

*Good News—Bad News—Good News*

**Hebrews 2:6-9**

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Do you remember the old “good news/bad news” jokes? There are several variations.

Good News: Your brother broke the high-diving record at his school.

Bad News: There was no water in the pool.

Good News: You made the Olympic javelin-throwing team.

Bad News: Your job is to catch the javelin.

Sometimes it goes bad news, good news. The lawyer told his client, “The bad news is that DNA tests showed it was your blood at the crime scene. The good news is your cholesterol is down to 130.”

Some have no good news and go from bad to worse. Bad News: You have 24 hours to live.

Worse News: I forgot to tell you yesterday.

Now, the worst thing you can do to jokes is analyze them. But let me just point out that most of those jokes start with something that sounds really good and then they have a tragic twist.

Isn't life like that? Life is full of wondrous possibilities and potential. It starts off so good. But then comes the tragic twist. Things go wrong. The wonder turns to heartbreak. Those old jokes tell us something about life, but they are too pessimistic, too cynical. They stop with the tragedy.

I've heard the Bible's message, the Gospel, God's story, summarized as Good News—Bad News—Good News. It's our story too. It starts great, wonderful, good. There is a tragic fall. But God doesn't stop there. God goes on to bring good out of what has gone bad, to rescue us from the tragedy. Let's explore the good news, the bad news, and the second good news.

The first good news is what life was intended to be, life as God designed it. *The good news about you is that you are created in the image of God.* The scripture verses we read introduce this. The author quotes a psalm that celebrates the dignity that God gave human beings.

You made them a little lower than the angels  
you crowned them with glory and honor  
and put everything under their feet.

The author comments that in putting everything under humans, God left nothing out.

This takes us back to the very beginning of the Bible where God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

A friend of mine tells about getting into an argument with his mom one day when he was young. At some point in the argument, she became so frustrated and angry that she blurted out, "You were an accident and I wish you had never been born!" Of course, this crushed him. He went to his room and broke down crying. After a while, though, he sensed God saying to him, "You are not an accident. I made you. I want you."

God created humans to have a relationship with God, to be able to respond to God, to be God's representatives on the earth. That meant originally that humans both wanted to and could obey God. Immortality (not dying) was their natural state. Fellowship with God was close and personal. They had free, open, and total access to reality beyond their senses—that is, heaven, God's realm, and God himself. There was no guilt, no shame, no fear of exposure because there was nothing to hide. Humans were to rule the rest of God's creation as they reflected perfectly God's love, mercy, righteousness, and peace.

It's important to know that we were created by God for a relationship with God and "response-ability" to God. That makes a claim on us. Without

that, the naturalists and materialists are right who say that we are merely physical. They say that our thoughts, our emotions, our awareness, even our "soul," are simply physical: chemical reactions and electrical impulses. Some draw from that the conclusion that what we do doesn't really matter and when we die, that's all there is for us—there is no on-going consciousness.

The good news denies that. We believe that God has made us, that we have the capacity to know and communicate with God. What we do with life now really matters because our Creator holds us accountable. Death is not the end of our existence.

All through the first chapter of Genesis we see the goodness of God's creation. At the end of each phase of creation, God sees that what he has made was good. After God creates humans, it says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (1:31).

What happened? Something went wrong, didn't it? Hebrews puts it simply, God put everything under the rule of humans, "Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them." *Life, as it now is, is not what God intended it to be.* The way things are now is not the way they are meant to be. The world as it is now, is not how God created it and it's not how God will recreate it.

There has been a tragic loss of humanity's original relationship with God. The image of God in us has been defaced. God's good creation has been corrupted. We are not now what we were made to be.

The third chapter of Genesis describes this tragic fall. The first humans God made were tempted to disobey the one command that God had given them. The Bible here doesn't explain where the tempter came from, it simply assumes that evil exists and entices us away from God. They gave in to the temptation. They chose not to rely on God for the knowledge of good and evil, but to try to grasp it for themselves. They chose to be like God not in relationship but on their own.

