

Romans 1:18-32 – God’s anger against our Sin

Video Clip from Indiana Jones <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr-8AP0To4k>

That was fun want’ it, what a great film! (Indiana Jones raiders of the lost ark)
I show it to you, because it is a visual parallel for our passage this morning, and therefore this talk!

A passage which is *hugely* significant for us, and which is in some ways pretty hard – it explains why God is *angry with us*, which he is.
It comes like a diagnosis of sickness – but a diagnosis which is specific enough, that it should be really helpful, perhaps even enlightening.
Not just saying “you’re sick” but “this is *how* you’re sick”

And Indiana Jones provides a visual parallel to our passage. In it, there are two big events
There’s a great exchange, when Indie swaps the golden statue/idol for a bag of sand – that’s the first event, the great exchange.
And, there are the terrible consequences of that, when the temple falls apart(!)
Nothing more complicated than that, but I hope it will help you remember – an exchange and the terrible consequences.

So as we think about this passage, let me pray:

Pray: Lord open up your word to our hearts, and our hearts to your word, that we might see it’s truth in our own lives, and be drawn back to you, on our knees and seeking your grace and help. Amen

So, this passage has some huge things to say about *all* human beings, and the first is this:

1. The terrible exchange which all humans make

Indie exchanges the gold statue for the bag of sand. But listen to what the passage says *we* exchange:

v22 “Although they claimed to be wise,
they became fools ²³
and exchanged the glory of the immortal God
for images made to look like a mortal human being
and birds and animals and reptiles”

v25 “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie,
and worshiped and served created things
rather than the Creator”

Did you see the swap. God, and the truth about God, is replaced – knocked off his perch! And in his place: created things – a lie.

We're supposed to gasp and think this is terrible – but you might be thinking “what does that mean?” “In what sense has God been replaced or exchanged for something else?”

And the answer is this “in our hearts”.

We love and treasure and pursue other things.

Look again at v25 – it's so important.

“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and **worshipped** and **served** created things”

I don't want to push the image too far, but you could imagine that platform, in Indiana Jones, which sensed the weight of the golden statue, parallels the *human heart*.

God is replaced in our hearts, by other things.

And when it says “what we worship and serve” it means: what we long for, what we love, what we prize, what we adore.

What we *worship and serve* dictates how we spend our time and money, it dictates what we chase after. You see, this exchange is deeply personal to each one of us, it's about what goes on in our hearts!

Now, I'll talk through a specific example later, but it should be clear immediately that this is a really bad idea!

Nothing else is fit to take God's place – any swap is a foolish swap.

The passage talks about the “glory of the *immortal* God” being replaced by mortal, that is temporary faltering and weak things.

Nothing is weighty enough to compare to God.

In the Indiana Jones parallel: nothing we could put on that weight-sensitive plate would match up to God.

And the passage says we have no excuse;

He says, we're not like really young children, who do something wrong but don't understand - they can't be blamed, they can claim ignorance.

He says we're like adults, old enough and clever enough to know exactly how foolish our mistake is, we shouldn't have done it.

V19 “Since, what may be known about God **is plain to them,**
because **God has made it plain to them.** ²⁰

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 **people are without excuse.**

²¹ For

although they knew God,

they neither glorified him as God

nor gave thanks to him”

He's saying, we should have known better!

God shows us enough about himself in our created world.

Now I used to find this really hard to understand. But, it's not saying that we can work out *exactly* what God is like from the world around us, it is saying there is *enough*:

God is big, he is powerful, he is wonderful, he is creative, and beautiful, that should be obvious. And we... we are not! We are small.

So... We should honour him, revere him, and worship him.

But we don't, we don't like that, we make the terrible exchange, and we worship and live for created things.

So, before I give some examples, let's see that like Indiana Jones, there are terrible consequences of this exchange.

And that's our second point:

2. The terrible consequences

Just like for Indie, the temple comes tumbling down, it's disaster.

So for people, and it's a hard but very important thought: there are terrible consequences of our exchange, **God is angry with us**. And if that's true, we really need to know about it.

v18 "The wrath of God (**that's his right anger**) **is being revealed** from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness"

How is his wrath/ his right anger being revealed?

