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Sermon Notes

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Vessels of Wrath and Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9:19-23

Introduction: A Recipe for Excellence

- Recipes for preparing some delicious family secret... how much of each ingredient, what order to add them, how long to mix them, what temperature to bake them, etc.
- Pharmaceutical companies work on drug recipes... how to manufacture; after penicillin was discovered, there was still an agonizingly difficult development process to discover how to mass produce the fungus in large enough quantities to be useful
- Byzantine Empire: Recipe for Greek fire... so secret it was lost to the Byzantines themselves... no written record
- Apollo 13: astronauts given a detailed step by step list of directions for powering up the spacecraft so they would have enough battery power left to deploy their chutes
- Step by step preparations... part of the genius of the human race; knowing how to break immensely complex problems into component parts, so that the end can be accomplished
- **GOD KNOWS HOW TO SAVE PEOPLE!!** He knows the right steps in shaping and molding the human soul for eternity... He is the potter, we are the clay... He knows how much prosperity and how much adversity to mix together... too much prosperity and we become arrogant and forget God; too much adversity, and we become discouraged and criticize God
- Romans 9:23 calls Christians **“vessels of mercy whom He is preparing in advance for glory”**

I. Review

Context: What Paul Has Said Thus Far

II. God's Rebuke

A. God Puts Humanity in its Place

Romans 9:20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?

B. "God on Trial"??

C. Talking Back to God : What Is Rebuked Is Not Questions, But Contentiousness

III. God's Role

A. God is the Potter, We Are the Clay

Romans 9:20 "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

B. Key Insight: God Does Not Craft Everyone for Glory

1. Some are crafted as vessels of honor
2. Some are hardened as vessels of dishonor
3. Some are vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction
4. Some are vessels of mercy, whom HE prepared for glory

IV. God's Rights

vs. 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

A. God's Rights of Ownership... The Sovereign King

B. "The Same Lump of Clay": the putrid, rejected pile of sinful humanity; not as originally created but as fallen in sin in Adam

C. God Has the Right to Make Vessels of Honor

D. God Has the Right to Make Vessels of Dishonor

V. God's Reason

Romans 9:22-23 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory--

A. God's Grace in Explaining

1. Amazing! After the Rebuke Comes the Reason!
2. God could have chosen to cut off all discussion, all explanation
3. However, God is zealous to help us understand

B. God's Reason for Everything: A Display of His Glory

Illus. "Display" When I was an engineer, I would go to **design shows** in which hundreds of companies would compete for our attention with **elaborate displays** of their products... these displays were incredibly expensive... some looked like real **mahogany wood**, others had state of the art **plasma TV screens**; others had **futuristic-looking** brochure racks or curved countertops where sales reps could lay out their catalogues or examples of their products

The companies knew that, as the **prospective customers** were strolling through the exhibit hall, each exhibitor had only **a few seconds to catch their eye**, a few key moments with which to make an impression

Companies would **spare no expense** to make sure their displays were of the highest quality... they would put their best-looking products out in the most expensive and elaborate displays to make sure they made an impression

If a company is zealous to make the best display of their product, how much more zealous is God to make the best display of His glory??

C. God's Glory Put on Display in Creation and in History

D. God's Glory Put on Display Even More in Redemption IN CHRIST

1. Christ entered the world to put **God the Father** on display

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being

2. God displays His **righteousness** and **justice** in Christ AT THE CROSS

Romans 3:21-26 [We are] justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

3. God displays His **love** in Christ AT THE CROSS

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

4. God displays His **power** in Christ AT THE EMPTY TOMB

Power over death in raising Christ from the dead

Romans 1:4 and [Christ] through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

5. God displays His patience through Christ in Paul's conversion

1 Timothy 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Summary: The gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest display of God's glory in history... God put His attributes on clear display in Christ throughout His life

But the highest display of God's glory occurred in the cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ, and the amazing advance of the gospel for 2000 years!!

