

His Death, Our Life

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Date: 02 October 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're going to be partaking together of the Lord's table. And it's a familiar thing that we do each month, the bread and the cup. But it's also one of the most precious things that we do as a church.

We celebrate something very special when we do it. And so to help us reflect again on the meaning of this table, we're looking to what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians, a letter to the church at Thessalonica.

In this letter, Paul celebrates how the good news of Jesus caused a massive impact on the people who believed in this city of Thessalonica.

There were many in Thessalonica who were hostile to the message about Jesus. But there were some there who embraced it. And it was obvious that they accepted it because doing so was risky, very dangerous.

And yet Paul tells us about how they began to follow Jesus with joy, even in the midst of suffering. You could imagine how opposition like this might tempt us to withdraw, to retreat, to stay quiet about our faith in Jesus.

[1 : 24] But Paul says that it wasn't that way when you Thessalonians believed. You began to tell people all around you about Jesus. The Lord's message rang out from you into the surrounding region, says Paul.

And it was obvious to all the people around them that they truly believed in Jesus because all the people around them saw how they just stopped worshipping idols.

That was a prevalent practice in that city. And instead they began worshipping the one true God.

Paul says that their faith, even from the early days, was marked with an eager expectation.

They believed everything they heard about Jesus and they were waiting for something. Paul says, You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead.

Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. So almost 2,000 years ago, there they were in the city of Thessalonica embracing what they heard about Jesus, turning away from the cherished idols of the city in which they lived, telling the people all around them about Jesus and waiting for Jesus, the Messiah, to come back and to rescue them from the coming wrath.

[2 : 54] This is such an interesting description of Jesus here in verse 10. Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. You know, there were so many other ways that Paul could have finished that sentence or described Jesus here.

Jesus, the good shepherd. Jesus, the gentle and lowly of heart. Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus, the one who put those religious hypocrites in their place. But this is how Paul describes Jesus.

Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. Somebody, I forget who, said that this little snippet of the verse is the gospel in a nutshell.

The good news of Jesus. He is the one who rescues us from the wrath of God that is coming. Now, when we hear the coming wrath, I'm guessing that for some of you, those words strike a nerve.

[4 : 08] For some of us, they may get us thinking that God is just angry with us and just waiting to punish us. For others, you may be thinking that Paul is just using this kind of language to guilt them into believing or submitting.

Some of you may be embarrassed by these words. The coming wrath. Don't talk about that, Josh. Or at least if we talk about it here in church, that's fine.

But don't talk about that outside these four walls because we don't want to offend people or turn them off. But Paul didn't shy away from telling people the truth about the coming wrath of God. And with that, he gave them the good news that Jesus rescues us from that wrath that's coming. So let's talk about this coming wrath for a moment. Why is there a wrath of God coming in the future on our world?

[5 : 22] The Bible's answer is that all of humanity sinned against God. In the beginning, we rebelled. God created us.

He loved us. He was good to us. He gave us good commands. He gave us freedom to obey or disobey those commands.

And long ago, the Bible tells us that in the beginning, we chose to disobey. And we received the consequence for our actions guilt came on all humanity.

And ever since that day, every single one of us has been choosing personally to disobey, to do things that are sinful.

And not just a little bit, but a lot. Paul describes in this letter what some of the people in Thessalonica were doing to the Thessalonian believers.

[6 : 26] They were persecuting anyone in Thessalonica who believed in Jesus. They were doing everything in their power to stop the message about Jesus from spreading.

and referring to these opponents. Paul says in chapter 2, verse 16, in this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit.

And so, he says, right after, the wrath of God has come upon them at last or fully. so, it's not just that we've done a teeny little bit of bad stuff here and there.

These persecutors in Thessalonica are an example of what we are all naturally bent towards because of sin in us. Apart from Jesus, we heap up our sins to the limit.

We try to get away with as much as we possibly can. And it's because of this defiance and evil that the wrath of God is coming on the world.

[7 : 40] Now, it's quite common for us to think when we hear that word wrath, it's quite common for us to point a finger at God and say, see, I told you, God isn't good.

He's not kind. He's not compassionate. He's full of wrath. He's full of anger. He's mean-spirited. He's vindictive. He takes pleasure in crushing poor people like us.

Maybe you've heard people say that. But as we read through the Bible, we begin to see that this accusation just isn't true. God is not mean-spirited.

He's not vindictive. He doesn't take pleasure in crushing poor people like us. That's what evil men in our world do. But God is not like that.

