

# The Wrath of God

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[0:00] The best and the worst news that you as a sinful person will ever hear is that God is good. God is good.

And you might say, wait a second, why is that bad news? Well, think with me for a minute. God is good.

From the top to the bottom of His infinite, eternal, unchangeable, holy being. He is good, righteous. There's not a trace, a hint of any kind of sin.

And so every single one of His thoughts, every single one of His emotions is completely and utterly righteous and holy and pure.

And every single one of His actions is completely and utterly, perfectly righteous and holy. See, God is good. And that is the worst news that we could ever hear because we are not.

[1:05] We are not good. Jesus said it. There's no one good but God. And Paul said it. There's no one righteous, not even one.

And he went on to say that our throats are open graves and our tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on our lips. Our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Our feet are swift to shed blood. Ruin and misery mark our way. God is completely, utterly, perfectly righteous and holy. And we are not.

And God cannot stand by without reacting to our unrighteousness. It's like fire and gasoline.

They don't mix well. And God's reaction to our sinfulness is His wrath. And that is what we are talking about this morning.

[2:02] The wrath of God. God. Now, to be honest, when I initially sat down at the beginning of this week to this lesson, I was less than excited.

I think part of it was I was just coming off a vacation and anything was less than exciting. But, you know how it is. It's no different for me. But I think more of it was that I really don't naturally like talking about the wrath of God.

It's not one of those things that any of us naturally go to in our conversation. Christians, we don't write books on the wrath of God.

We don't, no one's written putting terrifying back into the wrath of God. We write putting amazing back into grace.

And so let me ask you, why don't we as Christians like to talk about the wrath of God? There's really no right answer here or wrong answer, but what are some of the reasons that we don't like doing that?

[3:15] Dare. Dare. Okay. Right. We don't live in a world that likes to talk about the wrath of God.

And so, because we naturally want to be liked, we have a fear of talking about it. What else? Tim. Right.

Yeah. I think the last statement's the best one. It's not a pleasant thing. The wrath of God is not a pleasant thing. It's not nice to think about what we've been saved from.

And yeah, we need to think about it. But, it's still not a pleasant thing. It's something that is frightening for everyone if they're thinking about it.

Well, let me ask you, why must we talk about the wrath of God? We don't like to. I wouldn't have chosen this lesson, I don't think, on my own, just if I had to pick something out of the air.

[4:28] But why do we have to? Ed. We deserve it. We deserve it. I mean, that's simple enough. Yeah. It's part of the nature, just as much as love.

And that's what the world wants to hear. They want to hear it of the love of God. They don't want to hear the body's underpinned. Right. Okay. This is one of the glories of God.

That God is a wrathful God. And that is part of what it means that He's good. What else? Why else do we need to talk about it? That's perfect.

If you read, or if you look in a concordance, God is not fearful about talking about His wrath. In the Old Testament and the New Testament, Jesus is not afraid to talk about hell.

Everyone always says this, and it's true. Jesus talked about hell more than anyone. Why else do we need to talk about it? Roger.

[5:36] Yeah. We're going to talk about that at the very end. Yes, we've been saved from hell, but our God is still a consuming fire. And we cannot trifle with a God who can throw His body and soul into hell forever.

And He might not do that, but you still don't trifle with God. Roger. Very good.

What else? Stan. Right. We talked about that two or three weeks ago.

How do we put amazing back into grace? You think about what we deserve, as Ed said. You think about what Jesus suffered. The cross makes no sense without the wrath of God.

And the grace of God is less than brilliant unless we put it on the background of the wrath of God.

And so, we can't appreciate grace, we can't understand the cross, we can't love Jesus the way He deserves to be loved unless we think about this topic.

[6:51] And yes, we don't like to. And I don't expect anyone really to come out of this Sunday school lesson overflowing with excitement. But, you should be overflowing with an appreciation for what Jesus did for you.

You should be overflowing with a fear of the Lord. And those are what we need. So, the wrath of God. To guide our thinking this morning, we're just going to answer two questions.

And they're really easy. The first is, what is God's wrath? And the second is, what is God's wrath like? So, the first question then, what is God's wrath?

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Nahum. And, that is right in the middle of the minor prophets. So, if you go to Daniel, and you move forward about six books, you'll get to Nahum, or you can go to Malachi and go backwards about six books, and you'll get there.

