

“IS GOD MAD AT US?”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Nahum 1:1-8; Exodus 34:6-7, 14

Introduction.

We come this morning to the last attribute and perhaps the toughest attributes to talk about. This is that attribute of God that some Christians feel like they have to apologize for. There might even be someone here who is a bit embarrassed their pastor is talking about this out loud.

God’s wrath certainly isn’t an attribute that we think should be cause for worship, something we should thank God for and praise Him for.

This attribute is closely related to several other of God’s attributes such as God’s righteousness, God’s holiness, God’s jealousy, God’s justice. I think it will help us get a handle of this attribute if I approach it through a brief consideration of God’s jealousy and God’s justice. This will give us a better context for understanding God’s wrath.

God is a jealous God.

To say that God is a jealous God doesn’t sound very flattering, in fact it sounds like an insult. So how is it that what is generally considered a vice in humans is a virtue with God?

The only reason we dare to ascribe jealousy to God is because that’s what He says about Himself in Scripture. The first mention is in the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20:4-5 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything ...
5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.

And a bit later to Moses:

Exodus 34:14 You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

Nahum 1:2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful.

We know there are two kinds of human jealousy, one is a vice and one is a virtue.

The vice is expressed as, “I want what you have.” Other words for it are envy, coveting, resentment, bitterness. It breeds pride and possessiveness.

But there is another kind of jealousy, a kind that is a virtue. This kind is a zealous protection of a relationship, especially a marriage relationship. Marriage is meant to be exclusive, “Forsaking all others” as our vows say. Exclusiveness is the essence of marriage and it should be jealously guarded. We would consider a wife who is fine with her husband’s mistress to be crazy.

God’s jealousy is of this kind. If you think a wife can get jealous, you ain’t seen nothing yet. Consider the jealousy of God. But what is God jealous about? What is so valuable, so important that it would stir up God’s anger?

God is most jealous for His perfections, His character, His attributes. He is the most supreme being in the universe, He alone is most worthy to be worshiped and adored. He will preserve the honor and glory of His name and His character.

When God’s character and glory are trampled or denied, then His wrath comes out because He is jealous for His glory. Some people have a hard time with this. They think God should be bigger than that or that God should not be that sensitive or self-centered.

Are we uncomfortable with God being so concerned about His glory? Yet God is selfish for His glory. God glories in his glory, it is right for him to be that way.

If I say, “When you’re as great as I am, it’s hard to be humble” how would you respond to that? You would see right through it, that it’s a lie. I am self-deceived if I think I am so great.

But God never says, “When you are as great as me, it’s hard to be humble.” God is not humble because God knows He is the most supreme and glorious being in all the universe.

God is God and there is no other. He is worthy of all praise, honor and worship. It is right that we should bow down before Him. It’s appropriate for God to be jealous for His glory and honor.

Love for God is to be an exclusive love.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

God hates idolatry because it is adultery toward Him, it’s giving our love which belongs to Him to something else.

Psalm 78:58-59 For they provoked him to anger with their high places; they moved him to jealousy with their idols. 59 When God heard, he was full of wrath.

This jealousy is not a jealousy of weakness or fear or feeling bad for Himself.

John Piper illustrates what it's like this way. "God is jealous like a powerful and merciful king who takes a peasant girl from a life of shame, forgives her, marries her, and gives her not the chores of a slave, but the privileges of a wife—a queen. His jealousy does not rise from fear or weakness but from a holy indignation at having his honor and power and mercy scorned by the faithlessness of a fickle spouse."

When we put anything before God, we stir up His righteous jealousy. He has exclusive claim on our love because He created us and He has provided for us all that we are and have. He expects and demands and deserves our loyalty and love.

God gets angry when someone or something else competes for the hearts of His people or when the hearts of His people go after another love.

God is a just God.

Now let's consider the justice of God as another context for God's righteous wrath. I don't remember if I have used this analogy before.

Suppose a man broke into your house, killed your children, raped your wife, stole your valuable possession and then torched your house. Suppose this man is caught and brought before a judge.

Suppose the judge says to him, "I know you did all these terrible crimes, I know you are guilty. But I want you to think of me as a nice judge, I want you to think of me as kind and loving and merciful. So I am going to pardon you. You are free."

How would you as the victim react? Every cell in your body would scream against such a gross miscarriage of justice. Deep in all our conscience is a sense of right and wrong, a sense that when something terribly wrong happens there needs to be something that makes things right, a way to balance the scales.

Why is it that when we talk about hell, people say, "Oh God is a good and kind and loving judge, He would never send anyone to hell." They say that because they are forgetting any truth about justice. And they forget because they have no sense of how holy God is and how much sin is a violation of the justice and holiness of God. They have no sense of the magnitude of the crime that has been committed against God.

