

Matt's out this weekend, he's getting some rest from the fourteen to fifteen billion services he did last weekend for Easter, and every night he'll be meeting about the building; and so you guys can see him then. My name is Barry Keldie, and I used to be on staff here at the Village a couple of years ago. My wife actually was the children's minister, and I was on staff. About three years ago, we were sent from the Village to plant a church in Frisco, and that's what we did. I'm the lead pastor of Providence Church in Frisco, and things are going fantastic. We covet your prayers. As you guys are moving into kind of a building season, and we're praying for you guys, we're moving into our second building season; so we covet your prayers as well. But what I want to do is just spend a little time with you this morning addressing an issue that I think will help as you guys go through the series you're going through in the book of Luke. I think Matt has been preaching in Luke for a little while, a couple of weeks or years—or whatever. If you read the book of Luke or any of the gospels, what you see happening is Jesus walking in a culture, and He is pointing certain things out in that culture that look spiritual but aren't spiritual, that look beneficial but aren't beneficial. So you're going to see in the 1st century, a hyper-religious culture, and so Jesus is attacking religion. He's attacking the Pharisees and the Sadducees saying, "They're telling you this is beneficial for you, this will give you joy and life and fullness and heaven, but it won't. Just because they're saying the right words doesn't mean they're taking you to a good place." So, what Jesus is doing really as He's walking inside of culture, building a counterculture, building a culture that is really going to fulfill us, really going to restore us, really going to change the world. Now I tell you that because I think basically that's what we're doing today. We're walking inside a culture, reading the Scriptures and asking, "Are there things in our culture that say they're beneficial, but they're not? Are there things that say they're going to give us joy, but they don't?" And so I want to talk to you a little bit not on a specific scale but on a broad scale about what things in our culture are dangerous for our souls and what things are beneficial. And I don't mean like our culture as an American culture; I mean specifically the suburban North Dallas culture. I think there's some very dangerous things for our souls because of where we live. And I tell you that because the suburban culture, the American Dream, the "good life," if you will, looks very similar to the Christian life, doesn't it? We both value family and safety and morals, community, making a difference in our communities. We all value similar things, and so I think for a lot of Christians, we begin to get off track in chasing the good life or a better life for ourselves instead of chasing Jesus, who can really give us what we're longing for.

And I'll tell you where this was really kind of crystallized for me. Last year I did our services on a weekend and got on a plane on Sunday afternoon to fly to Managua, Nicaragua. We flew down there to work with a missions organization who wanted us to see what they were doing and see how our church could help and partner. And so a team from my church flew down earlier, and so I was meeting them down there. And I got down to Managua. I was really, really tired. It's about a four hour flight plus all the services. So I got there, and I sat down with a guy who was leading our trip and I said, "What do you want to do? Where do you want to take us today?" And he said, "I want to take you to the city dump in Managua." I'm from Harlem, Georgia; I see the value of going to the dump. I get it. Like if you want a couch or a new hood for your Trans Am, I

