

The Open Curtain (Good Friday)

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. If you're new or visiting, my name's Jono Smith. I'm one of the pastors here at the church. And it's great to be here this morning to preach from this passage that we've just heard.

Because I think that this passage will show us two great themes of the atonement of Jesus' death on the cross. And two great aspects or attributes of God's character, that being God's wrath and anger and judgment against sin.

And also God's love and mercy and forgiveness towards sinners. So that's what we're going to see this morning. And then I'm going to ask you to respond.

See, I think a lot of Christians and a lot of churches, this might be your experience, a lot of Christians and a lot of churches will go to one extreme or the other on those two things.

There'll be Christians and churches, they're always talking about the judgment of God and God's anger and hell and fire and brimstone. And they tend to tuck their shirts in really tight and always angry and yelling.

[1 : 12] You've got those guys, those kind of churches. And you've also got churches, they're always talking about God's love and forgiveness and unconditional affection.

And those people tend to neglect the parts of the Bible. And there are many. In fact, on weight of verses, there's probably more in the Bible about God's wrath than his anger.

And these people disregard the Bible because it speaks of a God who is actually angry against sin. What we want to do is be a people who hold these two things comfortably together, just as the Bible does, just as this passage does.

And this morning we're going to see that God is angry against sin and that he loves and welcomes sinners to know him and put their trust in him.

So I want to pray for us first and then we'll get into this passage. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, I pray that you'd be with each one of us now. Help us to focus, concentrate on what you would have us learn from your word.

[2 : 17] Help us to meet a God this morning who is angry against sin but who provides a way out for sinners. I pray that those who are here who aren't believers and haven't believed a single word that we've said this morning, that you would bring them to a place where they would put their trust in you, where they would confess you as Lord of their life.

I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'd love it if you picked up a Bible and turned to page 811 and we're just going to start from verse 45 to 46.

I'm going to talk about God's anger and wrath for a little bit now. So 45 to 46. Up until this point, Jesus on a Thursday night was arrested, as we know, in the garden.

He was dragged before the Jews and then the Romans. He was beaten, scourged, whipped within an inch of his life. He was forced to carry his own cross outside the city gates where he was going to be crucified.

And then he was thrown to the ground and nailed to a cross. Five to six inch nails through the median nerve which runs down the arm. Excruciating pain.

[3 : 32] That word excruciating, remember, means out of the cross. We invented a word to try and capture just how agonizing it would be to be crucified on a cross.

And Jesus there was hung up, probably naked, ashamed or in a shameful way to slowly asphyxiate and die.

That's where we come into the story. So verse 45. From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani, that is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Darkness came over all the land at this point, at noon, as Jesus hangs on a cross. And so many scholars with more degrees than Fahrenheit and more time than they should have, have talked about whether this was a, you know, was it a solar eclipse?

Was it a Sirocco wind that comes over the Mediterranean, picks up all the sand from the Sahara Desert and blocks out the sun? And the point is, it doesn't matter. The Bible doesn't tell us how it happened.

[4 : 51] We know that God did it. And just like in Jesus' miracles, like when he walks on water, when he feeds 5,000 people, the writers of the Bible don't care how he does it. They want to show us the theological point.

And with the miracles, it's normally they want us to see that Jesus is God. And here they want to show us, when they explain or describe the darkening of the land, they want to show us God's wrath and anger that burns against sin.

The darkness that comes over the land is representative of God turning his face away from Jesus, of condemning him. And this is why. The Bible says that every one of us is when, from the time we are born, is born into a sin nature.

We are all sinners. And because of our sin, we are cut off from God. Sin is our offense against God. Our want to rule our own lives.

To not repent of our sin. To be proud and arrogant. And because God is infinitely righteous and infinitely good and infinitely wise and infinitely loving, our sin against him is infinitely offensive.

[6 : 15] And so we deserve death and condemnation and hell, separate from God forever, because of our sin. That's the truth. And every one of you is a sinner and you know it.

So am I. Amen. So, God can leave us in this state, condemn us forever, or he can do what he did on Good Friday.

He sends Jesus, God's son, who has lived for eternity past with God, a member of the Trinity, in perfect relationship.

