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 Ocean City Bible Conference
 7:00pm Tues., Sept. 11, 2018pm
 Ocean City Baptist Church
 Ocean City, NJ

The Wrath of Almighty God
Revelation 11:15-19 [NIV]

Introduction

I remember some years ago hearing a theologically liberal minister in Boston telling the story of being accosted on the street by a fundamentalist who asked him, “Friend, are you saved?” The minister recounting the story relished recounting his bold (and he thought insightful) answer to the man—“saved from *what*?!” That whole crisis, share-and-scare way to conceive of Christianity was just ridiculous. Or, at least, so thought this minister, and his congregation, who laughed with him when he shared the story of his exploits.

His question was a good one, wasn’t it? Saved from what? What do we Christians go around warning people—what do we think we ourselves—need to be saved *from*? It’s very popular to say that we’re saved TO God, and fellowship with Him, to new life and meaning and purpose, and all of that is fine and true. But the whole image of being saved suggests some peril, some imminent danger, some Damoclean sword poised above our heads, about to fall. What is our danger? What is our peril? What do we need to be saved from?

Well, think of conversations that you’ve had with non-Christian friends about the good news of Christ. Why are you telling your friend that he or she needs to become a Christian? Because they need to be saved from what? From the negative consequences of some of their sins—obesity, lung cancer, possible death through drunk driving, AIDS? What do we need to be saved from? Meaninglessness? Unfulfilledness?

Friends, I’ll tell you what the Bible says we need to be saved from. **The wrath of God!**

This evening, I want us to consider 5 truths about the wrath of God. And while so much more could be said, I want us just to focus in on one appropriate passage of Scripture for our topic. And that passage is Revelation 11:15-19:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." 16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,

17 saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. 18 The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great-- and for destroying those who destroy the earth." 19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

Tonight, I want to suggest for your consideration five important truths about the **wrath of God**.

First, God's wrath is Personal.

Some people have suggested that the whole idea of God being wrathful is so difficult, that we would do better to understand God's wrath as simply the impersonal working out of cause and effect in a moral universe. Cambridge NT Professor C. H. Dodd was particularly well known for his defense of a position similar to this a few generations ago. And we can understand why there is concern on this point. Surely those here who were brought up in some homes know all too well the ugly underside of a wrath which is personal—quixotic, unpredictable, violent, senseless, mean, ugly, abusive. Not really things that we either want to ascribe to God, or imagine that He is like!

But it's possible to conceive of God's wrath being fully personal, but not being random and abusive. If we look at those few verses from Revelation 11, you'll notice that in v18 the voices in heaven refer very clear to wrath as belonging to God. "Your wrath" they call it. It's the "wrath of the Lamb" in Rev. 6:16. And this is consistent with the Bible's presentation about God's wrath throughout the New Testament and Old. So in Psalm 7:11 we read that ***God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day, (cf. Ezekiel 7:8-9).*** As He said through Moses in Deut. 32: ***"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me, (Deut. 32:39-41).***

So far is God's wrath from being an impersonal working out, it seems that God's wrath is instead quite precisely an expression of God's very own personal opposition to what is wrong. In fact, God expressing His wrath—both in delaying it, and in pouring it out—is part of how He reveals Himself and glorifies Himself in His creation. So we read in Isaiah 48:9 ***For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off.*** And in Ezekiel 5:13 we read ***"Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal."*** And in Ezekiel 25:17 we read, ***"I will carry out great vengeance on them and punish them in my wrath. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I take vengeance on them."*** The prophet Nahum goes so far as to say ***The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies, (Nahum 1:2).***

So Paul could refer to God showing His wrath in Romans 9 as making His power known (*Rom. 9:22; cf. Rev. 19:15*).