understand. But why do we want to go to the dump today? I can't take that couch home. So I was kind of perplexed, but what he was showing me is in Managua, Nicaragua, there is a literal city in the city dump. People live there full time—a community of upwards of 15,000 people live inside the dump, and he wanted me to see the ministry that they were doing among those people. And so we went, and what we saw is probably what you'd expect. It broke my heart. It was tragic. And it was even more poignant to fly from Frisco, which is much like where you live, to the dump and see the difference in my life and our life and their lives. And what I saw was they live in homes made out of cardboard, primarily, so when it rains you have to build your house again. Their houses—you could probably fit fifteen of them on this stage. They average about 8-10 adults in each one of those things. So you can imagine trying to sleep on top of one another. This was their life. Kids are playing soccer. This is what really blew my mind. Kids are playing soccer on a field of trash, not grass, trash. They're playing soccer with no shoes, a deflated kick ball, and they're playing soccer. Now they're playing soccer in a dump that is very old, so what's happened is pockets of methane gas have built up in the garbage, which happens. And while these kids are playing soccer, they're simultaneously dodging random balls of fire that pop out of the ground. And just parenthetically, if you ever wondered why American soccer will never be as good as the rest of the world, that's why. I don't know if you've driven by Pizza Hut Park, but they're different. So these kids are playing soccer with random balls of fire coming up out of the ground. Dozens of people living in what we would call a closet. And we go back to our hotel, and the guy begins to talk to us about what they're doing and the nature of poverty. And what he says is, "There's a global annual income scale that helps you determine if you're poor or not." And I said, "I get it. I'm poor. I know. I understand." And he said, "Well, no, according to this scale if you make \$825 a year, you're low income. You're not poor, you're low income." He says to be impoverished is to make less than \$1 a day. To live on \$1 a day or \$365 a year—that's what it means to be poor. And the stats are staggering. One out of every six in the world lives on \$1 a day. 6 billion people—1 billion of them are impoverished. And he says what's heartbreaking about people who live in the dump and people who are impoverished is not the financial aspect. It's not really an issue of money, it's not the idea that "I don't have enough," it's more the attitude that "I will never have enough." He says to live in poverty is more a lack of choices and a lack of opportunity and a lack of hope than it is a lack of money. He says the crime happening here is not that these people don't have money, it's that they think that they never will, and they shouldn't ever chase it. It's this kind of nagging insufficiency with absolutely no choice to make it stop. Now can you imagine as a parent, you watching your child play soccer in those conditions and you knowing you can never do anything about it? This is life. There's nothing you can do. We pull our kids out of soccer if they don't get enough playing time. They have absolutely no choice. He says that's what it means to be poor. They don't have the social or financial infrastructure to move past this. They know this is life for them, and this is what it means to be poor. Now, I go back to my room, and I lay down. And as I'm trying to fall asleep, I can't get these kids out of my head. Scripture tells us when Jesus is teaching about heaven and hell, He describes heaven as paradise. He says to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." That's how He describes heaven. When He talks about hell, Jesus uses the Greek word *gehenna*, which describes the city dump on

the other side of the valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem. So when He wants to describe what it is like to be separated from God and have no hope, what He describes is the dump. So I'm laying in bed thinking to myself, "I've just watched kids play soccer in hell, literally in hell."

But that's not what gets me. What I can't get out of my head is you watch these kids play soccer, and they can't stop laughing and giggling. The adults who live in cardboard boxes want to give you things and help you. They're deeply connected. And I thought about those kids and the kids that play soccer on my street. I thought about those adults and me and my neighbors. And I thought, "You know, I wonder who's really poor." I mean, they're impoverished financially, physically. If you live there in Managua, Nicaragua, in the city dump, it is much more difficult to provide for your family financially. Because of their geographical location, it's difficult to provide for your family physically. I wonder as I look at them and I look at us—and it seems that they have absolutely nothing they want, but it also seems they have everything they need. And while we are quite the opposite—we have everything and enjoy nothing. Maybe it's much more difficult for us. Maybe not in a financial sense, maybe not in a physical sense, but it takes much more work to take care of them physically. What if it takes much more work spiritually and emotionally because of where we live? What if this image-obsessed, plastic culture is very, very hard on our souls? Shouldn't we, because of where we live, react and say, "We should really take care of ourselves." If I asked you to move to that city dump, you would take with you everything you could think of to help provide for your family. You'd go, "If I'm going into this culture, I know how dangerous it is, and I'm going combat that." Well, I think what's happened to us in suburbia is that we've moved here, and we've bought the house and drive the car and our kids go to the schools. And we do all of the things we do, and we haven't realized how dangerous some of this is for our souls. I'll tell you what walks into my office. Young guys who have been married and have kids, and they're doing well at work. And they're serving a church, they're reading their Bibles, and they walk into my office and say, "Is this all there is to life? Because while I'm doing all of the right things—I get up in the morning at 6:00. I get in my car that's in my garage. I open it, and I leave. And I sit in traffic—in Frisco the average commute is forty minutes one way, so I imagine yours is similar—I sit in traffic. I go to work. I work until 6:00, maybe 7:00. I drive in traffic, home, pull into my garage, so I see no one. I walk into my house. My kids are going to bed in the next half hour. My wife is exhausted from working herself or taking care of them all day. And while I'm doing all of the right things apparently, where's the fullness that I'm supposed to have? Where's the joy that I was promised if I did all of the right things?" It's the young woman who feels trapped by her family rather than enjoying them. That's, if we're not careful, what can be produced by our culture. Our kids aren't going to play in dangerous fields, but they're going to live in spiritually dangerous places. We have to be really careful. You're a very young church, a lot of you starting life, that you make sure you're building a life centered around Jesus, not centered around our culture. Because they look really similar.