He is a God of wrath. And He is a God who gets angry. But why does He get angry? Why is He wrathful?

[8 : 48] Well, the more we read the Bible, the better we see that for God to be good and love what is good, He must also hate what is evil.

For God to do right, He must also deal with those who do wrong. What kind of God would He be if He just did nothing to those who perpetrate evil all over the earth?

What kind of God would He be if He just let people do terrible things to other people and get away with it? How long should God put up with those who promote evil?

Forever? For God to be good, there has to come a day when He brings the world to right, when He rights the wrongs, when He brings justice for all the oppressed, for all those who have been victims. there has to be a day when all who act corruptly are cleansed from God's good earth. God is not angry because He is mean-spirited.

[10 : 01] He is angry because He sees our sins and our sinfulness for what it really is. Sometimes I think it's helpful to think in human terms here.

Have you ever witnessed somebody do something hurtful to someone else? Maybe a bully on the playground who's picking on someone smaller.

Maybe a parent who is verbally abusive to their young children. Maybe somebody who's going around and spreading false rumors to destroy another person's reputation.

have you ever witnessed something like that and just felt the anger rising up within you? And you just want to jump into the fray and come to that person's defense.

It's in those moments that I think it's the closest we get as human beings to having a righteous anger. A good anger. anger. We are angry at the evil being done because we see how it hurts the

people we love.

[11 : 15] That's maybe a picture a little bit of what God's anger is like towards sin. He is angry at the evil being done because He sees how it affects everything.

He sees how our sins hurt the people around us. He sees how our sinful bent ruins what was made good and beautiful and perfect.

He sees how our sins warp and twist things and make them ugly and sick. And so His anger about sin is a righteous anger.

It is a good anger unlike most of the anger that we feel ourselves. Where we might think of it this way.

Imagine that you've just finished painting a masterpiece. Beautiful fall scene of the trees and all their colors. And you take that beautiful painting off the easel, put it down on the table for a moment to adjust your easel and somebody comes by and they accidentally knock over a jar of black ink and it spills right over top of the whole painting.

[12 : 35] The ink soaks and seeps deeply into the canvas and you look at it and what can you do but just admit that there's a very real sense in which this beautiful masterpiece is now ruined.

It's no longer beautiful. It can't really be fixed. It's no longer worthy to be hung on the wall for display or given as a gift.

The good thing to do, the right thing to do, is to throw it away, to destroy it, to start over fresh and new. There is a sense in which God's wrath is like that too.

It is that good part of him that is willing to do what must be done at some point for the masterpiece that he created, which was spoiled by sin.

And so there is coming a day in which the world as we know it, the Bible tells us, will be totally destroyed by God. And it won't be a mean-spirited wrath, but a wrath so noble and good that it will do the right thing and do away with what is spoiled.

[13 : 52] Thankfully, that's not a perfect analogy because in the midst of all this, there is this wonderful news. There is a way to be saved from God's wrath, the coming wrath of God.

And that way is through Jesus, the rescuer. He has come to rescue us from the coming wrath.

He came into our world. He lived a perfect, holy life. And in his death on the cross, he received the wrath of God on himself.

And it was all part of a great exchange, the Bible tells us. For all who will believe in his name, he took our punishment and he gave us his righteousness so that when that day of wrath comes, God will look at all who accepted this gift and say, their sin is paid for.

Someone has already suffered on their behalf the punishment they deserve. Their guilt, their sin, it's forgiven. And we will be spared and rescued from the coming wrath.

[15 : 09] Now all this talk about the day of God's wrath, it might get us thinking, what is that day going to look like?

That's a really good question. Some of the prophets who came before Jesus spoke about that day. They called it the day of the Lord. And if you look at those words in your Old Testament, in your Bible, the Lord is capitalized.

It's actually his name, the day of Yahweh, the day of the Lord. And we see in the Old Testament that there have been several days called the day of the Lord.

And all of them have this thing in common. God on those days poured out judgment on a nation or on a people because of their immense wickedness and sin.

But we also see in the midst of all that, God telling us about an ultimate, final day of the Lord, where God will pour out judgment on the whole world because of its immense wickedness and sin.

[16 : 23] The simplest way to get a feel for what the day of the Lord will be like is to just read through Revelation, the last book of the Bible. In Revelation, the Apostle John receives a vision from Jesus.

Jesus. And this vision has for centuries captivated everybody who reads it. The vision tells a story of what will happen at the end. It tells of the moment when God's day, the day of the Lord, will break forth upon the world.