With His whole nature in combination and harmony, God acts out His own completely consistent opposition to evil. And this opposition is His wrath. It is His personal displeasure. It is His divine contradiction of sin and wickedness. It is His divine assurance of justice and holiness in the universe that He has made. It may be His strange work, as it's put in Isaiah 28:21, but it is still His own work of justly punishing all wrong-doing.

God's wrath is personal.

Second, God's wrath is Certain Rev. 11:15-19

Notice that in these verses from Revelation.

No power on earth can prevent it, hinder it, delay it. As the psalmist says in Psalm 2, ***“the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Messiah”*** ***“in vain,”*** (Ps. 2). The natural and social forces of the world are at God's disposal. Famine and plague do his bidding. All creation from untamed animals to earthquakes are his servants in bringing about His judgment. So complete is His power presented that even his extra-terrestrial creation acts in concert with His judgment on earth—the sun is blackened, the moon turns red and the stars fall. More than once in Revelation the fixed points of this world—the sky, the mountains, the islands—are presented as “being removed” and “fleeing away.” As we read in verse 18 here—The time has come for judging the dead—Not even death itself can hide us from the searching judgment of God.

*****Application to John's readers.*** Now if the heavens above and the earth beneath are subject to Him, how could John's readers even begin to think that those presently persecuting them, enforcing idolatry, could escape? They could be certain, even confident that there could be no circumstances which would ever finally overwhelm them, no persecutors that would ever torment them—regardless of how powerful, or apparently beyond the reach of true justice—without answering to the God of Heaven for it.

*****Application to us.*** And what about for us this evening? Is there anyone within the sound of my voice who thinks that YOU can avoid God's scrutiny, His assessment, His evaluation, His judgment? You cannot. . . .

When I first came to DC, I had the privilege of serving as the interim chaplain for the Senate for a couple of weeks. As such, I had to write out my prayers and send them in a day in advance. One of those days, I prayed **And along with a renewed sense of your bounty, we pray for a renewed sense of our accountability. Remind all who work here, in massive buildings which seem so permanent, remind them of the brevity of life, and the certainty of judgement.** I had no idea of in what fire and tragedy we would see that worked out a few years later, 17 years ago this very day.

If you recall, the reason the Bible calls you and me to lay aside revenge is because of the certainty we are to have in God's justice. In Acts 17:31 we read of God that “He has set a day when he ***will*** judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.” The OT is full of references to the coming day of God's wrath (*e.g., Zephaniah 2:2*). Do you doubt that God will judge the world? Paul wrote to the Roman Christians in Romans 2:5 ***But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.***

Are there perhaps situations which you know of, perhaps that you've read of in the papers, that you've seen at work, that you've heard of in your family, perhaps even that you've experienced in your own life, situations in which the wrong seems to go forever unanswered? The Bible makes it quite clear to us that it will not always be so, it will not always be so. As surely as we're sitting here this evening, God will draw a line under it all, and say “Enough.” God's judgment is certain. Of this we can be confident.

God's wrath is personal, and it is certain.

Third, God's wrath is Final (eternal) Rev. 11:15-19

Again, in the passage, notice the FINALITY of God's wrath.

There is no appeal from His judgment. When God judges the response is the silence of assent, and the songs of worship. The opposition clearly presented in Revelation eventually provokes the statement in chapter 10 that "***There will be no more delay!***" And so we read here in 11:15 "***The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.***" He will reign "***FOR EVER AND EVER.***" And that is the same duration which is presented time and again in this book for the judgments of God, in chapters 14 and 18 and 19 and 20 and 21, (*Rev. 14:11; 18:22; 19:3; 20:10; 21:27*).

This is consistent with what we read in John's gospel, John 3:36→ ***Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.***

*****Application to John's readers.*** The first readers of this book would have gotten a double message from this, I think. One was that things were going to get worse. They thought they were bad now, and they may have been, but they should know that they're not as bad as they would get. But the other thing that they should know is that there would be an end to their troubles, and that end would be as permanent and lasting as the rule of God Himself. Once the judgment had been completely poured out, there would be no more prospects of terror for these believers.

