

How Does God Deal with His Anger?

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 22nd of July 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, How Does God Deal With His Anger? and is from Romans chapter 3 verses 21 to 31.

Please be seated and you may like to have open Romans chapter 3 on page 916 in the Black Bibles in front of you. Romans 3 verses 21 to 31.

The gun is aimed and ready to shoot. The man who is in the sights of the gun is suspected of being somebody who is able to speak foreign languages, somebody who is intelligent and therefore somebody whom the Pol Pot regime wants dead.

Deet Pran is about to die. He's a journalist. And when Phnom Penh fell, he ended up working in the fields, trying to keep himself alive.

[1 : 23] His family had fled. His fellow colleagues had flown out at the last minute from Phnom Penh and the French Embassy. And out in the killing fields of Cambodia, there seemed to be no hope for his life to be spared.

Around him, dozens had been killed already. The killing fields were littered with bodies and it seems that his would be the next. There seemed to be no escape, no flicker of hope.

And as you watch the film The Killing Fields, your heart beats faster and louder. Beads of sweat, tension. But inexplicably and unexpectedly, a senior officer shouts out, stop.

There seems to be little reason. But at the last gasp, his life is spared. Jack Dawson is manacled to a pipe, accused of theft, wrongly accused.

He's imprisoned in the ship's little office. The trouble is the ship is sinking. It's the Titanic, of course, and the water level's rising. And slowly he's getting wet.

[2 : 38] As the water level's rising, he's still manacled to a pipe. And it seems that there is no way that his life can be spared. There's no key. The jailer has gone. There doesn't seem to be any means by which he can be freed.

He has no strength to do it. There is little time. And it seems no hope. And your heart beats faster and louder. And the tension rises. But inexplicably and unexpectedly, perhaps, he's freed with the help of the girl.

And he gets free only, of course, in the end to drown in the sea after the ship sinks. But in the nick of time, from that manacled position, he gets out of the situation.

Captain von Trapp, enlisted by the Nazi forces in annexed Austria, allowed to sing with his family a final concert. The guards are watching, preventing any sort of escape.

It seems that there is no hope that he will be able to get to freedom with his family, but he'll be sent off to serve in the German Navy. But amazingly, through unsuspected nuns, he with his family flees to climb another mountain.

[3 : 49] Escape and rescue is the staple diet of many of our films and books. Suspense is created by the lack of obvious escape routes.

People seem to end up in cul-de-sacs, in dead ends, with no possible escape. And suspense is heightened by the impossibility of rescue.

There doesn't seem to be a rescuer in sight who's got the time or the power or the ability or the inclination or whatever it takes to come to rescue the person who is at the dead end, facing it seems certain gloom or death.

But just at the last minute, when there seems to be no hope of escape and no hope of rescue, a hero or sometimes a heroine arrives.

Horace the Greek writer wrote, in the years before Christ, you never bring a god into a play unless there is a problem large enough that requires a god to solve it.

[4 : 59] And if ever there was a dire predicament, ours is it. If you've been following through Romans up to this point, we are in a cul-de-sac without hope of rescue.

We are in a dire predicament because we've exchanged the glory of God for idols and idolatry. We've failed to honour God as God. We've suppressed the truth about God and we have no excuse.

There are no exemptions from the judgment and wrath that is to come. There are no exceptions. Ignorance is no excuse, we have seen. Self-righteousness is no way out.

And religious privilege brings no advantage. Or at least, it does not make us better off. There is no way out. For we are all sinners facing the judgment and wrath of God.

There is no flicker of hope, no prospect of rescue. There is no higher court of appeal. For God, of course, is highest of all. And his verdict is that we are guilty.

[6 : 04] And so we're stuck and we are without hope. And in a sense, if we read Romans up to this point, there is tension and suspense. Maybe our heart might beat a little faster or louder.

Because it seems that judgment and wrath is absolutely inevitable. There is no loophole in the portrayal of our predicament by St. Paul.

