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God Gave Them Up

Romans 1.24-32

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
 - 1. I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
 - 2. I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
 - 3. Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
 - 4. I hid from Him, and under running laughter."
- B. "Up vistaed hopes I sped;
 - 1. And shot, precipitated,
 - 2. Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
 - 3. From those strong Feet that followed, followed after."
- C. "But with unhurrying chase,
 - 1. And unperturbed pace,
 - 2. Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 - 3. They beat – and a Voice beat
 - 4. More instant than the Feet –
 - 5. 'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'"
- D. "Across the margent of the world I fled,
 - 1. And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
 - 2. Smiting for shelter on the clanged bars;
 - 3. Fretted to dulcet jars
 - 4. And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon..."
- E. "Still with unhurrying chase,
 - 1. And unperturbed pace,
 - 2. Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 - 3. Came on the following Feet,
 - 4. And a Voice above their beat –
 - 5. 'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.'"
- F. "I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
 - 1. Heaven and I wept together,
 - 2. And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
 - 3. Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
 - 4. I laid my own to beat,
 - 5. And share commingling heat;
 - 6. But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.
 - 7. In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's gray cheek...."

- G. “Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
 1. With unperturbed pace,
 2. Deliberate speed, majestic instancy;
 3. And past those noised Feet
 4. A voice comes yet more fleet—
 5. ‘Lo! naught contents thee, who content’st not Me.’”
- H. The words of **Francis Thompson (1859-1907)**
 1. From his classic poem, *The Hound of Heaven*
- I. Thompson was running away from his parents
 1. Who insisted he pursue a medical degree in Manchester, England
 a. Which he soon spurned, choosing to go to London instead and become a writer
 2. When his health began to fail he became addicted to opium
 a. Fell into despair among the homeless
 b. Sleeping on the banks of the Thames
 c. Selling matches just to scratch out an existence
- J. It was during this time of destitution that Francis Thompson realized that he wasn’t so much running away from his parents and their aspirations for him
 1. He was running away from God
 a. And one doesn’t run away from God with impunity
 2. His desperate circumstances heightened his sensitivity to his spiritual condition
 a. And his poetic gifts were elevated
 3. In 1888 he sent a damaged manuscript to a Catholic magazine
 a. Its editors, as devout Christians, immediately recognized the poem as a masterpiece
 b. They took him under their care, provided a home for him
 c. And published a book of his poems, which included *The Hound of Heaven*
- K. Which raises the question for us, as it has for many in the generations since Thompson, of what happens when you run away from God
 1. Our text this morning – **Romans 1.24-32** – answers that question
 2. The short answer to that question – the question of what happens when you run away from God – is that God gives you up
 a. He lets you go
 b. He removes whatever restraints may be holding you back from your desires to live apart from God
 c. And He gives you up to do whatever you want
- L. We see it stated three times in this passage
 1. **Romans 1:24** (ESV) — 24 **Therefore God gave them up ...**
 2. **Romans 1:26** (ESV) — 26 **For this reason God gave them up ...**
 3. **Romans 1:28** (ESV) — 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up ...**
- M. And yet, as Francis Thompson discovered, even as God gives you up
 1. He’s never far behind

- a. “From those strong Feet that followed...
- b. But with unhurrying chase,
- c. And unperturbed pace,
- d. Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
- e. They beat – and a Voice beat
- f. More instant than the Feet–”

