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The Indictment Read

Romans 1 Part 3

Prayer: *Father, again we just thank you for gathering us together again this morning. And Lord, I confess this has been difficult material these last few weeks, difficult stuff to hear, difficult stuff to preach. And again, I pray for your Spirit's presence, I pray for your Holy Spirit to accompany us as we open up your book, as we look into it, Lord, there is much there for us to learn and to grow by. So we pray your Holy Spirit's presence and again we pray this is of permanent value. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been spending some considerable time examining a disturbing but nonetheless highly accurate statement that's been written by Paul in the book of Romans. The statement speaks about the wrath of God and the consequences thereof. God states that his wrath has been revealed from heaven because mankind has committed in God's eyes the one sin that is at the core of almost every other sin, and that is the suppression of truth about who God is. *Romans 1:18 says: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against*

all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Because we have suppressed the truth about God, we are experiencing God's wrath which unfolds through three ever deepening layers of God's wrath revealed. Three times the scripture says, "God gave them up," "God gave them up," "God gave them up." And in each case we saw that the wrath of God is not expressed through famine or earthquake or disease but rather through a progressive removal of God's wisdom and input leaving man more and more isolated by his own rebellion.

We have thus far looked up the first instance of God giving us up. And the first giving up was what brought us wholesale into our national obsession with pornography. *Romans 1:24 says: Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. It was fitting that God would take his hand off our culture and in the very area that we had rejected him. Because we chose to worship creatures instead of the creator, God gave us up to the dishonoring of our creaturely bodies. And instead of recognizing our error, we embraced it and promoted the worship of the creature rather than the creator. Verse 26 says: For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those*

that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Well, we spent last week looking at the second giving up which was the wholesale embrace of homosexuality. Well, to finish out this downward spiral, we find ourselves now at the third phase of being given up. And once again we see that the cause of God's wrath being revealed in these three giving ups is the refusal to see or recognize the truth about God. This is Romans 1 starting at verse 28. It says: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* This is not fun stuff. And this morning I want to look at this passage from three different perspectives. First we want to look at its effect, then we want to look at its cause, and finally we want to look at what all of this means.

So first let's look at the effect. God is describing here an ongoing trajectory, an arc, if you will, that starts with suppressing the truth, continues with the dishonoring of bodies and goes further still with the dishonorable passions and then in the end winds up embracing a collection of 21 different reflections that God refers to as a debased mind. There are many different ways that commentators have looked at this list. Some divide it into different groups depending on the type of depravity, others see it as part of a continuing downward spiral. I want to just rapidly go through this list allowing the words that everybody understands to just speak for themselves and using Baker's New Testament Commentary to define words which might be confusing. So the list starts with unrighteousness, and this is the core sin that unleashes all the other sins. And again we go back to God's statement, he says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Next we have evil, and again that's people who take delight in what is doing wrong. We have next covetousness which is a craving for more and more, and then followed by malice which is delighting in evil for evil's sake. Envy and murder we all understand. Strife is a quarrelsome disposition and its consequences. Deceit is cunning and treachery. Maliciousness is the desire to harm people. That's followed by

gossips and slanderers which says what the gossips do secretly, slanderers do openly, followed by haters of God. And again, we have the new atheists like Dawkins and Hitchens, et cetera. That's followed by insolent, that means treating others with contempt. Then we have haughty and boastful, inventors of evil or novel forms of evil. Again, you think of the porn industry, they're responsible for a whole slew of new technical innovations. That's followed by disobedient to parents. Foolish, which means lacking any moral sense. Faithless, heartless, that meaning is without natural affection. Again, think of the abortion industry and how they have proliferated. And finally ruthless. Those last four: Foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless, all of these describe the effect. This is the end point of the trajectory that starts with the suppression of truth.

Now what is amazing here in a reflection on our culture is that most of these conditions are no longer considered socially unacceptable. I mean, coveting, envy, haughtiness and boasting, they all come under the heading now of looking out for number one. There are numerous TV shows dedicated specifically to gossip and slander. Insolent, haters of God are also now either famous TV commentators like Bill Maher or the new atheists like Dawkins and Hitchens or organizations like the Freedom From Religion Foundation who make it their business to drive any aspect of God out of our

culture. Being heartless and ruthless are now what you need to succeed in business, according to so many people. Even the seven deadly sins are no longer considered that deadly.

