

The Bad News

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, I don't know if you know, but just over a year ago, I was admitted to hospital for the first time in my life. And as you can imagine, it was quite an interesting experience.

But it was the last thing I expected going to hospital. I was young and fit, and I didn't think I needed to go to hospital. And at the time, all I had was a bad headache. That was the only thing I was suffering from.

It was a bad headache, but all I thought I needed was some decent painkillers, and it would go away. Until the doctor saw me and told me what I didn't want to hear.

He told me that my condition was much worse than I thought, that I had contracted a severe sinus infection. And I could have, if I left it alone, I could have even lost my right eye.

It was that serious. And that was bad news. That was bad news that I didn't want to hear. But he also said that he can treat it perfectly well if he operates.

[0 : 55] And, of course, I let him do that. And I was admitted to hospital for a number of days. And that was the good news. The good news was that it was treatable. But, you see, it was only good news. And I was only happy to be admitted to hospital because I first understood the bad news of how serious my condition really was.

And the good news of Jesus Christ happens and works in exactly the same way. A person will only see it as good news and only respond to it properly if they first understand the bad news of how serious their condition really is.

And that's why Paul writes this section of Romans that we have before us. The end of chapter 1 and into chapter 2 and 3. You see, Paul is at pains here to make sure that you and I understand how bad the bad news really is.

And make no mistake, this is bad news. It's news that you won't want to hear. But just like the news that the doctor told me, it's news that you have to hear.

And it's news that I have to hear. And so please come with me to Romans 1.18 and get ready for some bad news. This is how it begins. The wrath of God.

[2 : 04] The wrath of God. Let's just pause there for a moment. The wrath of God. The what? The wrath. We don't like the idea of wrath, do we?

That's a phrase that really makes us uncomfortable. You know, the word wrath tends to put us off. We don't like to think of God as a God of wrath and anger. We prefer a loving and merciful God, don't we?

But the truth is, if we open up our Bibles, what do we find? Well, we come face to face with an angry God. He's a God who wiped out an entire city with fire.

He's a God who sent plagues to devastate our nations. When we open up our Bibles, we see a God who drowned an entire army and who flooded the world to wipe out most of the human race.

You see, multiple times we see God's terrifying anger burning against people who cross him. Make no mistake, God gets angry. And you don't want to be around when he does. But that still doesn't sit right with us, does it?

[3 : 04] Doesn't the Bible say that God is a patient and merciful and loving God who loves what he made? Well, yes. But then how can a God of love also be a God of anger and wrath?

How can the two be true at the same time? Well, to answer that question, think about it this way.

So, when we open the newspapers or listen to the news and we hear of a family brutally murdered violently like we did in this week's news, what's our response?

We're angry, aren't we? We're angry at that. And we have a right to be angry at that. Well, let me ask you, does not God, who is infinitely more holy than us, have a right to be angry with the evil and the wrong that threatens the world he loves?

Of course he does. God has more right to be angry than any of us. And that anger that he has isn't opposed to his love. It's because of his love for his world that God gets angry.

It was once said, the opposite of love is not anger or hatred. It's actually indifference. And God is not indifferent to the suffering and the wrong and the evil in this world. And he gets angry.

[4 : 17] And we've got to understand as well, God's anger is not some spontaneous outburst like human anger that's unjustified most of the time. No, God's anger is just and righteous and perfect.

And it's his settled hostility towards all that is wrong and evil in our world. And it won't change. It is part of who he is. And as I said earlier, he has more right than anyone to be angry.

And he is. And that's the sobering truth that he wants us to hear this morning. He is angry.

Because, verse 18, the wrath of God is being revealed.

It's being revealed. Not has been or will be. It is currently being revealed in God's word, throughout history, in his actions, and even in the teaching and life of Jesus Christ.

There's one message that is clear that comes through it all. And that message is that God is not happy. God is not happy. And we need to know that. We need to hear that this morning.

Throughout history, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

[5 : 26] Now, that's an interesting point. That last phrase, suppress the truth. Because what we see there is that the thing that makes God angry with people is not so much the sins that they do, which is bad enough.

No. What really makes God angry is at the heart of people's sin against him, which is the real problem in our world, which is that people suppress the truth about God.

That is the real problem. And Paul goes on to explain what he means by that phrase, suppress the truth, from verse 19. He says, So, in other words, what he's saying here, we must get this.

