

Wrath of God

Knowing God

By Pastor James Mansfield

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We live in a time when God's presence is known less in our land than for probably many decades. If you read of some of the things that God did in the 1800s and the revivals that we had and then we tip into the next century and see what the Lord was doing in the early part of that century. Read the biographies of christian people who lived in the last couple of centuries and you realize there were so many well attended churches. Someone has just kindly lent me a book of a man who was living up to the early 1960s, at a time, of course, which I can remember. And even then, there are churches in places I'm familiar with but they are gone now, and they've not been replaced. The gospel is still being preached, we should be thankful for that. Up and down our land there are many fellowships similar to ourselves which might have a different name outside, that matters not, but there are places where the gospel is being preached.

Bibles are plentiful, thank God for that, but it is a time of famine of the hearing of the Word of God. And that situation is not by chance. We could find all sorts of reasons for that but as we look at particularly today, a part of the reason for that today is God's anger, God's judgment upon our land and even across the world. We ask "Where are the equivalent of the Wesley's? Where are the Whitfield's? and the Spurgeons? The Lloyd-Jones or even the Billy Graham?" There are men today in some areas that are quite famous for their preaching but they're more famous by the power of the media than they are by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

I'd not intended to speak on this subject for a couple of weeks, but my mind was exercised as I watched and listened to much of the debate in Parliament on the BBC Parliament Channel on the debate of same-sex marriage in Parliament. There were those there who spoke well and defended certain professions and that was really one of the main thrusts of the debate, to try and find opt-out for registrars, for teachers, for those who would be greatly affected if they had to positively teach this particular new legislation when, in fact, it goes against their own beliefs and of course against scripture.

There were very few that actually stood up to say "This is not what God wants." I understand William McCrae made such a plea later in the debate but he was a lone voice – I believe the Lord will bless him for it. In generations past, there would've been many Christians in that place who would have been called, who would've stood and plainly defended the scriptures.

When a nation so blatantly turns its back on God, it can expect nothing less than God's anger to be turned towards it. That's common sense, that's as sure as night follows day. And our nation is not alone in these things, but, it is alone in that it has been singularly blessed of God in the past. You know, France has just introduced similar legislation but France hasn't been blessed as our country was. France hasn't known the great revivals that we've known. France hasn't known the blessing of the promotion of the Reformation and the powerful preaching of the word of God that we've known. Therefore, our judgment has the greater warrant.

Now, we've been looking at knowing God on Sunday mornings. We've been looking at what God has decided to reveal to us about Himself. I'm sure there's much that God didn't reveal because we couldn't take it in, but what he has revealed we ought to know. And we've been looking at lots of different things concerning God. One of the things that God decided to tell us about was that he does get angry. God does have a wrath. And it's not something we think of very often. Perhaps as preachers we think of a much more of our favorite subjects. But we have to be very careful that we don't turn away from things that God has revealed about himself. In fact, I think if we look at scripture we find that God reveals more about his wrath and anger than he does about almost anything else. As far as I can see, probably the only thing that surpasses that, is God's revelation concerning his holiness.

Indeed, some things we read about God, would make little sense if we weren't aware of his wrath. For example, his love. We can't understand his love until we understand why God is also a God of wrath. His mercy and his sovereign grace also lose much of their meaning unless they're seen in the light of who God is in all his character and attributes.

I wonder what you think of, when you think of the wrath of God? We might think of Sodom and Gomorrah. God came down very quickly to make a judgment there. We might think way ahead into God's future judgments such as we've read in Revelation, chapter 20. But sometimes our thinking is a little bit haphazard concerning his anger or wrath. Particularly as it's something we don't hear a lot about.

I want to first of all set out something of the character of God's wrath that we might understand what we're talking about. It isn't just the case of, people saying "Well, the wrath of God isn't the nice bit about God. That's the nasty bit about God and we can't think about that too much." It's almost making an excuse for the wrath of God. We're to get that completely out of our mind. The wrath of God is a part of who God is and unless we understand it, then we are missing something about God.

So, I want to look at something about the character of God's wrath. Then I want to look at something like five different aspects of God's wrath, how he has revealed it to us. There are different times and types of God's wrath. We can't just wrap it up and say, "God's going to be angry one day at judgment." You can use fancy words for that, theological words but I just want to kind of try and keep it simple that we might understand when we leave the chapel, I know a bit more about God's wrath and I understand it a bit more, I see how it fits into things. That's not a nasty bit of God, that's

a part of who God is and shows me the wonder of the gospel and the wonder of his sovereign grace.