Frank Furedi of *Spiked* writes this -- quote -- "They used to be called the seven deadly sins: Lust, gluttony, avarice, sloth, anger, envy, pride. They were deadly because they led to spiritual death, and thus to damnation. Now, some theologians are not sure where to hold the line on sin, or even, indeed, if there is a line to hold. Today, the notion of personal guilt, which underpinned the idea of the seven deadly sins, seems only to exist in a caricatured form. Western culture can only make sense of the act of sinning as a symptom of some regrettable psychological disease. Behaviour that was once denounced as sinful is today discussed through the language of therapy rather than the language of morality. The old deadly sins tend to be looked on as personality disorders that require treatment, rather than transgressions that deserve punishment."

Like I said, over half the sins I just mentioned are perfectly acceptable today in our culture and apparently many of the other ones can be explained away psychologically. I've said it many, many times, our culture's answer to shame is shamelessness. And those are the effects and they're by and large self-evident. So we

have to ask ourselves, okay, if those are the effects, what is the cause? How did we get here? Well, no one has done a better job of describing how we got here than Pastor John Piper who would tell you flat out that it has to do with one word and one word only, and that word is "glory." This is what Piper says, "The created universe is all about glory. The deepest longing of the human heart and the deepest meaning of heaven and earth are summed up in this: the glory of God. The universe was made to show it, and we were made to see it and savor it. Nothing less will do. Which is why the world is as disordered and as dysfunctional as it is. We have exchanged the glory of God for other things."

I think that part of our problem is that we really don't understand glory at all. And because we don't understand glory, we really can't understand God. See, God says that everything in all creation is created to glorify him and he could not have made it any clearer when he said in verse 19 and 20: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* Paul is saying here our failure to understand that, it's not a matter of some kind of intellectual shortcoming. It's far more a matter of human wills refusing to acknowledge what is

overwhelmingly self-evident. God says that every single part of his creation is ordered and structured in ways that bring honor and glory to him. I mean I've said it many, many times that it's self-evident that creation glorifies God simply by existing. Every creature, every plant, everything that God has created all fits into this incredibly complex mosaic that brings glory to him, and all that's created glorifies God simply by being. *Psalm 148 says: Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.* See, every creature, everything created by God does what it's designed by God to do, and what they do is self-evident in their design. I mean you look at a fish and it's obvious instantly that this was a creature that was designed to swim. And then you see those videos of a 15-foot great white shark leaping way out of the water in slow motion, you see the magnificence of this creature glorifying God in its creatureliness. You look at a bird and it's obvious it was designed to fly. You see an eagle flying and you get the exact same sense, that this creature is glorifying God simply by existing. Fish swim and birds

fly, beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds all in their own ways, they all glorify God. This is what God says we are willfully ignoring. The God glorifying beauty of everything around us is no longer ascribed to God but now it's ascribed either to nothing or to the other God that we corporately all worship, mother nature.

Let me begin to describe our problem by talking about one of the smallest components of God's glory. I want to talk a little bit this morning about squirrels. I tell you why. I spend most of my time preparing my sermon, I sit by a window that looks out on a tree in which a family of squirrels have lived for the last year. And I watched last spring, I watched the mother venture out with three of these extremely nervous little babies that are following directly behind her and every time something spooked them, they go running back to the tree. And now I watch them and they're just racing around the tree all the time just chasing each other and it's just fun to watch. I mean the tree is right next to our barn and it just amazed me to see the squirrel leap from the tree right to the broadside of the barn and then just go right up the side of the barn as if they have some kind of magic glue on their feet. Well it turns out that they actually do. I mean I don't know if you know this but they can actually rotate their ankle bones 180 degrees so they can run down a tree headfirst and have their back

