

Weary of the Bad News
Romans 8:18-25, 35-39

Well brothers and sisters, this morning... I've got good news, and I've got some bad news. The good news is that in Matthew 11:28 Jesus says to us *"come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest!"* The bad news is that this good news will only be good news... if you are feeling weary and burdened! And who wants to feel that way!?

But... the good news, as you can see from the title of the message this morning is that there is so much bad news that we can't help but feel weary of it all, and thus the good news is that all the bad news puts us in a position to truly receive Jesus' words... as good news.

Ironic isn't it – but let's unpack this a bit more this morning, so that our weary hearts might receive the rest that Jesus promises to us.

Now maybe it seems obvious as to why we are weary of the bad news – its bad news... But I think many of us can take a

little bit of bad news now and then. One of the reasons we become weary of it however, is so much of it, it is a constant unending stream of bad news that drowns out any good news.

Now way back in the day maybe this stream of bad news emanated from the person in your family, or your workplace, or in your small town, who had the unfortunate predisposition to be a negative nelly or a debbie downer. They had the particular talent of being able to point out the dark cloud in any silver lining.

If you said it was a beautiful sunny day, they would bemoan the fact that it would mean we weren't getting enough rain and there was likely to be a drought. When it rained and we said it was a good thing we were finally getting some rain, they would point out that it was probably going to be too much and would flood the fields and drown the crops.

But if you grew tired of their constant pessimism you could tell them to be quiet, just leave, or avoid them completely.

But with the development of the news media, with newsprint, radio and then television, it has become more challenging to stem the flow of bad news into our daily lives, in part because the news industry discovered early on that we actually have a morbid fascination with bad news and desire to receive it.

Maybe you remember the old news editor's slogan "if it bleeds it leads!" Meaning the more negative the story, the more prominent it should feature as a front-page headline because it will attract attention, sell papers and increase viewership. It's the same instinct that will have us all slowing down and causing a traffic jam just so we can all look over to see how bad accident is - on the opposite side of the highway.

Thus in 1980 the 24-hr news channel format became a reality. All the news all the time! You just had to tune in your TV or radio. And with the recent development of the internet, smart phones and social media... the steady stream of bad news, along with everyone and their dog trolling their nasty comments about any given headline... all this can follow you

around wherever you are 24-7. So yes, its no wonder we are weary of bad news just given the sheer volume of it.

There's the old joke about a business man at a convention who bumps into a sales contact he hasn't seen for a few months. *"Bob you look terrific!"* he says *"I almost didn't recognize you, you've lost weight, you're looking fit, you don't look tired and worn out, and I think even your hair is starting to grow back!?* You look terrific – what have you been doing? Working out, keto diet, are you doing Yoga or something??" *"No, nothing like that"* says Bob *"I just stopped watching the news!"*

Now for as much wisdom as there is in limiting our consumption of the news, you didn't brave the cold weather this morning, and come all the way out to church, just to have your pastor tell you that you will find rest by limiting the amount of news that you watch. That does not help or encourage your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ!

You see its not just the sheer volume of bad news that makes us weary, it's also the specifics of what makes the bad news bad, and how that affects us and impacts us what we believe about ourselves and this world and God.

When we hear news about international provocations – North Korea firing mortars close to the conflict zone with South Korea, Chinese and American navy ships intercepting each other in the south China sea...

When we hear about terrorist attacks – like Islamic State suicide bombers attacks in Iran, or Boko Haram killings in Nigeria...

When we hear about rumors of war – Sweden telling its citizens to get prepared and ready to defend their country, Communist China threatening to annex Taiwan, the U.S. pledging to defend Taiwan...

And when we hear about actual wars – Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Hamas continually firing rockets into Israel and its

barbaric assault of civilians, Israel's campaign to eradicate Hamas...

We become nervous, worried about how this might impact us. Fearful about how things might escalate and spread. We are sad for the loss of life, anguished for the human suffering and collateral damage, outraged at the aggression and destruction, horrified at the atrocities and the brutality displayed against fellow humans, all for the sake political egos, ideologies and false religion. We lose hope in the good will and nature of humanity.

And when we see natural disasters happening – tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, wild fires... the raw power of nature which so easily destroys what took us years to build, shaking the foundations of what society is built upon. It frightens us.

When tragedy strikes – our hearts break as we hear about the victims of random crimes, school shootings, bus accidents and

plane crashes... We feel helpless as we watch fatalities from fentanyl overdoses increase exponentially.