What he's saying here is that creation itself, this creation we live in and we see every day, we see creation when we look at each other, because we're parts of creation. All of creation should naturally point people to a creator.

That's what it should naturally do. And it makes sense, doesn't it? If you, for example, go to an art gallery and you see a beautiful painting like this one behind me.

[6 : 49] Well, you want to know who painted it. Do you kind of look for the name at the bottom? Or you look for the little plaque that's underneath it. Do you want to know who the artist is? Because you know instinctively when you see the beauty of the painting, you know that someone painted it.

You might not know who it is. And that's why you want to find out. The paint didn't just randomly fall on the canvas like that. No, someone deliberately painted it. Anyone know, incidentally, who painted this?

Any art fundies out there? No? Just Claude Monet. Monet. French painter. Who painted this famous painting, which is in a gallery in France now. But if you go to that gallery and you see this painting, and I didn't tell you who painted it, you would want to know, naturally.

Because the painting itself implies there's a painter, even though you can't see him, even though he's not there in the room with you. And you see, it should be the same with our world.

We look around. When we see the design and the beauty of creation, when we learn how our bodies are so wonderfully put together and so wonderfully made, that should point us to seek out our Creator who made us and who made our world.

[7 : 57] That should be a natural response of all people, to honor and give thanks to their Creator who made them. That should be our natural response.

But the problem is, it's not. People don't do that. Look at verse 21. For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him.

But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. Of course, we see that all the time, don't we?

People claiming to be wise in denying the truth about God, that He exists, that He is powerful, that He made them. Denying that truth and claiming to use science to disprove God's existence.

People claiming to be wise. You know, saying, well, because science doesn't prove God, He obviously doesn't exist. You heard that before? That argument sounds logical, doesn't it? Well, science can't prove God. He can't observe God.

[8 : 55] So, He's obviously not there. He's just something we've made up. You see, these are people claiming to be wise. They might have loads of university degrees. But actually, people who

think that, the Bible says, are fools.

They're fools to think that. Think about it. Just because science can't prove God doesn't mean that we don't still know He's there deep down inside. Science can't technically prove that a painting has a painter, can it?

I mean, you can analyze it. You can take samples of the paint. You can see its chemical composition. But science can't prove technically that that painting was painted by someone. But you know it was. And it's the same with creation. We look around. Science can't observe God, but we know He's there. He's given that knowledge to each of us deep down inside. Although we want to suppress it naturally.

We want to deny it. You see, people suppress the truth. They don't let themselves draw that conclusion when they look at creation. Their thinking becomes futile.

[9 : 56] Their foolish hearts are darkened. Now, why? You've got to ask why. If creation is so beautiful, if it screams to us to recognize and find our perfect holy creator behind it, why do we naturally all, as human beings, suppress that truth?

Why do we put it down? Why do we not let ourselves draw that conclusion? Well, the reason is because if people admitted to the existence of God, what would that mean for their lives? If people admitted that there is a God who made them and owns them, what would the implications be? Well, they'd have to get in line with what He wants in their life, wouldn't they? That's the natural conclusion to there being a God who made us. But people don't want to do that.

People don't want to do that. And so listen to what they do instead from verse 22. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

Okay, so Paul's referring to the ancient practice of idolatry here. And what he's saying is that people, in order to get out of recognizing, having to recognize the true God, people, what they do is they direct, they redirect, they worship to gods that they make.

[11 : 15] So at least they're still worshiping something, but they don't have to recognize the true God. Gods that, they make gods that they can control, called idols.

Gods that will get in line with them so that they don't have to get in line with God. You see, that is the heart of idolatry. And people have been making idols right from the beginning of time.

Inventing gods to suit their situations. A God of agriculture because people wanted good crops. And so they invented a God who would give that to them as long as they worship it. A God of fertility because people wanted free sex.

And so they would invent a God that allows that. You see, there were countless gods in the ancient world to fit into people's lifestyles.

Gods that got in line with what people wanted. But you know what? There are still countless gods today. People are just as guilty of idolatry today as they were back then.

[12 : 13] Not so much physical idols, but idols of the mind. People deciding what to believe about God to suit how they want to live. To suit their lifestyles.