Then, of course, we can't leave this subject without finally looking at the verse that I think I put on the sheet this morning, from Romans. "Now being justified by his blood we shall be saved from wrath." That's a tremendous thing. You see some things here that God is really just angry about and he's right to be angry about it. But we are saved from that wrath, we are delivered. And that's the gospel, isn't it? And so, that's why it's an important subject to know about because he goes to the very heart of the gospel.

1 The character of God's wrath.

How do you feel when you get angry? We feel a bit different don't we. I'm not talking about when you get a little bit annoyed, I'm talking about when you really get angry. You know, something really winds you up. It might be deserving or it might not. As soon as we get angry we say, "I have a right to be angry about that." And another time, we get angry and we think, "Oh, perhaps I shouldn't really be angry about that, but I can't help it," we say. There's something about us that just touches a trigger somewhere. And either way it's an unpleasant feeling.

There are two particular words that God uses in the Bible for his wrath and the first one is "thermos." We know that word a little - you think of thermonuclear. Thermonuclear explosion is something that's pretty big, isn't it? And that's how God describes his anger, that there are times when God's anger is thermonuclear. It's something massive. We actually think of when God sent the plague upon those who rebelled in Israel. All of a sudden, God just did that. That was a thermonuclear type of God's anger.

And the other word is the word "orge" that we're not so familiar with. And it relates to anger building up inside. Now, we know both of these, don't we? You know what it's like sometimes to just explode in a situation but you also know what it's like to feel something beginning to simmer. And you can feel it beginning to rise and rise and rise. A bit volcanic, isn't it? And all of a sudden it might turn into the thermonuclear rage or whatever. But we get redder and redder and that's really what the word orge means. It's becoming an anger that causes us to be very red in the face and it rises slowly.

You know, our wrath is often what we might call, intense anger. There's a bit of difference, isn't there, between just being angry and then really having a wrath. It's a really strong word. And our indignation can often be aroused by an injustice. How many of us were angry when we heard the news during the week? That a young man, a soldier, a man who had put his life on the line for his country, walking down a street in daylight, that was run over and then butchered. I mean, it's almost indescribable that such a thing should happen. And no doubt, many feel anger at that and maybe wrath. And you might say, "Well, that's not right." That's a righteous anger, we have a right to be angry like that. It's an injustice.

But sometimes our anger is out of control. Sometimes our anger comes from a misunderstanding. My friends, God's anger is not like ours. God's wrath is never self-indulgent. It's never irritable but it is a right and necessary reaction to evil. And for that we have to understand the depths of evil and the holiness of God. That God has a perfect right to be angry at evil and he never gets it wrong. God is only angry where anger is called for. You know, sometimes with our children, particularly when they were younger, sometimes you are angry with them and you tell them off and sometimes afterwards you find perhaps, that perhaps they didn't quite deserve that. I didn't know that this had happened or that situation was there.

God is only angry when anger is called for. And we may know, from time to time, a righteous anger but all God's anger is righteous. God's wrath is what we might say, always judicial. It's always correct in court. It's there for a reason. God's wrath is based on and flows from his perfect assessment of what he sees and what he knows. What we see and what we know can sometimes be plain wrong. God never gets it wrong. When God is angry, when he speaks about his wrath, it's because he has seen and he knows and this is the right response to that situation.

You know, if God was not angry at sin, if he didn't react to evil in the world, he would not be morally perfect. God's wrath is a part of God as much as his holiness, his mercy, his love and all the other ways in which he has chosen to reveal himself. So there's something about the character of God's wrath.

But then it's beginning to look at some of the types of God's wrath.

2 God's wrath can be instant and yet sometimes delayed.

In other words, you can't always pin God down. When you hear of people doing very wicked things and again, we use the example of Lee Rigby who was killed during the week. We might ask, "Why doesn't God just strike them two guys down who did that?" I can understand people asking that question. "Where is your God?" It's not for us, we know, to question the acts of God. God does do that sometimes but you can be sure that the people who do such things will know God's wrath. Maybe in time, but certainly in eternity. None can escape the wrath of God unless they are in Jesus Christ.

Having said that, there are times when God has poured out his wrath on people very quickly. We think of Sodom and Gomorrah. God just hit them, he gave some warning, it's true, but then very quickly his wrath was poured out upon that place. We take the Flood. Again, he gave lots of warning, in fact, there were hundreds of years of warning. But when the Flood came, it came very quickly. We turn over the page to the New Testament and I know it's only a small example, but we've got time to look at everything. Ananias, he lied in Acts, chapter 5. God struck him down dead instantly. There is instant wrath, instant judgment sometimes from God.