We become skeptical and suspicious of authority, leadership, of the experts... as they are exposed in scandal, caught lying or found to be acting in conflict of interest.

And our trust in God is shaken, we begin to question our faith when the bad news hits home and becomes personal. A cancer diagnosis, a job layoff, a retirement savings loss, marital infidelity...

In every instance of receiving bad news brothers and sisters, our view of this world, of people, of ourselves is shaken. We see and hear things which suggest the world is not the safe, stable, predictable, dependable, wonderful place we want it to be - that we hope it will be for us... and we are not the nice, kind and good people that we thought we were...

Bad news dashes our dreams and hopes for this world and for ourselves, and as Prov 13:12 says "*hope deferred makes the*

heart sick." So... we grow tired and weary from all the bad news.

And brothers and sisters if that is where you find yourself this morning, tired and weary from all the bad news, then Jesus' words in John 16:33 are what He gives you to bring you rest and reassurance: "*In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

Yes, there may be bad news – yes some of it may be really bad news. But don't lose hope, because there is even better good news! I have conquered and prevailed over the entire universe. And the Apostle Paul teaches us the implications of Christ's victory in Rom 8:37-39.

He says "*in all these things (all the different kinds of bad news) we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* (Christ does the overcoming of the universe, we are the benefiteres).

So, is there anything in the entire universe that can generate bad news... that is bad enough not to have been overcome by Christ? Paul answers that in vs38.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So.. no.

The good news... is that neither the specifics of the bad news, nor the amount of bad news – even if it was every single piece of bad news... in the entire universe - can't destroy the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. And that's really good news!

That's the kind of news that restores our hope, strengthens our hearts, and can give us rest from being so weary.

Because it's not just the volume of bad news, or all the specifics of bad news that wearies us... it's also the response that it prompts from us, the work that it requires.

The bad news of war and hostilities means that we must defend ourselves and figure out how to restore peace, natural disasters mean that we will have to clean up and rebuild, tragedy means the hard work of grieving a loss and moving on without someone.

The realization that this world is not a safe, stable place, that we are not nice, kind and good people burdens us with a sense of responsibility that we should... that we ought... to do something in order to make it safe and stable and to inspire people to be nice and kind. We should make a difference; we should be the change that we want to see. That's wearisome...

And maybe we've made some progress in that, maybe we think we're seeing some changes for the better in our world – but then the bad news comes along and it looks like all our efforts were for nothing, we are reminded of just how difficult it is to affect change, and that we must double down and work harder to bring about the results we're striving for. That's discouraging.

So, it's very good news to hear Jesus say *"Take heart! I have overcome the world!"* Jesus has already won the battles that you and I are fighting for. Believe that, trust in it, have faith!

But I pray brothers and sisters that this good news, which brings us some rest and respite from the striving, will also be used by the Holy Spirit this morning to help us reflect on the question; "what is it that we have been working towards, what have we been hoping and striving for?"

You see, ever since the time of the European Enlightenment in the 1700's, Western society has come to believe in progress: scientific progress, economic progress, educational progress, medical progress, social progress...

And underlying this belief in progress is the expectation that we human beings can use reason and the scientific method to discover and apply universal truth to all areas of our lives in order to overcome the problems and issues that generate all the bad news.

And we have to admit, over the past 320 years it's had a really impressive run. The entire world has been shaped by the modern approach of the Enlightenment, and benefitted immensely from it – we need only to compare what daily life was like for people back in the 1700's with our standard of life is like today to see the contrast.

As a result, our default beliefs and thinking and expectations as humans are centered on the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness as free individuals, and even when we are claimed by God in Christ and begin to follow Jesus, we still tend to follow based on those default settings... looking to Jesus as the savior and solution for whatever "bad news" is standing in the way of our life, liberty, happiness and personal freedom.

Many people in Jesus' day, including Jesus' disciples looked to follow him for similar reasons. It was part of the default beliefs and thinking of the Jews to anticipate the day when the Messiah would come and bring the great day of the Lord.

On that day, as the prophets foretold, he would restore God's people of Israel and rule over the all the nations with peace and justice. In Amos 9:14 God promises *"I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit."*

And in Jer 33:6-7 God promises *"I will bring health and healing to it; [the city of Jerusalem] I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before."*

So, when Jesus began His ministry with healings and miracles you can see how people would have been drawn to Him with their Messianic expectations. When Jesus arrives at Jerusalem riding on a donkey, they expect that He is coming to bring Jerusalem it's freedom and independence as its King and restore its glory as the City of Yahweh.