But you see, at the heart, idolatry is the same today as it was back then. In any generation, idolatry is making God get in line with what I want rather than getting in line with what he wants.

That is idolatry. And it is at the heart of every human being. And so what does God do in response? Paul goes on to list the conclusion of humanity's deliberate suppressing of the truth.

What does he do in response to people turning away from the truth? Well, he does the worst thing he could possibly do to us. He lets us.

That's the worst thing he could do. He gives people over to their desires. Have a look with me at what happens when he does that.

[13 : 14] Verse 24. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. Verse 26. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. Verse 28. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done.

You see what happens here? When God lets people turn away from him, they lose touch with what they've been designed for and how they've been made to live.

And they begin to use their lives and their bodies in completely the wrong way. You know, it's kind of like if I bought a new toaster and I opened it up and the instruction manual came with the toaster. But the first thing I did was I threw the instruction manual in the bin and I used the toaster. Instead of what it was designed for, I used it, say, to warm up my bed at night. All right. Now, what would the result be?

[14:20] Well, it would be a disaster. I would wake up in an inferno if I woke up at all. You see, when something's been designed for a purpose, when we neglect that purpose and use it how we want, the result is disaster.

And we've been designed for a purpose, every single one of us. And when we neglect our creator and use our lives and bodies like we want, then what's the result?

Disaster. Disaster. Disaster. For one, our sexuality is distorted. No longer is sex a gift used to enhance a marriage and strengthen a marriage and produce offspring, which is what God designed it for.

But now it's just a tool to satisfy our lusts and our desires. And so there are no rules. People have sex outside of marriage. People have sex with people of the same sex. Men with men.

Women with women. Because it's not about what God wants. It's about what I want. And who are you to tell me how to use my body? Hmm? But look what happens when people think like that.

[15:22] Verse 24. The result is the degrading of our bodies. The degrading. The dishonoring. The making them into what they're not supposed to be because we neglect what God wants of our bodies.

You see, when we use sex to satisfy our own desires, then we're misusing our bodies and we're misusing other people's bodies. And we feel the effects, whether we like it or not.

Whether we admit to it or not. We feel the effects of that. Emotionally, relationships are ruined.

Marriages are ruined through the misuse of sex. Families are broken through infidelity. Not to mention the physical effects.

Sexually transmitted diseases as a result of the misuse of sex. And not obeying God's rules of sex. And you see, in all of that, God is trying to make a point to us.

He's trying to say, look what happens when I let you get what you want. And that's just one result. Here's more. Look at some other results of God letting people get what they want.

[16:19] From verse 29. People become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful.

They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. You see, when what I want becomes the most important thing, well then the result, at the end of the day, is murder, envy, deceit.

Basically, all the things you see in the newspaper every day, that's just the result of people saying, what I want is the most important thing. All of it, simply because God lets us go our own way.

And that is the worst thing that could happen to any of us. It's the worst thing that could happen to you, for God to say, okay, and totally let you go your own way. With no reference to him.

And that's why the world is like it is. Because God has begun to do that. To let people go their own way. And so that's, in summary, what Paul wants us to understand.

[17:29] What God wants us to understand in this part of his word. But what should we take home from this? Like when we leave here this morning and go into our week, what should we take from this?

Why is this passage here for us? Well, it's here, firstly, because God wants us to know that he is angry. That's the first thing.

And it's something we often forget. God is angry. But look again with me at verse 18. Look exactly what it says. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Now, that should make each of us sit up and listen. Because what it's saying is that God's wrath isn't just being revealed against the really bad people and the really wicked sins, but against all godlessness, any form of rejecting God, turning away from him.

All godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth. And we are all under that judgment. We sit on this planet under that judgment. Every human being. Because why?

[18 : 38] Because we all do that. All of us. To a certain extent, suppress the truth about God so that we can live our own way. Make no mistake, that is a human instinct for every single one of us.

To suppress the glory of God. To not recognize him in our daily lives. To forget him and to live our own way. It's human instinct. Even if we know he exists, and even if we know that he gives us everything we have, even if we come to church week after week and hear his word and listen to how he wants us to live, we still fail to glorify him as we should.

Because, do you know what it means to glorify God? Do you know what that word glorify means? Well, at its most simple, to glorify God means to recognize as important.

