

Introduction



WE live in a bad news world, don't we? Every morning when I wake up, I'm in the habit of taking a brief look at an app on my iPhone to check out the world headlines. I also like to relax with my wife in front of the TV each evening to watch a broadcast of what's happening locally. In both cases, the reports are overwhelmingly negative. There are probably studies that have analyzed the ratio of bad news to good news, but anecdotally to me, it feels like it is 10:1. It's relentless.

Some people have suggested the reason for this disparity is simply emphasis. That is, news organizations are businesses. Businesses need to make money. And bad news sells much better than good news. Thus, the media emphasizes bad news.

There's definitely some truth to that point of view. In a 2014 study, the web recommendation platform Outbrain discovered that negative words are 30 percent more effective at catching our attention than positive ones and negative headlines increase the click rate of smartphone users by 63 percent. Other research has provided similar data. There's no question that consumers prefer bad news. It's one reason the media majors on it.

But I think there's more to it than simply businesses giving the people what they want. We live in a bad news world, not just because of the emphasis of the reporting. We live in a bad news world because there's actually more bad news than good news to report. Good certainly happens, but the bad is always right there with it and clearly seems to outweigh the good.

For example, I'm not sure there is a more joyful occasion than a baby being born. I love when I am at a hospital and Brahms' lullaby is played over the loudspeaker to celebrate a birth. Some veteran labor and delivery nurses say it still gives them a warm feeling every time. It brightens their day and never gets old.

Yet, some people hear that lullaby and are filled with grief because they haven't been able to conceive a child they desperately want, or because their last pregnancy ended in miscarriage, or because they experienced the horrifying loss of a still birth or an infant mortality. The song that is designed to bring happiness to all who hear it has the opposite effect on them. It's only a reminder of their deep pain.

But even if we are among those who smile ear to ear when we hear that tune and think only about the wonder of a newborn child, that delight doesn't last that long. It's fleeting. It's here one minute and gone the next. Why? I think it's because deep down we all know that all births eventually end in the ultimate sadness of death. The grave casts a foreboding shadow over every umbilical cord that is cut. Nobody who comes out of the womb can avoid the tomb. The sting of death always pierces through the joys of life. No matter how good the good is, the bad is always right there with it.

Every birth ends in death, every loving relationship has conflict, every healthy body gives way to decay, every family knows the pain

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of disease or disability, every country suffers disasters, and every well-designed plan is disrupted by something that goes wrong. Every single time something good happens, it seems there is a ‘yeah that is good, but ...’ moment that follows at some point. That’s not pessimism. That’s just reality. Bad news always looms on the horizon of life.

We live in a bad news world because the bad outweighs the good. Evil is alive and well on planet Earth. Look at these headlines from just a single day through a simple internet search:

- ‘Spat Ends in Murder’ – A painter was murdered by his friend when he refused to treat the latter to a drink on a Sunday evening at the bar.
- ‘Twisted Cleric’ – A former Ukrainian monk-in-training pled guilty to killing a thirty-nine-year-old nun at the religious academy.
- ‘Mom Help Me!’ – A twenty-year-old woman helped her twenty-five-year-old boyfriend cover up his murder of her twenty-month-old daughter.
- ‘Where Were the Adults?’ – A teenage boy was charged with homicide after deliberately suffocating his four-month-old nephew.

This is one day of news just on the topic of murder. A man killing another man over not picking up the tab. A monk killing a nun. A young mother protecting her boyfriend even after he killed her daughter. A boy killing a baby. Evil is alive and well on planet Earth. It is in every segment of society in every part of the world.

We live in a bad news world because there's actually more bad news than good news to report.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I get discouraged by the headlines I read on my iPhone. I get disturbed by the prevalence of evil I see in the news on TV. I get anxious about the bad things that happen in my life. And I am often troubled by the sinful tendencies I find lurking in my own heart. I suspect your experience is the same.