And, the book of Nahum is about God's wrath. And, it's about God's wrath on the city of Nineveh.

So, Nahum chapter 1, we'll read verses 2 through 8.

[8:10] And, as we read, remember the question that we're trying to answer, what is God's wrath? verse 2 through 8.

The Lord is jealous and avenging. 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.

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

He rebukes the sea and dries it up. He makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. 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.

[9:16] The rocks are shattered before him. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with that overwhelming flood, he will make an end of Nineveh.

He will pursue his foes into darkness. As you look at this passage, you see that God's wrath is a reaction to guilt.

The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished, verse 3 says. So Nineveh is guilty and so God's wrath is aroused against them.

In verse 11, you don't have to turn there, it says that Nineveh plots evil. In chapter 3, the very first verses, it says, Nahum calls it a city of blood. It's full of lies and plunder, never without victims.

There's never a single period of a few minutes when there was not a victim in the streets of Nineveh. So sin arouses God's wrath.

[10:26] It's sin that arouses God's wrath. Now, look through verses 2-8 and let me ask you, what synonyms do you see for God's wrath that will help us understand what God's wrath is?

Indignation? Anger? Jealous? His heart stirred up? Yes? Vengeance?

Those are the four I thought of or saw. So, we're just going to camp out on this one of indignation. Have you ever been indignant with a person?

They offended you, they did something against you, and you were filled with indignation. So how do you feel when you see a news story about a child molester or a child trafficker or a man who abuses his wife?

It makes you indignant, doesn't it? And it makes you want to destroy that person. It makes you angry with that person to take vengeance on them for their actions.

[11:40] And that is what God's wrath is. It's his holy nature, it's his goodness, it's his righteousness revolting against sin.

And so look at verse 2. The Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. Where is the wrath of God? God. He's filled with it.

It's inside of him. It's his, the movement of his heart against sin. And more than that, it goes on, God takes vengeance.

And so his wrath is the overflow of that emotion. It's the overflow of his heart. And so it's straining to be poured out.

And that's what verse 5 says. His wrath is poured out like fire. And so what is the wrath of God? It's his revulsion, it's his revolting against sin and the exercise of that emotion in vengeance against sinners.

[12:50] And that's what it is simply. I want to talk for a moment as sort of as an aside about something we don't think about very often.

And we don't talk about very often. But God's wrath is worthy of praise. It's worthy of praise.

All of God's works praise him, including his work of vengeance and wrath. So the very fact that God is a wrathful God should inspire praise in us because it is clear evidence that he is stunningly holy. It's pointing to the fact that he is good, that he is not ordinary. See, if God was ordinary like us, sin wouldn't be a big deal.

If he was ordinary, he wouldn't abhor sin, but he isn't that way. He isn't ordinary, and so he abhors sin and strikes out against sin and sinners.

[13:55] And so he's different. He's majestic. He's glorious. Maybe this will help you understand what I'm saying. A few days ago, I was having my devotions, and I was drinking some coffee, and I was wearing an ordinary white t-shirt.

And as I was drinking my coffee, a few drops spilled on my shirt, and I sort of said, oh, bummer, and just kind of wiped it off. I'm sure you've done it a hundred times in your life.

And so now on my shirt there was a few coffee stains. And I said, well, I kind of said, oh, well, you know, and I kept reading. That's how we look at sin.

We sort of rub it away, and we kind of say, oh, oh, well. We know it isn't good. I mean, coffee stains aren't good, and we know sin's not good, but it doesn't disgust us.

But God's view of sin is totally different. Tuesday is August 3rd, and it's my eighth wedding anniversary. And on our wedding day, someone in the bridal party, not my wife, but someone in the bridal party tried to iron the train of my wife's wedding gown.

[15:16] And as she did, she burnt the train. And so now there was an iron-shaped burn mark on my wife's wedding dress.

And the reaction of the bridal party was far different than the reaction that I had when I was sitting in bed, drinking my coffee, reading my Bible. It was completely different.

The stain wasn't ho-hum. it was horrifying. You can imagine. There were tears. There was anger. There might have been death threats. I don't know. But everyone survived.

So two stains, but two very different reactions. One reaction was mundane, and the other one was horror. And so what was the difference?

[16:18] My shirt was ordinary. My wife's wedding gown was not ordinary. It was extraordinary.