And he sends Jesus to earth to die on a cross as a substitute for us. He dies the death that we should have died.

And when he dies the death that we should have died, he dies for the sins, to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever trust in him.

[7 : 20] For their sins, past, present and future. He pays for them all in that one act on the cross. So when Jesus dies, with the sins of the world on his shoulders, God turns away from him.

He is condemned. He suffers God's absolute, unbridled, undiluted wrath and anger against sin.

And the whole world goes dark. That's what happens as Jesus dies on the cross. And he quotes Psalm 22, verse 1.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He is forsaken. Some people will point out that Psalm 22 starts out with anguish.

That, you know, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And that it ends in victory. And they say, well, Jesus is in anguish now, but he ends in victory as he rises from the dead. And that's true.

[8 : 22] Jesus rises in victory. He conquers Satan, sin and death. He does that. But we shouldn't, shouldn't discount the anguish that he's feeling here.

He has been condemned in a very real way. And it was your fault. And it was my fault. Because it's our sin that he dies for on the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That's God's anger against sin. And against Jesus who died for the sins of those who had put their trust in him. Let's look at God's unconditional love and welcome for wretched sinners like us.

Verse 50 and 51. Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

If we're going to understand why this represents God's love, we need to understand the history of that curtain.

[9 : 34] That curtain is very important. So you need to know in the Old Testament, God dwelt with his people in the tabernacle, which was like a tent of meeting where they had their worship services like a church, and later in the temple, which was the same thing, but a building.

And so God dwelt with his people. And I don't just mean God's all around us. I mean, God was actually dwelling in that place. And he dwelt in a sectioned off part of that building.

It was a perfect cube. It was called the Holy of Holies. And what separated that Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple or the tabernacle, that area that was sectioned off by a curtain.

And the reason it was sectioned off by a curtain is because God is so perfectly just and righteous. No one can dwell with him without being killed.

If you walked into God's presence, he is so holy and you are so sinful that you would be killed, annihilated. And many people in the Old Testament were because they underestimated the holiness of God.

[10 : 42] So he set up a means by which people could approach him. He had this inner sanctum of the temple. He had a curtain that divided him off from the people. And he said to the high priest, and this was just one guy, you can come in once a year on what's called the Day of Atonement.

You can come into the Holy of Holies and make a sacrifice for the sins of all the people so that they can be forgiven. And so he had to get dressed up in the right garments, in the right vestments.

He had to burn the right incense. He had to say the right prayers. He had to kill the right sacrifice. And only then could he walk in to the Holy of Holies to make the sacrifice for his people.

They even tied a rope around the guy's legs so that if he was killed by God or if he dropped dead, they could pull him out again without having to go in and be killed themselves.

So this is seriously, seriously exclusive, the Holy of Holies, because God is righteous. By Jesus' time, this had got a little out of hand.

[11 : 54] I mean, the curtain was now 60 metres high, 30 metres wide. I think it was at least a couple of feet, maybe even a couple of metres thick, thick woven cloth.

That was the curtain that separated God from the people, the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. God was not approachable. You try and approach God and you will be killed and condemned for your sin.

So, Jesus, after taking on the sins of the whole world and dying on the cross to save us from our sins, as he dies on the cross, darkness comes over the land.

As he breathes his last, the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom. No man could do that. No man would want to do that.

It was torn in two from top to bottom to signify and symbolise for us that God did it. God made the way open for us to approach him.

[13 : 04] If you look up a little later on towards the back of the Bible, you'll find a book called Hebrews. I think it's chapter 10, verse 19. The writer to Hebrews says that because Jesus died for us, because the curtain has been torn in two, we can boldly approach the throne of God.

This means you can pray to God without having a priest to pray for you. This means you can put your faith in God without having to go through a mediator to get to him.

This means that when you die, you can quite literally approach the throne of God. There'll be no St. Peter. There'll be no gates. There'll be no ticking off a list. If you have faith in Jesus, you will boldly approach the throne of God in heaven because the curtain has been torn in two.

Access to God has been granted. Can you see the significance of that curtain being torn apart? We're in a window of opportunity right now.