As a matter of fact, suburbia's a relatively new phenomenon. It happened after WWII. Before that, people primarily lived in rural areas or in urban centers. The government,

right after WWII, started two government programs to help people buy homes—the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration, to give loans. Those two organizations gave 11 million new mortgages in the first couple of years. Simultaneously, the government built 41,000 miles of new interstate highway. So all of a sudden, the suburbs were born. You didn't have to live in the city to work there. You didn't have to live in rural areas to work there. You could live where you wanted. And in the 1950's, a Chicago housing development firm was the first to begin to stop marketing their homes and begin to market paradise, and the American Dream was born. They literally called their neighborhoods "Paradise." "This is paradise. The American Dream promises no less." If we're not careful, we're going to begin to exchange the real paradise for a fake one. We're going to find ourselves doing all the right things apparently and not having any of the joy, fullness, vibrancy that Christ offers—any of it.

So here's what I want to do. I want to look at a family in the Scripture who battled this directly. They were offered "Here's God's paradise. Here's fullness. Here's vibrancy. Here's what life can be for you, the world that was meant to be. And here is an imitation paradise." And they, as we all do in certain areas, picked the wrong choice, suffered the consequences. But I want to talk about them because they were restored. They were restored. And I don't want to just help you see that we've all made bad choices. We do, but I want you to see that the hope of Jesus is the hope for every area of our lives that He will give what is promised. He will do what we cannot do. And so open your Bibles to Genesis 3. We'll look at the first family, the most famous family in humanity, really, Adam and Eve. Why I think their story is helpful is because their story starts about like how ours starts. And what I mean by that in Genesis 1 God is creating the world. In Genesis 2 we have a chapter centered on the creation of man. And what it says basically is this: There was a guy named Adam who needed a woman. God looked at his life and said, "You need help"—like we all figured out one day. And God gave him a wife, and their marriage, their family started much like ours did. Maybe not exactly, because God gave him his wife. She walked up disrobed, and he began singing. That's a good idea. That's a good play. If you're a new husband, you can try that. But that's probably not how your marriage started. But in the beginning for all of us, when you're first married, when you're first starting your adult life, there's pure potential. It's all romance and hopes and dreams and plans. It's all fruit and singing. It's all fun. And what happens to them happens to all of us. They're wrapped up, as they should be, in one another, in the paradise God has given them. The next thing we see is God takes them through the garden, through paradise, and tells them how to live life. "Here's how you engage paradise. You eat this, you don't eat this. You do this, you don't do that." He tells them, "If you do this, you will get paradise. If you do this, you will get hell." And most of our families, through a good church, premarital counseling, mentors, books, good parents—when we start our adult lives, we're given all the information. "Don't do this financially, spiritually, physically. These things will create a hell in your life. And when you're married you should do this: protect date nights, speak beauty to her. Do these things, and it will create heavens, paradise in your home." Very few marriages fall apart over a lack of information. We all know what to do for the most part. Do this. Don't do that. Just as this church I know for a fact does for us—you—every weekend. This is truth. This is a lie. But then what happens to Eve I think is very, very intriguing because of what it

