

Best Bad News Ever  
Exodus 20:1-6, Romans 8:24-30  
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## **Exodus 20:1-6**

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

## **Second Reading: Romans 8:24-30**

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

There's an old preaching joke that has been floating around as long as I can remember. Not a good preaching joke, but an old preaching joke.

One day a super arrogant scientist couple decided that humanity no longer needed God, so they told God, "Look, we can clone pets and transplant organs and do many miraculous things, so you can just hang out in heaven by yourself, kick back, and watch March Madness."

God said, "Well before we jump to any conclusions, let's make sure you're ready to be God. Let's see how you do making some humans."

The scientists were onboard.

God added, "But we're going to go old-school, like I did with Adam. You know, out of dirt."

The scientists were all for it, and they bent down and grabbed a handful of dirt.

God said, "uh uh uh. You make your own dirt."

Okay, so I warned you ahead of time that it wasn't that funny! Truth be told, I didn't tell you this joke because it was hilarious. I told you the joke because it points out there's a big difference between God and us. Whether you believe that God created humanity literally out of dirt as the book of Genesis describes, or whether you believe God was involved in a much broader sense over the sweep of history as humanity came to be, the point is the same: God is the creator; we are the creation.

Now it's easy to ignore a joke that gets 2 stars on [funnyandjokes.com](http://funnyandjokes.com). It's a little harder to blow by the Ten Commandments, our Old Testament passage today. The very first two things covered?

*You shall have no other gods before me.*

*You shall not make for yourself an idol...;*

So...God starts out the whole shebang: “Look, I’m the Creator. Nothing else can compete with me. Keep me first.” And although the passage doesn’t say it directly, it might as well just go on to say, “In God’s eyes, you’re the creation. Not the Creator. Creation. Don’t forget it.” So basically in this command God is putting us into our places.

That seems like bad news to me. I don’t like anyone telling me I’m not as important as I think. I suspect that at least some of you are the same way. “I know perfectly well what I’m doing, God. Just let me take care of everything!” And when we hear that in God’s eyes we’re creation and not Creator, it feels like bad news.

Well, if it’s bad news, it might just be the best bad news ever. After all, the Ten Commandments start out with a prologue before they ever get to God’s putting us into our place:

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...*

God’s like, “Hey, remember who I am and what I’ve done for you! You didn’t get yourself out of Egypt. I’m your creator; you’re creation. I was there every step of the way. You might not have seen me, but I was there. So take a deep breath! Let me do my work here too.”

And suddenly what seems as bad news from God—let me put you in your place—turns into the best bad news ever: it’s okay, I’m at work here too. When the world seems to be spinning out of control, and we think that it’s all up to us, God’s offer to “let me put you in your place” is a gift. God’s statement “it’s okay; I’m at work here too” becomes a promise.

Of course, some people need this gift more than others. If you lined up all the Christians in the world, some would be more over here when things get out of control—I'm going to do everything I can myself and I might just forget that God is at work too because it's all up to me? Others would be over here—I'm going to sit back and do nothing because I'm overwhelmed and God is going to figure it all out anyway and I don't have to do anything.

I asked the women in the Wednesday morning Bible study where they think folks here line up. They thought we probably veer toward this side. I said, "Sometimes we act like there's no God" and the woman sitting right beside me interrupted me and said "Sometimes?!?!?!?"

This resonates with me, because many of the comments on the colored shapes hanging on the pulpit and the lectern reveal the same thought. A few weeks ago, worshipers wrote on these shapes to complete the thought, "Jesus, drown out the voices that tell me..." If you haven't come up to look at them, please do—they're very poignant and moving.

Anyway, several of them talked about the voices around them that tell them to forget about God's presence. Here are just a few examples: "Jesus, drown out the voices that tell me..."

- I can do this alone.
- Things need to happen the way I want them to happen
- That my plan must be completed before your plan
- I am alone.

When these prayers go up, God answers back with the best bad news ever: "I'm the Creator. You're creation. I'm with you every step of the way. You may not see me, but I'm here. So take a deep breath. Let me do my work here too."

This may be the best bad news ever, but it isn't quite perfect news.

Perfect news would be, "I'm the Creator and you're creation and so I'm going to fix all of your problems exactly as you want so that nothing bad will happen to you or the people you love."

We don't get this perfect news. I wish we did, but don't. The world is broken—things are not the way that God wants them to be. Our passage from Romans tells us this—we wait along with Paul for the time when our hope will one day be realized. We need the Spirit to pray with us because things are not yet right. We cling to the hope that all things will one day work together for good, because we do not yet see it.

So the best bad news ever is not a promise that God will clear up every bad thing that ever happened to us. Paul makes a different promise in our passage from Romans:

*all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

The best bad news ever does not mean that whatever has happened to us to spin our life out of control is good, or that God will immediately clear it up just as we want. No, the best bad news ever means that God is Creator, and we are creation, and God is at work in ways that we don't see, to bring good out of the bad.

The best bad news ever means that when your spouse suddenly asks for divorce and your world seems to be falling apart around you, it's not good in any way. But God can bring good out of it in a way that we cannot, because God is the creator and we are the creation.

The best bad news ever means that when your family member gets a terrible diagnosis that you never saw coming and the chemo starts right after

the spinal tap, it's not good in any way. But God can bring good out of it in a way that we cannot, because God is the creator and we are the creation.

The best bad news ever means that when the person you love suddenly drops dead when you have your whole future planned out together, it's not good in any way. But God can bring good out of it in a way that we cannot, because God is the creator and we are the creation.

The best bad news ever means that when you lose your job after 31 years of working at Wal-Mart, it's not good in any way. That's what happened to my friend Paul. He was an assistant store manager. He messed up taking inventory while he was being audited by corporate. Next thing he knew he had lost his job.

I've known Paul and his wife Tonya for years. One of our mutual friends called her "the little general" because she was such a control freak. The day after Paul lost his job, when things were clearly swirling out of control, she posted this on Facebook:

*Back in January..., I talked to God about working on my need for control. I asked for help and direction. Almost immediately, I began sleeping better as I concentrated on what I could do and what I was doing...rather than stressing and worrying about what I could not control. Little did I know that God was preparing me for an uncomfortable journey this Lent. God is with us and seeing us through.*

I wish I could tell you that the best bad news ever meant that Wal-Mart realized what a mistake they made and they hired Paul back with a raise. But this happy ending hasn't happened. Their happy ending is still a long long way away. Paul got hired on with Lowe's, at about 1/3 his previous pay.

Getting fired after 31 years is not good in any way. But I'm praying with Paul and Tonya that they'll see quickly how God can bring good out of it in a way that we cannot, because God is the creator and we are the creation.

After all, that's what God did at the crucifixion. There was certainly nothing good about Jesus' death on the cross. Nothing good about Jesus' betrayal by Judas and his denial by Peter. Nothing good about the pain that Jesus felt as he was nailed to that tree. Nothing good as he felt his life slip away. Nothing good at all

And yet the great good news of the Gospel is that God can bring good even out of crucifixion. God can bring Easter out of Good Friday, in a way that we cannot, because God is the creator and we are the creation. And that is the best bad news ever. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.