feet cling to the bark as they run. I see them go running full speed across a telephone wire. I just marvel at the precision, of the balance that enables them to do that without flinching. I confess, I get really ticked off when they go after my bird feeder. But I have an enormous amount of respect for squirrels, not the least of which is when you look into it, you find out what an amazing animal it is. We have walnut trees around our property. And every fall they litter the ground. They're almost the size of apples. There's just thousands of them. But in a matter of weeks, they're all gone. I mean they get processed and then they get buried by the squirrels. And if you're familiar with walnuts, you know that they have this very thick green husk on them. I just sit there and I watch the squirrels pick them up and they spin them in their mouths as their mouths are chomping away and the green husk is flying in the air, literally processing them, and it takes literally seconds to just reduce it to just a nut, and then they look for a place to bury it. And when you stop and look into how that happens, it becomes even more amazing. I read about it and found out that squirrels do amazing things with the food that they bury. You see, you can't just bury something without taking a mental note of exactly where it is so that you can go back at some point and dig it up. You got to find the exact spot that you buried it or you're just looking blindly. Well, it turns out that researchers have found that squirrels are able to note and locate

over ten thousand different objects, noting each one and its exact place of burial. I also learned that there's other lazy squirrels who sit back and watch more industrious squirrels burying their stuff, memorized that spot and go back and steal it, and that there are squirrels who see them doing that and fake that they're burying it, keep it and bury it somewhere else. I mean this is astounding stuff. The amazing thing is how perfectly squirrels fit into God's plan. I mean they inevitably forget some of the nuts and the seeds they bury thus helping the trees to spread and grow. You know just the other day was that really cold day with real bright, bright sunny day and I watched one of those squirrels, he's hanging 40 feet up just by his back feet, he's hanging right out in the air, he's munching on one of these nuts that he's just buried and just sitting in the sun. And I thought to myself, isn't evolution wonderful. I mean isn't nothing glorious? Isn't mother nature marvelous? I thought of all of the times that we suppress the truth of God's creation. I can look at that squirrel and give glory to God for his invisible attributes displayed in something he has made, something as inconsequential as a squirrel or I can say God had nothing to do with this, that that great 21st century God no-thing or mother nature is responsible for all of creation including squirrels.

And then when I'm thinking about animals, I can start to think

about another creature that's closely related to the squirrel. It's Latin name is *rattus norvegicus*, it's also known as the Norway rat or the sewer rat. And you know just saying the name makes people shudder. I mean it's considered commensal with human beings. That means it is closely associated with humans. Wherever humans go, rats go as well. They're not quite parasites but they're perilously close. And everywhere this creature goes, filth, disease, contamination and corruption follow. I think it's no small irony that these creatures are used in medical testing because to quote livescience.com: "Their genetic, biological and behavioral characters closely resemble those of humans, and many symptoms of human conditions can be replicated in mice and rats." Now to be sure, rats are not capable of moral reasoning but I think one of the reasons why people are universally repulsed by them is that they in some sense replicate in the animal world the fallenness of humans, the arc, the trajectory, if you will, of corruption that our text this morning is describing. I mean we can see God's glory in something as insignificant as a squirrel and at the same time sense its direct opposite in a sewer rat, because they serve as reminders that everything in creation is either connected to the glory of God or committed to denying it.

Paul has told us in our text this morning that everything about God's eternal power and divine nature is reflected in what he has

made, that is it's his handiwork. Again *Psalm 19: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. John 1:3: All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. Colossians 1:16: For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him.* Here's the part that makes our text this morning so grand and glorious on the one hand and so perfectly horrific on the other. You see, what we're seeing this morning, again, is the description of an arc, it's a trajectory that goes in either of two directions. It goes in one direction when you acknowledge God as the author of creation, it goes in the exact opposite direction when you refuse to. What truly matters is that your life, my life, all human life is either a success or a failure depending on what arc you are on. And how we understand creation's connection to the glory of God, again John Piper, this is how he explains it. He says this:

"'The heavens declare the glory of God.' That is why all the universe exists. It's all about glory. The Hubble Space Telescope sends back infrared images of faint galaxies perhaps twelve billion light-years away. That's twelve billion times six trillion miles. Even within our Milky Way there are stars so great as to defy

description, like Eta Carinae, which is five million times brighter than our sun. Sometimes people stumble over this vastness in relation to the apparent insignificance of man. It does seem to make us infinitesimally small. But the meaning of this magnitude is not mainly about us. It's about God. 'The heavens declare the glory of God,' says the scripture. The reason for 'wasting' so much space on a universe to house a speck of humanity is to make a point about our Maker, not us. 'Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these stars? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.'" He goes on to say: "The deepest longing of the human heart is to know and enjoy the glory of God. We were made for this."

