

“THE WRATH OF GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 1:18-23

Prayer:

Introduction.

Think about hearing this letter read for the very first time. Paul has told them how much he thanks God for their faith, he tells them how much he longs to come to them and how eager he is to preach the Gospel to them. Then he tells them about this Gospel and how the righteousness of God has been revealed and the best news of all, the righteous shall live by faith.

What are we expecting to hear next? More about this good news? Maybe Paul will flatter us with more gracious words. Maybe Paul will tell us how great we are doing in such a hard city to live in. Maybe he will tell us more about this good news of the Gospel, how much God loves us, how much God has done for us and how the Gospel will make us and our lives better and how God has a wonderful plan for our lives.

That’s how we think evangelism should be, right. Let me tell you all about Jesus and how wonderful He is and what He has done for us and how He can make our life better. All we want to hear about is dessert.

With vs. 18 we come to the body of the letter, the meat of Paul’s teaching. In order for the good news to be good news we have to know the bad news first, and not just the bad news, but how bad the bad news really is. Until we understand this, our view of the Gospel and of Jesus and God is going to be, well, like it is in much of America and in much of the American Evangelical Church. Weak, anemic, watered down, lukewarm, truth without power.

Paul will have none of that. Paul hasn’t suffered beatings, flogging, imprisonment, torture, shipwrecks, hunger and thirst, hatred and animosity, mocking and humiliation for a sweet, nice, precious Gospel. No one would suffer and be willing to die for that kind of Gospel.

Starting with verse 18 and for the next 64 verses Paul is going to humble us with our sin, our unrighteousness and ungodliness, our rebelliousness and the utter foolishness of our hearts and darkened minds. He is going to show that all men are in sin and under the just wrath of God. We have no righteousness of our own and if we are going to be saved it will have to be by a righteousness provided by God through faith in Jesus and His righteousness.

The world at the time of Romans was divided into two groups of people, Jews and Greeks, or Jews and Gentiles or pagans.

Paul starts with the Gentiles/Greeks. The rest of chapter one will focus on the spiritual condition of the Gentile world, the pagans, and their relationship with God, without the Gospel and saving grace.

Then chapter 2 to 3:8 will focus on the Jewish world without the Gospel. In a sense that is us Christians, the religious folks, the people who think we have Jesus, and we are all good, like the Jews having the Law.

Then 3:9-20 will give a summary universal application, the universal sinfulness and guilt and rebellion against God in every human heart.

He will destroy our pride, our independence, our autonomy all the way to Romans 3:21, until we cry “uncle,” until we submit and cry for mercy, until we see that we are all without excuse and hope except in Jesus.

Finally in 3:21 64 verses from here, Paul will return to the theme of the greatness of the gift of the Gospel in the righteousness of God freely given through faith in Jesus to all who believe.

Before we get there we have to face the reality of the seriousness of sin in our world and in our own hearts. Some might wish we skip over this or go over it quickly. Let me encourage us to persevere for *three reasons*.

First, when you go to a doctor you don’t want him to rush through a diagnosis and treat your disease lightly or superficially. Nor should we brush off the seriousness of our spiritual condition. We want the truth so the cure will be effective.

Second, the better we know our sin, the better we will be in fighting our sin.

Third, the better we know our sin, the more glorious and great and beautiful and truly precious the Gospel will be to us, the greater will be our love for God and His Gospel. It will become far greater cause for worship.

If someone says to you they have good news and bad news, which do you want to hear first? I think most of us might want to get the bad news first and then the good news.

When it comes to sharing the Gospel that has to be the order. The good news won’t seem like good news until you hear how bad the bad news is.

Remember what I said in my very first sermon on Romans, how this is considered the greatest book in the Bible, how countless men and women having been humbled by the depths of their

sin, have come to the heights of God's love revealed in Jesus. The good news far outweighs the bad.

The next 64 verses will reveal just how big a deal the Gospel really is and how much we need it. To do that Paul has to wake us out of our sleepwalking though our daily lives somehow confident in our own goodness, our own self-righteousness, all the while enjoying our pride, our lust, our greed, our sloth, thinking ourselves self-secure.

God is God. God will not have us proud, He will not let us rob Him of His glory. He will not let us suppress the truth about ourselves, so He begins by revealing His wrath against our sin.

The Wrath of God.

One of the reasons we have trouble thinking about the wrath of God is that we think of it in human terms. We equate wrath with someone who is violent, whose emotions are out of control.

God's anger is not an emotion, His divine peace is never disturbed. God's wrath is not outbursts of frustration over unmet expectations. God doesn't have a bad day, He doesn't fly into fits of rage or throw a temper tantrum.

God's wrath is His holiness and righteousness responding to sin and evil and immorality. God's wrath is judicial, it is the carrying out of His justice.

Why is God so wrathful? Because God is a personal God and God is a jealous God.

God is God. God created the universe, the earth, and everything in it. He did it for His glory and out of love and a desire to show His love to all He has made for Himself. It is all His, we are His creatures, we belong to Him, we are made by Him for Him. We are made in His image.

But what did we do? We rebelled against our God. We took what was His and belongs to Him and we gave it to another. We committed the worst kind of adultery.

