

# The Heart of Darkness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] If you would turn to Romans chapter 1, I'm going to read bits of Scripture throughout the sermon tonight so I'm not going to initially read a portion of Scripture. So we'll jump right into our series that we had started last week. As we look at the Gospel through the lens of Romans 1 to 8, we're doing a kind of quick overview of Romans 1 to 8. And what I wanted us to see last week is really that Paul from the very beginning, before we really get into kind of defining what the good news of Jesus is, he does two things. First, what we did last week was he says, hey what I'm about to tell you is not some kind of fringe or peripheral matter. It should be center to who you are, central to finding what it means for you to find life in me. That the Gospel is not merely we said last week kind of the entry point of the Christian life, but also the promise of the Gospel is also the power of the Christian life and the goal of the Christian life as we'll look over the coming weeks from this point on at justification and sanctification and glorification. All promises of the

Gospel. So the first thing that Paul does is he says, look at the Gospel, it is the good news and it should shape who you are and it is that which empowers you to live for Jesus. It is truly the life of Christ in the soul of man. But tonight what we're going to do is we are going to first look at, as Paul does, he says, okay the Gospel is going to be central and then before he really gets into the nuts and bolts of the Gospel he says, I'm going to give you the bad news before I give you the good news. Because the good news of Jesus is relative. Now for those of you who are children of philosophical realms of the Enlightenment, I do not mean by the good news is relative as though we all get to decide whether it's true or not. But it is relative in the sense that the only way that we are going to properly come to grips with the good news and the greatness and the grandeur that is Jesus Christ for you is this we first take a good look in the mirror and see us for ourselves apart from Christ. That's what

I mean by the fact that the Gospel is relative good news. That is we're only able to appreciate the good news of Jesus Christ when we first recognize that the news of ourselves and the news of our community, the news of our worlds, the news of our relationships apart from Jesus Christ is actually quite bad. And so tonight just like Dan kind of said this morning we're going to go into those dark places. We're going to go into the heart of darkness. We're going to consider what is wrong with the world according to what Paul says so that we might be able to better understand what is actually offered when Jesus is given to us. So again just like I said before we introduced the Psalm I invite you Christian to have a sophisticated view of sin. Most of the time when Christians talk about sin we mean kind of the you know moral faux pas, the slip-ups, the things that people out there do, the things that all of us would recognize as ah that was quite naughty. But what Paul is saying this first and foremost sin hits a lot closer to home and it is so much more destructive than little white lies or even the big kind of major sins that we would all kind of identify. But that sin itself is the corrosive influence in our world that it is consuming the world and us too apart from Jesus. And so we're going to look at three aspects of sin that we see from this passage. The first one that I want us to see and it's quite a long section of scripture but the but I'm going to read it in bits so it might not be so overwhelming hopefully. The first thing that I want us to see from Paul's understanding of the bad news is that sin is personal. Sin is personal. Look at what he says in verse 18 to 23. God's word, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him but in their thinking they became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of

the immortal God for images of made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. If you went out in the street and took a survey, a brief survey of the people in the streets of Edinburgh and you said what is wrong with the world today? You might get quite a few opinions. You might get something like well the war is on the forefront of most people's minds that has been waging on for seems like forever now with no apparent conclusion. Economic oppression and inequality, political corruption, lack of clean water and food for the hungry. These are all problems. They're all issues that justice needs to meet. But what we do when we kind of talk about what's wrong with the world and we start with stuff out there, right?

The world is when we talk about what's wrong with the world and we start talking about things like war and economic oppression. Now yes you might you know sign a petition somewhere you might buy a fair trade coffee instead of you know kind of making the you know people work harder and not paying them anything. But to be honest what we're doing is we're kind of pushing the problems of the world at arm's length. We're trying to go yeah the problem with this world is mainly stuff outside. It's out it's over there it's a part from me it's distant I want to do something about it but it's quite clear that it's way over there. Well I think Paul in this passage like Jesus before him is saying something much more condemning honestly about sin. Jesus says it in Mark 7 verses 14 to 19 if we have those passages we could put up and

[ 7 : 51 ] Jesus says again Jesus called and he's talking to the Pharisees and they're worried about kind of what they're eating and following all the laws and Jesus says verse 15 nothing outside of a man can make him unclean by going into him rather it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. In other words Jesus like Paul in this passage starts off with this kind of grand problem out there but then what does he do he internalizes it. He says what is wrong with the world today for according to Christians according to the gospel what is wrong with the world today is you and me. That the brokenness of this world starts in my heart by my failure to show grace my failure not to love my failure to be a wimp when I should be bold to be sacrificial when I'm selfish.