reveals about our own story. As you see in Genesis 3, the devil shows up, and the devil shows up as a serpent, a snake. Now this is important because her husband ran the world. That was Adam's day job. I don't know if you knew that or not, but Adam ran the world. So if you sell insurance, and you're mad about that, that's why. It's part of the curse. He got to rule the world; we get to sell things. So his wife, Eve, looks at a serpent, and she doesn't see devil or enemy, she sees employee. "Hey, oh, you work for my husband. Can you go get me some coffee?" And so when the serpent begins to talk to her, she doesn't see, "You're dangerous, and so I shouldn't listen to you." He doesn't look like enemy. And I think where we get off track, especially on "Are we following the American Dream and our suburban hopes or Christ?" is advice from people who look like friends. And they might be, and they give you things that seem good. What you're going to see about the advice from the devil is incredibly important. God tells her, "If you do this, you will have paradise. If you do this, you will lose everything." And the devil comes along, and he doesn't offer her another paradise. He doesn't offer her another life; he just says there's a quicker way, an easier way to get what God has offered you. So many times we see the devil and God as polar opposites in their temptations, but that's not how it is. You see, what the devil offers you and me, especially in the American Dream, is the idea that we can have a life of fullness. Jesus says, "I've come to give you an abundant life." We can have all of those things without the selflessness and service and simplicity that Jesus talks about. So you can have all of those things, you just don't have to be hyper-religious or weird. So what we have, Eve receiving from the devil, is an option. Not, "God says this, and He's a liar," but "He forgot to tell you about this way. I can get you to the same place as He can. I can just get you there in a way that's easier for you."

I think the question we have to keep bringing ourselves to in our culture is the key difference between the American Dream and our suburban hopes and the gospel can be wrapped up in a psalm. Psalm 63:3 says this: "*Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.*" That's the gospel. That's the point of our sanctification. That's what the gospel produces in you and in me. "You, God, are better than life, so I will praise You." The American Dream—what we're taught by our culture and our education, sometimes our parents, is the idea that you should be good and moral and safe and have friends and all of these things—go to church—but you do all of them because of how much better they can make life, and they will support you. The gospel says God is better than life; the American Dream says God can give you a better life. And therein lies the difference in a real paradise or a plastic one. Do we believe Jesus is going to give us a better life? Because let's face it, He is. But that's not why we go to Him. Most of us were sold the gospel. When I was a kid, I didn't grow up in church. As I engaged church, the idea was, "If I love Jesus, then I get to go to heaven." We see our faith as a means to a better life at the end. And the gospel says heaven's only heaven because Jesus is there. I want Him. He's the means for sure, but He's the end. So we have to be very careful when we're tempted with the good life that at the end of that decision—"Does it make much of God or does it make much of me? If I buy this or do this or cut this activity and add this one, does it make much of me or does it make much of God? Does it support the statement that I want a better life or does it support the Psalm that says, "Because Your love is better than life, You are better than all of these things"?

This is what happens to Eve. She falls. She makes a poor choice, as we all do, and she is what the Bible calls “cursed.” In Genesis 3, the last half walks through the specific curses. I want you to look at the practical nature of these. Here’s what it says about the curses, to the woman in verse 16. Here’s what the curse of her choosing an imitation paradise, making much of herself—this is what it gets her practically. *“To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.’”* And the second one is, *“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”* And that sounds really attractive for men, but that’s not why she likes you in your pink shirt. That has nothing to do with that. What the Hebrew was saying there literally, is not her desire for you will be for you in a longing, wooing, romantic way, but in the way that a lion looks at you and wants to eat you. That’s the way she’s going to want you. So she’s going to want to devour you. It’s not romantic at all, so don’t pull that. What we have here—here’s what happens. When you make the decision to accept a plastic imitation paradise over the life God’s called you to as a young woman, what happens—the curse affects very practical pieces of your life. So it plays out in young women like this: “All I do is take care of these kids. That’s all I do—is I take care of these kids, and he has no idea how much I do for this family.” It turns into a place where young women, begin to, because of the curse here, they have said, “This was going to make my life better. This choice was going to improve my life...” And the very things that are so full of joy in our lives begin to overwhelm us. So hers, specifically, most of the time, are going to center around family dynamic. She’s stressed over the details of life instead of enjoying life.

