

“By No Means Clearing the Guilty” // Exodus 34:6–7 // *The Name*, part 4

SG Testimony Video

- SG are so crucial to the life of our church... It's how you move off of the sidelines and into the game. **It's where you make friendships, grow deeper in the word...**
- I hope if you're not in one, you'll get into one...

I know this is unusual... but this weekend, I want you to stand up... Things are always chaotic in our world... but racial issues; police; ISIS; Planned Parenthood—we pray for peace and justice

Introduction

As a pastor, I've learned that a lot of people expect me to talk like I have it all together:

- Many of you think that I **open my eyes every morning** and say, “*Good morning, Lord.*” And then I roll over and **grab the harp** that I keep beside my bed and stroke out a few love psalms to Jesus... then I **come downstairs** to a kitchen that smells like **cinnamon** and my kids are all gathered around the table with their Bibles open saying, “Teach us, daddy.”
- That's **not usually** how I wake up in the mornings... I usually wake up to the sounds of someone yelling. I don't wake up saying, “Good morning, Lord;” but “Good Lord... it's morning already?” I come downstairs and one of my kids has another one in a strangle-hold, and when I say, “Let's read the Bible!,” they say, “How long, Dad? We want to watch TV.”

I've also told you that throughout my life, I've gone through various seasons where I struggled with faith... one of the **worst was in college**, and it was over the issue we are going to discuss today... it was probably the closest I ever came to losing faith.

The issue was ***the wrath of God***. The whole system just didn't seem fair to me... It seemed like God was this vengeful deity who was going to show up at somebody's bedside when they died and say, “*Aha! You didn't believe in Jesus!*” And they'd say, “Jesus who?” And he'd say, “It's too late now” and as he cast them into hell they'd say, “It's not fair; I never heard about Jesus' and he'd mutter “Tough cookies” in Latin, or something, at them.

I know I'm not alone in that struggle. For a lot of people, this is the issue that creates the biggest obstacle for their faith.

- **The famous skeptic Bertrand Russell**, in his book *Why I am Not a Christian*, said the primary reason he did not believe in Jesus was because Jesus “so clearly believed in the wrath of God.” (You have to at least give it to him that he's willing to acknowledge what a lot of Christians won't). Russell called Christ's belief in the wrath of God, “*The one profound defect in his character.*”
- **C. S. Lewis** said, “**There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power.**”¹
- I've often said, “Give me an eraser and 10 minutes and I would take this out of the Bible!”

But we can't, and we really *shouldn't*, because while it is a difficult doctrine, it is also a **good doctrine**, and one **absolutely essential to knowing, loving and worshipping God**. A god without wrath would be a god without goodness.

Let me show you.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, “Hell.”

Exodus 34:6–7

Here's the setup: Moses asks God to see his glory, and God says, *¹⁹ "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' (in cave; covered with hand) ***34:5** And the LORD descended in the cloud and... ⁶ proclaimed, "The LORD (*Yahweh*), the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, *slow to anger*, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but *who will by no means clear the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

I have **6 points** about the wrath of God (*which I thought was cogent since 6 is the number of judgment in the Bible.*)

1. God's wrath exists

- It's very clear in this text.
- The **Bible speaks of God's wrath** more than 600x
- **Psalm 7:11** says that God is angry with the wicked "every day."
- And I know some of you think, "Well, that's **just an OT thing**. God gets **nicer in the New Testament**. He was kind of cranky in the OT but then he has a change of heart—he comes back as God 2.0, Jesus, meek and mild."
- That's not true at all... I showed you last week that **the love of God is a predominant theme** in the OT, and God's wrath is a **repeated theme** in Jesus' teaching in the New... in fact, one his **most frequent** themes.
 - **John 3:36:** Jesus said, "...whoever rejects the Son will not see life because God's wrath remains on him."
(restatement of Psalm 7:11)
- **And not only does Jesus talk about it, we see him demonstrate it.**
 - Toward the end of his life Jesus goes into the temple and chases out a bunch of **Temple workers** with a homemade whip.

- I grew up with **flannel graph** Jesus... We **never had this image**. We had the ones with him holding the kids or stroking the lambs or looking pensively up at God...

- But Jesus' testimony to the wrath of God was central to his message and ministry.
- For that matter, it wasn't **effusive talk about God's love** that got him killed; it was his insistence on God's anger toward hypocrisy and injustice.

2. God's wrath is an expression of his goodness

- **God did not say to Moses**, "OK, Moses, I'll make all my goodness pass before you... *and...* you'll see some of my badness, too.' It's all his goodness. ***His wrath is part of his goodness.*** His goodness would **not be complete** without it...
- God's **wrath grows out of his love**—his love for goodness and purity and holiness and *us*.

