

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: 1 Thess. 1:9-10

"The Wrath to Come"

CHRIST'S RETURN

Please take out your bulletins and turn to the bottom of our second reading. I want us to look at **1 Thess. 1:9-10: *"For they themselves report about us what kind of reception with you and how you turned to God from idol to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."***

My friends the great hope for humanity is revealed here. If Jesus' first coming accomplished so much, wait until we experience His Second Coming. That's what is being talked about here. The Word of God is clear. Jesus is coming back. We are to look forward to it, we are to proclaim it, we are to be ready for it.

It is therefore one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. And it is a truth that the devil hates because Christ's return will mark the end of his reign on the earth; the end of evil, the end of rebellion, the end of pain and suffering, and the end of death.

But notice what will be also true concerning the coming of the Lord. Christ's return will coincide with the outpouring of God's wrath. What may you ask is God's wrath? The Greek word used for wrath is *orges* and it is used throughout the New Testament to refer to the physical torment the Lord, at His return, will inflict on the inhabitants of the earth because of their rebellion and evil. The wrath of God incorporates the anger that has built up within God Himself over the ages. It is an anger directed to all that is wrong and evil in this world; an anger towards abuse, oppression, rebellion and pride. What we are talking about is God's judgment.

You see many like to talk about the love of God, but you can't talk about the love of God without also talking about the holiness of God. They go hand and hand. But what happens? People focus on one or the other. The result? You have half of the truth. And when you get only half of the truth, you no longer have the whole truth and the half of the truth that you do have becomes an untruth.

GOD'S HOLINESS

You know it's interesting, nowhere in the Scriptures do you have the words directed towards God, "Love, love, love!" But you do have "Holy, holy, holy." It is the word from which we get the word sacred. It literally means "to be set apart." And when it is used of God it means that God is above and beyond all else. But God's holiness also includes the reality of His righteousness; that God is perfectly pure, and good. There is no evil whatsoever in him. He is the standard of perfect righteousness. And His love flows out of this righteousness not the other way around.

WHERE DID EVIL COME FROM?

Now I know there are those who like to question that if God is so good and pure why is there evil in the world? Why would a good God allow evil? In fact, some say that God can't be totally good because there is evil in our world.

Well, let me try to answer this question for a moment. **Hebrews 12:29** tells us that **"our God is a consuming fire."** Fire produces light and heat, and fire purifies. Light and heat are always present in fire. Jesus said He is the light of the world. The Holy Spirit came as tongues of fire. The Spirit warms our heart and soul, and enflames our hearts to do good. Now let me ask you, what is the absence of light? Darkness. If you have a light darkness cannot cover it, can it? Now let me ask you – what is the absence of heat? cold. You cannot have coldness if there is heat. But as soon as you take away the heat, the cold returns. So light and heat do not create or cause darkness or coldness. Rather darkness and coldness are related to the absence of light and heat.

So it is with God. God is good, but if you remove God from the equation of life, evil is the result. Darkness, coldness of heart and ultimately death. Therefore, God did not create evil. God has nothing to do with evil. Evil is simply the absence of God. And God allows evil because he has given angels and human beings the freedom to choose.

THE CHOICE TO LOVE

And that choice is grounded in his love because true love is love that chooses to love. If there is no choice to love, that is not love. God gave our first parents the freedom to choose and they choose to not only disobey God but they did it in such a way that they were saying in essence we don't need you. We can become like gods ourselves. And that my friends is the heart of evil and the heart of sin. Saying we can do it ourselves. Living as if there is no God. Living as if we are the kings of our own domain.

And when man chooses to do his own thing without reference to God – sin, suffering, heartache, and abuse – you name it - set in. Think about Cain and Abel, for a moment. Cain in his jealousy and anger murdered Abel. And ever since the first murder human beings have been murdering one another in their hearts. Nothing has changed except now God has provided the remedy: His Son, Jesus Christ

God in His love has given us the opportunity to make things right. But if one rejects the Son, if one continues to reject the Lord, judgment awaits. God's wrath will be poured out. You see true love includes the prospect of punishment. We are told God disciplines those whom He loves. He cannot tolerate sin and evil forever. Sooner or later God will punish those whom do not accept responsibility for their actions, who do not repent and turn to the Lord.

PARABLE OF THE FAITHFUL HOUSEHOLDER AND THE WISE SERVANT

Jesus told a **Mt. 24:42-51** which reminds us of the need for all people to be ready and that we are living on borrowed time. After telling His disciples to watch for the signs of His coming, Jesus said, **"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your**

Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and wouldn't have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of this household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, "My master is not coming for along time and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he doesn't expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth."

The point of the parable is clear. We are to be doing the work of our Master, Jesus, until He returns to earth. This is the reason why we are here. God is with us and is still in control, but we cannot see Him visibly and He has in a sense pulled back from daily direct intervention. He is allowing the good and the bad to grow up together. Which begs the question, Why doesn't God do something now? Why doesn't He take care of the evil today?

The answer to that question can be found in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (read **Mt. 13:24-30 & Mt. 13:36-43**). The wheat are the righteous, and the tares (weeds) are the unrighteous. They are left to grow together until harvest time which is at the end of the age. Then at the age of the end when Christ returns, the angels will separate the good from the bad. The reason why God doesn't deal with evil directly is because of the righteous, His people. All who are destined to be with the Lord have not been born yet. The fact is in order for you or I to have been born, many have had to come together. We are the offspring of both good and bad like. In our family trees you will find believers as well as unbelievers. And if the unbelievers had not been part of the family tree you or I would not have been born because our DNA comes from them.

So yes there is judgment coming, the Day of the Lord will arrive, the outpouring of God's wrath will take place, but the good news is that anyone can pass from judgment to life. Jesus said in **Jn. 3:17: "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him."**

And that is why Paul could look forward to Christ's coming and rejoice that on that day we would be delivered from His wrath. In fact, later on in his first letter to Thessalonians Paul writes, **"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another, and build one another up, just as you also are doing."**

DELIVERED BY JESUS

You know you have heard me say it before. There are three types of people in this world – those who are afraid, those who do not know enough to be afraid and those who know Jesus Christ. We have nothing to fear. We are no longer under the prospect of judgment. We have accepted Christ. Jesus is now our righteousness. He has taken our place and as a result we now can be forgiven. And since we have been freely given so great

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a salvation, we are to live in such a way that people know that we are Christians and we are to share the hope of Christ with all who would listen. We cannot afford to keep it to ourselves. We are the light of the world, we are the salt of the earth, we are the ones God will use to bring people into His Kingdom. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!