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Sermon Notes

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His Hand is Still Upraised

Isaiah 9:8-10:4

On July 8, 1741 substitute preacher stands up to proclaim word of God to a town bypassed by revival

His Text: Deuteronomy 28:35 *“Their feet shall slide in due time.”*

His Doctrine: "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God." By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment."

This was Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

4. A troublesome view of God; a troublesome view of Edwards

“And if they had been taught aright,
Small children carried bedwards
Would shudder lest they meet that night
The God of Mr. Edwards

Abraham's God, the Wrathful One
Intolerant of error
Not God the Father or the Son
But God the Holy Terror”

(“the Theology of Jonathan Edwards,” Phyllis McGinley, 1961)

5. John Piper's cogent questions

And before any of us, especially us pastors, sniffs at Edwards' imagery, we had better think long and hard what our own method is for helping our people feel the weight of the reality of **Revelation 19:15**. Edwards stands before this text with awe. He virtually gapes at what he sees here. John writes in this verse, **"He [Christ] will tread the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty."**

Listen to Edwards' comment in this sermon,

The words are exceeding terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is "the fierceness and wrath of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! O how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?"

What high school student is ever asked to come to grips with what really is at issue here? If the Bible is true, and if it says that someday Christ will tread his enemies like a winepress with anger that is fierce and almighty, and if you are a pastor charged with applying Biblical truth to your people so that they will flee the wrath to come, then what would *your* language be? What would you say to make people feel the reality of texts like these?

Edwards labored over language and over images and metaphors because he was so stunned and awed at the realities he saw in the Bible. Did you hear that one line in the quote I just read: "Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?" Edwards believed that it was impossible to exaggerate the horror of the reality of hell.

High school teachers would do well to ask their students the really probing question, "Why is it that Jonathan Edwards struggled to find images for wrath and hell that shock and frighten, while contemporary preachers try to find abstractions and circumlocutions that move away from concrete, touchable Biblical pictures of unquenchable fire and undying worms and gnashing of teeth?" If our students were posed with this simple, historical question, my guess is that some of the brighter ones would answer: "Because Jonathan Edwards really believed in hell, but most preachers today don't."

Archaic view of God? Angry? Is God angry with the human race?

Isaiah's refrain in Isaiah 9-10 stated four times gives a four-fold answer:

Isaiah 9:12 Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Isaiah 9:17 Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Isaiah 9:21 Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Isaiah 10:4 Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

It's as if Isaiah is saying God's wrath is not easily extinguished... it is relentless, terrifying, inescapable

Isaiah is saying to Israel, "Yes, God has struck you. And He isn't finished yet... there's still more to come!!"

For us as Christians, this understanding only heightens the joy of the Gospel... for we have come to realize that there is one and only one refuge from the relentless, terrifying, otherwise inescapable wrath of God... the cross of Christ

I. The Wrath of God: Pure, Holy, and Perfect

A. Not the God of the Greeks: Emotionless and Detached

1. Stoics posited a god completely incapable of being moved to emotion
2. emotion, passions, were thought to derive from the animal nature and beneath pure deity
3. Aristotle spoke of the “Unmoved Mover”... a god who causes great passions in others but is himself never moved to passion

“The god of Aristotle is little involved in the world; it would have been a sign of inferiority and imperfection for him to be so. This reflected a typically Greek attitude. To be affected by something external to yourself is a sign of weakness...” [quoted by Raymond Ortlund, *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 101]

4. This is, however, NOT the God of the Bible
5. The God of the Bible is shown to have an active emotional life full of passion
 - a. Concerning the salvation of human souls:

Luke 15:10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Cycle of Parables—Lost sheep, lost coin, lost son—in all three parables, the one who was searching is the one who celebrates and calls his friends and neighbors to celebrate with him

In Luke 15:10, it is not the angels who are rejoicing, but GOD!!

So also, Zephaniah pictures a very emotional God who rejoices over His people with singing:

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

- b. Many other emotions are ascribed to God in the Bible
 - i) Compassion
 - ii) Grief/Sadness/distress

Isaiah 63:10 Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit.

iii) Longing

Isaiah 30:18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion.

iv) Contempt

c. But the issue here... anger, wrath

B. God Involved and Passionate

1. The God of the bible is not detached... but actually observes everything going on on the face of the earth
2. He gets involved, He extends His hand, He notices, He cares
3. AND He is passionate
4. That includes the passion of ANGER... sin makes God angry, it moves Him to wrath

Psalm 18:7-13 The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry.⁸ Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.⁹ He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him-- the dark rain clouds of the sky.¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning.¹³ The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.