As a dad, if I love my kids, I will not tolerate things in them I know will harm them: dishonesty, cruelty, or laziness. I get angry when I see those things.

- **God is *angry at sin because he loves his creation and us and sin destroys his good creation.***
- **One of the best depictions of the wrath of God unfolding on earth happens through the Plagues** at the beginning of Moses' career.
 - I'm not sure if you remember this, but when I preached through the 1st part of Exodus I explained that the plagues were **not a random set of bad things** God did, there is a logical order. God turns the Nile to blood, which destroys the natural ecosystem of the Nile, so out of the Nile came the frogs; from the frogs come the gnats, from the gnats come disease. It's as if creation is unraveling.
 - Now, had God's only objective been to **show Pharaoh** that he existed and was more powerful than Pharaoh, he could have chosen some other means. He could have had Moses put him in the **Darth Vader chokehold**. Or Moses could

- have just walked in and said, “Alright Pharaoh... and made all of Pharaoh’s soldiers tiny and then **squashed a few** of them... and then looked at Pharaoh and said, “You’re next.” Either of those would have gotten the job done.
- God was **demonstrating something** in the plagues. Not only is he there and powerful, but he is showing **what sin and rebellion do... They unravel creation.**
 - In Genesis 1, God brought **order out of chaos**. In the plagues, order is descending back into chaos.
 - **That’s what happens when we sin, and because we have a God of love, he will not sit by and just watch it happen.** God desires to bring us to a world free of sin and injustice and exploitation and racism and greed and perversity.
 - **He wants to bring us to heaven, and heaven can only be heaven if there is no sin there.** Think of how heaven is described... a place of no pain or crying; no locks on the doors—How many times has my selfishness or bad temper made someone cry? You can’t leave the doors open if people might steal your stuff. **Heaven can only be heaven if no sin is there...**
 - **(That’s why when someone says, “Why doesn’t God get rid of all injustice?”** *What if he started with you?* If God got rid of all evil at 12:00...
 - **God’s anger toward sin is born out of love for purity and his creation...**
 - One theologian: ****God’s anger is his “unrelenting, uncompromising and steadfast antagonism towards evil and injustice in all its forms.”**

3. God’s wrath often consists in letting us experience the consequences of the choices that we make

- **PASSIVE:** You see that in this passage where God says **“...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”**
 - People sometimes see that phrase and they think, “Well, that doesn’t sound fair. It sounds like God is holding the kids accountable for what the parents did.”

- And they would be right... and that phrase can’t mean that, because Scripture expressly denies that in multiple places, like **Ezekiel 18:20**, where it says, “The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father... the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”²
- **So what then does it mean?** It means that parents’ sins have consequences that will affect their children!
 - If I **embezzled money** from this church and get put into jail, will that affect my children? Of course.
 - If you **cheat on your wife** and leave her for someone else, will your kids suffer for it? Yes.
- God’s judgment, you see, **often consists of simply allowing us to experience** the painful consequences of our choices.
- Again, theologians call that the **“passive” wrath of God...** In fact, when we do see the **active wrath** of God—the lightning bolt—it’s consistent with, and an extension of, the passive.
 - **Genesis 3:** Adam and Eve sin and God casts them out his presence; but Adam and Eve had already chosen to hide from God’s presence, long before God banished them from the Garden.
 - In the **story of the Plagues**, Scripture says that God’s judgment on Pharaoh was to harden his heart so he would not believe, but only after Pharaoh hardened his own heart several times.³
- In fact, the way Jesus **describes hell shows it to be** the fruition of our sin. We might miss it because the Jewish metaphors he uses can be unfamiliar to you:
 - The “worm that does not die” – an image of a conscience continually being eaten away by guilt and regret
 - Outer darkness – the total absence of God and all his goodness.
 - Gnashing of teeth – Jewish image that meant self-condemnation and self-loathing
 - Fire – the agony of God’s displeasure

² See also Deut 24:16

³ **Romans 1:** God’s wrath was to “give them over to their own lusts...”

- **Hell is simply the** full fruition of telling God to get out of your life and allowing sin to grow unchecked in you.

No one has helped me get my mind around the idea of hell as much as C. S. Lewis: SUMMARIZE: *“The Bible asserts that each person will go on forever... There would be a good deal of things that would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only eighty years or so, but which I had better bother about if I am to live forever. If my bad temper or jealousy only gets worse for a span of 80 years, the increase will not be very noticeable. But what does it look like for that temper and jealous to grow non-stop for a million years? Hell is precisely the technical term for what it would be.”*⁴

- Sin is like **cancer**. It never stops growing.
- **If your pettiness or jealousy or foul moods or dishonesty** or tendencies to abuse others keeps growing in you for eternity... what would that be like?⁵
- (God’s final statement of judgment in the book of *Revelation*: **“Let him who is unjust be unjust still.”**)

Hell is simply God giving to you what you’ve been asking for...