But, as we know that's not how Jesus was planning to fulfill the role of the Messiah.

Now its not that the Jews of Jesus's day didn't properly understand those particular promises, the issue was they were being selective in the promises they paid attention to. There are many other Messianic prophecies which speak to the need for the cleansing and spiritual restoration of God's people, the suffering the Messiah would endure, the unwelcome changes He would bring and the rejection He would experience because of that.

But the Jew's of Jesus day were not paying attention to this larger prophetic context.

Now Jesus was fully aware of this, and that's why the full context preceding the words of comfort Jesus gives us in John 16:33 is all about preparing the disciples for what is yet to come.

Listen to what he says in chapter 15:20 *“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”* And in 16:2 *“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.”* And 16:32 *“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone.”*

And just before the Passover meal, when Jesus and the disciples were at the Temple, we find Jesus preparing the disciples for the broader trials and tribulations that will take place among the nations before the great Day of the Lord comes.

In Matthew 24:6-8 Jesus says *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the*

beginning of birth pains.” The “birth” being when the Messiah brings in the Great Day of the Lord.

Thus, when they are together at the Passover meal Jesus concludes sharing of all this bad news in John 16:33 saying *“I have told you all these things, so that you may have peace...”* So that when you encounter these trials and challenges and tribulations, they won’t cause you doubt me and question me and stumble as you follow me - because I’ve warned you about them...

So *“In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world!”*

And indeed the disciples’ motives and reasons for following Jesus would be tested by everything that Jesus said would occur, but... because of Jesus’ warnings and encouragement – through the testings the Holy Spirit transformed their motives for following Jesus.

And in turn they were transformed from disciples into apostles who were sent out from Jerusalem to make disciples of all nations, undeterred by the trials and tribulations and challenges they would face. Knowing instead that such things verified the authenticity of the Kingdom work which they were pursuing.

And I pray the Holy Spirit will work such a transformation in us this morning brothers and sisters and give us new default settings as we follow Jesus, not the pursuit of life liberty and happiness but seeking first His Kingdom through redemption and transformation for the New Creation.

The good news is that Jesus' victory over the world restores our original purpose as stewards of the world, which has led to the creational progress we experienced in the Enlightenment, but... Jesus victory also achieves our full glorified destiny beyond this world - which Adam failed to secure for us, and which our Enlightenment progress will never achieve.

And what a shame it would be to continue to believe that the ultimate purpose and destiny of human beings is our life, liberty and happiness here for a few years here on this side of eternity. As 1 Cor 15:19 reminds us; *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."*

Brothers and sisters if Jesus is to truly give us rest from the bad news, if we are truly to be encouraged and given hope because Jesus has overcome the world we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit and realize that all the bad news which comes our way - ultimately points to something that is not yet fulfilled and indicates that something better is still on the way.

We must confess with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, as Paul does in Romans 8:18 *"that our present sufferings are not even worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!"* We must truly believe this...

And the good news is that the bad news is used by the Holy Spirit to help take the shine off this life, to show us the defects

of this world, so that the glory of the next life and the New Heavens and the New Earth can show through.

So that we catch glimpses of that day when nation will no longer take up sword against nation but will turn their spears into plows instead, that day when the lion will lie down with the lamb, that day when there will be no more sickness or disease or sadness – when even death itself has been banished, and when we shall see Jesus face to face and Yahweh will dwell on earth and we will worship and serve Him and enjoy His presence in a way we cannot even imagine.

And when the Holy Spirit brings about this transformation in us brothers and sisters, then we are no longer driven to make a difference by the bad news, we no longer strive to change the world for the better – we can rest from that and what a relief that is...

Instead, we are empowered to be witnesses to what is yet to come, and our work with the Holy Spirit to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded

in order to bring healing, peace, justice and holiness... and many more blessings of God. These are all done as redemptive signs, in the name of Jesus, so that we are pointing ahead to the good news of what and who is still to come.

So come to Jesus brothers and sisters, come to Him if you are weary of all the bad news – and He will not only give you rest in this life, but for the rest of your life... the bad news will only serve to make the good news even better!

In this world you will have trouble, but take heart brothers and sisters, Jesus has overcome this world! That's good news!
Amen