However you interpret Genesis, you can see that this is the story of every person. We all trade the kind of world where God is at the center for the kind of world where we are at the center. That kind of pride leads to

fear—the first man and woman tried to hide from God and cover themselves up. It leads to denying our responsibility—they both tried to blame someone else for their choice. It leads to death. God had told them that if they crossed the line into disobedience they would die. Their bodies didn't die right away, but they began dying. They were cut off from the source of life. They were alienated, lonely, fearful, exposed, vulnerable.

The next several chapters of Genesis show humanity quickly spiraling down into murder, vengeance, wickedness, evil, unfaithfulness, idolatry. Sin is expressed in sins. The inclination of our lives away from God comes out in actions and attitudes. This sin separates us from God.

A Christian was talking to a man who was living an immoral lifestyle. He said cynically, "Bet you're going to tell me it's sinful, huh? Well, I couldn't care less."

She told him, "That's probably true. You couldn't care less about yourself, and God couldn't possibly care more. You know why God hates sin so much? Because it's the opposite of who he is. It's destructive and can only lead to brokenness. God weeps at what you're doing to yourself because he wants your best—your wholeness" (Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker* 120).

God is against sin because it doesn't work. It deceives and destroys. It draws us in with promises that it doesn't keep. It's hard to get rid of.

A family discovered that they had a skunk in their basement. They tried to lure it out by putting a trail of bread crumbs from an open basement door out to a field. Before long, they had another skunk in their basement. Once we get tangled up with sin, it keeps increasing in us.

One winter, I was in east Texas at a youth retreat and I was sick. Finally, I went to the emergency room. The doctor told me I had a "para-flu" and explained to me that it was a viral and not a bacterial infection. Then he explained the difference in how viruses and bacteria affect us. Bacteria see us as food—they just kind of munch on us. Viruses use our genetic material to make more viruses. Both of those are descriptions of what sin does to us. It eats away at us and it corrupts who we are as it grows in us.

Sin is persistent and hard to overcome. Like trying to hold a dozen balloons under water, we think we have sin pushed down in one place and then it pops up in another place.

Sin traps us and puts us in bondage. It turns us away from God and separates us from the source of life and goodness and wholeness. Sin kills.

I once heard sin illustrated this way. It's like a little fish that a large clam swallows. The fish swims around and eats the clam's insides. The clam can no longer open up, it's consumed and dies.

Sin will eat away at us. It will keep turning us in on ourselves, closing ourselves until we no longer open up. We shut ourselves off even from God and God's love. That condition is called hell. If we take the teaching of Jesus seriously, I don't see how we can deny hell's reality. Our understanding of hell needs to be more informed by the Bible than by medieval literature. I've come to believe that the door to hell is shut and locked from the inside. It's the closed, lonely, dark place where we shut ourselves in with our unfilled desires, our bitter longings, and our fears.

Left to ourselves, that's where we are and that's where we stay.

*But the second good news, the great news, the wonderful, glorious news, is that God has not left us to ourselves. God has come to us to rescue us, to set us free, to restore us, to give us new life.*

Again Hebrews says it simply: We don't see ourselves as God intended us to be, "But we see Jesus." Jesus, the Son of God, became like us, became one of us. He too was made a little lower than the angels. And Jesus recovers what Adam lost. Jesus fulfills where we fail. Jesus truly is crowned with glory and honor. Jesus truly rules.

In Jesus we see human life as God created it to be. He lived in perfect relationship with God the Father. He gave perfect obedience to God. He died so that by the grace of God he would experience death for all of us. He died for us, in our place, to set us free, to defeat the enemies that bind us and destroy us. He shared in our humanity so that by his death he might destroy the devil and set free those who were slaves to fear and death (Heb. 2:14-15).

How does what Jesus did affect us? There is a great word in this sentence about Jesus dying for us. It's the word *grace*. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. Grace is God doing for us what we can't do for ourselves. Grace is God's love and mercy at work in our lives. Grace is the Holy Spirit of God bringing us back to God and transforming our lives.