You know, a number of years ago I was memorizing scripture, and I memorized this one scripture, it was a group that I was memorizing, I never gave it a lot of thought but over and over again it's been coming back to me. I also say the more scripture you put into the hard drive inside your head, the more God is going to access it to speak to you through. This was the scripture: *Jeremiah 9:23*. It says: *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices*

steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." Understand what God is saying here, understand he's saying that there are three things that human beings typically gravitate towards to give meaning to their lives: There's wisdom, there's power, and there's wealth. And most people think if you have those three, well you're absolutely set for life. But listen to what God is saying. He says if you're smart and you're powerful and you're rich, don't boast about that, because that in the end is going to get you nowhere. But he says there is something worth boasting about. And it's exactly the opposite of the trajectory that we're looking at this morning. God says: *"But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me."* This is God himself saying that here's what really matters is understanding and knowing God. There's nothing more important in your entire life than that.

I remember some thirty years ago when I first read J.I. Packer's wonderful book *Knowing God*, I remember being so moved by his opening statement. He said this -- quote -- "I walked in the sunshine with a scholar who had effectively forfeited his prospects of academic advancement by clashing with church dignitaries over the gospel of grace. 'But it doesn't matter,' he said at length, 'for I have known God, and they haven't.'" The remark was a mere parentheses, a passing comment on something I had said, but it has

stuck with me and set me thinking. Not many of us, I think, would ever naturally say that we have known God. The words imply a definiteness and a matter-of-fact ness of experience to which most of us, if we are honest, have to admit that we are still strangers. We claim perhaps, to have a testimony, and can rattle off our conversion story with the best of them; we say that we know God. This, after all, is what evangelicals are expected to say, but would it occur to us to say, without hesitation, and with reference to particular events in our own personal history, that we have known God? I doubt it, for I suspect that with most of us, experience of God has never become so vivid as that."

And there's a reason for that. You see, the first problem that we encounter in trying to know God is that there is certainly huge aspects about God that are unknowable. In fact it's one of God's attributes, it's called incomprehensibility. Now I've often said that us trying to know God is like a German Shepherd trying to know calculus. It doesn't matter if you're the greatest teacher in the history of mankind, you will never succeed in teaching a German Shepherd calculus. Dogs and humans are separated by such orders of magnitude in terms of comprehensibility that there's absolutely no way to bridge that gap. We're just too different a creature. And when it comes to God and man, we're talking about a finite creature trying to understand an infinite Creator. We have the same type of

problem only it's amplified. But here's where Christianity differs from so many other mystery religions. You see, we can know God, not by trying to reason from the finite to the infinite, people make that mistake all the time, but by understanding God's gracious revelation. That is to say what we can know all we need to know about God through what God has chosen to reveal to us. *Deuteronomy 29* says: *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* You see, God has shown us and demonstrated to us that the way we conquer our inability to know God is to go to his revealed will and spend our energy, our wealth, our power, and presence on accumulating what really matters. As God says it's not wisdom, it's not might, it's not wealth, it's the knowledge of God.

So here's what all of this means. Here is where the actual real horror is of what our text this morning is getting at. We've looked at 21 different characteristics that follow the arc of suppressing the truth and rejecting God, but in that very scripture that introduces those terrible characteristics is the ultimate indictment by God that perfectly captures of horror of finding yourself on that end of the scale. I mean I read it this morning but it's easy to gloss over at the very beginning. Let me just re-read it to you noting something that should fill anyone with

dread. I want to read it to you from three different translations just to show you, to give you more of its impact. This is the very start. This is *Romans 1:28*. It says: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.* The very same words are translated in the NIV: *Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a debased mind, so that they would do what ought not to be done.* And finally in the New King James version it says: *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.* Those are three different ways of describing arriving at the end of the arc of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