*****Application to us.*** This same message—of the finality of God's judgment— should affect different ones of us different ways.

For some here who have not considered this before, you should prepare yourself. Ask your Christian friend how you can prepare yourself for God's judgment. Or speak to another Christian friend. We'll happily share with you Jesus' teaching about turning from our sins and trusting in Him, and the newness of life He has for us.

Surely this must give some others of us here this evening some peace—to know that life is not simply a never-ending circle of struggling & suffering, of joys which end and sorrows which endure. We can have *peace* knowing that there's purpose. One thing which separates Christianity from many of the world's religions is just this—knowing that history is not merely a recycling of ourselves again and again on an ever-lasting treadmill, but that it actually has a point in time, a focus in history finally around the throne of God. God's judgment is final.

God's wrath is personal and certain and final.

Fourth, God's wrath is Horrible (fierce) Rev. 11:15-19

We really need go no further than the images of natural disaster used in chapter 11's final verse 19: ***And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.***

How often do we hear of terrible earthquakes in Japan or China or Turkey? The accounts are always appalling—the apparent randomness of sudden death, the strange dilemmas in which people are left when parts of their world they'd assumed are secure suddenly vanish; the fear it seems to leave in people—I remember reading of one little girl asking her mother, “Mommy, are we going to have another one tonight?”

God's wrath is so fearful. It will cause unmitigated terror! Not the kind of safe mock terror that gives us a rush in movie theatres, but the kind of terror some of us have known when we have felt ourselves genuinely to be in grave and imminent danger. In the last verse of chapter 16 we read ***From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.***

The images throughout the book, from supernatural prisons to the Abyss, to judgments of plagues and earthquakes, and even Hades and an eternal lake of fire—they are all unimaginably horrible. Some have called these images unbearable, and I can certainly understand why. But if they're true, we help no one by trying to make them seem less terrible than they really are.

Looking at the horrendous nature of judgment presented in this book, the Cambridge NT scholar C.H.Dodd wrote that “the god of the Apocalypse can hardly be recognized as the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” (*Apos Preaching & Its Development*, p. 86). But this is of a piece with the way Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in one of the earliest letters in the NT: ***God's judgment is right God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. . . . This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (II Thessalonians 1:5-9).***

Sometimes in academic circles, Paul or others are presented as having the finally shaping influence on Christian doctrine, BUT the closest parallels you'll find in the NT to these kind of words about judgment, are not in Paul or Peter or John—they're on the lips of Jesus. Just look at Matthew 25! And Jesus' teaching is consistent with what we find in the OT. So in Psalm 90:11 the psalmist asks, ***Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.*** In Jeremiah 10:10 we read, ***But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.*** In Nahum 1, we read ***“The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him,”*** (*Nahum 1:5-6*). From the Fall to the Flood, from Egypt in the Exodus to Israel in the Exile, God has revealed Himself as a God of righteous wrath!

→walking along with a student in Oxford

annihilationism.

Me, I'm not sure why I would want God's wrath to seem any less terrible.

****Application to John's readers.** When Jonathan Edwards preached his now-famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in Enfield, Connecticut, those listening began to cry out for God's mercy. Feeling themselves slipping down into Hell, some shrieked and clung

to their pews. Others simply wept and prayed. So powerful is contemplation of the wrath of God.

***Application to us.* And doesn't this book, even in our age of over-stimulated imaginations from almost unbelievable special effects in movies STILL bring about awe in those of us gathered here this evening who believe? Christ Himself is the Judge, who will pronounce the Final Malediction, "**Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,**" (Matthew 26:41). Surely our response as we see God's holiness displayed in the lightning flashes of his judgments, will be like the response of Moses to hide, or Isaiah or these elders, to fall on our faces, or, like Job, who said at the end of it all, "**My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes,**" (Job 42:5-6).