Right now. Where the curtain has been torn in two and access to God will be freely granted. In the past, the curtain was in the way.

[14 : 20] You could not access God unless you did a multitude of things and did them right. In the future, when Jesus returns, history is rolled up, judgment day comes, there will be no open curtain for those who haven't put their trust in Jesus.

It will be wrath, anger, condemnation at your sin. Right now is the window of opportunity. Right now, the curtain is open and God welcomes sinners to come to him and put their trust in him.

Jesus said himself that he will never turn away anyone who comes to him in faith. Jesus will never say to you, I don't want to know you.

I don't want to forgive your sin. I don't want to accept you. The opportunity is now and the time is short. The curtain is open and Jesus stands there with arms wide open and says, Come.

I want to end verse 51 to 54 and this is where the rubber hits the road for every one of you and for me.

[15 : 47] At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and rocks were split. The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

After his resurrection, they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him who were keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, Truly this man was God's son.

Jesus has been crucified and he was willingly crucified for the sins of the world. He's breathed his last as he has succumbed to the asphyxiation and probably a significant heart attack in pain and agony.

And when this happens, an earthquake rips through the earth. And the centurion, that is a very important official in the Roman army, overseas 100 men, and the soldiers who were with him who were watching to make sure that Jesus was dead beyond all doubt, when they saw him die, they said this, Truly this man was God's son.

This morning, you have in effect seen Jesus being crucified before you. In the reading of this account, you have heard how Jesus was killed on a cross for your sin.

[17 : 31] Now standing before the cross, you have the exact same opportunity. You can say, this is a tragedy. A good man, an innocent man, has died unjustly on false charges.

How terrible is that? Or you can scoff and you can turn your nose up at Jesus and say, what an idiot.

He went to a cross willingly and died in the most excruciating way for nothing. He was a messianic pretender. What a loser. Or you can be like these guys and like billions of people since this day.

You can see Jesus on the cross. You can see him suffering for your sin so that you wouldn't have to suffer. And you can confess, truly this man was God's son.

The opportunity is right now. The curtain is open. God freely accepts everyone who comes to him. What would this look like?

[18 : 41] If you're here this morning, you don't have any, you're not putting your trust in Jesus. You don't believe what's written in this book. You're here because it's Good Friday and this is what you do.

And you're welcome here. I'm stoked that you're here. But if you're here this morning and you've heard this and you're convicted and you know that you're a sinner and you dread the judgment day that's coming and you don't want to be cut off from God's mercy and love forever, this is what it would look like for you to become a Christian.

All you need to do is acknowledge that fact that you have been trying to control your own life. You've been trying to be the king over your own life and you're disregarding God and his claim on your life, his lordship over your life.

You put your faith in Jesus. You trust that he did indeed die on the cross for your sin. You humbly come before God and you admit that you're a sinner and you need help and God promises I will never turn anyone away from me who comes to me in faith.

If you need help with that, I know I did when I became a Christian and I put my faith in Jesus. We've got a bunch of people at this church who would love to pray for you, to walk through this with you.

[20 : 07] We'd love to plug you into some of the groups that we run throughout the week that just run to encourage us to follow Jesus. So please, before you go today, come and speak to me.

If you see Jesus on the cross this morning and want to confess, surely, truly, verily, this man was God's son. Let me pray for us.

Father in heaven, we thank you, we praise you, we worship you because you didn't leave us in our sin. You could have left us to rot for eternity away from you in condemnation, but instead, you took your one and only son who had spent eternity in loving relationship with you, you put him on a cross for our sin and then you cut him off as punishment for our sin.

And we thank you so much for doing that for us, even though we were your enemies and we didn't deserve it. Father, I pray for everyone in this room that you would convict those who don't believe in you.

I haven't named them, but I pray that you would be working in their heart to let them know that the time is now for them to come to you, to throw themselves before you and ask for your mercy.

[21 : 35] Lord, please stamp out pride and arrogance and give us soft hearts of repentance and humility. And I pray that we as a community would embrace all those who come to know you today as brothers and sisters as we look forward to spending eternity with you in heaven because of what Jesus has done on the cross.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.