You could or should ask yourself, how could we ever get to a place so far removed from where we were originally intended to be? I mean, how could the very creatures created by God to glorify him and enjoy him forever get to the place where the very thought of their creator repulsed them? Well, it happens like it always happens. It happens incrementally. You see, what God was describing in our text this morning was in fact a destination, and you get there by taking an arc, a pathway, a fork in the road that you travel either to the place where thoughts of God disgust you or where you live for the glory of God. And once again, Piper sums up

brilliantly where that leads. He says this: "The deepest longing of the human heart is to know and enjoy the glory of God. We were made for this. 'Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth whom I created for my glory,' says the Lord. To see it, to savor it, and to show it -- that is why we exist. The untracked, unimaginable stretches of the created universe are a parable about the inexhaustible 'riches of his glory'. The physical eye is meant to say to the spiritual eye, 'Not this, but the Maker of this, is the Desire of your soul.' Saint Paul said, 'We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' Or, even more precisely, he said that we were 'prepared beforehand for glory.' This is why we were created -- that He might make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy. The ache in every human heart is an ache for this. But we suppress it and do not see fit to have God in our knowledge. Therefore, the entire creation has fallen into disorder."

I was recently struck by a comment made -- and Darcy, I feel bad for you for saying this -- it's by the quarterback of the Green Bay Packers, Aaron Rodgers. She's a huge Green Bay Packer fan. Unfortunately, Aaron Rodgers had to say this about his Christian upbringing. This is a *Fox News* article that quoted Rogers, saying -- quote -- "I don't know how you can believe in a God who wants to condemn most of the planet to a fiery hell," Rodgers

continued. "What type of loving, sensitive, omnipresent, omnipotent being wants to condemn his beautiful creation to a fiery hell at the end all this?" The star quarterback added that religion can cause a divide. Quote -- "Religion can be a crutch," Rogers continued, according to the magazine. "It can be something that people have to have, to make themselves feel better. Because it's set up binary, it's us and them, saved and unsaved, heaven and hell, it's enlightened and heathen, it's holy and righteous, that makes a lot of people feel better about themselves."

Now I understand that Rodgers is indicting a God who he thinks is unloving, tyrannical, and brutal, but I don't think he even begins to understand the indictment that God has on us. Now God's indictment of us might read as follows: He might say: I created you as the very crown of my creation, as the ultimate creature who alone shared my image. I made you in my likeness; male and female I made you. And I designed you as the ultimate expression of my creative power. You were designed to reflect my glory, to eventually share in it as well. I surrounded you with hundreds of millions of living, moving creatures who all stood as proofs of a creator along with billions of non living creation, such as mountains, oceans, stars, and planets, all of which attested to my eternal power and nature, and you took that proof and you suppressed the truth about it. You made a conscious decision to

reject me and worship my creation instead of me. So I gave you up to the worship of creatures, to the lustful worship of bodies themselves. And when you plunged headlong into that worship, I gave you up to dishonorable passions where you abandoned the natural order of creation for that which is unnatural. And now we've reached the place where the ultimate creature created to glory me and enjoy me forever has so fully rebelled against me, that not only does he refuse to worship me but he now intensely resents even having to think about me. Again *Romans 1:28: And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.*

So now God and man are so separate that mankind originally designed to focus in on, to dwell on, to glory in, and to worship as creator now so thoroughly detests the One who is responsible for his existence that he refuses to entertain thoughts of his creator in his mind. How do you think God sees this? I mean I once heard someone say that if God were to take the entire population of earth and fling it headlong into hell itself, the entire universe would still shout, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord GOD Almighty!" But that's not what God did at all. The creator himself entered into flesh and he walked among his creatures perfectly and he gave us the opportunity to prove to the universe our hatred for him. We

not only slaughtered the creator, we tortured him as well. We abused him first and then we made sport with him. And after we grew tired of that, we flogged him, ripping the flesh off his body. And when the brutalized bloodied pulp of this man who had been whipped and scourged was brought before us for one last ditch attempt at mercy, Matthew's gospel says this: *Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him up to be crucified.*