C. Slow to Anger... But Overwhelming When It Comes

1. nine separate passages state that God is slow to anger... the first was spoken to Moses by God Himself... all the others are spoke ABOUT God by others

Exodus 34:6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness

2. BUT Isaiah 9-10 show how overwhelming God's wrath is when at last it comes

Picture: engineering days, working on an emergency brake for a machine that had a huge metal disc that spun at over a thousand revolutions per minute

We made a heavy wheel out of steel and attached it to a motor to see how quickly we could stop it... this steel wheel weighed over a thousand pounds; I remember how slowly that motor turned it at first... slowly... slowly but picking up speed... a little faster... a little faster... a little faster... fast now... faster still... finally after a long period of time it was a blur... then we tried to stop it with a bar brake, and the thing destroyed it with a hideous crash... the inertia was too high

So it is with the wrath of God... it takes a long time to build, but when it is unleashed it is unstoppable

3. Isaiah 9-10 depict four distinct judgments that come on Israel because of their sin... and each uses this arresting phrase:

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

II. Judgment #1: Stubborn Pride Results in Invasion (9:8-12)

Isaiah 9:8-12 The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall on Israel. ⁹ All the people will know it-- Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria-- who say with pride and arrogance of heart, ¹⁰ "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars." ¹¹ But the LORD has strengthened Rezin's foes against them and has spurred their enemies on. ¹² Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west have devoured Israel with open mouth. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

A. Israel's Stubborn Pride: "We Will Rebuild It Even Better!!"

1. God had already brought some judgment on Israel... some incursions of the Philistines and Arameans have already come and some buildings have been leveled
2. They should have repented in sackcloth and ashes... pleading with God for forgiveness
3. Instead they responded with pride and arrogance: "You destroyed our buildings... but we will replace them better than they ever were before!
 - a. Bricks replaced with dressed stone
 - b. Fig trees replaced with mighty cedars

After the twin towers fell on September 11th, 2001, I said to someone, "If I know the tenor of our nation, there will soon be plans to rebuild the towers with one even taller than they were!"

It's fine to rebuild and make it even better... but it's not fine to respond to a judgment from God with defiance and arrogance of heart... that's precisely what Israel did here

B. What They Should Have Done: Humble Themselves Under God

James 4:8-10 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

C. Result of Pride: Invasion

1. God responds to this arrogant attitude by bringing even more judgment... another invading army
2. The Philistines and Arameans will come
3. and after them... the mighty Assyrians: Rezin's foes

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

III. Judgment #2: Unrepentance Results in Leaders' Removal (9:13-17)

Isaiah 9:13-17 But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty. ¹⁴ So the LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day; ¹⁵ the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail. ¹⁶ Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray. ¹⁷ Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

A. Israel's Willful Independence

1. They live an independent existence in their own minds
2. They have no thoughts for the God who made them and sustained their lives every day

B. What They Should Have Done: Repent and Return

1. when God struck them, they should have come running back into His loving and forgiving arms... repenting, weeping for their sin
2. vs. 13 highlights this:

vs. 13 But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty

3. Raymond Ortlund's cogent remark

“When God strikes you, the biggest mistake you can make is to turn away from him instead of turning to him and inquiring of him.”

When Jonathan Edwards’s wife learned the shocking news that her husband had died suddenly and unexpectedly from a smallpox vaccine while he was away at Princeton, her reaction is a classic illustration of proper response to trials from the Lord:

“What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. Oh, that we may kiss the rod of discipline, and lay our hands on our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore His goodness, that we had my husband so long. But my God lives, and He has my heart. Oh, what a legacy my husband and your father has left with us! We are all given to God; and there I am and love to be.” [quoted by Ortlund, p. 105]

4. Instead, Israel chose not to repent and return to the One who struck them

C. Result of Unrepentance: Leaders Cut Off

1. God decrees the decapitation of the nation... its leaders and officials cut off
2. He also removes the prophets who were supposed to speak God’s words to the people
3. The wickedness of Israel’s leaders has led to this sin... Rehoboam’s immediate leading of Israel into idolatry, and the string of wicked kings and officials since then

Vs. 16 Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray.

4. As a result, the wickedness is widespread... every mouth speaks vileness all the time

IV. Judgment #3: Growing Wickedness Results in Self-Destruction (9:18-21)

Isaiah 9:18-21 Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke. ¹⁹ By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire; no one will spare his brother. ²⁰ On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: ²¹ Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

A. Israel’s Wickedness: Spreading Like a Wildfire

1. One thing history has shown us about sin, about evil, about wickedness... it never stays put... it spreads, it moves, it metastasizes, it pollutes one after another

- a. One chapter after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the first murder occurred... Cain killed his brother Abel
- b. By the end of that chapter, Lamech had taken two wives and murdered a man for injuring him, and boasted about it
- c. By the beginning of Genesis 6, wickedness had spread so widely all over the earth that the account had this to say:

Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

2. Sin is a relentless plague that only one force in the universe is strong enough to stop: that force is the grace of God in Christ
3. The image here is of a wildfire spreading through the land

Vs. 18 Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke.