And so he's not saying Paul is not saying Jesus is not saying hey there are no system problems there's no yeah it's all just kind of individualized saving souls is not that but what I want us to understand is the systems are constructed on the backs of a much more personal problem that you and I need renewing that we need to be renovated not from the outside in but from the inside out. And oftentimes we have this idea that even in the church that kind of we're God's gift in a more self-righteous and arrogant and prideful way to this community and if they would just be more like us wouldn't they be lucky. And I can't help think of Joseph Conrad's book the heart of darkness that appeared in 1899 in articles but later was compiled and the main character in that book was a man named Kurtz a man named Kurtz who was employed by the European trading company or the English trading company I can't remember it's a book basically as an indictment on imperialism British imperialism and and what happens is that Kurtz goes in and he is not only tasked with kind of being a successful tradesman in the ivory business with trading with the African natives but he is also kind of prided on the you know on the back and patted on the back as he goes to take British culture too because we are the civilized ones they need our help and we're gonna give it to them well the story goes along of course and Kurtz goes in and ultimately what happens is all these grand stories about how what a hero Kurtz is come out of the jungle and there's this you know he's he's a great tradesman and he's oh my goodness he's brought for it flourishing to the community and when when the narrator goes in he actually finds the truth and Kurtz is not civilized the savage he's imprisoned them he's beheaded some of them his posts outside of his of his house are lined with the heads of those who were in rebellion to what his purposes were I use that illustration simply to say this that Kurtz had this idea that I'm the one that is healthy I am I am going to kind of serve that community and civilize that community when he all the while missed the fact that he himself is at the very heart darkened it's the old saying right power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely why because when you are given power your heart comes out what comes out of a man is unclean and so I think that brothers and sisters as we think about going on the mission that Dan was charging us with that Derek I know stands up here in breaches every week for us to to be in our communities that the days are past of opening up the door and the and the city starts flooding in we must go out but if we go out deceiving ourselves that they are the ones that need help they're the ones that need the we're all fine in here we're good religious folks brothers and sisters we will become masters and enslave others to a jay

Jesus less religion and so Paul wants to see from the very beginning our own heart of darkness that the sin and the corruption is not principally out there but in here and that we do not want to be a soft hearted I mean a hard-hearted church that where our foolish hearts are darkened but that we want to be a soft hearted church that we want to be a church full of saints who are malleable and teachable and humble and know our sin that we're not masking but we're healing there's a difference and Paul wants us to recognize that so sin is much more personal than I think that sometimes we recognize secondly from this passage I want us to see that sin is also progressive look at verse 24 to 32 therefore God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurities for the degrading of their bodies for with one another they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised amen because of this God gave them over to their shameful lusts even their women exchange natural relations for unnatural ones in the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another and men committed indecent acts with one another with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion furthermore since they did not think it worthy excuse me so they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God God gave them over to the depraved mind to do what ought not to be done they became filled with every kind of wickedness evil greed depravity they were full of envy murder strife deceit and malice they were gossips and slanderers and God haters insolent arrogant and boastful they invented ways of doing evil they disobey their parents they were senseless faithless heartless ruthless although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them wow Paul wants us to see that sin is not this kind of static experience that there is a movement to sin it's not a one-off kind of slip up that it is corrosive the sin that Paul wants us to understand is that it is the cancer that is eating away at us and I think cancer is a beautiful picture and that'll be the only time you ever hear the word cancer and beautiful but of the nature of sin my father and my mother have both had cancer in the last three or four years and cancer most often the times is slow growing you find you have a bit of cancer and you go wow and if you did nothing to it you probably would last months years it may never kill you depending upon what kind of cancer it was it may take decades but what we see in Scripture when we talk

about sin is that it may for a time seem like it is dormant that is kind of just barely under the start we can live with it but in the end it will take you and that's what Paul is saying here talking about being deceived and kind of pursuing sin is that there is a movement to sin and James chapter 1 13 to 15 James says this very well especially in verse 15 he says then after desire was conceived it gave birth to sin and sin when it was full grown gave birth to death do you see in that passage the movement of sin that it goes from something that maybe only I know maybe I've toyed with a little bit in my head and then there's an action point when it is kind of conceived and then it becomes full grown as that sin grows and develops in my life where it ultimately comes back and consumes me to devastating picture of sin it is a devastating picture of sin and what I want us to understand here is that the contrast in the good news because what I think that sometimes we do is as