It begins around the end of chapter 6 and it goes all the way through till chapter 20. And while there's plenty of debate and speculation as to the precise interpretation of all the details of this vision, the order in which it will happen and the duration of that day, the overall sense that we get is that it will be a dreadful day for everyone on whom God's wrath falls.

God will send down in judgment plagues, sickness, disease, famine, scorching heat, destruction of many of the good resources of the earth, natural disasters of magnitudes and frequencies the likes of which we've never seen before.

There will be darkness, violence, pestilence, wars, and death. And all of it deserved for the immense wickedness and sin of all who live on earth.

[18:01] To the believers at Thessalonica, Paul actually wrote about this coming wrath. I'm just going to read a little of what he wrote in chapter 5 of his letter. Chapter 5 verse 1, Paul says this, Now brothers and sisters, about times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

While people are saying, peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Paul tells us here that the day of the Lord, the day of God's holy judgment, will take our world by surprise. He says, I don't even need to write to you about times and dates for this.

That's perhaps a word that we should all keep in mind. God has not given us the times and the dates of when this will occur, but what he does tell us is that it will take the world by surprise.

The day of the Lord will not be on the world's calendar at all. They won't see it coming. It will not be expected. It will catch them off guard, just like a thief catches somebody off guard, a homeowner, when they break into the yard and steal something unexpectedly in the night.

[19:26] The day of God's wrath will come suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, just like contractions just come out of nowhere for a woman who is about to go into intense labor.

Paul even tells us that the saying of the day, when this day comes, will be peace and safety. Everybody will be thinking, wow, we've done it, this is good.

And when it's least expected, Paul says, destruction will come upon our world in an instant from God and people will not escape. But now listen to these encouraging words of Paul which follow.

Verse 4, but you brothers and sisters are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day.

We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.

[20:36] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The world will be caught off guard by the day of God's wrath, the day of the Lord. But you, brothers and sisters, need not fear. You need not worry, says Paul.

This day is not going to surprise you like a thief surprises a homeowner. For those of us who are in Christ Jesus, we're expecting something different.

And Paul goes into metaphors of light and darkness and being asleep and awake. I'm just going to skip right over that down to verse 9 because it's here that Paul gives us the clear statement of how it will turn out for us when that day comes.

[21:48] For all who believe in Jesus, God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I love these words. The terrible wrath of God that the world deserves, that even we deserve for our sins, it will not fall on us if we belong to Christ.

God did not appoint us to suffer wrath. Instead, we will be saved from it. He appointed us to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And how does it happen that we get a pass on that coming day? how does it happen that we're saved from going through that and suffering on that day?

Paul tells us in verse 10, he died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

[22:59] Jesus' death for us is at the center of our salvation.

It's the reason we won't have to go through that. It's the basis for why we will not be condemned with eternal fire at the final judgment.

it all comes back to the cross. And what happened with Jesus at the cross when his body was broken and his blood was shed for us.

And I love the way that Paul says it here. He says he died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, he's using the metaphor whether we are dead or alive before he comes, he died for us so that we may live together with him.

He did it so that he might live together with you and with me. He wanted to have that with you, life with you, life with me.

[24 : 17] It was for love that he died. It was so that we could have a sweet, wonderful relationship with him, living with him forever that he died.

I don't know about you, but some days I actually thank my wife and my kids for putting up with me, for bearing with me.

I'm far from perfect and there are days that I don't even like being with myself. but do you know that Jesus, the Son of God wants to live with you?

Let that sink into your heart. He wants to live with you so much that he was willing to die that agonizing death on the cross.

that's what the table that we celebrate this morning is all about. It's here we celebrate Jesus who saves us from the coming wrath and who died for us so that we could live together with him forever.

[25 : 31] So we're going to take a moment of quiet now and I want to encourage you to pray, to talk to the Lord, to reflect on your own sins and to confess your sins to God in these moments and to think about the love of Christ for you.

And after we've done that for a few minutes, Charles is going to come up and he's going to distribute the bread. Actually, we'll have Charles and Rod come up and distribute the bread and the cup. And if you believe in Jesus and he is your Lord, then I want to invite you to partake and join with us as we eat and drink from this table.

We'll wait until everybody has been served and then we'll eat together. and raise in the a and notable on Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[29 : 19] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Let's give thanks. Lord Jesus, from the bottom of our hearts, we say thank you.

[33 : 03] Thank you for suffering as you did to save us. Thank you that we can have hope and life and joy and a future with you forever because of what you did on the cross.

We love you. Amen.