But. But. verse 21 begins but but now something different something new something unexpected a rescuer a hero to come to save us from this predicament but now apart from law the righteousness of god has been disclosed and is attested by the law and the prophets the righteousness of god through faith in jesus christ for all who believe now the good news what some people have said the most important words ever written in human history here describing god coming to the rescue our predicament is so great that we cannot save ourselves from god's wrath and judgment but the good news the surprising news the resolution of the predicament is that god himself comes to the rescue if ever a great hero is needed by a dire predicament this is it and god comes to rescue us the righteousness of god leads inevitably to the punishment of sin because god is righteous he must and will punish sin he's angry at sin his wrath is poured out on those who are sinners both now and ultimately on his day of judgment as well our sin is revealed by his law the law of the old testament revealing god's standards his moral standards and expectations for humanity it reveals our sinfulness and shows us our expected destiny to stand condemned before the judgment throne of god but now saint paul says apart from that law revealing god's righteousness god's righteousness is also revealed in another way through faith in jesus christ now this righteousness is not new even though paul says but now god has revealed this righteousness it's not as though it's totally new as though this is plan b and the old testament is plan a that's a failure throw that out let's start again new plan no paul says the righteousness of god that is now revealed in jesus is actually attested by the law and the prophets that's by the old testament as well if you rightly understand the old testament not only does the law of the old testament show god's righteousness that will punish sin but the old testament also shows the righteousness of god that will provide us with some rescue from our predicament of sin rightly understood that is the old testament anticipates and looks forward to jesus christ and god coming to the rescue and this rescue is received through faith in jesus christ lots of people have faith very few people that will say they don't have any faith i remember when i was a theological student in training working in a parish elsewhere in melbourne going visiting and i met a lady whom i'd never met before didn't come to church i think i was just door knocking a few streets and she said to me i have lots of faith i asked her what she had faith in and she paused and then after a little while she said i have faith in humanity i said to her i was very sorry for her i didn't think that was a very good thing to place your faith in i had faith in jesus christ i said you see lots of people have faith but they don't necessarily have faith in things that are worthy of faith lots of people confuse faith with wishful thinking or just bright optimism like the pathetic song at the end of the life of brian always look on the bright side of life lots of people like that they think that that's faith it's not christian faith is faith in jesus christ that is it is firmly located in him and as we'll see in a minute in his death on the cross

and in his resurrection and the issue is where your faith is located not how much faith you've got sometimes people say to me i wish i had as much faith as you that's not the issue the issue is where is your faith placed and christian faith is placed in jesus christ you can have lots of faith in something that is untrustworthy unreliable that faith won't get you very far you might be facing a rickety old bridge that is about to collapse and will not take your weight you may have lots of faith that you could walk across that bridge doesn't matter how much faith you've got it may not do it to put the opposite sort of picture you may not have much faith at all in the sydney harbour bridge you look at it and you think gosh look at all those cars and trains that's not going to stand for much longer i'm not walking across that well that would probably be folly the issue is where do you place your faith not how much faith you've got mountains of faith will not actually make something reliable and worthy of that faith but if something is worthy of faith then even a skerrick of faith in that that is reliable and worthy of faith is worth believing in it's not the worthiness of our belief but the worthiness of him whom we believe that matters and the bible in one sense is written so that we will have faith in god and in his son jesus christ it makes us realize that he is reliable that what he says he will do he does he does effectively and effectually and we can have faith in him to the utmost because of who he is and his worthiness of our faith so why jesus why is he the rescuer why is he the hero that comes to bring us out of our dire predicament for which we have no power to rescue ourselves what is it about jesus that is so crucial if you excuse what in the end is a pun paul summarizes his argument so far at the end of verse 22 and in verse 23 there's no distinction he says that is between jewish person or non-jewish person between a right self-righteous person or an ignorant person there's no distinction at all human beings are in the same boat since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of god in essence that's what paul has argued to this point without exception or exemption and without excuse all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of god and in a sense that's a summary of what sin is because what we're meant to do is live lives that bring glory to god but we've failed to do that we've exchanged the glory of god for idols we've practiced self-righteousness instead of glorifying god so we've fallen short of his glory we've fallen short of the mark if you like of god's standard to bring him glory so then despite that paul says in verse 24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift undeserved unexpected they are now justified or perhaps better declared righteous by his grace as a gift it's a language of a law court our dire predicament is that we can expect fully that on the day of judgment standing before the throne of god in his eternal courtroom so to speak we will hear the verdict guilty we will stand condemned before him because we have fallen short of his glory in this life we can be sure of that verdict because we are no different from anybody else there are no exceptions and no exemptions from receiving that verdict on that day but paul says here that that will not be the verdict on that day for us who have faith in jesus christ instead of being told guilty instead of being

