

Introduction:

Sadly, though we may not be aware, the message of the gospel is slowly slipping away from us. Even among Christians and in churches, we are losing sight of the gospel message. As Christians get sidetracked with politics, trying to “take back America,” or with psychology, treating the gospel like it is the means to a fulfilling life, or with self-help, thinking the Bible is the key to marital happiness, business success, and emotional well-being, the gospel is actually getting lost in the mix. We must remember the gospel is the proclamation of Good News, not the pandering of good advice. Increasingly, even among Christians, we talk about Jesus as our personal savior (an idea foreign to our New Testament counterparts). As we talk about our personal journey with the Lord and increasingly claim we know Jesus lives not for any objective reason but subjectively because He lives within our hearts, we are whittling away at the gospel message and do not even realize it. We must remember the gospel is Jesus’s story, not ours. We must not base the gospel on us, but on Jesus.

The most profound statement of the gospel in modern times is perhaps the most simple. You’ve heard it again and again, but have perhaps overlooked it because you think it is a message for kids. It is not. It is a message for you.

Jesus loves me! This I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
they are weak but He is strong.

Jesus loves me! Loves me still,
tho I’m very weak and ill,
that I might from sin be free,
bled and died upon the tree.

Jesus loves me! He who died
heaven’s gate to open wide.

He will wash away my sin,
let his little child come in.

Jesus loves me! He will stay
close beside me all the way.
Thou hast bled and died for me;
I will henceforth live for Thee.

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

We don’t know Jesus loves us because we got a job promotion or because we beat cancer. We don’t know Jesus loves us because we have a good spouse. We don’t know Jesus loves us because against all odds we quit cussing, drinking, lusting, or lying. We know Jesus loves us for one simple reason. The Bible tells us so. How does the Bible tell us? Look at what the Bible says in **Romans 5:6-11**. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (ESV). Brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, this is the gospel. This is the good news. Jesus died for you and your sins; if that is not enough love for you, then I’ve got nothing for you. You see love is not an open door, neither is it a battlefield; it’s not a river or a bridge. Love is not a razor, a hunger, or a flower. But you know what, love is not a handout, a healing, or help on the road to personal happiness either. Love is a cross. Love is Jesus on the cross, and if we lose sight of that, we lose the gospel.

Discussion:

I. The Wrath of God

- A. I struggle with this aspect of God. I want to talk about God’s love, not His wrath. When I do talk about it, I want to couch it in terms that don’t sound so...well...wrathful. But we cannot understand the love of God if we do not first understand His wrath. After all, it is the wrath of God from which we are being saved by Jesus on the cross (see **Romans 5:9**). Notice that. Jesus on the cross saves from God’s wrath, not from God’s displeasure, not from God’s frustration, not from God’s irritation, from God’s wrath. At the same time understand Jesus didn’t go to the cross to save us from tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword (cf. **Romans 8:35**). In fact, when the gospel was first proclaimed, if you went to the cross with Jesus, you were signing up for those things not escaping them. In like manner, Jesus didn’t go to the cross to save us from hunger, oppression, or social injustice. Jesus went to the cross to save us from the wrath of God.
- B. Have you considered the wrath of God? Listen to what God told Nineveh through Nahum in **Nahum 1:1-14**. “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies...” (ESV). On occasion, we see the wrath of God break through