- a. Again and again in history the devastation of fires started by one small spark has been established
- b. The Great Chicago fire of October, 1871, started in Mrs. O'Leary's barn, although not by a cow that kicked over a lantern as the myth went. Yet it was one small spark into a bale of hay that destroyed four square miles of a city
- c. The Great Fire of London, 1666, started in the oven of a baker on Pudding Land in the middle of the night while he was sleeping upstairs; it burned for four nights and four days, destroying 13,000 homes
- d. October, 2003 Southern California saw the Cedar Fire burn 280,000 acres, 2200 homes... started by a single man, a hunter who was lost and set a signal fire

Like a wildfire, sin starts small and spreads... so it was with the people of God... sin spread from person to person, and from generation to generation

B. What They Should Have Done: Rescued their Brothers

1. The response should have been to stop sin in its tracks
2. To confront brothers for sin and deal with it directly
3. To love a brother enough to show him his fault and help him repent
4. The second great commandment was the center of the horizontal law:

Leviticus 19:18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

5. Israel had completely thrown this off

C. Result of Wickedness: Brother Devours Brother

1. Instead, they turned on their brothers and devoured them
2. Israel in particular devoured one another... the last five of the last six kings of the northern Kingdom's history came to the throne by assassination!!
3. Human sin spreads by people growing cold in their love for one another, turning away from their brothers, away from their children... every man for himself
4. the mutual devouring of one sinner by another does not satisfy, but results in every-increasing wickedness

vs. 20-21 On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: ²¹ Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah.

Very much like the warning Paul gave the Galatian church:

Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

By the time of the exile, Israel had no concern whatsoever for their fellow Jews, for their brother tribes...

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

V. Judgment #4: Social Injustice Results in Conquest (10:1-4)

Isaiah 10:1-4 Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, ² to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. ³ What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? ⁴ Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

A. Israel's Injustice: Laws Against the Oppressed

1. Issues of social justice are huge in the book of Isaiah

2. One of the central purposes of government is justice for the weak and oppressed
3. But Israel's leaders were actually making unjust laws to oppress the weak
4. they were using their positions of power to fleece God's people

B. What They Should Have Done: Protected the Weak

1. Social justice flows right from the character of God and is established in the Laws of Moses
2. God had established laws to protect the poor and needy
 - a. The landowners were not to glean to the edges of their fields or go carefully over their fields a second time at harvest, but were to leave the gleanings for the poor
 - b. Every seven years the farms were to be left fallow so the poor could eat what grew naturally from them
 - c. Judges were especially commanded to be careful in their dealing with the poor

Exodus 23:6-9 Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. ⁷ Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸ "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous. ⁹ "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.

- d. The people were to be openhanded to the poor and needy and give generously
3. Job 31... his defense; he acknowledged that his fear of the Lord's justice on behalf of the poor ensured that he would care well for them:

Job 31:13-23 "If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, ¹⁴ what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? ¹⁵ Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers? ¹⁶ "If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, ¹⁷ if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless-- ¹⁸ but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow-- ¹⁹ if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, ²⁰ and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, ²¹ if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, ²² then let my arm fall from the

shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. ²³ For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.

C. Result of Injustice: Inescapable Justice

Isaiah 10:3-4 What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? ⁴ Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.

God sees from heaven, and is powerfully motivated to crush those who oppress the poor and needy

Proverbs 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

Psalms 94:1-10 O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. ² Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. ³ How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant? ⁴ They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting. ⁵ They crush your people, O LORD; they oppress your inheritance. ⁶ They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless. ⁷ They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed." ⁸ Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? ⁹ Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? ¹⁰ Does he who disciplines nations not punish?

VI. The Only Refuge: The Cross of Christ

Isaiah 10:3 asks the central questions:

Isaiah 10:3-4 What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help?

Is there a place of refuge from the wrath of God?

A. The Two Greatest Displays of God's Wrath

1. the Cross of Christ

Matthew 26:39 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."

Matthew 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

2. Hell

Revelation 14:10-11 he, too, will drink of 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. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

B. "Full Atonement, Can It Be?"

1. Jesus' atonement is a full propitiation from God's wrath
2. Jesus' cross is a safe haven, a safe resting place from the wrath of God

Romans 3:23-25 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

The word "propitiation" means a sacrifice offered to turn aside the wrath of God

C. Applying These Lessons

1. Understand the Biblical doctrine of the wrath of God
 - a. God hates sin... it moves Him emotionally
 - b. God is SLOW to anger, very patient, giving us time to repent
 - c. But we should not imagine that, because God doesn't pour out His wrath immediately that He doesn't care about sin
 - d. Nor should we Christians who know we are free forever from the wrath of God cease to fear His discipline
2. When God disciplines you from sin, repent and draw NEAR to God... do not pull away
 - a. Sarah Edwards spoke of "kissing the rod" of discipline
 - b. Hebrews 12 speaks of the discipline of the Lord as a blessing He gives to His children rather than give them over to sin

Hebrews 12:5-6 My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

- c. He says "Do not lose heart" and "do not despise the discipline of the Lord"
3. Pray for our nation
 - a. That we would not be arrogant, saying "The buildings have been destroyed, we'll build them even bigger!"

- b. We should lead the way in humbling ourselves in prayer for our nation
4. Understand God's passion for the poor and needy
- a. Some of us will be called on to ministries of mercy
 - b. Our growing urban ministry will have as its core a concern for social justice biblically defined
 - c. Few prophets spoke as much about justice for the poor and needy as did Isaiah