

Introduction

A lot of bad news has been filling the airwaves in recent days. In fact watching the news is not something I recommend for you to do but for a limited time each day. It can be downright overwhelming, and it is very little that you can do anything about, of course, except for pray. There has been some good news, however. It is news about people helping each other and banding together to look out for the most vulnerable. People have come up with creative ways to be a community without being within 6 feet of one another. But the good news is good and the bad news is bad. From time to time someone will say, “I have bad news and good news,” and they will ask, “Which do you want first?” I usually want to hear the bad news first. When the good news follows the bad, it helps me accept the bad a little more easily.

This morning’s text is actually a marvel because it contains bad news, but the bad news is good. In fact it is very good news. It is joy and peace-inducing news. And I anticipate it will cheer and embolden your heart this morning.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

The wisest and most effective teacher ever to walk the earth is Jesus. He spent three years instructing and equipping his disciples so they might turn the world upside down when they were commissioned. He prepared them to be bold, confident, and courageous in making disciples of all nations. An important element of his preparation stands out in these two verses. Jesus alerts the disciples as to what lies ahead. And it is bad news. Yet this bad news is also good news. It is news they need to be steadfast and bold.

This morning I want you to see three aspects of the gripping, the bad, news with which Jesus was preparing his disciples to face the future.

I. The Bad News Produces Great Distress.

A. This is not the first time Jesus has pointed ahead to a dark and sorrowful day. Immediately after Peter confidently and boldly confessed that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must suffer and be killed. Afterward, as Jesus came down from the mount of

transfiguration, he mentioned his suffering and death again. And now we come to two additional verses in which Jesus straightforwardly points to his looming suffering and murder. Before, he told the disciples it MUST occur. Now he is preparing them for the fact that the time is near. He says, "The Son of Man IS ABOUT to be delivered into the hands of men."

B. Neither the Jews as a whole nor the disciples of Jesus themselves expected the Messiah to be vulnerable much less persecuted by Jewish leadership and Roman government. No, he came to overthrow not be overthrown. And here was a man who exhibited unmatched power. He could withstand winds on the sea. He could command demons. He could effortlessly resurrect the dead, restore the maimed, and heal the sick. Surely he could not be made to suffer and die! It was so hard for their minds to grasp. Death did not fit the narrative that was being bandied about. So Jesus relentlessly hammered away at this mistaken notion. That is what he is doing here.

C. And though we can be sure the disciples still do not fully get it, they do hear what he is saying, and the news of Jesus's looming demise is devastating to them. Jesus was saying, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." Because of these words, this gathering was solemn. They were greatly distressed.

Perhaps we could liken the experience of the disciples to the wave of news that has been billowing for the last two months. Three months ago no one had even heard there was a coronavirus. Then we began to get waves of indication this thing was wreaking havoc. But still, many of us reasoned, it won't be a problem here. And when talk started brewing that we might have to distance ourselves socially, many of us rolled our eyes and wondered what health officials were telling us. Who could have thought only a month ago that every church in the United States of America would have to stop meeting in person in a normal and usual way for a succession of weeks? No, surely not! That has to be the way the disciples looked at Jesus's talk of death. But now, they can tell he is getting more and more serious. They do not like this talk, but Jesus is the one doing the talking.

So the disciples were seriously saddened. To them the idea that Jesus will suffer and die is seriously bad news!

It is likely your thoughts during this crisis have sometimes imagined the worst. What if one of my loved ones gets sick? What if they have to go to the hospital? Fear has crept in along side anxiety and you have been on the verge of, perhaps in the midst of great distress. Again, that is how the disciples felt. They cannot even lay hold on Christ's words about resurrection because of the idea that he might have to die. This is bad news!

D. Well the fact is that Jesus was about to be handed over. And he was about to suffer at the hands of men. And he was about to die. And it is true that he did suffer and he did die. And there is nothing about the death of Jesus itself that should make us anything but distressed. Here is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the Glorious One who created earth and holds it all together. Here is holiness in person, a spotless lamb without any blemish or any just cause why he should be anything but exalted as king over all the earth. Here is a humble and merciful servant, who worked acts of kindness and goodness and love everywhere he went.

But he was delivered over to be scrutinized by sinful and corrupt human beings and found guilty! We look through the eye of the reports of Jesus's trial and we see no justice, no wisdom, no righteousness, nothing but guilt in the hearts of those who sentence the spotless one to die. Everything within us cries FOUL! Facts about the horror of crucifixion only serve to augment our distress at such incredible and unbelievable injustice.

