

February 14, 2021 - Jeffrey Smith

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Preacher: Jeffrey Smith

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Our new study in Romans, and we're going to be looking at the second half of Romans chapter one.

And I, as I often do, I'd like to start with just a story, a true story, actually, a true story about myself. And it goes back a couple years to when I was 16 years old.

Not as bad as Brad's story. That was, yeah, this is much cleaner than that. But it does involve driving, actually. So maybe there's some similarities. So 16 years old, I got my license, and I'm driving.

Actually, let me kind of set the scene. My parents live right by Kirkwood High School. And one of the roads is Doherty Ferry that runs kind of along near where they live.

And there's an intersection, right, at Doherty Ferry. And it's a T, where Chopin comes in and hits it like this, okay? Everybody see this T diagram? And so I'm 16 years old, and I'm driving.

[1 : 15] And at this intersection, there's no stop sign. Obviously, there's no stoplight. There is a yield to pedestrian sign. And so I'm driving down Doherty Ferry.

Think of this T. I'm driving this way. And I'm a new driver. I'm an inexperienced driver. And I do see someone that is about to cross the road.

But they're not going to cross my road. They're going to cross Chopin. So we're going to be going parallel. Does that make sense? So I'm going to go through the intersection.

I look over. I see them. They're going to be crossing in parallel to me. I wasn't turning or anything. So I thought for a minute, well, I don't think I need to yield to someone that's not crossing my street. So I just go in my merry way. But little did I know that there was a conspicuously hidden cop car, a police officer parked there.

[2 : 18] And as soon as I went through the intersection, he turned his lights on and pulled me over. And he said, I'm going to give you a ticket because you failed to yield to a pedestrian.

And to be honest, I don't remember if I, like, tried to explain myself or if I just was, like, new and nervous and just said, okay, sorry, sir, and just took the ticket. But when I got home, I was kind of frustrated.

I was like, I'm new to this. And I'm sure I made a mistake here. But, like, it seems like I didn't really fail to yield to a pedestrian. And so I explained the situation to my stepdad, Scott, and I give him kind of my perspective to it.

It was one of the few times he was like, yeah, I think I kind of get where you're coming from. And Scott always kind of liked, you know, like the law and order type of stuff.

My stepbrother, Nate, is a cop, and he loves kind of hearing the stories there. So he was kind of getting into this, like, well, you know, I see where you're coming from. Like, what do you think we should do? And so ultimately we decided to go to the Kirkwood Courthouse, and I was going to contest this thing.

[3 : 26] And so having watched enough Judge Judy, and I felt like a lawyer essentially at that point, I thought I will put together some exhibits, right, because that's what you do. You, like, present your evidence.

And so I, like, drew this map of, it was probably the simplest map you've ever seen, but it just had the intersection. And I had something that represented a car, maybe like a Hot Wheel or something, and maybe like a little G.I. Joe, like, representing this guy crossing the street here.

And I was going to present this to the judge. And so we go down to the local municipality whenever it's our date, because the police officer did say, if you want to contest this, here's the process to that.

And so Scott and I go down there, and we're sitting in the waiting room. And as you can imagine, it's full of people. And you're getting a very colorful group in this.

I mean, you're getting everything from, like, minor disputes to, like, you know, bigger things. And as I'm sitting there, you can kind of hear what people are saying as they go up to the judge.

[4 : 29] And I thought there were two options that I could either say, yeah, I'm guilty, which there would have been no reason for me to be there. Or I could say I'm innocent, and here's my reason.

But I learned that there's a third option. Is anyone aware of the third option? Guilty with an explanation. And so they said, you can plead guilty with an explanation if you'd like.

And I had never heard of such a thing. So I thought, you know what? I'm telling my dad to Scott. I'm like, I think that's probably what I should do, because I'm sure I broke the law here. But maybe there's some leniency or some favor that this judge will give me if I kind of explain it.

And so that's what I did. I pleaded guilty with an explanation. And I explained my situation. I used my diagram. The guy was probably like, yeah, I don't need to see that. I understand what you're talking about. And they actually did adjust the ticket.