The puritan minister William Gurnall, in his *Christian in Complete Armor* meditated on the terror of God's coming wrath:

"When I consider how the goodness of God is abused and perverted by the greatest part of mankind, I can not but be of his mind who said: "The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world." Oh, what would God not do for His creatures, if thankful, Who thus heaps the coals of His mercies upon the heads of His enemies? But think not, sinners, that you will escape thus. God's mill goes slow, but it grinds small. The more admirable His patience and bounty now are, the more dreadful and insupportable will be that fury which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing is blunter than iron; yet, when sharpened, it hath an edge that will cut mortally. Nothing is smoother than the sea; yet, when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing is so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath, when it takes fire."

God's wrath is HORRIBLE.

So, God's wrath is personal and certain and final and horrible.

Fifth, God's wrath is Right Rev. 11:17-18 Notice that the heavenly beings here in this passage in Revelation are not apologizing, nor are they averting their gaze in embarrassment. They are publicly praising God for being like this! There are words of praise from the elders around the throne. *¹⁷We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. ¹⁸The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.* There is no question of God's judgments being uncertain or ineffective, or inadequate; nor is there any question of God's judgments being *wrong*. There is no cruelty in the Biblical picture of God's wrath. Indeed, God is praised throughout the Bible for His righteous wrath. So in Psalm 76:10 we read ***Surely your wrath against men brings you praise . . .*** God's judgment is right in every sense of the word.

****God's judgment is right in that it is COMPLETE—no claim is left unmet.** If you look at seal 5 there in Rev. 6:10, you'll find the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God calling out "***How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?***" Then in Rev. 15:1 we read ***with the seven last plagues God's wrath is completed.*** The whole pattern of the visions represented here underscores the completeness of God's judgments. There are three whole series of them. Each of them is composed of 7 judgments, like the seven days of creation. So here there is the judgment leading to the *new* creation. God's judgment is complete.

****God's judgment is also right in the sense that it is ACCURATE—no malefactor is left unpunished; no innocent person is menaced.**

****And God's wrath is right in the sense that it's APPROPRIATE—no further injustice is done by God's punishments.** It's not like the vendettas of medieval Italy or Corsica—the family blood-feuds that would lay waste to families and even villages through revenge, each act of retribution for a past wrong, spawning another one for the future. There is nothing like that here.

One thing I am particularly struck by is the response of the people in the book of Revelation to God's judgments. When seal 6 is opened, you see, back at the end of chapter 6, the people flee. And after trumpet 6 in chapter 9, the rest of mankind still did not repent [**READ 9:20-21**]; in bowls 4 & 5 they still didn't repent [**READ 16:9, 11**]; after bowl 6 they gathered for further rebellion; and after bowl 7 we read in 16:21, ***they cursed God.*** Why is Hell eternal? The puritan divine Richard Sibbes said ". . . if thou couldst thou wouldst sin eternally, and that is the reason sinners are punished eternally, because they would sin everlastingly . . ." (*Sibbes, "God's Inquisition," Works, VI.212*). That seems to be the picture we see of peoples' continuing sinful and remorseless responses to God's punishments here in this book of Revelation.

So it is that we read the angel pouring out the third bowl of God's judgment in Rev. 16:5-6 saying, ***You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.***

God's wrath in the Bible is always, as J. I. Packer has observed, the wrath of a judge administering justice (*see Knowing God, p. 137*). God is wrathful against sin. That is the consistent message of Scripture. So we read in Romans 1:18 ***The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness . . .***

***Application to John's readers.* God should repay those opposing Him in His creation. It was right. And these visions told John's readers that God would do just that; (cf. *Ezekiel 36:18; Amos 1-2*).

***Application to us.* And what about us today? Well, if the idea of temporal punishment in human jails and prisons is unpopular, you can just imagine the kind of reaction which many people today have when they read these biblical pictures of Gods' wrath! The book of Revelation alone is complete with supernatural prisons, Abysses, judgments of plagues and earthquakes, and even Hades and an eternal lake of fire!