We all need to hear more good news! And not just temporary good news like a Brahms' lullaby that makes us feel good for a moment or a day or two. We need much more than uplifting words that ultimately get dampened by the onslaught of bad news. We need a daily dose of good news that both transcends all the bad news and puts every bit of it in a hope-filled framework.

So, I wrote this little book for you to know that type of news exists. It really does! Historically, it's called the Gospel of Jesus. This message about Jesus of Nazareth is so good that it warrants being heard and shared every day. It's good for me. It's good for you. It's good for everyone. It's so good that no bad news can bring it down. It is able to respond to every 'yeah that is good, but ...' moment with, 'yeah that is bad, but ...' perspective. It's always good news.

My heartfelt prayer for everyone who reads this book is to know this good news about Jesus so well that you can easily bring it to your mind for the good of your own soul or quickly speak it to others for their encouragement. You are going to want to remind yourself of it every day. And you are going to want to share it with others.

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The Subject of the Good News: Jesus of Nazareth



GENDER reveal parties are all the rage these days. If you aren't familiar with this event, it is a gathering of family and friends usually held during the second trimester of a woman's pregnancy to reveal a baby's sex. Sometimes even the parents themselves don't know if they are having a boy or a girl prior to the occasion as the sonogram results are kept a secret by one person who is in charge of the reveal. It can truly be a surprise to every guest except one.

Apparently, parties like this began as recently as 2008 when a married couple who were really excited about their first child decided to have a cake with pink frosting in the middle as a way to announce to their guests, 'It's a girl!' Since then, people have smashed pinatas, popped balloons, set off fireworks, and even brought in a live ultrasound technician. Google the topic and you will find plenty of over-the-top examples.

And though there is always the potential for a curmudgeon to be disappointed by the reveal, these are happy occasions. Even if you want the baby to be a boy, it is good news to find out it is a baby girl, and vice versa. New life is worthy of celebration. That's why we have birthday parties every year.

When our four children were born, we had the technology to find out if they were a boy or a girl, but the tradition at that time was simply to do birth announcements. The most common way to tell people the good news about your new baby was to send out a postcard in the mail with a picture of him or her. Creative types who wanted to do more than that would put a stork on their lawn in blue or pink with the baby's name on it.

It's hard to know exactly what kind of birth announcements were common in ancient times, but we know for sure that one birth had a very uncommon announcement – Jesus of Nazareth. His gender wasn't revealed at a party. His arrival wasn't declared through the mail or on the front lawn of his home. It was heralded by angels. Look at the way an angel announced the good news about Jesus' birth to some shepherds out in a field, keeping watch over their flock by night ...

'And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."' Luke 2:10-11

This announcement is fascinating and wonderful, but it does require some explanation to understand what the angel pronounced that day around 2000 years ago and why it is so relevant and good for us today.

First and foremost, notice the news is about Jesus of Nazareth. I will address the declarations about him being the Lord, the Christ, and the Savior later in this book, but for now, it is important to linger on the simpler observation that Jesus is the subject of the angel's announcement. The good news is about him. He is the focus.

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In other words, the good news doesn't begin with 'God created the world,' and continue with, 'You are a sinner,' because the focus of the message isn't what God did all the way back when time began, and it certainly isn't about you.

Articulating the news in that way is a bit like being in charge of a gender reveal party and making it about the guests, the parents and all the lineage of the child from ancestry.com; or sending out a birth announcement that portrays family and friends as prominently as the baby and even has a little mirror in the corner so that you can take a glance at yourself while looking at the photo.

While its true that the scope of Jesus' *impact* on history, theology, cultures, nations, societies, individual lives, and civilization itself, is extremely *broad*, we must not let that cause us to lose focus on the fact that the scope of the *subject* of the good news about him is exceptionally *narrow*. It's *about him!* Jesus is not simply the hero of a long and complicated human story or the third act in a four-part play. He is the consuming emphasis of every bit of a specific proclamation from God called the Gospel. He is on the front page, the back page, and every page in between.