He takes deep personal displeasure and indignation over human sinfulness. God's wrath blazes when His love is rejected by human pride, rebellion, obstinacy and disloyalty.

The wrath is revealed.

Notice it says is revealed, not was revealed, not will be revealed. It is present tense, it is a continuous action.

Must of us assume that the wrath of God will only be revealed at some far distant end times on the great day of judgment.

How is the wrath of God being revealed today? At least three ways.

First, in the universal experience of death. Death is God's judgment on ungodliness and unrighteousness.

Romans 5:15-18 ... many died through one man's trespass, ... the result of that one man's sin. because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man. ... one trespass led to condemnation for all men.

Every death is a reminder of God's judgment and curse on sin. The wages of sin is death.

Second, we experience the wrath of God in the universal suffering we all experience living in this fallen world.

Romans 8:20-23 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in ... bondage to corruption ... the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, ... groan inwardly.

Adam sinned and God subjected all of creation to His wrath against sin. All the futility, the frustration, the pain and heartache, the sweat of the brow, the pain of childbirth, the devastating natural disasters. Think the book of Ecclesiastes.

A Chocolate factory blows up in Pennsylvania, tornados destroy towns in Mississippi, floods in California. My brother gets MS and dies at age 40, far short of so many dreams and goals. A person spends a lifetime saving for retirement and just before retirement has a heart attack. A farmer labors to prepare the soil and plant a crop and just before harvest rain or hail or drought wipes it out.

The myriad miseries of this fallen world are the judgment of God on sin.

Third, as we will see in this chapter God's wrath is revealed daily in the way God hands people over to their sin and sinful desires and behavior. We see it in the increasing sinfulness of sin in our daily world, the a downward spiral into darkness, hatred and violence.

Universal death, universal suffering, universal sinfulness.

“The history of the world is the judgment of the world.”

It was first experienced when **Adam and Eve** were driven out of the garden into a cursed world for their sinful rebellion against the truth of God and suppressing that truth by listening to the lies of Satan. They become subject to death, the misery of toil in this fallen world, and increasing sin leading first to the murder of their son Abel.

Then sin increased until everyone did what was evil in their own eyes and all the time, so God's wrath was poured out in a great flood at the time of *Noah*.

The *Egyptians* who treated wickedly the people of God fell under the wrath of God in the ten plagues and finally in the Red Sea. The people in *Sodom and Gomorrah* couldn't escape wrath when it rained down from heaven for the abomination of their sin.

The wrath of God was behind *every sacrifice* made in the OT, appeasing the righteous wrath of God against sin.

Of course, the greatest display of the wrath of God against sin, and ungodliness and unrighteousness is seen in the suffering and death of the divine Son of God.

The cross only makes sense in the light of the wrath of God. If God has no wrath, then we don't need the cross, we don't need the atonement, we don't need the blood of Jesus.

Atonement presupposes wrath.

Propitiation presupposes a wrath needing to be satisfied.

Sacrifice presupposes an offering for sin that deserves God's wrath.

Redemption presupposes deliverance from judgment and condemnation, justly required by God.

Reconciliation presupposes an alienation because of sins that deserve wrath.

The death of Jesus presupposes payment for the wages of sin.

When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was experiencing the full wrath of God, and when He cried out, "It is finished" He declared the righteous wrath against all sin was fully and finally satisfied, His wrath was exhausted. Nothing more need be done.

The reason for the Gospel is because of the wrath of God. Salvation is being delivered from God's wrath. This is why Paul is eager to preach the Gospel and loves it more than his own life.

Paul wants us to know how serious our crimes are, to feel the weight of them, so that when the charges are dropped you will feel the profound joy, freedom and lightness.

Revealed from heaven.

This is not just Paul's doing. This is not Paul having a temper tantrum or being hotheaded or harsh, this is not some personality twitch where he has to vent his frustration and get it out of his system. This is not a matter of opinion or speculation.

The apostle Paul is an instrument in the hands of God, being guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What is written here is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, to the Jew first and to the Greek.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven. We must have a sense of danger before we will flee from danger, and turn to the grace of the Gospel.

Implications and application.

This is a most appropriate text for us in this season of Lent as we reflect on why Jesus came to earth and why He had to die the way He died.

For the unbeliever, there is hope, there is time to repent. Death, and the hardships of this life and the spiraling into sin are all warnings shouting to you to humble yourself and repent and turn to the Gospel revealed in Jesus, who takes away the sins of the world.

God uses death, suffering and sin as a megaphone to get our attention.

For the believer, there is hope and mercy. Death and the hardships of this life and the sting of sin all work for your good, for your redemption and holiness. And because of the Gospel we have hope of victory over sin and victory death.

Remember what you once were and now by God's grace are.

Remember Romans 1:16-17. Against the revealed wrath of God is the revealed righteousness of God. This will be our sure and constant anchor for the next 64 verses.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for the revelation of your wrath that opens our eyes to see the depth of our sin. Thank you for the revelation of Jesus Christ and His death for us, opening our eyes to see the greatness of our sin, that the only solution was you going to the cross for us. As we continue through this season to Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, humble us and deepen our repentance and our faith, deepen our love for you and desire to worship you with everything we have because of everything you have done. All this we ask for the sake of Jesus, Amen.