told condemned we will be justified we'll be declared righteous we'll be acquitted we'll hear the sentence not guilty this is even better than being forgiven being forgiven for our sins true that will happen and it's part of that but in a sense we can be forgiven for our sins but we're still guilty for them but what jesus does for us is even more than that because on that day we'll not just hear that we're forgiven for what we've done wrong but we'll be declared righteous in god's sight an astonishing declaration for people who are manifestly unrighteous and sinners but that is the declaration that paul expects for christian people on the day of judgment before the throne of god and that verdict is given to us now as a gift free of charge by god's grace he says in verse 24 it's not earned by us we contribute nothing to us we don't sort of take it out now and have to repay it later on in a sense it's not merited by us as charles wesley writes tis mercy all immense and free how can god do that how can god who is a righteous god declare righteous people who are sinners it seems to be that he can compromise his own righteousness when he does that does he lower his standards does he shove our sin under the carpet and pretend it's not there that is not in the end moral of god if that's just what he does paul explains how god can give sinners a verdict of righteous in the next in the rest of verse 24 and in verse 25 firstly he uses the language of the slave trade in the roman empire there were millions of slaves some of them had the ability to save up some money to buy their freedom or buy their redemption so that they'd be liberated from bondage as a slave and go free as a free person to receive manumission from their slavery or in a slightly different way an owner might buy back their property from the ancient equivalent of cash converters or a pawn shop or whatever you sell off your property you get some money and then later you want your property back you pay usually more than it's worth and more than you got in the first place that's the language paul uses to understand how god can declare us righteous on the final day so he says at the end of verse 24 that god does this how through the redemption that is in christ jesus that is jesus is the one who redeems us jesus is the one who buys us out of our slavery and liberates us and frees us and that is why it is a gift and free for us because it is jesus who pays the price to redeem us the price we'll see in a minute but it's free for us but it's costly for god and his son jesus christ they pay the price so that we don't they pay the price it is free for us the language of redemption presupposes some slavery some bondage if you like and paul had earlier on in chapter three as we saw last week said that we are under without exception the power of sin not just that we sin and fail from time to time but in the end we're in its grips and tentacles we cannot break free from the power of sin jesus redeems us from the power of sin he doesn't just forgive us for our sins but he actually liberates us from the power of our sin as well god to the rescue is jesus come to free us from the grip of of sin now what went what then was the cost that was paid paul turns in the beginning of