II. **The Primordial Sin**

- A. We’ve been exploring the book of Romans in our series “The Pure Gospel”
 - 1. The book of Romans is about the gospel – the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself
 - a. But first we’ve encountered the bad news
 - b. There is no good news unless we’ve first recognized the bad news
 - c. And that we desperately need the good news because of the bad news
 - d. And we learned in the last message that we are the bad news
 - 2. In other words, in the last message we began to see the need of the gospel, the need for Christ
 - 3. We learned that God is angry
 - a. The dreaded word “wrath” is used by Paul in verse 18
 - b. His wrath is not an emotional outburst provoked by a particular incident
 - c. But it is an abiding, relentless antagonism toward anything that opposes His holiness and righteous character
 - 4. We learned as well that the primordial sin, the underlying transgression, that drives God’s passionate anger is truth suppression
- B. **Truth Suppression**
 - 1. **Romans 1:18** (ESV) — 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
 - 2. What truth do human beings suppress?
 - a. Well, they suppress the truth about God
 - b. That the universe declares, with “perspicuity” – absolute clarity – something about the nature and character of God
 - 3. **Romans 1:19–20** (ESV) — 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
- C. **The Atheistic Rejection**
 - 1. This is the atheistic rejection of God
 - a. That even though the created world – the universe, from its cosmic, macroscopic expanse to its microscopic detail and complexity
 - b. Shouts the godness of God

2. **Romans 1:21** (ESV) — 21 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.
3. **Psalms 14:1** (ESV) — 1 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” ...
4. Human beings will not have God in their thinking
 - a. They will think about anything else
 - b. They will rationalize and philosophize using, ironically, the very intellectual gifts that God has given
 - c. Given so we might have a relationship with God
 - d. But they use those very gifts to deny His existence, or at least to ignore Him
 - e. And live as if they could escape Him
5. In other words, human beings, in their atheism, try, in vain, to run away from God

D. **The Religious Substitution**

1. The interesting thing is that you can't be an atheist for very long
2. Human beings are incurably religious
 - a. And if we deny the true religion of the worship of the One true God, the God of the Bible
 - b. We will make up a substitute
 - c. We will create an idol
3. As C.S. Lewis said, when you reject God, it's not that you stop believing
 - a. It's that you'll believe anything
 - b. And that's the religious substitution
4. **Romans 1:22–23** (ESV) — 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
 - a. Human beings are, by nature, idolaters
 - b. Those who claim to be atheists are simply in denial
 - c. Even they have substituted something in place of God
 - d. At the pinnacle of their values
 - e. They all have their idols

III. **The Judgment**

- A. So what does the judgment of God look like?
 1. How is the wrath of God manifested?
 2. What happens when you run away from God?
- B. **God Gave Them Up**
 1. Basically, God gives you up
 - a. He lets you go your own way
 - b. He lets you have what you want
 2. Because He knows the more you pursue what you think you want, the more it will destroy you
 3. There is a saying – “Virtue is its own reward”
 - a. That doing good is good for you

- b. “Virtue is its own reward”
 - 4. But its corollary is also true
 - a. “Sin is its own punishment”
 - b. Little by little, sin itself will tear you apart
 - c. Physically
 - d. Emotionally
 - e. Psychologically
 - f. Certainly spiritually
 - 5. That why, when God judges, He gives you up
- C. **To Impurity**
 - 1. What does He give you up to?
 - a. There are three things
 - b. First – impurity
 - 2. **Romans 1:24** (ESV) — 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...
 - 3. Impurity – uncleanness (KJV, NKJV)
 - a. **Akatharsia (Gk)**
 - b. Related to our word catharsis
 - c. ‘A’ – negation
 - d. Kathairo (Gk) – to cleanse
 - e. Uncleanness, filth, in natural or physical sense
 - f. Moral uncleanness; lewdness, either by oneself, or with another
 - 4. “In the lusts of their hearts”
 - a. Desires in the very core of one’s being
 - b. Not something peripheral to human beings – but central
 - 5. Reading this section of Romans 1 is like “lifting the lid on hell”
 - a. Lloyd-Jones: Hell is a condition in which life is lived away from God and all the restraints of God’s holiness.
 - b. When God removes His restraints it’s like peeling back the surface and veneer of human respectability to see what’s beneath
 - c. What’s beneath is ugly
 - 6. The human heart is ugly
 - a. Illicit lusts (not just sexual) reside there
 - b. **Matthew 15:19** (ESV) — 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.
 - 7. Result: “... to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves”
 - a. Two dimensions
 - b. Negative effect on their physical bodies
 - c. Social effect – “among themselves”
- D. **To Dishonorable Passions**
 - 1. **Romans 1:26** (ESV) — 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. ...