E. God's Glory is Put on Display in Both Types of Vessels

1. Two types of "vessels"

a. "vessel" = kitchen container (like a pitcher, bowl, platter) or implement or tool... something fashioned for a purpose to accomplish a certain task, or to hold a certain fluid

b. Verse 21: "vessel of honor" vs. "vessel of dishonor"

i) "honor" refers to that which is usually conferred on God... praise, honor, glory... perhaps a vessel so crafted that it can hold the most valuable commodity

Illus. When I bought Christ's engagement ring, I bought it from one of the best jewelers in Boston... The jeweler knew how to present such a valuable thing... it was in an exquisitely made box

ii) "dishonor" could either be a strong word of disapproval or rebuke, of rejection... or (as some translations have it) "common use"

Focus is on the potter here... what He has power to make out of the SAME LUMP of CLAY

Remember the overall context: Paul is answering the question "Why are so many of the Jews rejecting Christ?"

The image of the potter shaping the clay is part of Paul's answer... an awesome picture of God's sovereign determination in salvation

c. Vs. 22-23: “vessels of wrath” vs. “vessels of mercy”

KEY CONCEPT: God does all this to DISPLAY HIS GLORY!!!

2. One type of glory shown in the vessel of honor... the vessel of mercy
3. Another type of glory shown in the vessel of dishonor... the vessel of wrath

VI. God is Glorified in the Vessels of Wrath

A. Paul’s Fragmented Question: “If God...”

“If God, even though desiring to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known, endured...”

1. Paul begins a question that he never answers
2. One pastor gave a possible completion of this fragmented question by looking at Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address

March 4, 1865: wrestling with the significance of the Civil War, ended up asking a theological question:

“If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, **shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?** Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

In other words, if God has willed this war, should we conclude that He is no longer loving, no longer just, no longer compassionate, no longer wise??

What Lincoln asked about the Civil War, it seems Paul asks about election:

3. If God, for His own glory, created people out of that sinful lump, knit them together, sustained them for years despite their rebellion against Him, then justly brings on them the due penalty for their sin... and if God, for His own glory, created another people out of that same sinful lump and poured out His mercy on them and forgave their sins and prepared them for glory...

shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

Is God any less loving? Any less just? Any less compassionate? Any less gracious and merciful? **NO!!**

4. That is Paul's question... "What if God did this? Is He any less to be worshipped?"

B. What God Displays in Vessels of Wrath

1. His wrath: if there were no reprobate, we would never have seen the flood or Noah or the fire and brimstone of Sodom and Gomorrah; or the destruction of Babylon after Belshazzar's feast, or the ruins of Berlin ending Nazi Germany 60 years ago this month
2. His power
 - a. God put His power on display with Pharaoh and the ten plagues
 - b. So also God uses the opposition of Satan, His demons and wicked men to prove His power to overcome great obstacles
 - c. God overcame the obstacle of the Christ-hating Roman empire, the bloodthirsty Viking invasions, and the Satanic Nazi war machine by His mighty power
 - d. AND God will overcome the immense obstacle of Islam by His mighty power too!!

God uses the rebellion of wicked people to demonstrate how powerful He is

3. His longsuffering patience

Romans 9:22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction?

- a. God puts up with more sin than we can possibly imagine
- b. God does not immediately judge it, crush it, destroy it
- c. Rather God shows astounding patience and longsuffering
 - i) God put up with the sin of the Amorites for five hundred years

Genesis 15:16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

- ii) Jews broke God's commands in the Law of Moses for centuries... only after hundreds of years of warnings did He exile the people
- iii) God puts up with sinners all over the world for decades... long-suffering

Illus. 19th century debate; godly pastor vs. renowned Scottish atheist, timing the wrath of God with a pocket watch, which he dramatically dangled on a chain over the pulpit... "If there is a God, I will give Him three minutes to destroy me for all the blasphemies I've spoken here tonight..." HIGH DRAMA as everyone waited out the time

Godly pastor answered: **"Did my esteemed colleague really think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in a mere three minutes?!"**

4. Another "DISPLAY" not mentioned here: His love for enemies

Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

God uses the vessels of wrath to put Himself on display... His wrath, His power, His patience, and His love for enemies

C. How God Deals with Vessels of Wrath

1. He creates them... this is immensely significant
 - a. Even though He knows full well they will end up in hell, He fashions them in their mother's wombs
 - b. Prime example: Judas

Matthew 26:24-25 It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Amazing... Jesus said it would have been better for Judas if he had never been born... but it was God who knit Judas together in his mother's womb... God chose something that was NOT better for Judas, **but it was better for the world!!**

2. He lavishes goodness on them... even though they hate Him and worship His rivals, He still gives them so many blessings!!!