*“In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: “What are you asking God to do?” To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But he has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? But they will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is precisely what he does... In the end, there are only two kinds of people– those who say to God, “Thy will be done” and those to whom God says, ‘Thy will be done.’”*⁶

- Hell is you telling God, “I don’t want you in my life,” and God saying, “As you wish!”

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 74.

⁵ J.I. Packer, “In the end, all that God does in judicial action toward the unbeliever, whether in this life or beyond it, is to show him, and lead him into, the full implications of the choice he has made.” J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 152.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, “Hell,” 116 and *The Great Divorce*, 69.

That means God’s mercy now is letting you taste some of the painful consequences of your sin to wake you up from them!

- We think **when a husband or a wife is caught in the middle of an affair** it is God’s judgment. I would argue that is God’s mercy. **God’s wrath is when he or she gets away with it.**
- “When your heart is not right the absolute worst thing that God can do for you is to give you what you want.”
- Ashley Madison...
- Do you see that in **YOUR** life? Where is he waking you up to the destructive consequences of your choices? *Is this really what you want?*

4. God chose to let his love overcome his wrath

- There’s a contrast set up in God’s presentation of his name... ****7** keeping steadfast love for thousands... visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, **to the third and the fourth generation.**
 - This verse in Hebrew is a poem, with a **parallel structure** where the last phrase compares to the first. On one end you have God’s justice, which is to 4 generations. On the other end you have God’s mercy, which is to thousands of generations (the word really should be here in the translation). God’s mercy is exponentially greater than his wrath, at least by a factor of 250!
- **Or go back to that phrase, “slow to anger.”** (**“The LORD (Yahweh), the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, **slow to anger,**) The Aramaic translation of the OT (which Jesus would likely have used, called the *Targum*) translates that this way: “The LORD (Yahweh), the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, **the one who makes anger distant and brings compassion near.**”
- God felt **2 rightful emotions toward us**: wrath and compassion. He sovereignly, and inexplicably, chose to bring one close and push another far away.
 - God **was fully justified** when he felt wrath for our sin. He **would have been fully justified** to push us out forever.

- But he **chose to push away that wrath**; and bring compassion near... It was his free choice, and it is one of the greatest mysteries of the universe.
 - One that **the angels, Peter says**, are still confused by!
 - They look at it and say, “It doesn’t add up!”
- One of the most remarkable passages of Scripture, maybe the whole Bible: **Romans 5:6** **“You see... when we were still powerless, Christ died for the *ungodly*. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a *righteous* person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...* 10 *While we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.*”
- Over the last couple of weeks, I’ve used an analogy for God’s wrath, and I want to show you where it breaks down (all analogies break down, and to really see the magnitude of the love of God we need to see where it does...)
 - I’ve used the analogy of my anger over my **kids’ lying**—and I said that when my kids’ lie my loving anger at their sin makes me want to see them **purified of it**.
 - But here’s where that breaks down: Even when my kids lie, they are still my kids. This passage in Romans says that our sin and rebellion made us **God’s enemies**. (Not “*like his enemies*,” or “*his disobedient children*,” but “*his enemies*.”)
 - God choosing to **push anger away and bring compassion** near was not like me wanting to see one of my kids be free of dishonesty; it would be like me choosing to **love and adopt into my family an ISIS member** who beheaded my daughter.
 - “**But we are not that bad... what about all our good works?**” Two Isis soldiers in a camp... one has

nothing to eat and the other shares his lunch. It’s a genuinely good act, but it’s hard for us to call that good because the whole mission they are on is evil. Our whole lives are spent in rebellion against God—**living for our glory** instead of his; **living as our only authority** and rejecting his. Our rebellion killed Jesus; that shrouds even our good deeds in a cloak of evil.

- There is **no greater wonder** in the universe than the love of God for us.
 - PETER: Angels confused...
 - *And Can It Be?* “In vain the firstborn seraph tries To sound the depths of love divine. EXPLAIN. ‘Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, Let angel minds inquire no more.” Some things can’t be explained... I simply STAND AMAZED in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how he could love me...