[18 : 48] the next verse 25 to the language of religion or the temple he says in verse 25 that g that god put forward jesus christ as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood effective through faith the word translated as sacrifice of atonement is an odd word technically in english it is the word propitiation probably not the sort of word you use very often over a breakfast table but to propitiate is to procure anger to avert anger to appease anger so if the language of redemption in the first in verse 24 presupposes something like bondage or slavery needs to be dealt with and jesus does that the language of propitiation or sacrifice of atonement presupposes that there is wrath or anger that needs to be dealt with and that is also true and jesus also deals with it we've seen from chapter one all the way through that we stand not only under a sentence of judgment but we also stand under god's wrath he is angry because of our sin and his anger needs to be appeased as well as his justice needs to be dealt with and jesus does both how do you make an angry god happy how do you appease an angry god in the pagan world humans will always want be wanting to offer up some sort of sacrifice to the gods to try and keep them on side keep them happy to appease their anger one of the greek stories agamemnon a greek hero sacrifices his daughter at sea in order to calm the turbulent winds and waves because he thinks that the winds and the waves are a sign of the anger of god or gods and so he sacrifices his daughter but the extraordinary thing about the christian faith compared to pagan thinking is that we don't have to do anything indeed we can't do anything to placate the anger of god at all we cannot propitiate him but god sends jesus to propitiate his own anger it is god who takes away his own anger he doesn't he he can't just sort of let it disappear because it's a righteous anger at our sin so jesus not only dies to take away our sins so that we can be declared righteous god actually jesus actually dies to take also the anger of god so that we do not receive either the sentence of condemnation or the anger of god for our sin god to the rescue you see it's not us propitiating god but god providing a way out so that his anger is dealt with rightly and we do not receive it this is the heart of the christian gospel and it is about the death of jesus it is not just jesus coming and living a good life and being a miracle worker and a great teacher but at the heart of the gospel what makes the engine of christianity work is the cross of christ on the cross there jesus pays the price to redeem us the price of his life a costly and expensive price indeed so that it's free for us there he pays for the penalty of our sin dying because we deserve death there he takes on himself the wrath of god so that we need not receive it as he cried out on the cross my god my god why have you forsaken me there he's receiving the wrath of god against sin sin that is ours but that he takes on himself and thus incurs the wrath of god there on the cross god's justice is satisfied and his wrath also satisfied we might well ask why this way couldn't god have rescued us without having his son to die for us isn't there an easier a nicer a more pleasant rescue plan

but sin deserves death god made that clear in the very beginning to adam and eve if you eat of the tree i've prohibited you will surely die and throughout history it is the same the wages of sin the wages of sin is death if you sin you deserve to die and we've seen that all of us sin and fall short of the glory of god and we deserve to die so any other penalty any other easing of penalty or lightening the load of burden that has to be paid is a compromise by god of sin death needs to happen for sin to be dealt with so jesus dies in our place taking god's wrath so that we may be declared righteous and not face his wrath on that day anything out anything less would be too unjust of god anything less would compromise god's own righteousness god is righteous but merciful and in the cross his mercy does not compromise his righteousness because jesus god's own son takes god's wrath and the penalty for sin god doesn't just ignore it that would be unrighteous and unjust and immoral but he himself provides his own son willingly his son dies so that god's righteousness is met and we receive mercy you see up to when jesus came throughout the old testament from time to time god forgives sinners we saw a couple of weeks ago david praising god for forgiving him his sin of adultery and murder in psalm 51 and there are numerous instances where god forgives individuals or even the people as a whole for their sin and god could rightly be charged through the old testament for being unrighteous because he forgives sin how can you god be righteous when you seem to pass over david's sin even without a sacrifice and when you forgive the israelites or other kings or other leaders or people for their sins god that's not a righteous thing to do righteousness demands that sin is punished but now in the cross god answers that charge or accusation because god shows that the reason why he can both forgive sin and declare sinners righteous and maintain his own righteousness is because jesus takes the wrath and the penalty for sin himself so that we do not you see on the cross not only do we find our rescue but god himself and his reputation is vindicated there up to this point god's reputation is under threat but the cross rescues it god is righteous but at the same time he can declare righteous people who are sinners without compromising his own righteousness that's what paul argues at the end of verse 25 and in verse 26 god did this to show his righteousness because in his divine forbearance he passed over the sins previously committed that's through the old testament it was to prove at the present time that's in that god himself that god himself is righteous and that he declares righteous the one who has faith in jesus christ and all of that without compromising his own righteousness that is the heart of salvation it is the heart of the christian faith it is the heart of the gospel god rescues us so then we are left with nothing to boast about we come to god empty-handed

nothing in my hand i bring no merit of my own i claim we contribute nothing to this it is a gift freely given we don't even pay a token towards it it is entirely a