And see, we react to sin very lightly because we're ordinary. And God reacts so violently against sin because he is no ordinary white t-shirt.

He's a dazzling, he's whiter than any white wedding dress. He's transcendently, he's majestically holy. And so his wrath points to the fact that he is good.

He is righteous. And so his wrath should lead us, should point us to worship, to praise. And we need to be careful in that.

And I understand that. This is not all that it says about God's wrath and our reaction to it, but this is one reaction that we need to have towards God's wrath is praise.

Well, that's what God's wrath is. It's his holy indignation towards sin and it's carrying out that reaction against sin and sinners.

[17 : 24] Now, the second question is, what is God's wrath like? What is God's wrath like? First, it's not cruel, it's not out of control, it's not malicious fury.

When men think of wrath, they think of something that is cruel and out of control and malicious.

Now, let me ask you, why do people think that's what God's wrath is like?

That's what we're like. That's what our wrath is usually like. And so, we assume that that's what God is like, but God isn't like us.

His wrath is holy, it's righteous, it's completely under his control. So, for 400 years, Israel was down in Egypt, and the Canaanites were living in the promised land.

Why, what was one of the reasons for that wait? Do you remember? Yeah. Right. The sin of the people in the land hasn't been full yet.

[18 : 52] It hasn't been filled up. God was withholding his wrath. And so, God's wrath is on a leash. And it's under his control, and he won't let it go until the exact right time.

And he hadn't let it go yet. Psalm 78, 38 talks about God's patience towards Israel, and it says this, yet he was merciful. He forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them.

Time after time, he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. And so, God's wrath, he stirs it up or he doesn't stir it up.

He restrains it or he doesn't restrain it. So, God's wrath is fully under his control. In other verses, there's a handful of verses that talk about how God directs his wrath.

And so, God's wrath is like a cruise missile. It does damage to the exact thing that the general or whoever wants it to do. It's not like a nuclear weapon where there's just mass destruction and there's all this collateral damage.

[20 : 08] God's wrath is under his control and he directs it where he wants. And so, God's wrath isn't out of control. It isn't cruel or malicious.

God doesn't get irritable with people and destroy them just because he's irritated with them. There are a lot of ancient accounts of the worldwide flood in Noah's time.

One of the accounts that comes out of ancient Babylon explains the worldwide flood and it explained it this way. Basically, the gods made the people and the people just grew in number and there were so many people and they were carrying on.

They were so loud and so noisy that the gods got annoyed with them. They couldn't get any peace and quiet. This is literally it. It was too loud on the earth and the gods couldn't rest.

And so, they sent the flood. They sent the flood to destroy everyone to keep them quiet. They were just irritated with them. And that's how most people think God's wrath is.

[21 : 20] People irritate God with this whole petty sin business and so God blasts them to kingdom come. And so God is made to be just like you and me at the end of the day when we're tired and our kids are bothering us and we fly off the handle.

But God is not like us. His wrath is not like ours. And that's not what the Bible says at all. He's slow to anger. And he's restraining it.

And he'll stir it up or he won't stir it up. He doesn't fly off the handle. He isn't cruel. He isn't easily irritated. He isn't out of control. So then what is God's wrath?

What is it like? It's completely fair. That's the second thing. The first thing, it's not cruel, irritated, out of control.

The second thing is, it's completely fair. God's wrath is a judicial wrath. And we've talked about this the last few weeks. That it's the wrath of the judge against the criminal.

[22 : 32] Sinners get exactly what they deserve. So Paul said it in Romans 2. God will give to each person according to what he has done.

each person according to what he has done. So wrath is completely fair. It's an exact repayment for the sin committed.

So people won't receive wrath they don't deserve. Hell will be different for different people. God's wrath will be experienced differently for different people.

It won't be the same for everyone. Jesus teaches us that in Luke chapter 12. Turn there. Luke chapter 12. And we'll read verses 47 and 48.

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving

punishment will be beaten with few blows.

[23 : 40] from everyone who has been given much much will be demanded and from the one who has been entrusted with much much more will be asked.

Few blows many blows. God's wrath isn't willy nilly. It's completely fair. So how much light how much gospel light you have received will determine God's wrath against you.

If God gives gospel light to a person and that person rejects it then and goes on sinning it will be worse for that person than for the person who hadn't been entrusted with very much.

So Jesus said it in several places. It will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you. It will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for Capernaum. One received less light.