5. We can escape God’s wrath only through Christ

- I pointed out the 1st week that a contradiction was set up in v **7 ...a God merciful and gracious... *keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.* How can God forgive sin, and at the same time not let the guilty go unpunished? If he will by no means “clear the guilty,” whom is he forgiving?
- The **resolution to the contradiction** is in Christ.
- Christ would stand as a substitute... **Laid on him... ILLUSTRATION**
 - **Because of that**, he now stands as our “**advocate.**” I used to think... You CAN’T hold him guilty! God can’t require two punishments for the same sin.
- A lot of times we want to **minimize God’s wrath** because that makes us feel safe... But we can’t, see... God has planted it on our conscience.
 - Garden: **Nakedness.**
 - **The playwright Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*) wrote that** after he quit believing in God he still felt guilty and judged. He needed to be declared OK by somebody and he

found that in the approval of audiences and critics. He confessed later that he realized all he had done was switched out God with other people.

- We try to deny the reality of God's judgment, but we can't convince even our own hearts!
- **Coming to Jesus takes that subconscious, unsettled feeling of judgment and makes it conscious...** we embrace that we are condemned... but then Jesus tells us to rest because he has taken that judgment onto himself.
 - We see (Keller) that we are **more guilty** than we ever imagined; **more loved and accepted** than we ever dared hope!
 - Luther: The **voice of condemnation** speaks truly, but God speaks a louder word.
 - The voice of condemnation whispers, "You are finished;" Jesus trumps that with a shout of "It is finished."

6. God's wrath comes slowly, but surely

- In Hebrew, the phrase translated "slow to anger" is literally "**long of nostrils.**"⁷ "How does that mean slow to anger?" you ask. (Hebrew is such a colorful language.)
 - What happens when you **get angry**? Your nostrils flare. If you're quick-tempered, your flaring nostrils get going right away.
 - But if you're **slow to anger**, you close your mouth and breathe through your nose...slowly.
 - The phrase means this: *You **can** make God mad, but you really have to work at it.*⁸
- And he is **slow to anger because** he wants you to repent. He wants you to wake up...
- The **Apostle Peter** says that throughout human history **mankind has mistaken God's slowness** to anger for its absence...

⁷ t'erek 'appayim

⁸ John Mark Comer, "God has a Name, part 4."

- **Noah.** Nearly 100 years took place between the time God announced the flood and when it came.
 - **Most people in those days interpreted that long space** as God failing to act; only the Gladiator and Hermione took God seriously. Peter said that long space was God giving people space to repent.
- Even now, Peter says, people assume the delay of the **coming of Christ and judgment** means he's not really coming back. But he is **Don't use what God intends to be space to repent with his absence.**
 - **Throughout the book of Acts**, most frequent theme is *Resurrection... We think it means: Christianity is true. They used it just as much to assert that judgment is sure: the resurrection means that he has appointed a day.*
 - ~~Illus. Indonesia tsunami: What was it like to see that 70-foot wall of water? The resurrection of Jesus is like that spot of receded water... the tidal wave of God's judgment is coming.~~
 - Don't let this time lull you into complacency. Flee in repentance to Christ for salvation.
- **Even now**, you may see that God is doing things to wake you up.
 - When God sent **the Plagues**, each one got worse... The water turns to blood; the animals die... they got disease... Trying to wake them up.
 - **Is this happening in your life?** Things falling apart?
 - **Ivan:** Landscaping job. God is screaming at you

Have you repented?

- He doesn't want you to perish...
 - **No one wants you to escape God's wrath more than God**
 - You weren't designed for wrath. Hell *was not made for you!* It was made for Satan and the demons, not for you
 - But you have to choose to receive it.
 - One of the most unusual Supreme Court cases: 1833... [United States v. Wilson, 32 U.S. 150 Vol. 32 \(1833\)](#), George Wilson who had pled guilty for (essentially) grand theft &

assault. In June of 1830, President Andrew **Jackson** issued a pardon to Wilson. But Wilson (for reasons undisclosed and unknown) refused it. The Supreme Court ruled, "A pardon must be received to be valid. It is an act of grace that cannot be forced. If unreceived, it is not valid."⁹

- Some of you will die and go to hell with your sins paid for!
 - **No one wants you to escape God's wrath more than God**
 - The **last voice** you'll hear as you step into hell is the voice of Jesus saying, "You don't have to do this!"
 - But you have to **choose it for yourself...**
 - **Lewis: God threatens** terrible things...

Are you living like someone who believes this?

Why we go: ~~we've seen the receding water!~~

- Do you really believe this?
- Gospel is only good news if it gets there in time

Optional: Are you **slow to anger**? *Do you push away wrath and bring compassion close?*

⁹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/phoenixandolivebranch/2011/02/mythbusting-the-message-a-pardon-is-not-a-pardon/>