For the man, here’s what it says. Verse 17. He says, *“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;”* Now this is significant. It’s talking about his work is going to be very difficult. And when He says, “Thorns and thistles it shall produce for you”—in Genesis 2:9, God describes how He’s going to feed Adam, specifically. It says he’s going to walk around the garden and trees are going to spring up out of the ground. And He describes these trees in two ways: trees that are pleasant and good to eat. “That’s what your life will produce. You will walk through the garden, and it will work for you.” The curse for men is, “You will give your life to make that tree grow, and you’ll get thorns and thistles.” So what it produces in a young man is hyper-stress over work. You have no time or energy to enjoy the things God has given you to enjoy. So for both man and woman, you’re overwhelmed with the details of life, the maintenance of life rather than enjoying life. Now tell me if that is not an epidemic in suburban culture. We average 60 hours a week working. A 40-hour work week? Are you kidding me? That’s like part time. I wish I could get that job. We drive all the time. Our kids need a Blackberry and an assistant for all the things that they do. We are so busy with life. How often do you enjoy life? Do you have the time and energy to enjoy your kids? Your marriage? Your friendships? Your work? How often for you and for me does life take a tragic turn to where we feel like life as a whole is our enemy, and we’re trapped. And it’s hard to deal with when life should be a gift to be enjoyed and deep and meaningful and vibrant and full. So this exchange is going to play itself out in

the symptoms of “Are we following Jesus or just a kind of cultural mandate?” It’s going to play out in our everyday, practical application of living, of how much we’ll be enjoying what we do.

Now, that’s not the scariest part. Keep reading here a little bit. What you’re going to find in chapter 4 is Adam and Eve are going to have children, which are a huge blessing. But what happens when you make a value exchange—“We love this life over this God”—whether you like it or not, your children are going to inherit your value system. They can’t help it. It’s why I still cheer for the Atlanta Falcons. It’s a curse, but I can’t help it. I’m from Georgia; it’s my cross. Whatever you choose, your kids are going to choose the same thing. What you see in Genesis 4:6—God is speaking to Cain. He is dealing with the same choice. “Cain, do you believe Me or are you going to build your own paradise?” And He says it to Cain like this: “*The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?’*” “If you will go My way, will this not work out for you?” Here’s the other option. “*And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.*” And here’s our phrase again. “*Its desire is for you.*” “Its desire is for you. It’s going to devour you.” The choices that we make about how we spend our money, our time, and our energy and our gifts will be multiplied in our children. It’s a fact. What you see—the struggle that Cain is going through, he’s thinking, “What would my dad do? What have I learned? What have I seen about this situation?” And Cain, of course, in this situation, he’s set up for failure, and he fails. He chooses to go his own way. He kills his brother, and he’s cursed. So I want you to see here, when we talk about suburbia and the gospel, the issues are not small. Like how you spend your money and time, those are smaller issues on the grand scale of your kids are going to mimic you. You’re building a legacy. Some of you guys, all of us in some way, some fashion, we’re reacting to the legacy we’ve been given, haven’t we? We’re going, “I’m never going to do that. I’m still recovering from that.” So for you and for me, are we pushing, helping, urging our kids to choose the real paradise? “No matter what they tell you, this is joy. This is life.” Because every commercial they hear is going to tell them the other story. Every class they take is going to tell them the other story. You are one of the very few voices of Jesus in their life. So yell it. Yell it with the way that you live, the choices you make.