So once again let me just sum up the indictment. We suppress God's truth. We deny God's creation. We worship the creature rather than the creator, and we wallow in lust and dishonorable passions, ending up in a place where the very creature designed to glorify God can't stand even having a thought about God in our brains. So God makes himself vulnerable to us as human beings and we slaughter him, relishing every opportunity we can to torture him as we're doing it, and God should be perfectly okay with that? Aaron

Rodgers is upset that God is upset with us. You see, here's what Aaron is missing. You see it wasn't just the Jews and the Romans who put Jesus to death. It was you and me. *"His blood be on us and on our children"* was a prophesy, it was a curse and it was a promise. The prophesy was without Christ, every single one of us would take our place on the very same road, in the very same crowd, cheering on Christ's crucifixion. I think of the song that says: Behold the Man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders, ashamed I hear my mocking voice, call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there, until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished!

The curse was the curse of sin itself which Jesus paid for with his perfect life. And there's also a promise. A prophesy, a curse, and a promise. The promise was the very words of the crowd shouted, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"* Now as usual, there's deep irony in what we human beings say. God uses even the most wicked and vile of statements made by humans to illustrate exactly why in Christ we have now been freed up and restored to the role we were intended to have, and that is to glory in, of, and about the beauty of God in Christ. You see, it's only because the blood of Christ is on us and our children that we've been given the gift of faith that the world so desperately needs, that we found ourselves as members of the kingdom of God on the opposite arc of

what the world has taken. Because we've been given the gift of the gospel received, we've been freed to experience just a tiny taste of what is in store for us. And again as Piper puts it, he says this:

The Christian Gospel is "the gospel of the glory of Christ" because its final aim is that we should see and savor and show the glory of Christ. For this is none other than the glory of God. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." "He is the image of the invisible God." When the light of the gospel shines in our hearts, it is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And when we "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" that hope is "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." In essence the glory of Christ is the glory of God and that's what we live for.

See, folks, there's something that we do have some common with squirrels. Both squirrels and people exist to bring glory to God. Squirrels do it just by doing what squirrels do. We as human beings have a choice. We get to choose which arc we're going to travel down and the vast majority of us choose the one that ends with us. And it brings us eventually to a place where we hate even the thought of God. That's the arc that every one of us was on

before we received the grace of God. And it is the task and the mission that God has given us to bring the gospel to people who don't even know that they are in that state.

Paul ends his statement in *Romans 1* with this abysmal thought, he says this: *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* There it is, folks. That's the end point of the arc. That's where all this is going outside of Christ. But we're not outside of Christ. Do you have any idea how blessed we are to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Do we have any idea what we have in store for us? I mean do you realize that God even now right at this moment is growing us in the glory he intends to share with us eternally? *2 Corinthians 3:18* says: *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.* Folks, we're going to rule the universe sharing and growing in the glory of God forever. We know now that there's more stars in the heavens than there are grains of sand on the earth and that all of heaven is there to display the glory of God and that we are going to have a vital part in that. Folks, it's literally beyond comprehension to even imagine what God has in store for us. And God puts it this way in *1 Corinthians 2*, he says: *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of*

man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

That's the good news. The bad news is that most of the people that you and I know are on the other side of the arc. They're not on the side of glory, they're on the side of judgment. And instead of cherishing the God of all glory, they -- quote -- "*do not think it worthwhile to retain thoughts of God in their minds.*" It is our task to beg, to plead, and to spend our lives seeking to change the arc of those lives by the power of his gospel. Let's pray.

Father, I just want to take a moment to praise you and thank you for the incredible gift that we have been given. Ten thousand times ten thousand lotteries couldn't begin to hold even a cup to this, and yet we've been given the treasures of the universe eternally. We are on that arc that sees your glory and the worship of your glory as what we live for. And yet the great sadness of our life is that we know that there are so many on the other arc who end up detesting even the thought of you, who cheer on others who do death defying things as if it's wonderful. Father, they are our constituency, they are the ones that we have to meet with, they're the ones that we pray for and plead for and interact with and share the gospel with. I pray for just an understanding of that great divide and the role that we have in bringing people from one side of the arc to the other. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.