[18:49] Christians we have this kind of moralistic understanding of sin hey don't do bad come to Jesus and be a good girl or a good boy that's what Jesus's purpose is is to make you good wrong Jesus's purpose is to make you whole which is good to make you like him which is whole not just morally respectable but whole from the inside out there are plenty of us that could go to manners classes and look perfectly respectable in every way practically perfect right Mary Puffins but cancer is eating away it's consuming us and what I want you to see is the contrast with the good news you see there is a trajectory to sin that sin kind of grows it incubates in our lives and we kind of let it sit there and think oh it's not that big a deal and it grows and it grows and then it eats us up and it swallows us into death we live toward dying apart from

Jesus but the gospel says you die towards living that you die to self and live for Jesus do you see in the passage that I just read the kind of de evolution that happens sin kind of dehumanizes us it takes us away from being fully human we start worshiping things that we were never intended to worship and doing things in the body we were never intended to do because we're craving something we never intended to love one of the things that I Dan and I were talking earlier today about kind of preaching and apologetics and those kinds of things I think each of us as Christians in a post-Christian society have to be aware of the unbelief around us some of you might be unbelievers some of you might be wrestling with the gospel for the first time and that is a good place

to be thank you for being here we want you here what we need to be aware of is the unbelief of our friends so that we might understand where the gospel and the bad news the good news fit into their lives we don't give give them some generic kind of tract and say be on your way but trying to and if you ever get a chance to sit around Paul for a bit in the Christian Heritage Center or the underbelly you'll see him do it masterfully but one of the things that I think that is interesting is that we living in a post-Christian society oftentimes as Christians we get kind of put maybe it's the Richard Dawkins of the world your most famous Brit now but you know that that that that we kind of as Christians were seen as kind of living in this fantasy world that we live in this world of make-believe and fairies and unicorns and it's not real but as I look at the kind of nature of sin that it de-evolves us it dehumanizes us I can't help but think of somebody like Christopher Hitchens who recently passed away he was a great apologist for atheism and I met one of his good friends who is a Christian apologist they had had many debates and he recounted one of the things that as he saw Christopher beginning to die that he lamented most was the fact that he had had an opportunity to get to know

Christopher's wife and his daughter and that he saw Christopher love his bride and love his wife so well and as he neared more and more to death's door he became ever more resolute to suppress that there was anything lasting or eternal or real to his love that when he went into the ground that was over that play had ended I don't know about you but that seems like a fantasy to me why should I look at sin in the world today and say yeah love doesn't matter love's not real it's kind of a temporary thing that helps us get through life no what we're doing when we are inviting people into the gospel life is not say hey come to Jesus and experience something less full but more full where your love in the things that you long for and even as we talk tonight of things you suffer from you can look in the face and go those things are real I need to deal with the stuff going on in here and out here and in the world that's all real those are real problems and the love and the charity and the grace and the sense of obligation that too is real do you see that the gospel life moving towards life rather than let them death actually promote something fuller not less is that your view of Christianity you see we talk a lot about duty obligation expectations of what you ought to be but when you think about life in Jesus do you think about something that is fuller and more real sin according to Paul is like a cheap trick it promotes fun and freedom and really living but it's a lie it's a bait and switch as Thomas Brooks wrote in his old work precious remedies against Satan's devices those were the days when book titles were awesome and he says about sin it is like a like a fishing lure that it promises such great things it promises something free something beautiful something tantalizing and as it flashes by we latch on and we find out their barbs and we are pulled along to our death that is the corrosive progressive view of sin that Paul has in mind and the nature of sin that Jesus came to redeem us from the last thing that we'll say is this is that sin is not only personal it's more about what's in here than kind of just the problems out there it's not only as and it's also not some static thing but a progressive thing moving towards death so we need to be wise in the lure of it but it is also a pervasive thing and specifically here I want us to look at Romans 2 1 to 5

where Paul says this you therefore have no excuse you who pass judgment on someone else for at whatever point you judge the other you are condemning yourself condemning yourself because you who pass judgment do the same by the way he's speaking to the church now now we know that God and he's speaking to the Jews in the church in Rome now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based in truth so when you a mere man pass judgment on on them and yet do the same do you think you will escape God's judgment or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness tolerance and patience not realizing that God's kindness leads you towards repentance but because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his in his righteous judgment will be revealed and then looking over if you have your