[to pagan idol-worshippers in Derbe] Acts 14: 17 He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

3. He withholds His just punishment from them FOR A SEASON
4. BUT... He records every careless word they have spoken... every single deed, thought, motive

5. He hardens their hearts (as we have learned in Romans 9:18)
6. He limits the damage they do and controls the effects of their evil
7. He justly takes their lives from them... the death penalty for sin
8. He judges them with perfect justice on Judgment Day
9. He destroys them eternally in hell
10. BUT He does not regenerate them by His sovereign grace

VII. God is Glorified in the Vessels of Mercy

***Romans 9:22-23* What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which HE has prepared beforehand for glory**

A. The Audience of Glory

1. God put up with the vessels of wrath for one central reason: to give the vessels of His mercy time to repent

***2 Peter 3:9* The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

2. God put his wrath on display for the elect... the vessels of His mercy
 - a. vs. 22-23 “In order to” ... vessels of wrath exist in part to accomplish something in the vessels of mercy
 - b. It seems that God wills that there be some vessels of wrath at least in part so that the elect would KNOW and DEEPLY FEEL what we have been saved from
 - c. If there were no hell, no unrepentant sinners... If the “smoke of their torment did not rise forever and ever”, our gratitude to Christ for His grace would be diminished
 - d. When we stand on Judgment Day, when the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, when the goats, the unbelievers, get the just punishment for their sins and are cast into the Lake of Fire, when the sheep get to come into the Kingdom which we did not deserve and we realize that we truly deserved hell but because of Christ, we are getting heaven, how sweet is our experience of His grace

3. God HAS MORE TO SHOW US than that!

- a. All the displays we've mentioned were for an audience... and the elect are the audience
- b. God put his power and wrath on display in the vessels of wrath
- c. God also put His love and justice on display at the cross of Jesus Christ
- d. **“God did this to make the riches of His glory KNOWN to the objects of His mercy... even us”**
- e. We are the glad, delighted audience of God's glory... we are the ones He's putting on the display for!! It was for us, to see and savor and delight in His glory
- f. He'll be showing us new aspects of His glory forever and ever
- g. Heaven is no boring place, but we'll keep seeing new aspects of His glory
- h. New Heavens and New Earth, we the audience, like Lewis and Clark, discovering new vistas of glory over the crest of the next hill... we will stand in awe as we see some new aspect of perfect glory
- i. We'll poke each other and say “Did you see that?!!”
- j. More and more display of God's glory... especially in His tender kindness to us in Christ Jesus

*Ephesians 2:6-7 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ **in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.***

For AGES and AGES God will have more and more to show us of His grace and kindness

B. What is Put on Display? The Riches of Glory

in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory

1. The wealthy of the world amass their riches in different ways; and they like to put their wealth on display
 - a. Bill Gates's riches are, for the most part, in Microsoft stock
 - b. Over a century ago, John D. Rockefeller amassed his fortune in the oil industry... at one point his monopoly, Standard Oil, controlled 90% of the entire oil industry, from the wells, through the rail lines for transportation,

and the refineries... it was a money-making machine unlike any the world had seen up to that point

- c. At that same time, J.P. Morgan was building the House of Morgan, and his riches were in stocks and high finances
 - d. In the 1970s, the billionaire Hunt brothers of Texas tried to corner the world's market in silver
 - e. Today, the House of Saud controls all the astonishing oil reserves of the Arabian boot, and thus were able to name the country of Saudi Arabia after themselves... their riches are also in oil
 - f. Warren Buffet, the second richest human being on earth, has made his billions in stocks and bonds
 - g. Other magnates, like Donald Trump, make their fortune in real estate development
 - h. The world amasses its riches in the stuff of this planet
2. Christians are wealthier than all of these put together... not in gold, silver, oil, real estate, stocks, bonds, jewelry, art, rare collectables or anything perishable... our riches are in GLORY
 3. God is going to put Himself on display for the elect for ages and ages... He is going to show us ever clearer revelations of His creativity and power and kindness and gentleness... all of it will be GLORY
 4. How incredibly encouraging should this one phrase be to you: THE RICHESS OF HIS GLORY... God will show you how rich He is, and therefore, as heirs with Christ, how rich you are!!

