

**Good News For Sinners 03**  
**The Good News Of Salvation**  
**By Bill Denton**

**INTRODUCTION**

A. This month Sunday morning sermons have focused on “good news”

1. We started with the idea itself – that in so many ways, in so many areas of life, we easily recognize good news when we hear it (“it’s not cancer,” “we’d like you to come to work for us,” or “we found your missing baby!”)
2. Then we talked about a specific piece of good news – God loves you

B. Did you know that it’s possible for unbelievers to understand the good news of Jesus better than some professed believers? Atheist Christopher Hitchens is an example.

1. During a recent trip to Portland, Oregon, noted atheist Christopher Hitchens laid down some seriously good theology. Most people recognize Hitchens as the author of the bestselling book *God Is Not Great: Why Religion Poisons Everything*. Since the book's publication in 2007, Hitchens has toured the country debating a series of religious leaders, including some well-known evangelical thinkers. In Portland he was interviewed by Unitarian minister Marilyn Sewell. The entire transcript of the interview has been posted online. The following exchange took place near the start of the interview:  
Sewell: The religion you cite in your book is generally the fundamentalist faith of various kinds. I'm a liberal Christian, and I don't take the stories from the Scripture literally. I don't believe in the doctrine of atonement (that Jesus died for our sins, for example). Do you make any distinction between fundamentalist faith and liberal religion?  
Hitchens: I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian. Sewell wanted no part of that discussion so her next words are, "Let me go someplace else."  
This little snippet demonstrates an important point about religious "God-talk." You can call yourself anything you like, but if you don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and then rose from the dead, you are not "in any meaningful sense" a Christian.  
Talk about nailing it.  
In one of the delicious ironies of our time, an outspoken atheist grasps the central tenet of Christianity better than many Christians do. What you believe about Jesus Christ really does make a difference. -- Dr. Ray Pritchard, "Christopher Hitchens Gets it Exactly Right," *KeepBelieving.com* (2-1-10)
2. What a telling exchange! An atheist gets the good news message better than a professed believer

C. It’s time for the church to refocus on what the good news really is

## I. THE BAD NEWS IS REAL ENOUGH!

A. On July 8, 1741, a Jonathan Edwards preached his most famous sermon, "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God"

1. It is an excellent example of the preaching done during the period known as the "Great Awakening", a time of intense evangelism
2. Clear distinctions were made between the lost and the saved and great urgency was given to salvation

B. Most of the sermon's text consists of eleven "considerations", which Edwards acquires from the Holy Scripture, the Word of God as his ultimate reference: They are as follows: (taken from Wikipedia article on Jonathan Edwards)

1. God may cast wicked men into hell at any given moment.
2. The Wicked deserve to be cast into hell. Divine justice does not prevent God destroying the Wicked at any moment.
3. The Wicked, at *this* moment, suffer under God's condemnation to Hell.
4. The Wicked, on earth - at this very moment - suffer the torments of Hell. The Wicked must not think, simply because they are not physically in Hell, God (in whose Hand the Wicked now reside) is - at this very moment - as angry with *them* as He is with those miserable creatures He is *now* tormenting in hell, and who - at this very moment - do feel and bear the fierceness of His wrath.
5. At any moment God shall permit him, Satan stands ready to fall upon the Wicked and seize them as his own
6. If it were not for God's restraints, there are, in the souls of wicked men, hellish principles reigning which, presently, would kindle and flame out into hellfire,
7. Simply because there are not visible means of death before them, at any given moment, the Wicked should not, therefore, feel secure.
8. Simply because it is natural to care for oneself or to think that others may care for them, men should not think themselves safe from God's wrath.
9. All that wicked men may do to save themselves from Hell's pains afford them nothing if they continue to reject Christ.
10. God has never promised to save us from Hell, except for those contained in Christ through the covenant of Grace.
11. The wicked will not escape the wrath of God unless they repent.

C. Edwards, like many preachers, used vivid imagery, and the result was that many people made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ

1. We sometimes refer to sermons like this as "hell-fire and brimstone" sermons
2. It's possible to whip people into a frenzy, cause people to literally tremble in fear, and some to have what amounts to anxiety attacks
3. We might want to be very careful with things like that, but the truth is the bad news is bad enough – sin causes people to be separated from God

## II. GOOD NEWS WAS INTENDED TO REPLACE THE BAD NEWS

A. If bad news is that sin separates us from God, imposes a sentence of guilt and condemnation, and consigns us to hell, then the good news of Jesus turns that around

1. The good news (gospel) of Jesus was boldly, confidently, proclaimed as the source or means of salvation from sin
  - a. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* (Romans 1:16, NAS)
  - b. *“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”* (Ephesians 1:13–14, NAS)
  - c. *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”* (Titus 2:11–14, NAS)
2. This is THE good news of Jesus
  - a. *“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”* (Mark 16:15–16, NAS)
  - b. we have a message for the world
    - 1) it is a message of good news
    - 2) it is the message that in Jesus is forgiveness of sins and salvation

B. Too often, the church gets its mission backwards

1. We need to help people understand the bad news of sin
  - a. the good news isn’t really good until the bad news is really bad
  - b. that said, we mustn’t make the mistake of stopping at the point of bearing the message of condemnation
2. *“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;”* (2 Corinthians 2:14–15, NAS)
3. *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* (2 Corinthians 5:20–21, NAS)

### III. A GLIMPSE AT WHY THE GOOD NEWS IS GOOD

A. Because we are forgiven of sins that separate us from God and condemn us to hell

B. Because it puts us back into fellowship with God

C. Because it relieves guilt and fear of punishment

D. Because it provides a way for our lives to have significance and meaning

E. Because it puts us into a family fellowship

F. Because it changes the course of our lives

G. Because it gives us the gift of eternal life

### CONCLUSION

A. I've got some bad news and some good news

1. The bad news is that every one of us is sinners, lost and condemned to hell

2. The good news is that Jesus can save us, forgive us, and give us life forever

3. The good news is something that will last forever – nothing else will

B. Does that good news mean anything to you?

C. Invitation