Bible's open to simply verse 10 of chapter 3 and as it is written there is no one righteous not even one there is no one who understands no one who seeks after God you see one of the things that Paul wants us to understand at the beginning when we talk about sin he's talking about the pagans he's talking about those outside the religion outside the church he's saying this is true of sin and so what happens is those inside the church maybe the kind of people who had been well established in the church for quite some time who were quite respectable began to slowly feel much better about themselves and Paul lets them have it too and he says are you serious have you forgotten your own heart of darkness have you forgotten that you are in need of the grace and kindness of God are you so foolish that you will stick up your nose in pride as someone who is desperately in

need of grace when the only grounds upon which you stand before me are upon grace you see Paul does hear what Jesus did all the time Jesus would not go after necessarily the prostitutes and the tax collectors though he did have a word with them every once in a while but most often Jesus is harsher words for her for who the religious the good the morally upright there I say at the elders in Judaism the people who knew the doctrines who studied the scriptures their heads were full of what should have redeemed them who what should have taken them to Jesus but you see what Paul does here is he says church don't be deceived please understand that actually being in the church around the doctrines having the heritage can actually sometimes be even more dangerous place than being outside because what do we do we subtly switch from the whole truth of the gospel to the half truth of religion and we say I'm gonna hold on to my tradition I'm gonna hold on to the things that make me righteous the problem is for the Pharisees and for some of us it's not Jesus a man walked into a village he was a traveler he didn't know exactly where all he was going along his journeys he walks into a village and as he walks in he sees the sign outside the village saying what the name of the village was and he notices on the sign is quite ornate that there are fish jumping over the words in the sign he walks in and he notices on the banisters and rails there are etchings and carvings of boats and of nets and a fish he goes into the local pub to refresh himself and he sees he sees he sees pictures on the walls he sees trophies as he overhears the people in the pub talking they are reminiscing about the great catches of old of the

[ 32 : 09 ] the nights spent over on the seas harvesting so many fish the good old days that they remembered this traveler got excited he had never been fishing before he thought man that sounds awesome I think I quite would like to go fishing so he asked someone in the pub can you tell me where I might go where I might go fishing only to find everyone looking curious and saying well I'm not sure any of us have boats anymore you see our days of fishing are long gone all we have now are these pictures and trophies in our memories and you see that was no longer a fishing village it was a fisherman's museum Christian what is our church is our church a museum for Jesus now I'm not talking about the Christian heritage center thing out here Paul's like sweating yeah I'm talking about because Paul obviously uses that as a springboard into a living faith dialogue but that we need to understand that our church that those of us that the few that are here that are sitting in the pulpits preaching and praying and singing together we're not just reminiscing about the good old days and walk down the streets of Edinburgh and go yeah that used to be a church so did that but that we as Jesus is calling us are to be fishers of men not a museum where those days have long past you see Paul is going after and saying none of us are righteous we are all corrupt sin is pervasive it may be religious it may be irreligious and so it means we must come with a humility to look at sin you see I think that oftentimes we do we do settle for a kind of morality Christianity we just want to be good we want to be respectable and that is not what Jesus is going to offer as we look in the next couple a few weeks I'm going to be off for two weeks and then I'll be back and Sunday morning and then Sunday morning and evening on the 8th and the 15th as we talk about the good news what's going to happen is Jesus is going to enter into this story of brokenness that Jesus looks fully in the face and he goes I know that your sin is personal I know that you in the quiet moments of your life recognize your heart of darkness that you are in need of God's grace that though we have personally turned against God and we are guilty Jesus looks at that personal sin and he is the provision for it and that God looks at Jesus the father looks at the son and he turns his back on him and pours out our guilt on Jesus so that when we by personal rebellion should have been pushed off we are brought near look at 2nd Corinthians 5:21 God made him who knew no sin to be sinned for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God don't brush over those words as familiar as they might be to you because when you are view of sin grows your view of Jesus needs to grow also that you need to understand when when Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 5:21 God made him to to be sin who knew no sin when he becomes his he becomes that personal rebellion he becomes and drinks in all of the progressive guilt and wrath and rebellion that deserves hell itself that he in his sin dies for the sinner and for the supposedly righteous that Jesus is our provision that's what Paul is going to get into as he looks at and so what I want you to walk away with today is this I want us Christians to have a big view of sin a devastatingly large view of sin to understand sin starts with you and with me and that if it starts with us it is moving us somewhere to separation and death and our religion is no help the religious performance is no help apart from Jesus Christ he is our provision and what we're going to see in the coming weeks is not only do we can we be honest about a big view of sin but we will also see the gospel proclaim an even bigger

view of Jesus let us pray

Jesus you are the overcomer you redeem us from the pit our hearts are darkened and hard we call us them with our religion so oftentimes we need your grace and forgiveness Jesus be our power be the resurrection to new life for us and may you revive and renew our communities through us may we fish not let sin move us to death and to mere memories but move ourselves and others to life in Christ in Jesus name amen