When we see events around the world that take lives. We cannot usually say with certainty, "God is judging that nation or that person." But when we see a nation that

persecutes God's people, when we see a nation that openly defies God, we have every right to say, "That nation deserves the wrath of God. And God has in his mercy and wisdom allowed something to happen in that land." And it may well be the direct anger and wrath of God. When a nation experiences environmental problems, economic problems, moral problems, whatever it be, it has no right to rile against God as some people do when, in fact, that nation has removed God from their government, from their schools and from their prisons and from its very morality.

You see, one of the implications of this legislation that's been passed recently and we saw it even before it was passed, that now if you are a prison chaplain and even if you're a chaplain in the Armed Services it's questionable now whether if you believe the Bible you can remain to be a chaplain. So, you see, in a very special way, Christians have been removed from the very areas of society where Christianity was supposed to be. Again, we've heard in Parliament this week, a teacher that is told, "This is part of the curriculum, you've got to go into that class and you've got to teach those young children these things about people's sexuality." And the teacher says, "That is so much against scripture. That is so wrong. That is sinful. I cannot do that." And so they cannot be a teacher. That is the end result.

And so, Christianity has been removed from our schools. You see, it's not simply removing a Bible, it's actually removing those who are salt and light. And so when a nation does that, then they are really saying, although of course they don't know they're saying it, "Lord, come and judge us. We invite your wrath and your anger." It's a sad situation that we find ourselves in.

And yet, we read in Nahum, chapter 1, verse 3, "The Lord is slow to anger." Isn't that a wonderful thing? Yes, there is instant wrath from God but his character very often is that he's slow to anger, he's willing to give people opportunities to repent, to change to see the error of their ways. The Lord is slow to anger and in great power. But it says, "He will not equip the wicked." He doesn't look the other way and say, "That doesn't matter." It does matter because he's God and holy. The Lord has his way, it says, in the whirlwind, in the storm and in the house. God does move the environment. Romans 8 tells us it groans under the curse and that's why we have earthquakes and volcanoes and all of those sorts of things. But God also has control of those things. The mountains quake at him, the hills melt, who can stand before his indignation, who can abide the fierceness of his anger?" Those are strong words.

But, you know, the very next verse says, let me read the last line again and I'll go straight into the next verse, "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can abide the fierceness of his anger? The Lord is good." Isn't that an amazing quick contrast. The Lord is good and he is a stronghold in a day of trouble. He knows them that trust in him. God is angry, correctly angry, at the wicked and all that goes on, but he loves his people. He is good to them. And he is good to all that will put their trust in him. And he knows those that trust in him.

So my friends, God has every right to make known his judgment instantly, if he so wills. When he does, he is always righteous in his anger. But he is also slow to anger if he so chooses.

3 God's Second Coming Wrath.

The Lord himself spoke about this when he was talking to the disciples in Matthew 24 and he says in verse 21, "Then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world." So, it's going to be greater than the Flood. "Since the beginning of the world to this time nor ever shall be except those days be shortened, there shall be no flesh saved, but for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened." It goes on about speaking of the rising of false Christs, false prophets and those that will show great signs and wonders insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. There will be those who will come and do dramatic things. We know the antichrist will, when we read other verses. And people will say, "That's wonderful. There's something special about that man if he can do that."

The Lord says here, people will be deceived. And it talks then further on about what the Lord will do at that particular time. You read more in the book of Revelation when the seals are opened and God's wrath is poured out in ways that have not been seen in the drying up of rivers and other times turning water into blood and all the things that some of us looked at in our studies a couple of years ago. And that's all the things that accompany God's return. Things that will happen when he comes to reign as a result of humanities rebellion.

And the nations at this very moment, as they continue to pass their anti-God legislation are moving towards the wrath of God. This is what the Lord says about those nations, "The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying, Let's break their bands asunder, cast away their cords from us." You see how the nations do that. Our nation in particular has been bound in law by the commandments, by the various things of God in holy scripture and that affects our marital laws, it affects our morality laws and all sorts of other things. And what the nation has been saying is, what it says here, "Cast away their cords." Snap this one and we'll have abortion, we'll snap that one and have homosexuality, we'll snap this one and we'll have this etc.

This is what God's reaction is, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." Shall laugh. Not laugh because God thinks it's funny as we might laugh at a joke. But he sits in the heavens, he shall laugh, he shall have them in derision. As if they think as nations that are as a drop in the bucket, can actually offend me by doing that. Yes, you offend me but you are only a nation. You are as nothing, says the Lord. Then, he says, he shall speak to them in his wrath. The time will come when God will speak to the nations in his wrath. In fact, in one place, the Holy Spirit says, that it is the filling up of God's wrath.