2. **Dishonorable = atimia (Gk)** – indignity, disgrace, dishonor, reproach, shamefulness, vileness
3. **Passions = pathos (Gk)** – to wound, hurt or suffer
4. Lusts that dishonor those who indulge in them
 - a. The diseased condition out of which various lusts spring
5. Evidence of these dishonorable passions is homosexuality
6. **Romans 1:26–27** (ESV) — 26 ... For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.
7. Previous level of God giving them up was natural
 - a. First level of judgment – distortions of the natural order
8. Exchanged the natural function for the unnatural
 - a. Don't have to have a moral law to see this – just look at the human equipment
 - b. Paul appeals here, not to the scriptures, but to natural law, to demonstrate the immorality of homosexuality
 - c. He could have gone to the scriptures – to Leviticus 18, or to many other examples of homosexual sin in the scriptures
 - d. But he doesn't do that; he says, all you have to do is look at the book of nature
9. Aside: ok, everyone is now on the edge of your seats
 - a. Homosexuality – is Hawkins really going to talk about homosexuality?
 - b. No – Hawkins isn't
 - c. These are the scriptures; this is the Word of God
 - d. One of the things you should notice about my preaching is that, by and large, I preach through books of the Bible
 - e. And when I do that, I don't get to skip difficult subjects
 - f. But my commitment is to teach you, not what I think about it – that's irrelevant
 - g. But to teach you what Bible itself teaches
 - h. And if you want to wrestle – you can wrestle with the Bible
10. A couple of other things
 - a. Everyone of us knows people who claim to be homosexuals
 - b. Most of us have family members who find themselves in the throws of the lifestyle – including our family
 - c. And most of us find it difficult to navigate the relationships, especially in the midst of our cultural moment when the issue is “in your face” dominating the national conversation
11. But let me tell you something about me
 - a. I'm a sinner by nature; I'm only a saint by grace
 - b. But I'm a sinner by nature
 - c. And homosexuality is not one of my sins

- d. But I have plenty of others that would send me to hell just as fast as this one, apart from the grace of God in Christ
- e. And those plenty of others are not just occasional slip-ups
- f. They are desires and inclinations that come from the core of my being
- g. They are desires and inclinations that I am constantly called to mortify
- h. **Romans 8:12–13** (ESV) — 12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- i. That’s what I’m called to do with my sin
- j. That’s what every Christian is called to do – with any sin
- k. So calling attention to this sin – as Paul does – does not come from any sense of personal righteousness on my part; I have none
- l. I weep over my own sin; and I weep over those who are captured by this sin that Paul uses to illustrate what happens when human beings run away from God
- m. When human beings run away from God, they exchange natural relations for those that are contrary to nature
- n. And he gives the example of human sexuality
- 12. Now let me say something about you
 - a. Homosexuality may or may not be your sin
 - b. But we haven’t gotten to the end of the passage about what Paul says happens when human beings run away from God
 - c. Because in this passage he lists a bunch of other sins
 - d. And I’m willing to bet your sin is in this passage
 - e. This passage is an equal opportunity offender
 - f. So homosexuality may not be your sin
 - g. But just wait – your time will come
 - h. And it will come in the next 20 minutes
- 13. Now back to homosexuality
- 14. Both men and women are mentioned in regard to homosexuality
 - a. And it’s not just the act of homosexual sin that is in view, but the very desires
 - b. “... men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another...”
 - c. **Passion = orexis (Gk)** – appetite or lust or desire; always reaching out after and toward an object with the purpose of drawing it to itself and appropriating it
- 15. There have been a variety of attempts at justifying homosexuality biblically
 - a. Some want to say that it doesn’t refer to loving, consensual sex with members of the same sex, but that it has to do with pagan idolatry