Now, I say they were restored. The story gets better if you finish chapter 4, which you’re going to see. Verse 25. Because I want to help you. If some of you are on this road saying, “I’ve made some poor decisions. I’ve definitely chased the suburban dream. How do I fix this? I don’t want my kids to make horrible decisions. I don’t want them to be crippled by my righteousness, my love for God. I want them to have what God promises.” In verse 25, we’re going to begin to see the restoration of this. “*And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.’*” Here’s the key. “*To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.*” And what you’re going to see in the family picture from this point is a turning point. Now when it says “people began to call on the name of the Lord,” I want to be very specific with you. The word “people” there is a pretty poor English translation of the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word is, “and the men began to call

on the name of the Lord.” So women, call on the name of the Lord. By all means, you are responsible for your homes, but men, I'm not going to let you out from underneath the weight of my responsibility and yours for your family. We are restored by God from a plastic imitation joy to the real paradise when men and fathers begin to get broken over what they've built and humble themselves before God and say, “Teach me how to love You more than my life. Teach me. How are You better than my life? Show me.” And at that time, God restored people when they began to call on the name of the Lord.

Now, I don't want to give you an impression that our life is bad, that your houses and homes and children—they're not bad; they're fantastic. What happens—the key here that we have to be careful of is to make sure we understand that when life is fantastic, and it is all that we would hope it would be—you have those moments in your life that you wish you could save. “I want to pause life, and I want to keep this moment forever.” On your wedding day, when you're holding a baby, when you get saved, when these monumental things happen that you go, “I want this forever”—there's some times when life is that good. But God doesn't give you that to tempt you away from Him. God doesn't tempt. He's giving you that as an example of how great He is. I have an eighteen-month-old. He's scary because he looks exactly like me. He has a dominant brow—he's beautiful. He's going to be 6 foot if God loves me, so we're hoping for that. But I have to travel a little bit for work. And this week I'm here with you guys because I'm on vacation. I guess this is what preachers do on vacation. So this week, we set aside the week, and I said, “Look, I need time with the family.” And we decided to take William to the zoo. Charity and I love the zoo. We're suckers for the zoo. And when I'm off, a day, a week—the beautiful thing about being a dad is I become a hero instantly, because I'm rarely around. So I'm like a toy he hasn't seen in a long time. So his mom's doing all the work, but I reap all the benefits—and it's awesome. So he is, “Daddy...daddy...daddy...” and I take him. And let me tell you this. I didn't have a dad. I don't know my father. And being a dad is the only thing I ever wanted to do, ever. So I take my eighteen-month-old with his dominant brow and his loud voice to the zoo. And there happens to be the white tiger right against the glass. So I knocked the other kids out of the way, and I put him up there. Their parents should step up. Right. That's why I need Jesus. So I put him up there, and he puts his hands against the glass. And he over and over again says, “Whoa!” When you go to the zoo, there are all these classes out there on their field trips. So there are like mobs of fifty kids roaming about without their parents. And so at any particular moment, they can come by and sweep you into them, and you're carried away like a wave. And I know they're coming. I can hear them and smell them kinda. I know I should move on, but I'm going, “I don't want to leave this. I want to do this all day long. This is why we came.” And so for me, to say, “Your love is better than life,” is saying, “You're better than that. You're better than that moment and that time. And it doesn't mean my depth of joy or the height of love that I feel at that moment is insignificant; it means when I'm carried to a new depth or a new height, it tells me how much deeper God's joy is, how much higher His love for me is. So He's always going to take me to a fuller existence, but not so that I will fall in love with life but fall deeper in love with Him. And so when you have those moments that you really love your house, your kids, your hobby, your job, make sure you finish the thankful idea and connect the gift with the giver or you will build yourself a plastic paradise. And let me tell you the

danger is for you and me—that is by definition the suburban culture. And so as we live in these neighborhoods and work the jobs that we do and have the friends that we do, like Jesus walks along and pulls people to a deeper calling, a deeper love, a deeper joy, may you and I, as we walk with Jesus, be pulled out of some of the imitation, things that mimic life that we go through.

Let's pray. "God, I thank You for these people. I thank You for the families they represent, for the futures they represent. And I pray that as we read the Scriptures tonight, any morning, at work, that You would speak loudly to us, clearly to us, that You would help us see these moments that we're tempted to exchange the gospel, a true life for another imitation. Help us see those moments clearly, because the primary issue is we don't know when they're there. And so will You help us feel the weight of our choices? Would You protect our children from some of the choices we make? And will You restore to us the joy of our salvation? We love You. We beg these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."