The other one received much light. It will be better for children living in Rwanda without the gospel and dying there than it will be for some of our children.

[24 : 54] God's wrath is completely fair. And so if that's true then brothers and sisters we need to beg God to save our children because they have much light.

And so we witness to them. We have to witness to them. We have to speak the gospel into their lives. We have to be relentless in the pursuit of their souls for the one reason that hell will be very terrifying for a child that grew up in this church and does not come to believe in Jesus.

Jesus. And it will be horrible for them, it will be horrible for us if we actually lead them away from Jesus by the way we live. Jesus said it would be better for a millstone to be tied around your neck and you to be thrown into the sea than for you to face me on the judgment day if you lead one of these little ones away.

God's wrath is completely fair. Third, it's freely chosen. It's freely chosen.

And this, I think, is the greatest of tragedies. Before God inflicts hell, men choose to go away from God.

[26 : 18] Before God inflicts hell, men choose to go away from God. Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus. This is the verdict. This is the verdict.

Light has come into the world but men love darkness instead of the light because their deeds were evil. And so men love their evil and when they see the light they retreat back into the darkness.

So they flee the light. They flee God and they choose darkness and they choose wrath. It's a simple choice. either you respond to Jesus when he says, come to me, or you don't respond.

To choose not to respond is to choose wrath. You either lose your life now and so gain it forever or you keep your life and you hold on to it and you lose it forever.

Remember what Jesus said, what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his own soul? To choose the world is to choose wrath.

[27 : 35] And so the tragedy is men condemn themselves. They sign their death certificate, their death warrant. They write the sentence against them.

Wrath is freely chosen. What is God's wrath like? Fourth, it's utterly terrible.

It's utterly terrible. What does it mean to lose your own soul? What does it mean to lose your own soul, to face God's wrath?

wrath? The Bible says it is completely, utterly horrific. Jesus uses an image to try to get the wrath of God across to us.

And he says, hell, the wrath of God is like Gehenna. And we go outside Jerusalem to Gehenna.

[28 : 41] Gehenna is the valley outside of Jerusalem where the garbage is burned. And so smoke rises from it continuously. And so the fires are always burning.

They're burning trash. And they're burning the corpses of animals. And maggots are feeding incessantly on all the dead bodies of all the animals and all the trash.

fish. And the other day I saw in my yard a dead bird. And as I looked at it, it looked like it was still moving.

And I got a closer look at it, bent down, and it was filled with worms eating away at it.

And Jesus said, that's what the wrath of God is like. the worm never dies. So, to lose your own soul is to face endless, everlasting destruction.

[29 : 57] In Mark 2, Jesus is talking about fasting and he says this, no one pours new wine into old wine skins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins and both the wine and the wine skins will be ruined.

That word ruined is the same word, allethero, that Jesus uses in many other places for everlasting destruction, for destruction.

And so, do you have that picture in your mind? There's lying on the ground, burst open, broken open, is this leather sack, this old leather bag, and it's a destroyed wine skin.

And Jesus said that is what hell is like. People face that. They are eternally ruined. They continually, eternally are broken down.

And so, to lose your own soul means you face the loss, the continual, ever-increasing loss of your humanity.

[31:08] And so, you lose more and more of your life. You're torn apart at the seams. That's why Isaiah said, woe is me, I'm undone.

I'm unraveling. He saw the holiness of God and that's what he felt in himself. The creative act. So, you have the picture of Psalm 139, God weaving a baby in the womb.

And hell is the exact opposite. It's God unraveling the person for eternity. And a condemning conscience devours them from the inside.

That's probably what is meant by the worm never dies. Conscience is always telling them that they are guilty. They're horribly aware of God's presence.

His presence will be a fire to them. Be a fire. And all hope will die. Because if you're continually facing destruction, your best things are behind you.

[32:15] A million years in hell. And all that time behind you, and still it's going to get worse. So hell will be a lake of fire.

fire. Some people think that's a symbol. Like, it's a symbol. It really won't be that bad. Fire may be a symbol.

It probably is. But symbols are never worse than the things they symbolize. They're never bigger than what they symbolize.

And so we can't escape that way by saying, well, hell's just a symbol. Fire's just a symbol. It won't be that bad. Actually, it will be worse than that. So you're driving through the mountains and you see a sign and it shows this big curvy road.