Alan Bernstein, a medieval historian at University of Arizona wrote a book called *The Formation of Hell*. In this book, Bernstein put forward the idea, as the title might suggest, that the Christian doctrine of hell was gradually formed. The NT writers, he suggests, made their descriptions of hell more harrowing the more external opposition and internal strife they faced. I guess then it is no surprise that Bernstein concludes by suggesting that Christians today "make" hell otherwise than it's traditionally been presented (291). The main problem, he suggests, with what has become the traditional Christian idea of hell (which we find in the book of Revelation) is not its torments but the menace *the mere existence of the idea* is to those who deny Christianity (341). Not too surprising a conclusion for one to come to who doesn't assume the reality of God's judgment as presented in the Bible. ***The menace of the idea will pale when compared to the thing itself.***

Having said that, people who are poor or oppressed, who understand their problems to come from a corrupt ruler or boss, an abusive father or a tyrannical landowner, who seem beyond their reach, *they* have a clear desire for justice. *I remember one friend telling me of some American students going overseas and watching hokey video in which hell is depicted villagers wanted to see it They understood the need for justice* One thing Christians have traditionally longed for is justice, the justice which will be brought with the second coming of the Messiah. While many of us may find that strange, you may be sure that many Christians around the world this evening would not.

Perhaps The Horrible judgment can only fully seem Right to us in Heaven. My experience Certainly none of us here and now know every real wrong done in every place at any time by every one who has ever lived. Nor do we have the moral character to know how wrong wrong is. But the God of the Bible does. As long as He is alive, the crucial witness to every act of wickedness and injustice committed in the history of the world lives, and calls for justice. He stands as an eternal, ever-present, ever-truthful witness, and an ever-wise, ever-merciful, ever-just judge. And that means that fairness is HELL for the Christian. . . .

I remember as a school child being interested by a teacher in the question of whether or not a tree falling in a forest with no one to hear it made a sound. With God, there is no such thing finally as a sin committed in secret. The Eternal presence of God underscores the reality of wrong, the difficulty of forgiveness, and the righteousness of His wrath. **God's wrath is personal and certain and final and horrible and right.**

Conclusion:

Back in 1937, H. Richard Niebuhr memorably summarized the liberal theology of the generation before him: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross," (*H. Richard Niebuhr, on liberal theology, in The Kingdom of God in America, 1937, p. 193*). My question to you friend, is this: is this liberal theology of yesterday the current theology in many of our evangelical churches, in our sermons and songs, in our prayers and conversations. Jesus as example. Much talk of kingdom, but little of judgment. Sensitive to people by not mentioning their sins. Speaking of God, but not of His wrath.

But, friends, when you leave wrath out of your picture of God, you begin to lose the biblical picture. From the second century heretic Marcion on, it seems people have been making this same error, of pitting the wrathful God of the OT against the loving God of the NT.

But it is in the New Testament that we read Paul's words to the Ephesians about their sins and some who were teaching that God wouldn't judge them for their sins, Paul wrote ***Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient*** (Eph. 5:6). Oh friend, do not be deceived! God hates sin! Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Praise God that in Christ, He delivers us from this wrath!

The more you study, the more you see that the wrath of God is not a topic for the narrow-minded or hard-hearted. Getting the wrath of God right is essential to getting the gospel right. Do you see that? With no understanding of the wrath of God, the cross slumps into a question mark.

"Saved from what?" the minister was asked. Saved from God, from God's own wrath against our sins, God's personal, certain, final, horrible and right wrath.