Well, it's *not just*, **automatic consequences**:

That's when, for example, a young child, despite warnings, touches the hob whilst it's still glowing hot. They get burnt! That's the automatic consequence.

For people, when we exchange God for something else in that premier place in our heart: it's not as good or wonderful or satisfying – we will be disappointed, and ultimately hurt – that's automatic! But it's more than that, our Father is angry.

Please look at your bibles to see this:

V24, they exchanged the glory of God for images,

Therefore, v24 "**God gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts"

And again v26 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, then v26 "Because of this, **God gave them over** to shameful lusts"

Still again v28 "just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so **God gave them over** to a depraved mind, so that they *do* what ought not to be done"

3 times so we get the point, the consequences are not just automatic, **God is actively giving people over** to their ways, to their bad choices.

The image is of me turning my back on God, and walking away, and God underlining it, letting me go, *sending* me to it.

It's awful when we look elsewhere rather than to God, he is angry, and not just passive, God is active, he *gives us over*.

That's why v18 says "The wrath of God **is being revealed**" now, present tense.

The punishment fits the crime – It's what we want, but it's bad for us, very bad.

That's really sad isn't it!

But if we look around us, this is the world we see isn't it?

Described in v29?

We see it in the newspapers, the magazines: gossip, greed and boasting!

We see it in other people, and at times we see it in ourselves:

v29 says

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ (Interesting to see that there isn't it!) they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³²

Like the temple falling down because Indie took the golden statue, our lives tumble down – it says, our world tumbles down, and God gives us into this terrible choice.

This is the Christian **explanation** for why the world is like it is.

People turn from God, AND, the things we turn to, result in these things - God has given us into that way as a judgment.

That doesn't mean God likes these things, they grieve him, they hurt him, and they make him angry. All these things are bad, to be avoided, God disapproves of them.

Now, I have to be honest at this point and address that among this list is something which is politically a hot topic: That is, same sex relationships – homosexuality.

v24 talks about **all** sexual sin, it says "Therefore **God gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another" (so sexual sin of a heterosexual kind is condemned! Please note!)

But also v26 talks specifically about homosexual sin "God **gave them over** to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged *natural* sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned *natural* relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."

This is saying sexual acts with those of the same sex are unnatural, and more than that, together with any sexual sin, they are a sign of having exchanged God in our hearts for something else, **and** are a sign of God handing us over into our sinful ways, they are not good. There is no approval from the bible for same sex relationships.

And this is an important enough issue, that we need to discuss it a lot more. I'm not going to say much now, but next week, we will give a whole sermon to talking about the associated issues.

Today, I simply want to say, the only sexual behaviour God approves of (and he thinks it's *great*) is between a **married man** and **woman**.

All of us, heterosexual or homosexual, have sinned sexually in a way which is described here.

And *all* of us, need God by his grace to make another exchange for us, one which enables us to come *back* to him.

And that is what Romans is all about, it's great news!!

So it's possible for every bad thing listed here – greed, anger or murder - gossip, envy, *disobeying your parents* - and sexual sins too, including those with people of the same sex. All these can be forgiven!

There is no one who cannot come to God by his grace.

If you are attracted to people of the same sex, God's word here does not *rule you out*, or separate you off, in fact it does just the opposite, it *groups you in*, it groups us all in together. So, I said at the start this was a little like a painful doctor's diagnosis: this list is a little like symptoms:

If you've ever been deceitful v29 – the reason is, you exchanged God for something else in your heart, something ruled.

If you've ever lacked love v31 – the reason is, something else other than God was more valuable to you, more important.

This truth both explains why the world is the way it is, and if we've understood it, it points the finger at our hearts, and says, we've done it, and this is what happens...

We've all done it – we all make the terrible exchange, and we all face the consequences, some of which are obvious, some listed here, but most importantly, and perhaps not noticed by some: God is angry.

So, that's it:

The terrible exchange, and the terrible consequences.

But why tell us? To frighten us? No.