And I, what's worse? The sign that shows the curvy road, the symbol, or the curve itself in the road? What's bigger? What's worse?

[33:18] What's more dangerous? It's not the sign at all. The sign is nothing. The road can kill you. The curves can kill you. So fire is a symbol of God's wrath.

It doesn't make things better. Hell will be full of sinners wishing that it was just fire.

And hell is terrible because they're always aware of God's holy, angry presence.

C.S. Lewis used to describe hell as like, you know, the sinner choosing, I don't want you, God. And God saying, okay, have what you, you know, have your way.

And that's right in a certain sense and it's wrong in another sense. God's God's good. We lose all of God's goodness, but God will not leave the sinner alone.

[34:23] Our God is a consuming fire. And His holiness, His purity, His goodness will be worse than the hottest fire. fire. It will always be pointing to their depravity, to their shame, to their ruin, to their misery.

God will be the heaven of some, and He will be the hell of others. God is everywhere. And so it must be that way.

So God, God's wrath is utterly horrible. It's utterly good, it's perfectly righteous, but it's utterly horrific at the same time for the sinner.

Now, I began by saying that we have a natural tendency not to think about these things. Not to want to think about them. But, brothers and sisters, we have to fight against that tendency.

We have to fight against that tendency to steer clear of the wrath of God. We're not naturally going to do this. Think about it, but we still need to. This is a part of God's glory, as Jim said.

[35:40] It is to His glory, and this is hard to hear, but it is to His glory to pour out wrath on sin because it shows that He is completely perfect.

And it does us good to think about the wrath of God. It does us good. Well, what good does it do? I just have four things really quick, and we've kind of already hit on them, but just to review them.

Four practical reasons why it's good for us to think about God's wrath. One, God's wrath impresses us, impresses onto our hearts how serious sin is, how much God detests sin.

Can you love sin when you see God's wrath? You can't. You can't love sin when you see how much God hates it.

two, it gives birth to a true fear of God in our souls. I think that's what Roger said. Hell makes our hearts quake.

[36:54] It should make our hearts quake. It's supposed to make us fear. Our God is a consuming fire, and so we can't trifle with God.

We are his children, but we still cannot trifle with God, who can throw his body and soul into Gehenna forever. Three, it draws out praise to Jesus for saving us.

This is what Stan said. This is the beauty of the gospel. Jesus took hell that we would be able to escape hell.

That's what was going on at the cross. God's wrath was being poured out, unleashed, stirred up against his son. That is what Jesus experienced on the cross.

We don't have any idea what that means. Sometimes I wish I could understand it more. I'm reading about it and it's unclear. I don't know what that means. But that is what happened.

[38:04] Wrath was being poured out. how could an eternal wrath be poured out in three or six hours is beyond me. But that's what was happening and Jesus experienced all that and so that should make me praise him.

Because it was either him or me. And he took my spot. So I should be thankful. We should be yearning. If we're not overflowing with joy, I understand that, but we should be yearning to praise Jesus Christ for what he did for us.

And fourth, it should motivate us to evangelism. There's a constant war going on in my heart about do I really need to evangelize?

And I don't think I'm alone. There's a war going on. Is it necessary to evangelize? Is it really that big of a deal? Because when I look out my window on some evenings, and there's my beautiful little neighborhood and all the grass is mowed and it's nice and cool and the wind's kind of breezing through and the birds are singing.

And it seems so peaceful. And I seriously say, why do I need to evangelize? I mean, these people are happy.

[39:36] And that's what my flesh says. And the word of God says something very different. It says the wrath of God is utterly horrible. And so we have to reach out and like pull them like a brand from the fire.

Because hell is real and it is terrible. Well, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, I pray that you would sober us.

Will you help us to see that yeah, these things are hard to think about. No one likes to think about them. But they're so necessary.

They are part of your glory. And we need to understand them. We need to appreciate them. Father, keep Satan from stealing the seed that has been planted.

And keep the cares of this world from choking out this truth. Father, will you change us with your word. Thank you for the Lord Jesus who saves us from the wrath to come.

[40:56] Thank you Jesus for giving yourself up for me. Pray that you would help me to love you, to trust you. Will you help all of us to love you and to trust you with all of our hearts because you have shown us the greatest love in going to the cross and dying for us in our place.

We stir our hearts to praise for all that you are. In Jesus' name, Amen.