If someone asks me what the good news about Jesus is, the first word of response out of my mouth is 'Jesus' because the content of the message inescapably revolves around him. He is the subject of the news, its constricted center. Therefore, he must be the subject of the sentences we use to communicate the headlines about him. That's the first point to notice about the angel's announcement.

Second then, notice another obvious but sometimes overlooked point. The angel said the announcement is good news. News – that's its genre of communication. This is really crucial. It's not an op-ed,

an advice column, a worldview, a vision for life, our actions, or a fanciful story. It's objectively true and vitally important information about Jesus that has eternal significance for all humanity. It is news, and it is oh so good. It's always good news.

That's what the etymology of the *Koine* Greek New Testament word '*euangelion*' suggests. That is the root of the word in Luke 2:10 that is translated into English as 'good news.' The prefix '*eu-*' refers to something that is good or pleasant. The root '*angelion*' is the word for 'message.' The combination of those terms would lead us to believe it is a 'good message.'

A simple etymological analysis alone can be misleading though. For, while a 'racecar' is, in fact, a car that races, a 'butterfly' is not a fly that butters your toast in the morning. Right? We must do more than analyze the components of a word to determine its meaning. We must also analyze how the word was used in its original context.

In the case of '*euangelion*,' it was often used in the first century to announce a great military victory but could also be used simply to celebrate more common events. For example, when Caesar Augustus eventually emerged as the Roman Emperor out of the turmoil resulting from his adoptive father Julius Caesar's assassination, his ascension to the throne was announced across the Empire as the '*euangelion*' of Caesar Augustus. At the same time, a person who recovered from an injury could spread that '*euangelion*' to their friends and family. The semantic range of the word indicates that it was used to communicate good news of all sorts.

Think about the last bit of good news you received. The CT scan shows no cancer! You got the job! You are going to be a grandparent! The school of your dreams accepted you with a full scholarship! The

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angel described Jesus' birth as this kind of good news, but even better. It wasn't the typical kind of good news. It was a unique form of '*euangelion*,' a bit more like the '*euangelion*' of Caesar Augustus than that of someone recovering from an injury, but even more special, even more important, even more profound, and even more relevant to everyone.

Further, notice this news is packed with exceedingly great delight for 'all the people,' not just some of the people. The news is SO good. And it is SO good for everyone. In other words, the news isn't restricted in its goodness by wealth or social status. Rich, poor, and middle class are all invited to hear it and celebrate.

The message isn't limited in its goodness by ethnicity. Praise God! Mongolians and Mexicans, Africans and Australians, Inuits and Incas, are all encouraged to listen and rejoice. The announcement isn't confined in its goodness by age or sex. Male and female, children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged, and the elderly are all welcomed to pay attention and applaud.

The proclamation is not constrained in its goodness to people with specific physical characteristics or social interests. Tall and short, thin and portly, muscular and puny, beautiful and less than attractive; those who like sports or band camp, theater or robotics club, politics or helping at the soup kitchen, books in the study or a hike in woods; everyone is urged to delight in what is said.

And perhaps most amazing of all, the news is fantastic for everyone no matter their religion or philosophy or morality. The righteous and the wicked, the spiritual and the secular, the pagans and the pious are all summoned by God to stand up and cheer.

ALWAYS GOOD NEWS

Don't miss this important theological description of what is historically referred to as the Gospel. The intention of God in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth is for the good of all humanity, our great joy in fact. The message was announced back then and is still announced today so that everyone celebrates.

Now, if you have haven't heard this news before in the way that a cancer patient would hear the news about a clean CT scan or someone unemployed would receive news about being offered a great job, you simply must keep reading. If you haven't felt comfortable sharing the Gospel with someone else like you would tell them you just became a grandparent for the first time or the school of your dreams was giving you a full ride, don't put this book down.

I'm going to share some things with you that you may have never heard before, but they come right out of the Bible. You do not want to miss them. The Gospel is the best news of all time. And it is for all the people, meaning it is good for you every day.