As in Adam all die*.” “*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die*.” “A*ll go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return*.” We all die.
   2. But we noted a moment ago that Adam did not die, physically, the day he disobeyed God. So, it cannot have just been physical death that God had in view with the command. And that is why we need to understand that the death that Adam did enter into the day that he ate was a spiritual death. **Ephesians 2:1-3** describes spiritual death as being “*dead in the trespasses and sins … by nature children of wrath*.” And Ephesians 2 is very clear that this is how every human being begins life – spiritually dead.
      1. And there is a vivid picture of this in **Ezekiel 37**, where human beings in their natural estate are pictured as like dry bones.
      2. It is also why Jesus said that we “*must be born again*.” Why? Because, by nature, we are spiritually dead.
   3. Now, we will say more about being spiritually dead in our last point, but our key focus here is that spiritual death is not something we learn through imitation of our sinful parents; it is something we are born with; it is something we inherit. And this is so because of **our twin connection to Adam**:
      1. The first and obvious connection is the **biological** one. Because he was the first human being, Adam is the great, great, great, great … grandfather of every human being. And just as we all inherit physical and mental characteristics from him, we also inherit a sinful nature. And this does not mean that we have a sin gene, alongside an eye colour gene; it means that every one of our genes is stamped with the black stain of sin. It is why the Psalmist said, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*.”
      2. But our other connection to Adam is what is called our **federal** connection. You see, Adam, as the first human being, **represented all humanity**.
         1. If you have played team sports, you will have chosen a captain. And when the ref does the coin toss, the captain represents the whole team. So, if he calls correctly and chooses to play from left to right, well, you all play from left to right, even though you did not make the call yourself. And that is because, the captain represents you. What he does, he does on your behalf.
         2. And Adam was our ‘spiritual captain,’ if you like. His choice had consequences for all humanity.
         3. Listen to these verses in **Romans 5**: “*Therefore, as one trespass [that’s the trespass of Adam] led to condemnation for all men … for as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners*.” Do you see it? Adam’s sin let to condemnation for all; we were *made* sinners. So, even before we have committed a sinful act, we already have a sinful nature. And this is why we commit sinful acts.
   4. And congregation, we see the evidence of this every day: Parents, did you have to teach your children how to wriggle while you were trying to change their nappy? Did you have to teach them how to lie and be selfish? No – that comes naturally and easily, doesn’t it. It is good behaviour that needs to be taught! And what about at work, did anyone have to teach you the shortcuts? The cheats? The ways to get out of work? Or how to wangle an extra break? No. We work stuff like that out intuitively and without hardly even trying. It is being diligent and hardworking and honest that takes effort. And this is all because of our biological and federal connection to Adam. From him, we inherit a sinful nature. Corruption breeds corruption.
4. Well, that brings us, fourthly and lastly, to this truth, which is that **we cannot save ourselves**.
   1. According to our text, what do we inherit from Adam? Death – physical and spiritual. In our natural and starting condition, we are “*dead in sin … by nature, children of wrath*,” as it says in Ephesians 2. **Romans 5:10** describes mankind in his natural condition as an *enemy* of God. **Romans 8:7** says that we are “*hostile to God*” and that in and of ourselves we “*cannot submit to God’s law*” or “*please God*.” So, what was holy and pure in Adam and Eve; what was “*very good*,” has become dark, futile, and distorted. Friendship with God has been replaced by hostility and enmity toward God. And **this is what is meant by total depravity**. It is not that we are as totally and utterly evil as we can be, all the time; it is that every aspect of our being – mind, will, heart, and emotions – has been corrupted by the Fall. Spiritual life has been replaced with spiritual death.
   2. So, the rest is really quite simple. Question: What can the dead do? Answer: Nothing. I had a dead bird on my lawn the other day. And if you saw me, saying to the carcass, Come on, little birdy, wake up! Get up! Fly away! You would ring the mental health crisis team. If the dead are to be raised, it must be by someone else; someone who is living!
   3. And this is why our Confession says, “… all men are conceived in sin and are born as children of wrath, incapable of any saving good … And without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they neither will nor can return to God, reform their depraved nature, or prepare themselves for its reformation.”

But having established all that, we are not finished with our text; we have only looked at the Adam and death side of it. The other side of it is Christ and resurrection and life. And we are going to dive into that in our next sermons. But the good news of our text, which is the good news of the gospel, is that though our natural and starting condition is being spiritually dead, we are resurrectable!

“For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him might have eternal [what? Eternal] ***life***!”

What we cannot do, by ourselves, the Holy Spirit can do, within us!

So, even though we all have Adam as our ‘captain’ in sin and death, we can, by faith, have Jesus as our ‘captain’ in salvation and resurrection and life!

Do you see why the right understanding of this doctrine is so important? If you are a believer, it is **a resurrection miracle**! You were a rebellious, hostile, spiritually dead one. You did not save yourself. It was all the Spirit of God! He raised you from spiritual death. And He will raise you from your grave to enjoy eternal life with Jesus!

Now, I want us all to be crystal clear about one thing. To become a believer is to make a choice. The Bible is full of invitations to choose to believe. Jesus said, “Come to me.” And those listening to Him had to process this in their minds and decide to go to Him; to receive Him; to believe in Him. So, if you are not yet a believer, you must exercise your mind and heart and choose to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And brothers and sisters, when you are sharing the gospel with others, call on them to choose or to decide to believe in Jesus. But those who have chosen to receive Christ learn later that they chose Him because the Holy Spirit made them able to choose Jesus.

And that brings us back to the illustration that began the sermon: If you were the one ‘resurrected’ after having been pronounced dead, and you were now conscious and able to talk, what would be your first question? What happened to me? And when you were told about being brought back from death by an orderly who did one more chest compression after everyone else had given up, what do you do next? You would ask to meet the orderly to thank him or her. And that, brothers and sisters, is the Christian life – a life of expressing your thankfulness to Christ for your spiritual resurrection. Amen.