into human history. When the thoughts of men's heart were only evil continually, we see His wrath break forth in the cataclysm, with only Noah and his family saved through the water (**Genesis 6-9**). This is no kids' story. We like to paint the pictures of animals on a boat on our nursery walls. Have you considered the wailing mourners, wretched and miserable climbing trees and rocky crags as the waters rose up to their necks and overtook their heads? Have you considered those who paddled and kicked trying to hang on to flotsam and jetsam until their strength gave out and they slipped beneath the surface? That is the wrath of God. Or when Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire to God in **Leviticus 10** and the fire of His wrath came from heaven and consumed them. There was the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against Moses when God opened the ground to swallow them and their entire households in **Numbers 16:31-35**. Again, when Israel began to worship Baal at Peor and God broke out in a plague against them killing 24,000 until Phinehas executed Zimri and Cosbi turning away God's plague in **Numbers 25**. Again, when the men of Beth-shemesh looked inside the Ark of the Covenant in **I Samuel 6:19-21** and God struck a number of the men with a great blow. There is Uzzah in **II Samuel 6:6** who merely reached out to steady the Ark when the oxen carrying it stumbled, and God struck Him down immediately. Lest we think this was just the "Old Testament God," but between the Testaments He became a Christian and quit acting like that, there is also God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira who, in **Acts 5:1-11**, lied to the church about the price of a piece of property they sold and donated to the brethren. God didn't hesitate, He struck the couple dead on the spot.

- C. And while these are exceptional circumstances (God very rarely treated people with such immediate wrath), they demonstrate what in reality should be the norm. This is what we deserve. Do you understand that? This is not simply what mass murderers, serial killers, recidivist rapists, and genocidal maniacs deserve. This is what we deserve. We think the wrath of God is a good thing when directed towards the Hitlers and Mansons of the world, but to the envious? ... to the deceitful? ... to those who disobey their parents? Consider **Romans 1:28-32**. Our culture has the idea that mutually consenting extra-marital sex doesn't hurt anyone, and therefore simply can't be wrong. But **Ephesians 5:5-6** says God's wrath comes because of such behavior. Some of you are sitting smugly as you exclaim that you've never committed any acts of sexual immorality. But did you notice that filthiness, foolish talking, and crude joking are also on that list as well as impurity and covetousness (**Ephesians 5:3-4**). Or what about **Colossians 3:5-11**, which includes passion, evil desire, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk. Have you ever told a lie? Even just a little bitty one? Have you ever disobeyed your parents? Have you ever looked on another with lust? Have you ever had an outburst of anger? I am ashamed to admit I've done all those things? Do you get what that means? We deserve God's wrath. All things being equal God should have reached out from heaven with His fiery hand and struck us down on the spot, casting us out of His presence and headlong into hell for all eternity.
- D. We may think this is extreme and harsh. But that just means we do not understand or appreciate the holiness of God. Sin is not bad because it isn't loving. You may really love someone you aren't married to. We know sex can be an expression of love. But you aren't free to have sex with someone just because you love them. You are only free to pursue sexual intimacy with the person you are married to. Sin is not bad because it hurts other people. As far as I know, no one else is hurt by your lustful fantasies that you keep to yourself, but they are still sin. Further, as we all know, truth can hurt sometimes. Sin is not bad for all the reasons our culture thinks makes sin bad. Sin is bad because it is an affront to the Holy God who created us in holiness. As **Romans 3:23** explains, sin falls short of God's glory. To get a clear picture of yourself, consider **Romans 3:9-18**. Paul is not saying you are a sinner when you are this bad, he is saying you are this bad when you are a sinner. Why? Because you have marred the holiness with which God created you.
- E. Consider **Psalms 5:4**. "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man" (ESV). This is God's holiness. He cannot dwell with sin, and sinners cannot dwell with Him. By His very nature He must stamp out and destroy sin. By nature His holiness demands that His wrath must be focused on His enemies in sin. Guess what that means? It means His wrath must be focused on you. It must be focused on me. It must be focused on us.

II. The Love of God

- A. Have you ever been angry at someone? I mean really angry, justifiably so. Someone betrayed you, hurt you, belittled you, trampled you under their feet. I mean the kind of anger that comes from a spouse cheating on you or a person stealing from your family or a man violating one of your children. I'm talking about the kind of wrath expressed by the Israelites in **Psalms 137:7-9** as they remembered the Edomites cheering when their homes were plundered and their children murdered. I don't know if I've been that angry. But I can imagine. Imagine that someone snuck into your home, raped and murdered all of your family except for you

and the one child that was out with you on a parent/child outing. Would you have the right to be angry at them? Should they experience wrath? Now imagine someone said to you, "You should love them." Could you do it? Would it be hard? What if you were told, "Not only should you love them, but you should express it by sacrificing the one child that remains to you in order to save them from the wrath and punishment they deserve." Could you do that? Perhaps you watched some of the videos as Nadine Collier, the daughter of Ethel Lance who was killed by Dylann Roof in that Wednesday night Bible study in the South Carolina AME church months ago, offered forgiveness to him. No doubt that was beautiful, but can you imagine she could have offered that forgiveness if the only way to do so was to allow others to execute her firstborn in order to save that young man from the wrath and punishment he deserves? I cannot even imagine that.