It's partly, because the good news of God's grace in Romans is: He is a God, who by grace, welcomes **sinners**.

I'm really pleased we're reading the OT book of Hosea alongside Romans. We're not going to talk about it in great detail. But it teaches the same ideas as Romans, in a less detailed but more emotive way.

In Hosea, the image is of adultery. The exchange we talked about could be described as *spiritual adultery*. We leave God and seek pleasure and fulfilment with another lover (a swap).

God is *angry*, because we are adulterers. The things we turn to to cheat on him, don't satisfy but hurt us.

He begins to push us away in his wrath, and one day there is the danger we are pushed away forever.

I hope this makes sense: to really understand his *love*, the great story of his *love* for us, It's really important to tell the story of our *adultery*, it's part of the truth, and shows just how great his love is.

God seeks us out, he makes us his bride!

And he loves us so much, that he does that for us, *even though* we are those who have been adulterous to him.

Do you see? The bad news shows just how amazing the good news is.

But also, with that love in our mind, **let me explain the other reason why he tells us this:**
The god who loves you, wants you to see what's going on in your heart.

It's not enough to say you make mistakes, God wants you to understand **how the exchange works in your heart.**

So you can turn back from it.

so I said I would try to give examples, here they are.

It's possible to put close relationships; or career and status; or money and comfort; or approval from others – into the place God should occupy.

Let's say *approval from others* is there, in the place of God – this is what will happen: much of the time it might not be obvious, the person will mostly act very respectably and do good things.

However, they will want that to be seen by others, and they will want recognition, praise and approval. So much so, that they may lie (if they can get away with it), in order to get that approval. But if there's a risk of getting caught out- that disapproval will stop them lying – you see, approval is the controlling factor.

If this person does something really kind, which they feel deserves approval, but then they *don't* get it(!)... They will get angry. Feeling deprived of the approval they want and deserve. You see, instead of looking to please God, and do the right thing for him. The value of what they do is simply in the *approval* they get – so, not getting approval, means they wasted their time.

This person will never get all the approval they want, they will constantly be seeking more, trapped by their desires and longing for it – they will live life in a constant struggle.

Being *given over* into this way of living is really bad news.

The swap in their hearts, taking God out of his rightful place, isn't something they remember consciously doing, but it's something they perpetuate, day by day – still thinking, wrongly, that they really can be made happy, if they can just get some approval, and so pursuing it.

God wants to be first in their heart, he's angry, and his judgment says – “ok, you go after approval, off you go”.

The same switch can be made seeking *status and power*.

It can be made seeking a *relationship, or love*,

It can be made seeking *comfort* – and if so - what a comfortable home those people have, what an array of gadgets and luxuries they can get.

But they're all the same, poor substitutes for God, they can't deliver. And the worst thing that can possibly happen – God's judgment, is to hand us over into those things.

To let us chase after that relationship, with all that we have, our heart and soul.

To let us pursue status, our career, handing us over into a whole life pursuing it.

That's bad!

When actually, *God* gives us the kind of approval which satisfies our soul.

God gives us the depth of a relationship, the lasting status, the comfort and security.

Of course because we were built to have our hearts set on him.

God put this passage here because he wants us to *wake* up to these imposters, to see sin as an exchange in our hearts.

He doesn't want you to simply feel *guilty* for adultery, but to know what it looks like to become more faithful. To no longer pursue these things, but to pursue God.

You see, so great is his love for us, that he *will* take us back.

Jesus Christ made another exchange, for us, at the cross, God's wrath was revealed against him, instead of us. If we want to turn back, he has made a way.

Communion, of course, is a way of us saying to God:

"Yes, lord, I want to come back. I want his body and blood to bear your anger against me" it's a great exchange.

"Yes lord, I want to be faithful, from now on"

And in this service we have a chance to take communion and to say exactly that to God.

I'm going to pray now:

Lord, we are sorry, we have made this terrible exchange.

We long for you to make an exchange back for us, to undo this.

Lord we know you could push us off into our foolish choices, but please don't, pull us back, draw us closer, and by doing so, show your great love.

We ask for it in the name of your son, Jesus Christ our lord. Amen.