And they made it a non-moving violation. And I still had to pay the fee and essentially just didn't have the points against my license. So anyway, I'd like to say it's somewhat worked out.

[5 : 36] But this topic of guilty with an explanation, we are going to look at that in Romans chapter 1. Because in this letter, we're going to step into this court scene.

And we're going to look at this theme that Paul is giving through this letter to the Romans of God's saving righteousness through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But before you can declare this great message, what do you have to do? You have to have this declaration of guilt.

This understanding of sin and what that means. It's not just sin. It's what that implies, which is God's judgment. You know, in my situation, if I hadn't acknowledged my wrong or I hadn't acknowledged my ticket, there would have been no reason for me to stand before the judge.

I would have just kept doing my own thing and just ignored it. But that doesn't mean that the ticket and the fine would go away, right? It would actually escalate, I'm sure, if I had not paid it.

[6 : 50] And, you know, things would have gotten worse. So Paul is about to explain in the second half of Romans 1 the sin that we've all committed. And actually the path that that sin takes if it is left unaddressed or ignored.

So let's pray. And then we're going to look at Romans, specifically Romans 1, 18 through 32. And I'll probably actually start a couple verses ahead of that just to give some context.

So, Lord, we thank you again for this morning. Thank you for just a chance to celebrate Valentine's Day and just celebrating the relationships we have.

We do appreciate that, Lord. Thank you for this morning and just a chance to get together as a church and to study your word. I pray that this message out of Romans 1 would be clear and full of truth and just impactful for those listening here.

Amen. So let's start with verse 15. I know that wasn't my passage and we were down at Junior Church, so I don't know exactly what was shared last week.

[8 : 04] But we're going to start at verse 15 and just read a little bit of the context. So it says, Or some may see that the one who by faith is righteous shall live.

And so to recap, again, Paul is eager to preach the gospel to those who are in Rome, especially to the Gentiles. And did you notice, look at verses 16, 17, and we're not going to go to 18 yet.

Look at 16 and 17. What does it start with? It starts with the word for. And if you look at that translation, it's almost like starting with the word because. He's eager to preach the gospel because it's something that he is unashamed in.

Because it is the power of God for salvation. Because righteousness is imparted by faith. And so let's continue that. That's an important kind of start to this because we're going to see this.

We're going to see how Paul tightly knits this eagerness to preach the gospel into the start of verses 18. And so going on in 18, it says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[9 : 43] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men and birds and animals and creeping things.

We're going to come back to these verses. But again, did you notice how Paul connects these verses to what he said before? Using the word for in verses 18, 19, 20, and 21.

He's eager to preach the gospel for the purpose of salvation and walking by faith. But it's also for the avoidance of God's wrath.

[10:57] Because the existence of God and his invisible attributes have been made evident and sadly rejected. There's more to come on this. You guys see this connection here.

He's eager to preach the gospel. And these are the reasons that he is excited to do this for.

Therefore, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts.

This is in 24. To impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies and among themselves. Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator.

Who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those who are contrary.

For those that are contrary to nature. And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women. And were consumed with passion for one another. Men committing shameless acts with men.

[12:03] And receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. Not quite the passage I would have picked for Valentine's Day. But let's continue. In 28.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God. God gave them up. This is really interesting.

We're going to really hit on this point later. God gave them up to a debased mind.

To do what ought not to be done. For they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness. Evil.

Covetousness. Malice. They are full of envy. Murder.

Strife. Deceit. Maliciousness. They are gossips. Slanders. Haters of God. Insolent. Haughty.

Boastful. Inventors of evil. Disobedient to parents. Foolish.

Faithless. Heartless. Ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree. That those who practice such things deserve to die. They not only do them.

[13:00] But give approval to those who practice them. The purpose of this passage is to show that the Gentiles are also guilty of committing sin.

The Greeks and the barbarians, these Gentiles have rejected God. And Paul is writing to share the best news of all. The gospel of Jesus and his finished work on the cross.

But this is the key that we all know. Until someone knows they're a sinner, you cannot appreciate this message. Until you see this personal sin you have, there's no need for a personal response to what Jesus has done on the cross.