- b. Temple prostitution in the Greco-Roman world was fairly common, and much of it was homosexual
 - c. Others want to say that it's just promiscuous homosexual relations that is off limits, that loving monogamous relationships are just fine
- 16. But the issue is not stated in those terms
 - a. The issue is addressed in terms of natural law
 - b. The exchange of the natural function for the unnatural
 - c. It's not the excessive engagement in one's sexual preference
 - d. And the fundamental issue is not the conduct per se, but the underlying desire which is at issue
- 17. Others will say, Jesus never talked homosexuality
 - a. That's one of the weakest arguments I've ever heard
 - b. First, Jesus affirmed the Law of God
 - c. **Matthew 5:17** (ESV) — 17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
 - d. Law of God is clear – about homosexuality as well as about a number of other sexual sins including fornication and adultery and incest
 - e. Second, this is what Jesus said: **Mark 10:6–8** (ESV) — 6 “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7 ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.”
 - f. So Jesus positively affirmed, not only the creation of human beings as two sexes, but that the only legitimate form of sexual engagement is sex between a man and a woman in the context of marriage
 - g. So that's what Jesus did say
- 18. So you cannot be a Christian, with any commitment to the scriptures, and with any sense of obedience to Christ Himself, and affirm the legitimacy of homosexuality
 - a. Any and all attempts to justify the issue biblically fails
- 19. So, what should be the Christian response to homosexuality?
 - a. Well, we must recognize it for what it is; it is sin; it is destructive of human beings made in God's image
 - b. But we must do it with tears; with compassion
 - c. Being “heartless” is included in the list of sins in Romans 1.31; some translations use “unloving and unmerciful”
 - d. The Church has strayed in one of two directions – either tolerated it (sometimes celebrated it!) or treated our homosexual friends with hatred, animosity, disdain
 - e. Instead we should preach the gospel – so that all would see their need of Christ

- f. And when folks come to the end of themselves, cast themselves on the mercy of Christ alone, and give their wills up to Christ – He will sanctify them
 - g. As He sanctifies us as we die to ourselves and by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh
- 20. **1 Corinthians 6:9–11** (ESV) — 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
- 21. So what does God do when you run away from God?
 - a. He gives you up to impurity
 - b. And He gives you up to dishonorable passions – the example that he uses is homosexuality
- E. **To a Debased Mind**
 - 1. **Romans 1:28** (ESV) — 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.
 - 2. “... did not see fit to acknowledge God” – epignosis (Gk), the word for knowledge
 - a. Means a clear and exact knowledge
 - b. Involves a thorough participation in the object of knowledge
 - 3. Echoes what we’ve seen earlier – our participation and involvement in the creation leads inevitably to a knowledge of God
 - a. Yet we humans suppress the truth about God
 - b. Humans will not have God in our thinking
 - c. “The fool says in his heart – no God!”
 - 4. To remove God from thinking is to seriously impair thought processes
 - a. The mind becomes debased!
 - 5. Such a mind produces illicit behaviors
 - a. 21 of them are listed
 - b. See if you can’t find yourself in this list
 - 6. **Romans 1:29–31** (ESV) — 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
 - 7. Categories
 - a. Roots sins of the heart
 - b. Sins of relationship with others
 - c. Sins against God
 - d. Sins involving pride
 - e. Sins of omission (neglect of duties of human kindness)

8. Boice: At the end is a mind not merely foolish or in error, but totally depraved. It is a mind so depraved that it begins to think that what is bad is actually good and that what is good is actually bad.
 - a. Much thinking today is like that
 - b. Good for a woman to abort her baby
 - c. Good for someone to strap explosives on himself and wander into a marketplace and blow himself and others up
 - d. Good for schools to keep information about gender confusion from the parents of those children
 - e. Good for people to convince children to take drugs to destroy their perfectly healthy reproductive systems, and to convince them to surgically destroy the reproductive systems with which God has endowed them
9. Boice: May I say it? It is the mind of the devil, which is what Adam chose to pursue when he followed the dangling carrot: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3.5). Adam did not become “like God,” knowing good and evil; he became “like Satan.” And, being like Satan, in time he came to call the good bad and the bad good.
10. Pastor Don showed us an example of this kind of moral insanity recently in his first person sermon on Nebuchadnezzar from Daniel 4
 - a. Recall that in his pride, God gave him to being like a beast
 - b. Thomas Aquinas reasoned that man is a “mediating being” – between angels and beasts
 - c. Angels have souls and no bodies
 - d. Beasts have bodies and no souls
 - e. Humans have both
11. Boice: In other words, although between angels and beast, man is nevertheless destined to look, not downward to the beast, but upward to the angels and beyond the heavenly beings to God, becoming increasingly like him. If he will not look up and thus become increasingly like God, he will inevitably look down and become like animals. Like Nebuchadnezzar, he will become beast-like.
12. The only way to restore moral sanity is repentance
 - a. Which is what Nebuchadnezzar eventually did
13. Paul mentions one final aspect of the debased mind
 - a. **Romans 1:32** (ESV) — 32 Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.
 - b. Whether people engage in the horrific sins that so dominate the world these days, they nevertheless approve of those who do
 - c. Hey! Let’s have parades, and flags, special days and months – let’s celebrate!
14. The depth of the debased mind...