Jesus knew the pain he would endure on the cross. He sweat drops of blood in anticipation both of the physical suffering and of the agony of bearing up under the wrath of God. We should never not be distressed when we consider the suffering and death of Jesus. He gave us an ordinance by we should regularly call to mind his agony-broken body and shed blood. Christ's passion is a reason for unsettling in our hearts.

Do you think on the cross? What can you say? When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride. See from his dead, his hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown.

How about these lines? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? O, O, O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble, were you there when they crucified my Lord?

The very imagining is a distressing one. It should be distressing. And the ultimate reason it should distress us is that this is what we deserve. This is what we have earned by our sin. There he is in agony, writhing, bearing scoffing and bearing the weight of the wrath of God, and he is doing it in the stead of those who actually deserve it! In a real manner of speaking, this is bad news.

But now I want you to see a second aspect of the news Jesus was sharing.

II. The Bad News Communicates the Heart of the Gospel.

The bad news Jesus was sharing with his disciples of his impending deliverance to the authorities and his death and his resurrection is actually good news because without this bad news, there would ultimately be NO good news. The bad news here in point of fact is the heart of the gospel. Every Christian should know the meaning of the word "gospel." It means good news. Gospel means good news. Everywhere in the Bible that you see the word GOSPEL you could substitute the phrase "GOOD NEWS." And the bad news Jesus shares here is at the heart of the good news.

Paul, the apostle, unequivocally sets forth the essence of the gospel in 1 Corinthians. In chapter 2 he describes his preaching. He says that the theme of his gospel preaching was "Jesus Christ and him crucified." In chapter 15 he calls to mind again the substance of the good news that he preached, saying, "I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved. . . .

I delivered to you of first importance . . . that Christ died . . . that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day." To the Colossians Paul wrote that those who believe are "reconciled in [Christ's] body of flesh BY HIS DEATH" (Colossians 1:22). Paul's epistle to the Romans is captivated with the gospel. At the outset Paul declares that he is eager to preach the GOSPEL to those who are in Rome, and he proceeds to do just that in the letter. The condensed summary is found in Romans 3:23-25. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith." For sinners to be accepted by God, they must receive that acceptance as a gift because they cannot earn it. Nevertheless the price had to be paid for the gift of right standing to be granted. That price, the propitiation, was paid by Jesus Christ by his blood, that is by his death.

But the gospel consists of more than just the death of Jesus. Clearly, Jesus shared with his disciples that he would be killed, but he also spoke plainly and confidently of his resurrection: "he will be raised on the third day." The resurrection is part of the whole package. The gospel is equally dependent on the resurrection of Jesus as it is upon his death. Paul asserts to the Corinthians that if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." If Jesus is not raised from the dead, there is no salvation. What is justification if there is no new life, no resurrected life with God? If our Messiah dies without rising, we have no king to lead us into the promised land of the new heavens and earth. And without the resurrection, Jesus is proven to be a fraud.

But he said he would be raised, and he was! We have a living advocate who ever lives to intercede. As surely as he lives, his people live in him. We are raised with him to newness of life. Who is there to condemn those whose faith is in Jesus Christ? It is because Christ has died and more than that has been raised and is at the right hand of God interceding for us that we can be assured that nothing shall separate from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus—not tribulation, not distress, not a coronavirus, not persecution, not famine, not nakedness, not danger and not sword! No, in all these things we (along with our Messiah) are more than conquerors through him who loved us and died for us and was indeed raised for us!

Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, who is Lord over death and Lord over us.

This is why we assert that the bad news is the good news. The news that Jesus Christ would die is bad. It is unseemly. It is sorrowful that the God-man himself had to die and in the cruel way that he did. But without this bad news, there is no good news. The word gospel occurs close to 100 times in the New Testament. But it would not occur even once if Jesus had not died as a substitute for sinners and been raised again. It is there a hundred times because he did both! Praise God for the gospel!

This gospel is your only hope. If you will repent of sin and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus, you will be saved, redeemed, reconciled.

Now lastly, I want you to see a third aspect of the news Jesus shared with his disciples.

III. The Bad News Emboldens the Disciples.

The bad news is good news because of the substance of the news—Jesus Christ will be killed and will rise again the third day. That is the heart of the gospel. But the bad news is also good news because of what it says about the role of God the Father in it all. What is Jesus telling his disciples about the Father? The answer is found in a particular word in the text—the word, DELIVERED. The Son of Man is about to be DELIVERED into the hands of men . . .”