You know, at the moment, God's wrath is restrained to a great degree. When God's wrath is filled up and those seals are opened, it says there will be those that will cry for the

rocks to hide them. What from? It says, the rocks will hide us from his wrath. A time to avoid, my friends. And we can.

4 God's Judgment Wrath.

It could be said in one sense that all of God's wrath is a result of judgment but here I'm thinking about the eternal wrath in the future on what we call Judgment Day. There is a Judgment Day for believers, that's not a time of wrath, that's a time of reward. But there is Judgment Day for unbelievers and for the nations. And we read that in Revelation, chapter 20. And God uses words to describe what's going to happen at that particular time and that's when we begin to read about what the Bible calls hell, lake of fire, perdition. A place that's eternal, dark, lonely and those various issues that we are, perhaps not so familiar with as we ought to be but what are motivation for the gospel.

This is probably the area of God's wrath that people think mostly of. We read "That it is appointed unto men once to die and after death the judgment." And in Revelation 20 a description of this where John said, "I saw the dead, small and great." Remember, this wasn't just something he dreamt about, God took him there that he might see it and write it because he wanted us to know what was going to happen in the future. He's talking about books being opened, he talks about the devil being cast away and he talks about those who are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Although he speaks much of nations, he also speaks of individuals and in Romans, chapter 1, that we were looking at in our studies a few months ago, he talks about those who persist in sin. He says, "They are storing up wrath unto the day of judgment." That's the same phraseology we would use as, "I'm saving up for a car. Saving up for, putting money in the bank." We don't have paying in books anymore do we? It's all on the computer or whatever. When we had a little paying in book we would take that to the bank and we'd say, "Look, here's my 50 pounds." And they'd write 50 pounds in and stamp it and take your money and you were saving up for something. God uses that phraseology. You're storing up wrath, he says, if we persist in our sin. And one day, as our 50 pounds would be paid out so God's wrath will be paid out.

Paul wrote about those who persecute God's people. And he says there in 2 Thessalonians 1:5. He talks about "The manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom for which you suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." God promises in scripture that those who are troubling Christians in Pakistan, in Vietnam, in China, in Nigeria, in so many places, God says that he will recompense tribulation to them. That's a promise of God. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." And so, it goes.

It's a very honest sermon, isn't it, trying to point out things that God has revealed about the future that quite often we don't want to look at and yet they are so, so important. It's a day to be avoided and we can.

Let me bring you one more judgment. And I think this is a very important one.

5 God's present judgment.

Whilst the character of God's wrath is unchanging, the revelation of his wrath does change according to time and circumstances. In other words, how he reveals that anger was different to the children of Israel on one occasion as perhaps it was to Ananias. We said, there are times for instant judgment and there are times for his Second Coming judgment, etc. And much of God's judgment is restrained at the moment. We can't really, but just try for a minute to put ourselves in the mind of God when he sees our Parliament passing that sort of legislation that we've seen this week. God's anger is there, we've read about it. It's a constant thing about God. He, indeed, is angry at what has happened. Well, we should be thankful, perhaps, that his wrath is restrained at this moment.

But we currently see one aspect of God's wrath in the withdrawal of his presence and blessing. The lack of men of God to stand in places of authority with great power. The lack of pastors. Speaking to John Harris last week, he was talking about the churches that he comes across that just can't find pastors at this particular time.

John MacArthur has called this the wrath of God's abandonment. You say but the Lord promised never to leave us nor forsake us." No he won't. He will not leave or forsake his people. But there is a wrath of God that will abandon a nation in the sense of his presence in that nation. And my friends, this is not a judgment we're waiting for, this is a judgment we're in at this particular moment. And it's a greater wrath than we give God credit for. The abandonment of God's blessing on a nation means that the light goes out. It means the salt is removed. And that nation becomes immensely immoral and immensely corrupt. This is just part of what Paul writes about again in Romans 1 where it says, "God gives us over to a mind devoid of judgment." In other words, God says, "You want to sin? You want to go your own way?" I can put this in colloquial language, God says, "Ok, I'm done here. You get on with that." Terrible thing. The sweetness of the gospel is removed. Crime and breakdown in society comes at tremendous cost to a nation. Not just emotional cost but economic cost, social cost and that's where we are as a nation and we're still running from God yet under his present wrath.