We only think about life from our perspective. We don't see it from God's perspective.

Because of sin, we fall under God's righteous judgment. In fact, if God did not judge us it would be a miscarriage of justice and a contradiction of His essential being and nature. Why? For the same reason that in our own courts we impeach judges who do not uphold the law and see that justice is done. For God not to judge would be an impeachable offense against His

character and nature. A God who does not punish sin is not a righteous God. And if He were not righteous then there would be no justice in the universe.

There is no contradiction between God's justice and God's mercy. When God judges the wicked it is consistent with what they deserve, the punishment is always fair because it fits the crime. When God is merciful it is consistent with His goodness and compassion.

When God justifies the unjust and the ungodly, justice is not violated because His justice has been satisfied by the atonement Christ made in His blood on the cross.

Isaiah 53:6 The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

God can't wink at sin or just sweep it under the rug, His righteous wrath must be satisfied. To vindicate His justice God put His own Son to death on the cross as the penalty for all our sins.

The wages of sin is death, and justice requires that debt to be paid. It must be paid in order for God to be a moral and righteous God. If we cast ourselves on Christ and in repentance ask for mercy and forgiveness then His payment becomes ours.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is a God of wrath.

One of the reasons we have trouble thinking about the wrath of God is that we think 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, but rather His holiness and righteousness responding to sin and evil and immorality. God's wrath is judicial, it is the carrying out of His justice.

We were all born objects of God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3). And every day a sinner stores up for himself more wrath.

Romans 2:5 Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Those who deny that a loving God could send people to hell, mock God, they mock His justice and righteousness and holiness, they trivialize sin and evil. But the worst sin of all is the sin of spurning the Son of God and His sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

The greatest threat facing this planet today is heat, but not heat from greenhouse gases or carbon footprint or global warming or climate change. The greatest threat facing this planet is the fire of God's holy and righteous and just wrath, against those who reject His Son and His sacrifice.

I have a hard time taking seriously environmentalists rantings and ravings about the demise of this planet when they don't have a clue about the most serious threat of all. If they would acknowledge that, I would listen more.

Our culture never stops disrespecting God, every abortion, every nodding approval of sexual sin, every participation in lies, gossip, slander, bitterness or hate, every sin overlooked, every calling evil good, every idol, every lack of forgiveness.

Do we get angry when we hear God's name taken in vain, when we hear the Bible mocked, when we see or hear the Ten Commandments broken like they are nothing? Do we get angry with our own sin, do we hate it the way God hates it?

Implications and Applications.

Should churches preach and teach about the wrath of God? Should parents and grandparents tell their children and grandchildren about the wrath of God? Should we talk about hard truths?

Let me answer by asking a question. When you talk to your kids about fire or sharp knives or electrical outlets, do you only tell them about the positive aspects of those things, how those things can be used for good? Is that all you say? Half the truth is dangerous, in fact half the truth is not loving. The whole truth is loving. In order to know God and love God we must know the whole truth.

Romans 11:22 Behold the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

Many of us only really think about half of the gospel or half of God. But Paul instructs us to behold the kindness and severity of God, the yes and the no of God, the positive and the negative of our faith. In other words, we are to have a complete and holistic picture of our faith.

If you ever do a study of the lives of Christians who really progressed and grew in their relationship with Jesus beyond what most normal Christians do you will find a common thread. You will find a combination of a deepening awareness of the sinfulness of their heart and a deepening appreciation of the God's incredible love and forgiveness. Grace and mercy are

meaningless without a context in the wrath of God. Truly he who knows how much he has been forgiven, loves much.

When you know in the core of your being that you really do justly deserve the eternal wrath of God and then see that all that Jesus personally bore all that wrath for you, you become astonished at God's priceless love and compassion. It is cause for greater and deeper worship.

Lord's Supper

Last week I said there was a reason I decided to put this attribute last and the reason is in front of us. The Lord's Table is a picture of why God is so jealousy for our love. Look how much He has done for us, look at the cost, He has made salvation possible for us, He has revealed His glory. And this Table is a picture of God's justice. This is the only satisfactory satisfaction of His justice, the only way His wrath toward sin could be propitiated or atoned for.

And all of this is why this table comes with a sober warning.

I Corinthians 11:27-29 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

God is jealous for and zealous for the honor of His Son. Don't despise the blood of Jesus. He purchases sinners with His own blood (Acts 20?).

Romans 8:1 Thanks be to God that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Prayer:

Holy and righteous Father, we worship you and love you for your justice and that you are a jealous God and a God of wrath. We love you that you are the perfect God and that all your attributes are worthy of worship and praise and honor. You are glorified in all that you are. We humble ourselves before you. Our lives are secure in your justice satisfied for us in the life and death of Jesus Christ our Savior.