And by faith to that gracious salvation God offered in Jesus. So back to my ticket story. I was wrong.

I failed to yield to a pedestrian. That was the letter of the law. And whether I acknowledged, agreed, or disagreed, that didn't really matter.

[14:10] The infraction had been committed. I had committed a sin. And again, as we're pointed out here, we're all sinners. And that's a fact regardless of a mission.

So let's just kind of state that clearly. So Paul is writing this passage in two parts. The first part is to talk about what is the basis of God's wrath against the Gentiles.

And that's verses 18 through 23. And then the second part is to talk about what the results are of God's righteous wrath against the Gentiles.

And that's 24 through 32. So starting with this first point, verse 18 says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

The wrath of God. When you think of wrath, what do you think about? You may think of like, you know, a situation at home growing up, a boss, a work situation, family, your reaction to kids.

[15:19] There's a lot of things that may come to mind. Oftentimes that wrath is not a great one. It's an irrational. It's a flying off the handle.

It's a bad example. That is not the situation with God's wrath on sin. God is a perfect God.

He has a hatred for sin and especially the suppression of the truth. And as we read in the middle of this passage, in the later part of the passage, you see where this sin goes.

There's this like linear digression. If you like to look at charts sometimes, you're thinking of like point A here. And there's just a line going down.

And it starts with this suppression of the truth. It's this ignorance of who God is. I'm not even talking like a saving knowledge.

[16:15] I'm just talking about like an acknowledgement of like there is a God. God, this creation, which I'll talk about in a second, this creation came together because there was a divine creator. And that suppression ultimately leads down this slope to where you are not only, you know, in this committing, but this approval of grotesque sin.

You know, homosexuality being an example of that. And so, like I said, it begins with this suppressing or this quenching of an obvious existence of an invisible God.

And it says that his divine nature and eternal power can be clearly seen in creation. And I was just thinking we had a couple of recent examples, but we took a family trip. Obviously, some of you know this, but we went to a family trip to Yosemite National Park.

And one of the first hikes we did, and I meant to get a picture of this, but mentally think about this. One of the first hikes we did was a recommendation from Kent Nicole to a place called the Sentinel Dome.

And, you know, you like hike to the point of this like dome rock, and then you hike to the top of the rock. And once you get to the top of this rock, it was awesome.

[17:29] It was magnificent. You're overlooking Yosemite Valley. You can see the famous like half dome over here. There's mountains all around.

It's incredible. And when you're up there just taking it all in, you can't help but to recognize and in a way worship the creator.

It's just undeniable. I don't look at that scene and say, wow, this is just an incredible, you know, evolution of a million years of unplanned and chaotic change.

And you start to realize that it would truly take a foolish person to suppress this knowledge of the creator. To mistake the obvious understanding that God is the orchestrator.

You know, God is the artist. God is the inventor. And instead of acknowledging God as these things, as the creator, you start to worship the music from the orchestrator.

[18:41] You begin to worship the artwork. Or you begin to worship the object that the inventor has created. And you start to worship the person who's created. And you start to worship the person who's created. And you start to worship the creation and not the creator.

I don't have this in my notes, but I was just thinking also, has anyone ever been to New York City? If you're in New York City and you go up in one of the tall buildings, you can look around.

And it's also magnificent to see just these giant structures. And you may look at it and say, wow, look at what man has done.

Or you may look at it and say, wow, look at the intelligence that God has given us as human beings to create such a thing. And again, it's where is that object of the worship?

The suppression of truth will lead to this worship of the creation. Personally, my feeling is that the sin of pride really leads to that.

[19:52] You know, in my example of New York City, you go to New York City, you're going to find very few people have this acknowledgement of a divine God.

You know, it's a very secular city. And part of that is because pridefully you look around and say, look at everything we have built. Look how great this city is that we have made. Look how smart these people are that, you know, this is mankind.

But it is pure foolishness and disregard of the truth. We want to do things our way. And if a righteous, all-powerful, omnipresent God doesn't exist, then we can do that.