6 Deliverance from God's wrath.

This is a wonderful thing. This brings us to the heart of the gospel. The knowledge of the attribute of God's wrath is one of the most powerful motivations to seek the Lord for salvation. How we can avoid God's wrath. Who can stand in that day? The scripture says, "No, no one can stand in that day." We have to first see, don't we, that we are deserving of God's wrath. God isn't wrong in scripture when he says we actually deserve his wrath.

Come to Ephesians 2 and he speaks there about us being children of wrath, chapter 2:3, he says, "Among whom we have our conversation in times past, the lust of our flesh, the desires of the flesh and of the mind. We were by nature children of wrath." He uses the same word as this attribute of God. And we have to know that that's where we stand. That's because of our old nature and there's nothing in our old nature we can do about that. But, and this is one of the biggest "buts" you'll ever find in the whole world. In that very next verse, it says, "But, God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us." That's a tremendous thing, isn't it? It then gives us an understanding of the immensity of the love of God. Although I deserve the wrath of God, God's love, as it were, trumps his wrath. And he shows us his love in that he has come, he has quickened us together. He has raised us up to sit in heavenly places. But how can he do this?

Romans 5:9, "By his blood. By his blood we shall be saved from wrath through him." How did he do that then? Through his blood on the cross of Calvary we find that yes he took our sin, he took the wrath that was our due. He hasn't bypassed it, he can't do that. He can't say, "I'm so angry because of sin and because of my holiness and I'll look the other way for you." He didn't look the other way, he took it in full force on the cross of Calvary. He took our sin. He took the wrath of God the Father upon himself that when he says that you will be delivered from wrath, it is because that wrath doesn't exist anymore because he took it upon himself. It's not there. Your sin is not there. We sing 'My sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and we bear it no more.' That is tremendous.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "God raised Christ from the dead as he delivered us from the wrath to come." My friends, many of you know the Savior. You know what the Lord says to concerning that: 1 Thessalonians 5:9, he says, "For God has not appointed you to wrath." Isn't that a wonderful thing? All of those things that I've said this morning, that we need to say from time to time, that God has said to us through his word, he says, "When you come to know me, learn that you're not appointed to wrath. This is not for you. But it is appointed to you to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for you that whether you wake or sleep, whether you live or whether you die, we're going to live together with him delivered from the wrath to come."

I've just scratched the surface this morning of this immense subject. But it's a subject the Lord spoke so much about. We've looked at the character of his wrath, it is always just. It is always righteous, always ready. When God has anger, it's because anger is due. We've seen something of his anger in that it can be instant and it can be delayed. We've seen something of the Second Coming wrath of God, that certain things are going to happen. When he comes it'll be a demonstration of his wrath against the nations. We've seen something of his Judgment Day wrath. His judgment of sin and the casting away of those who refuse Christ. We've seen something of his present day wrath. Though we may see instant wrath here and there, but particularly the abandonment that he brings upon nations. We've seen his wonderful deliverance. "But God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he has loved us even when we were dead in trespass and sins, that he quickened us together for by grace are you saved."

Application.

Every Christian should rejoice, for you've been delivered from wrath. How thankful we should be that through the blood of Christ, we're saved. That he took that which was my due, that he appeased God, that he satisfied the righteous anger of God in himself on my behalf.

You know, every Christian should let the knowledge of God's wrath drive us to our knees. If we believe these things, and heaven help us if we don't, they are the very word of God, if we believe these things, we know God's wrath and what it entails should drive us to cry, "O Lord, save sinners! Save sinners! Save my family! Save my friends!" When we see the consequences if there is no intervention of God's grace, how we should pray that the Lord might save those within our communities that we might have a great vision and a heavy heart for sinners. It was said of Mr. McCheyne the hymn writer and great pastor who died at a very tender age that on a Saturday evening before the Lord's day, before he was going to preach, he would lift the lid of hell. He wanted to remind himself of what scripture said about that place. When he went to preach the gospel, he wanted to know what it was that they were being delivered from by the power of the gospel.

And then this morning, if any here or listening later who are outside of Christ, what can I say but that you might seek the Savior? That you might see the amazing love of God revealed in Christ to take your sin, to take your penalty, to take the wrath that was your due. And then he offers free salvation. It's free grace. Why would we refuse? Why would we want to remain under the wrath of God and walk knowingly into eternal damnation? When we know that his love has been revealed in Christ. When we know that he has dealt with sin and wrath and he offers freely forgiveness and peace and power and all things in Jesus Christ.

O my friends, seek him with all your heart. For the Lord promises it is then that we shall be found. May the Lord help us to so wake us from wrath to flee. And may the Lord help us and all who hear this morning that we might by the blood of Christ be saved from wrath through him. Amen.