- B. As you try to put yourself in this situation, you begin to comprehend the shocking magnitude of God's love. If His wrath against us and our sins is as terrible and horrible as the Bible says, how much more awesome is the love He poured out on us through that cross even while He was that angry at us. **Romans 5:8** says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (ESV).
- C. The text says Christ went to the cross at the right time. Have you stopped to consider what that right time was? No doubt, Paul could mean in the fullness of time, that is, at just the right time in history when all the right players were in place to produce the outcome God wanted. But I wonder if the time table in the immediate text isn't what Paul means. At what time? While you and I were still ungodly, weak sinners. After all, that was the only time the sacrifice could be offered. If God had waited for when we were strong, godly, law-keepers, He would have waited an eternity. We've already read **Romans 3:23**. Consider also **Ephesians 2:1-7**. When did God make us alive to Christ? When we were dead in our trespasses, living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, when we were by nature children of wrath.
- D. Do you remember what Nahum said about God and His enemies? Read it again. "The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies" (**Nahum 1:2**, ESV). And yet, while we were still His enemies He offered the sacrifice that would allow our reconciliation. As **Isaiah 53:4-6, 10** explains, the wrath of God was turned on and willingly accepted by the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the Sacrifice for our guilt.
- E. And we wonder if God loves us because our car won't start every time we want it to? We wonder if God loves us because we got sick? We wonder if God loves us because we are hungry? We wonder if God loves us because a loved one died? We wonder if God loves us because our battle against sin isn't quite going our way? God nailed His Son to a cross to show you His love for you. Why would He have to do more?
- F. Sadly, in our American prosperity, we have thought Jesus went to the cross so we would never have to suffer. When we suffer, we begin to question God's love for us. But when we grasp the full wrath of God and that Jesus's suffering on the cross has saved us from that, then we, like Paul in **Romans 5:1-5** can see suffering for what it really is. It is a cause for rejoicing because suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And we know our hope won't disappoint because we know God loves us. How do we know? Because God's love has been poured into our hearts. And how do we know that? Because He tells us it has in **Romans 5:5**. Because the Bible tells us so.
- G. Brothers, sisters, friends, and neighbors, our post-modern, post-Christian world would have us believe Jesus on the cross is little more than a metaphor. It is one meta-narrative among many that gives us a story to guide our lives if we choose to accept it. This is just not true. Jesus on the cross is a historical event. It happened in real earth time. We can go to the spot on earth where it happened. And if it did not happen, we have no reason to believe God loves us. If it did happen, then it is the only story/narrative that matters. It is the only event that should guide and govern our lives. When we see this gospel proclamation, we see love is a cross. Then and only then we can have the confidence Paul describes in **Romans 8:31-39**. Jesus hung on to the cross; nothing going on in our lives can separate us from that love of Christ if we will merely hang on to the cross.
- H. Love is a cross. And if you need more love than that, I've got nothing for you.

Conclusion:

Here are your options. The Holy God simply cannot dwell with sin. By His very nature, He must stamp it out. One way or the other, He must destroy it. The choice is yours. He will either destroy it by separating you with your sins from His presence in judgment, consigning you to the abyss of hell which is eternal separation from God. Or He will destroy it by separating your sins from you, cleansing you by the blood of Jesus Christ allowing you into His eternal presence. Which will you choose? "Jesus loves me! He will stay close beside me all the way. Thou hast bled and died for me, I will henceforth live for thee." When you finally grasp God's love for you in the cross, how could you not?