That's a definition for the word glorify. To recognize the importance of. And so when Paul, in verse 23, says, people exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mortal things, for idols, you know what he's saying?

He's saying that people decided to make the things that God gives them more important than God himself. But don't we all do that? Don't we all make the things that God gives us more important than God?

[19 : 56] Don't we all spend much more energy and focus on the things that he gives us more than on him? You know, whether those things are family, or career, or money, or leisure, whatever it is that we spend our energy and focus on whatever is most important to us, you know what?

Those are our idols. Those are the things we worship. And we can sing songs to God on Sunday about how important he is to us, but then hardly think about him until the next Sunday.

Or even if we do, you know what? We still sin during the week, don't we? We don't go a week without doing something we know that God doesn't want us to do. And you know what that says? Every time we sin, you know what we're doing? We're just showing that something else is more important to us than what God wants. That's what sin is. It's saying that something is more important to me than what God wants.

Which is, of course, suppressing the truth of God, that he is the most important thing in the universe. And so, you see, we all do it. We can't read Romans 1 and say, yes, yes, those bad people, they've really got what's coming to them.

[21 : 05] No, we are, this is talking about all of us. We all suppress the truth about God. We all worship idols. Because we're all idolaters. And so, we're all under God's wrath.

And that's why the world is like it is. That's why we suffer. That's why we feel its pain. It's God telling us that we are under his wrath. Now, I'd love to end there, but I've got to go on because that's not even the worst news.

And I don't want to tell you, I don't want to remind us, but I have to, to be true to God's word. The worst news is that all this pain and suffering in the world today that we feel, that's just a foretaste of God's wrath to come.

It's just a warning. God is warning us. God is still giving us a chance. God hasn't let us go completely. Even though the world is so bad, even though we suffer so much, this is just a warning of what the Bible calls the day of wrath to come when God will completely judge the sin and idolatry of the world.

And you know how he'll do that? By letting us go our own way once and for all and cutting us off from him forever. And the Bible calls that hell and it is terrible.

[22 : 23] And we're all by nature on our way there. Listen to how the famous American preacher, Jonathan Edwards, depicts the situation that we're in.

He writes, O sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in. It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit over which you are held by the hand of God.

And this is the God whose wrath is provoked as much against you as against anyone. You hang by a slender thread and there's nothing that you can do to induce God to spare you even for a moment.

That's a hugely scary picture. And if it doesn't make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, then nothing will. You see, we've got to understand and God tells us clearly in his word that our situation is much worse than we think.

And that's the bad news. That's bad news. I'm sorry that you have to go home with a heavy heart, but God gives us bad news and we need to hear it.

[23 : 30] Just like that doctor in the hospital had bad news for me when he told me my condition was much worse than I thought. That's what God's doing this morning. But remember, I want you to

remember one thing.

The doctor also had good news for me. He said that he could treat my problem as long as I submitted to his treatment. And I'm very, very, very relieved to tell you that God has good news for us as well.

You see, God wants you to know your condition is much worse than you thought, but he also wants you to know that he has a treatment for you in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as the wrath of God is revealed in our world, so the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.

You see, he reveals his wrath, but he also reveals his love and his mercy in Jesus in the treatment that he's given each one of us to deal with the wrath. You see, we don't so much need to be saved from our sins as we need to be saved from God himself.

And he gives us the perfect treatment, his righteousness, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only question is, are you going to submit to that treatment?

[24 : 43] That's the choice of every human being on the planet. Are you going to submit to the treatment that God gives you, or are you going to suppress that truth and go your own way and follow your idols?

Do you realize that Jesus is your only cure? And are you going to submit to that cure and follow him and listen to him? Well, I leave you with that question. And I don't want to waste any time because life is so uncertain.

I want to give you an opportunity to do that right now as we pray a prayer of confession together.

And so the prayer of confession that I want us to pray will appear on the screen behind me.

And I invite you to join me as we say these words together. Together. Mighty Creator God, I confess that I have made other things more important than you in my life.

I have exchanged your glory for meaningless pursuits of idols. Because of that, I have sinned against you in mind and body. I have not listened to you and I have failed to give you the place you deserve in my life.

[25 : 53] I deserve your wrath. But I also know that you have given me a way to escape it through Jesus Christ. Help me from this day forward to submit my life to him and cleanse me from my sin for his name's sake.

Amen.