We experience grace all through our lives, whether we know it or not. Simply being created, that we exist at all is an act of God's grace.

Grace is at work in us from the moment we're conceived. Left to ourselves, we would keep going away from God, keep shutting ourselves off from God. On our own, our response to God's invitation would always be no. But the Spirit of God keeps us from wandering so far from God that we can't come back. Grace woos us back to God, draws us to God, gives us some freedom to say yes to God's claim on our lives and his offer of salvation.

Before Jesus is our Savior, he is our friend. He comes to us and walks alongside us. He knows about what we suffer. He knows what we're going through. He knows what our life is like. He comes to be with us, to walk with us through all that and lead us back to the Father, to lead us back home. That's grace.

God takes the initiative, reaches out to us, pursues us and draws us in. God creates a hunger in us to come back to him.

Ernest Hemingway told a story about a father and his teenage son who lived in Spain. Their relationship was strained. The son ran away from home. The father began searching for his rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, he made a last desperate effort to find his son. He placed an ad in the newspaper that said, "Paco, meet me at Hotel Montana noon Tuesday. All is forgiven. Papa." When the father arrived at the meeting place he discovered that 800 young men named Paco had showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers (Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* 37-38).

It's like God is saying, "Meet me at the cross—at the place where Jesus died. All will be forgiven. I love you." And we can show up.

Our longing for God, for forgiveness, for a right relationship with God is created in us by God. And God has countless ways of doing this. Our

conscience, the Bible, worship, family, friends, events, experiences, and all kinds of people influence us for God. What experiences has God used to call you to himself? What people have had an influence for God in your life?

We can resist God's grace or we can yield to it and receive it. Faith is how we yield and receive. Faith is our trust in God's grace. Faith is giving up on trying to reach God ourselves.

Along with trusting God, we repent. That is, we change our mind about God and ourselves. We grieve over the brokenness and separation our sin causes. We are willing for God to take our sin from us. By grace, we turn from sin and return to God.

When we turn to God, when we say yes, when we yield to the grace that is drawing us to God, we experience a turn-around in our lives. God forgives us and gives us new life.

In forgiving us God takes away the guilt of our sin. He washes us clean. God restores us to a right relationship with himself. He sets us free from the bondage sin puts us in. He gets the skunk out of our basement.

In giving us new life, God heals the brokenness that sin causes. God gives us a new beginning. The Bible even calls this being "born again" by the power of God. We are renewed and restored to life. God delivers us from the power and fear of death. God starts the process of remaking us into what he intended for us to be. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God starts making us to be like Jesus.

Jesus came into the world to show us what we were like when God first thought of us. And he shows us what we can be through what he did for us when he died on a cross for us. Some of the early Christian writers expressed this in sayings like, "He became what we are to make us what he is," and, "The Son of God became human so that humans could become children of God."

*Kon-Tiki* recounts the adventures of a Norwegian crew that sailed across the Pacific on a raft. During one harrowing time, one of the men was swept overboard. He couldn't swim fast enough to catch the raft and the other crewmen were unable to throw a line to him. It looked like he would

be lost. Then one of the men grabbed a life belt attached to a line, dove in and swam to his struggling friend, rescuing him.

Jesus left the realm of glory and plunged in to rescue us from sin and death. As his followers, we dive in to share good news with people who are struggling, sinking, and lost.

Good News: We were created in God's image for fellowship with God.

Bad News: We deface that image and ruin that relationship through our sin.

Good News: Because of what Jesus has done, God invites us to come back to him, to start again, to be restored to what God intends us to be.

I'm offering you an invitation to trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and follow him as Lord. The beginning of Christian faith, its essence, is to accept a gift. New life is a gift from God. Someone said it this way: You just have to kneel down and ask for it, then get up and believe that you received it, then go out and live like you received it, only to find that it really is yours.