The Father is about to turn his Son over to those who were seeking to destroy him. He is about to remove the cover of his protection and subject Jesus to the hostility and hate of his enemies. Up to now Jesus has been protected from those who wanted to kill him. There in Nazareth the citizens wanted to throw him off a cliff, but miraculously he passed through. The scribes and Pharisees were seeking opportunities to destroy him, but they were prevented from doing so until the precise time and way in which God in his sovereign design had determined. And THEN he would be delivered, not ultimately by Judas' kiss, not ultimately by the power of a band of soldiers from the chief priests, but by the will of God who turned him over to them. This word DELIVERED is pivotal because of its profound effect upon the disciples.

One effect was to convince them that the crucifixion of Jesus was not an accident. It was not plan B or C. It was the one and only plan God had for redemption. It was necessary that Messiah suffer and be killed in this way and rise again. You hear it from the voice of Peter on the day of Pentecost when he preaches to the Jews. Recorded in Acts 2:23, Peter proclaims that Jesus was (here is that word!) "DELIVERED up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." Peter understood that though the Jews and the Romans were acting in their own interest and according to their own desires, God was ultimately the One having his way in the death of Jesus.

The same reality is seen in the first chapter of the book of Job. God delivers Job over to Satan to do with him as he will. And Satan has his way. But things are not out of hand. Job's suffering is not to no purpose. Clear designs are in the heart of God. And in the midst of our own trials we can be emboldened to know that when things seem to be unraveling and the enemy raises his head to strike and to molest, God our Father remains on the throne and his purposes for his people are good ones.

The assurance that filled the hearts of the disciples that the murder of Jesus was by divine design had an additional effect. It emboldened them. That boldness was particularly apparent when Peter and John were arrested for preaching Jesus in the temple. The Jewish council sought to scare them and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. When Peter and John were released, they went to their friends and told them what had happened and how they had been commanded to stop preaching Christ.

The group got on their knees and prayed. They lifted their voices together to God. And this is what they said (Acts 4:24), "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, . . . in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." These disciples were unshakably convinced that when Jesus was placed upon the cross, these enemies gathered together against him were only fulfilling the very things that God had

ordained to happen. At their very worst, they were not out of the purview of the sovereign hand of God. God had delivered Jesus to them and God had raised him from the dead. These enemies of the Lord were completely incapable of overturning his plan. No matter how much they hated the plan, they could only fulfill it.

And now that assurance emboldened the disciples as they prayed. For this is how they continued. "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." And that is precisely what happened. Acts 4:31 says, "When they had prayed the place in which they were gathered was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

The news that Jesus shared with the disciples before it all happened assured them that it was all ordained by God and for their good. And through that knowledge they were filled with courage, confidence, and boldness.

What an important reminder this is for us in these days. The sovereign hand of God rules. He has his way. Christ's followers have the blessing of assurance that even when life appears to be unraveling, it is all under God's control and a part of his plan. He uses rebellious people, hostile people, incompetent people, and viruses, and also the extraordinary way in which our lives have been interrupted, and even the economic complications that are hanging over our heads. All of these God is engineering to bring about his glorious purposes. The world will be judged, yes, but God's people will be purified and emboldened if we respond in faith to what God is doing. He is good and He does good. You can bank on that!

Conclusion

Over the last several weeks, Melissa and I have been reading a biography of George Müller. God blessed him greatly as he delighted in God and trusted in the Lord's constancy and goodness. Part of the joy of Müller's life was being married blessedly to Mary Müller for 39 years. But in her 73rd year, she was stricken with rheumatic fever and died. During the dark days of her suffering, Müller's heart was breaking, but he would say, "The Lord is good and [he does] good; all will be according to His own blessed

character. Nothing but that, which is good, like Himself, can proceed from him. If He pleases to take my wife, it will be good like Himself. What I have to do, as His child, is to be satisfied with what my Father does that I may glorify Him." As he preached Mary's funeral message, George testified of the void he felt in his heart, yet his text was Psalm 119:68, "You are good and you do good." He had experienced God's goodness through Mary while she lived, and now he was trusting that he would experience the goodness of God in her death.

The days in which we find ourselves are testing in many ways. Fear, anxiety, disbelief, even anger knock at our hearts' doors. But let this assurance control. According to God's eternal plan, Christ has regarded our helpless estate and has shed his own blood for our souls. There is no good thing that he will withhold from us. And sometimes what we most need is to be tested and tried. Rest in God's sovereign reign over viruses and governors' orders and presidents and economies. And entrust your soul to the One who more than anything for you wants you to know the goodness of who he is and what he does for his children.