We can do whatever we want. The feudal thinking in the Greek is related to idolatry. We're all worshipping something. It's just what are we worshipping?

Are we worshipping the creator or the creation? Psalm 19.1 says, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

[20:55] I mentioned this earlier that I believe Paul had two intentions or two kind of pieces of writing these verses. The first, as we just looked at, is God's wrath being unveiled against the suppression of truth.

The second is the result of this wrath. And it's interesting, like I said, the start of verse 24, if you want to look at Romans 1.24, it says, Therefore God gave them up.

That's how it starts. If you're reading the ESV like I am, you'll hear that. If you're reading the New King James, you'll hear that. If you're reading the NIV or the NASB, it says, God gave them over. If you're looking at the New Living Translation, I don't know what it says. It just says, You're in trouble. Paul says that because they did not know God, they exchanged the glory, his glory, for the glory of creation or in creation.

And therefore, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies. Later, it says that he gave them up to dishonorable passions of men and women committing shameless acts of homosexual behavior.

[22 : 08] Does anyone find that phrase interesting? God gave them up. God gave them up.

If you look at that meaning of this phrase, it explains that God is almost yielding up or surrendering up or almost deserting these people. And it implies that God is no longer divinely interceding in some ways on their behalf.

I'm not going to say this is what it is, but there's something that God is no longer almost protecting them with. I almost have this visual, like a protective hand of God, and it's being retracted.

And this is an intriguing concept, right? You know, I'm sure it's happening throughout Scripture.

That exact phrase is not mentioned much. You can think back to the Israelites in Judges 2, where it says the Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight, and his anger burned against them to the point that he handed them over to their enemies.

In verse 15 of Judges 2, it says, Every time Israel went out to battle, the Lord fought against them, causing them to be defeated. And the people were in great distress.

[23 : 28] That's a terrible situation to be in, the Lord fighting against you. It brings to mind, and I've had this conversation a little bit, you know, earlier this morning and yesterday.

It brings to mind this thing called a doctrine of common grace. And I am by no means an expert in this, but if you're not aware, it's this idea that God is restraining evil, but he's also sovereignly releasing it, you know, to accomplish a purpose or allowing it.

And there are several examples in the Old Testament where God, you know, is hardening hearts. You think about, you know, the story of Pharaoh and Moses and Pharaoh's heart being hardened.

In Psalm 81, it says, But my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me, so I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. And ultimately, what I'm getting at with this connection with the doctrine of common grace, the fact that any sinful act by an unbeliever can be met with anything other than destruction is a testament to God bestowing, and I'm going to put in parentheses, a non-saving grace to that person that is non-elect.

So my point is, if someone is not a believer and not elect to be saved, any act that is of sin, the fact that God is not destroying that person right away is an example of common grace.

[25 : 15] It is an example of some divine intervention. And by looking at the fact that God is giving up these in this passage that are suppressing the truth and heading down this path may be an instance of that common grace being lifted for that individual in some form or fashion.

This path of suppressing the truth and deeper sin may lead to relinquishment. In verse 24, it says, they were given up in the lust of their hearts to impurity.

Women exchanged the natural desire for men, for the sinful desire of women. Men began doing the same thing with other men. God gives them up to a debased mind, a perverted mind, and they're filled with all unrighteousness.

The sin, and then there's a long list of sins in verses 29 through 31. It's a lengthy one. I'm not going to go into it in depth, but I'll just say that it's covering everything from gossip, which we're all guilty of, to murder, and everything in between.

And it says, although they knew the truth of God, they suppressed this knowledge. They knew that it was deserving of death. But at the very end, it says they gave up, they not only committed these sins, but then they also gave approval to these sins.

[26 : 44] And so there's no, and just kind of wrapping up here, there's no question in my mind that we as a nation, as a society, as a world, we're heading down this slippery slope.

And Mike Harry may appreciate this. We started on this bunny trail, and we are going down the double black diamond now. Things are escalating quickly.

The thing that I would like to just say, though, is I don't believe we are on this downward slope just because of the sin I see. You know, obviously, you can turn on any source of media, and you can be pretty discouraged by what you see.