It is God's own wrath from which we need to be saved. What did Paul say in Romans 5:9? "*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him [Jesus Christ]!*" This is what Paul had earlier written to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 when Paul recounted what these Christians had correctly done, they had turned to God to serve Him, and "*to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming **wrath.***"

Jonathan Edwards reportedly saw more conversions through his preaching on Romans 3:19-20 than any other text: ***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*** What was it Paul said? "*since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men,*" (II Cor. 5:11a). And remember Jesus' words in Luke 12:5: "***I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.***"

The whole story of mankind can be summed up in these words: holiness, sin, wrath & salvation. God's holiness, our sin, God's wrath, and God's salvation of sinners through Christ. That's the story!

Do you see how it all hangs together? I'm not surprised that modern Christians who spend little time considering their own sins, and the sinfulness of our sin, what makes it so bad, seem less and less concerned about Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. "He who thinks lightly of the sin, thinks lightly of the Savior," (*Anselm, Spurgeon*). If you don't know something of the wrath you deserve and why you deserve it, then you don't know why Christ came and died.

→example of Jonathan O'Neil's membership interview in March 2003 in which he had questions about eternal torment.

Then he interviewed again in May 2003, by which time, he had resolved his issues on God's wrath, which made God seem more holy, his sin worse, God's love more amazing, Christ's cross more precious . . . etc.,

In the Old Testament, the LORD said to His people through Jeremiah that they were to take the cup filled with His wrath, and that they were to make nations drink it (*Jer. 25:15*). In the New Testament, those who worship the beast are also supposed to drink, as he says in Rev. 14:10, ***the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.*** And then in Rev. 16:19, when the final installment of God's wrath is described, we read that ***The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.***

You understand why Jesus came to die. He came to drink the cup of God's wrath. That's what He said in Luke 22:42 ***"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*** In Mark's gospel, a little bit more is recorded, which helps us to see what a central part of God's plan this was. We read in Mark 14:36 ***"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*** And then, Matthew makes it clear that Jesus prayed about this *twice!* ***Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*** (*Matt. 26:39*). ***He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."*** (*Matt. 26:42*). John's gospel, too, shows us how important this was. In John 18:11, after Peter attempted to defend Jesus with force, ***Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"*** As the hymnwriter says "Dearly, dearly has He loved," (*There is a Green Hill Far Away, Cecil Alexander*).

To understand the cross of Christ, you must understand something of the wrath of God. You must understand, as Ephesians 2:3 says, ***All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.***

But it was this wrath that Christ drank for us fully, if we are His. Christ became, as Paul said in Romans 3:25, a propitiation for our sins. He became, that is, a sacrifice bearing God's wrath for us (*cf. Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10*).

And to understand this world we live in, to make sense of it, you must understand something of the wrath of God. What of all the injustices done in God's world? The unjustly spurned spouse? The falsely accused and slandered employee? The robbed elderly person? The people who have been bought and sold, who have been illicitly caressed, wrongly treated, exploited? The parents who have been wrongly disobeyed, the children who have been abused? What of the murdered child? What of the wrongs represented on the front pages of your own newspaper this very day?! Let alone those larger crimes! What of the millions of Ukrainians and Jews and Cambodians and North Koreans and Christians who lay dead from the sinful, murderous actions of just the last few decades of human history? What of millions enslaved, and racial prejudice and hatred and violence and killings?

Friends, I could go on and on!

About all of this, is nothing to be done?! Is that justice? Is that right? Is a cool response of composure and acceptance anything other than immorality and nihilism?

But finally, though, it is not these crimes against humanity alone—as great as they are—but it is the offense *against God* that calls out to be answered.

And it will be.

God's wrath will fall.

The only question for you is, will God's wrath—His certain, final, horrible, right wrath—for YOUR sins, fall on you,

or has it fallen on Christ?

If you trust in Christ alone,

it has fallen on Him, and you are saved

from the wrath of God.

If not, it will fall on you.

Let's pray.

Prayer:

Oh God, we thank you for the cross, where you paid the price for the sins of all of us who would repent of our sins and turn in trust to you.

Oh LORD, we have heard of your fame; we stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in **wrath** remember mercy.