C. The Vessels of Glory

1. The phrase here is literally "vessels of mercy"
2. BUT earlier in Romans 9 we learned what kind of mercy God was speaking about
3. Moses desired to see God's glory: "**Now show me your glory**" he said
4. God said He would pass all of His goodness in front of Moses and display the hindparts of His glory, for no one can see Him and live
5. Then He said on what grounds He would display His glory to a sinner like Moses: "**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy**"

6. We are the ones who will see all of God's glory forever and ever... we are the vessels of mercy!!! We are the vessels of glory
7. "Vessels" can mean "tools" or "implements"... we are tools in God's hands to display God's glory through the advancement of His Kingdom

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

8. BUT "vessels" usually means "containers"... we are going to be filled with God like a vessel filled with oil
9. We are going to be saturated with the glory of God through and through
10. It will permeate us and change us forever... like the way Moses' face was shining after He would see some of God's glory
11. Only in heaven, it will so fill us completely we will shine like the sun
12. That process is going on right now in the elect... we are becoming more and more glorious in Christ

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

13. But at death it will be accomplished forever... we will be like a sponge soaked in the glory of God, and we will thereby become glorious ourselves

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

D. The Preparation for Glory

1. God is preparing us day after day for that eternity
 - a. Like the potter, He is shaping the elect for glory
 - b. "Prepared in advance for glory" Paul writes
2. God is NOT preparing our bodies for glory... for they are part of this sin cursed world

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 *or God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

1 Corinthians 15:50-52 *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

3. He is preparing our souls for eternal glory

4. Literally, He is preparing a place for us and us for the place

John 14:1-3 *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

Illus. Contractor working on a majestic mansion; sometimes takes a long time completing the task... Christ has been working on this mansion for two thousand years... but it's not a physical building project, with physical stones made of marble or granite or covered with gold or inlaid with rare jewels

The building material are PEOPLE, souls from every nation on earth; shaped, crafted, PREPARED for glory by the gospel and the Holy Spirit

Romans 9:23 *What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory--*

5. We ARE the place God will dwell... we ARE the eternal temple... we ARE the New Jerusalem; and when WE are fully prepared, Christ will dwell in us and with us eternally by His Spirit

Revelation 21:1-2 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

Christ has been preparing His bride for two thousand years; when she is perfect and ready, He will marry her and we will dwell with Him in overwhelming glory for eternal ages

6. In the meantime, everything that happens to us is for a purpose; everything comes through the wise and sovereign hands of God... a wise recipe for glory... some trials (illness, unemployment, unanswered prayers, physical

sufferings, disappointments, persecutions, weariness, anxieties, and countless other griefs) and some delights (spiritual blessings, comfort in the Holy Spirit

VIII. Application

1. Christian... feel the hands of the potter all over your life

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

- a. When you hear a good sermon, God is preparing you in advance for glory
- b. When you read a missionary biography, God is preparing you in advance for glory
- c. When you get diagnosed with cancer, God is preparing you in advance for glory
- d. When you lose your job, God is preparing you in advance for glory
- e. When you go to the Grand Canyon and marvel, God is preparing you in advance for glory
- f. When you sin, and God disciplines you, and the Holy Spirit convicts you, and you confess it, and God assures you of His forgiveness, and you yearn never to commit that sin again... God is preparing you in advance for glory

2. Furthermore, God is USING YOU to prepare OTHERS in advance for glory

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- a. When you use your spiritual gift to build up the church, God is using you to prepare others in advance for glory
- b. When you spend an hour praying for unreached people groups, God is using you to prepare others in advance for glory
- c. When you invite someone to church, God is using you to prepare others in advance for glory
- d. When you disciple your children in the gentleness of Christ, God is using you to prepare others in advance for glory
- e. When you cherish your spouse, God is using you to prepare others in advance for glory

- f. When you give to missions, or support a crisis pregnancy center, or write a letter to the editor in behalf of righteousness, or speak a word of encouragement, God is using you to prepare others in advance for glory
3. To our non-Christian friends: Don't you yearn to have the master potter shape and mold you for glory? Don't you yearn to have Him soften your heart and craft you after the pattern of Christ? Don't you yearn to have Christ's blood atone for all your sins, accept you kindly, adopt you into His family, and begin to craft you for glory?

COME TO CHRIST TODAY... He is the potter, we are the clay!