IV. **Biblical Principles**

- A. **When you run away from God...**
1. The judgment is that God let's you do what you want
 2. Of all the sins that are listed in this passage – not just homosexuality but the other sins listed – do I think God is going to judge humanity for those sins?
 3. No.
 4. No – God is not going to judge humanity for those sins
 5. No – the sins *are* the judgment of God
 - a. God has removed the restraints
 - b. And He lets you do what you want
 - c. Because those sins will destroy you – unless you repent
 6. When you run away from God, God let's you do what you want
 7. Oscar Wilde: When the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers.
- B. **When you run away from God...**
1. You run away on God's terms, not your own
 2. Unless you want to leave the universe, we will never escape God
 - a. That's what Francis Thompson discovered
 - b. This is God's universe
 - c. God is immutable – He can never change
 - d. His universe is always subject to God's laws; pattern will always be consistent
 3. There is a moral gravity in God's universe
 - a. Once God lets go, we fall
 4. Boice: It is like releasing the porcelain pitcher on earth rather than in space. When you let go of the pitcher it does not drift off into nowhere. You release it from your hand to the law of gravity, and when you do that it falls downward and breaks...
 5. Boice: The universe with all its laws, physical and moral, is a given – because God is a given. Since God can never be other than he is, the universe will always be as it is. And this means that when you and I rebel against God, we must by the very nature of the case do it on God's terms and according to God's laws rather than our own.
- C. **When you run away from God...**
1. When you run away from God, the path is always downhill (Barnhouse)
 2. Boice: When we run away from God we think our way will be uphill, because we want it to be so. But the way is actually downhill. We are pulled down by the law of moral gravity – when God lets go.
 3. Example – NT
 - a. Prodigal son
 - b. Runs away with his inheritance, ends up in an increasingly desperate strait
 - c. All the way into a pig sty
 4. Example – OT
 - a. Jonah
 - b. Wonderful pictorial representation (geographical)

- c. Jonah was called to go to Ninevah and preach
 - d. Didn't want to go to – Jews and Ninevites hated each other
 - e. Would be like a Jew preaching repentance to the Nazis in Berlin in the 1930's
 - f. Jonah called to go east; goes west instead
 - g. **Jonah 1:1–5** (ESV) — 1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” 3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went **down** to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went **down into it**, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. 4 But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone **down** into the inner part of the ship and had lain **down** and was fast asleep.
 - h. Four times – “down”
 - i. Then, eventually, he gets thrown overboard and goes down
 - j. Into the belly of the fish
5. When you run away from God, the path is always downhill

V. Summary

- A. Condition of lost humanity is desperate
- B. Subtle sin of suppressing the truth about God has led to disastrous consequences
 - 1. Downward spiral
 - 2. Starts with ignoring God
 - 3. God then lets humans go the way they desire
 - 4. Apart from His restraints, the desperately wicked human heart is revealed
 - a. Lid is lifted off of hell
- C. Gerstner: Man as sinner hates God, hates man, and hates himself. He would kill God if he could. He does kill his fellow man when he can. [And] he commits spiritual suicide every day of his life.