**The Glorious Wrath of God – #1 The Pain of God.**

**The Wrath of God** is a constant theme that runs through both the OT and the NT.

**The Glorious Wrath of God:** But why the title. (Moses Exod 33:12-23. God’s answer. Exod 34:5-7)

God’s wrath is very much a part of God’s glory. **If we are to understand what is happening in the world today, we need know how the sovereign God is acting in love but also in wrath.**

**Eden - Wrath and the Fall –** Human sin has consequences for all of humanity and for the creation itself as God acts in in holy wrath. Eden lost, shame, pain in child birth, thorns, thistles and death. The sin of humanity is no trite thing. God responds to sin in holy wrath. “Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all”. “Sin reigned in death”, (Rom 5:12,21). (… as in Adam all die 1Cor 15;22).

**God’s Covenant love & patience**

Deuteronomy 7:7It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8It was because the **Lord loved you** and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains **covenant loyalty** with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10and **who repays in their own person** those who reject him. 11Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that I am commanding you today.

**God”s Covenant with Israel.** See Deut 28:1-14 for the blessings that God promises for his people if they are faithful to his covenant of love. If a nation loves and obeys God, he blesses that community. When a nation forsakes God it is cursed –

Deut 28:15-68. **20**“The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.” – Pestilence, wasting disease, drought, blight and with mildew, no rain, enemies, boils, tumors, exile …).

**Wrath**. (NeW Bible Dictionary 1962:1341). **The permanent attitude of the holy and just God when confronted by sin and evil is designated his ‘wrath’.** It is inadequate to regard this term merely as a description of ‘the inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe’ or as another way of speaking of the results of sin. **It is rather a personal quality, without which God would cease to be fully righteous and his love would degenerate into sentimentality.** His wrath, however, even though like his love it has to be described in human language, is not wayward, fitful or spasmodic, as human anger always is. **It is as permanent and as consistent an element in his nature as is his love**.

The injustice and impiety of men, for which they have no excuse, ***must* be followed by manifestations of the divine wrath in the lives both of individuals and of nations** (see Rom. 1:18–32); and the OT contains numerous illustrations of this, such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the downfall of Nineveh (see Dt. 29:23; Na. 1:2–6). But until the final ‘day of wrath’, which is anticipated throughout the Bible and portrayed very vividly in the book of Revelations. **God’s wrath is always tempered with mercy,** particularly in his dealings with his chosen people (see, *e.g*., Ho. 11:8ff). For a sinner, however, to ‘trade’ upon this mercy is to store up wrath for himself ‘on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed’ (Rom. 2:5). Paul was convinced that one of the main reasons why Israel failed to arrest the process of moral decline lay in their wrong reaction to the forbearance of God, who so often refrained from punishing them to the extent they deserved. They were presuming upon ‘the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience’, and failed to see that **it was intended to lead them to repentance.** We see that God’s wrath is about God’s righteousness. (Judge Court – Love you all, don’t do it again).

Tasker (1250–1251) says, “In their unredeemed state men’s rebellion against God is, in fact, so persistent that they are inevitably the objects of his wrath (Eph. 2:3), and ‘vessels of wrath made for destruction’ (Rom. 9:22). **Nor does the Mosaic law rescue them from this position, for, as the apostle states in Rom. 4:15, ‘the law brings wrath’.** Because it requires perfect obedience to its commands, the penalties exacted for disobedience render the offender more subject to the divine wrath. It is, to be sure, only by the merciful provision for sinners made in the gospel that they can cease to be the objects of this wrath and become the recipients of this grace. The love of God for sinners expressed in the life and death of Jesus is the dominant theme of the NT, and this love is shown not least because Jesus experienced on man’s behalf and in his stead the misery, the afflictions, the punishment and the death which are the lot of sinners subject to God’s wrath. … Consequently, Jesus can be described as ‘the deliverer from the wrath to come’ (see 1 Thes. 1:10); and Paul can write: ‘Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God’ (Rom. 5:9). **On the other hand, the wrath of God remains upon all who, seeking to thwart God’s redemptive purpose, are disobedient to God’s Son, through whom alone such justification is rendered possible’.** (How is this so? Rom 1)

**The Pain of God -** Plato and other Greek philosophers taught that God cannot suffer and that he was beyond the reach of external influences, that he was independent of the human situation, that he was free, self-sufficient and without feeling” (Konig 1982:91f). However the Old Testament gives us a very vivid picture of God’s love for his people and the agony of God when his people rebel.

Kittel (Wrath III Divine Wrath 2.) says that **‘Wrath is not the same thing as judgment for it has to do with the process or emotion within God’**. He then says, **‘the aim of divine wrath is the establishment of the divine rule of holiness’.** **God’s wrath is his love in action as he seeks to ensure the integrity and glory of those created in his image’.**

To do this, evil along with those who refuse to repent and be reconciled can never enter the new creation. Kittel continues, ‘Yet God does not give free reign to wrath but is long suffering. … in relation to Israel wrath is no mere caprice (impulse) but is **the reverse side of God’s faithful and zealous love’.**

Adrio Konig (1982:93f) says that **God is the opposite of the ideal Judge**. “The ideal judge must be neutral, emotionally uninvolved, objective. It must be all the same to him whether he finds the accused guilty or innocent…. **God is not like this. The accused are his concern**. He is deeply concerned with their fate. He wants at all costs to acquit them and give them a new future, because he loves them. …. **Had God not been loving he would never have been angry**. … **The opposite of love is not wrath, the opposite of both love and wrath is neutrality. Neutrality would mean that God had withdrawn himself from the covenant.** The fact that he continued to be angry with Israel meant that he was still interested in them. (Parent / Child – both love and righteous wrath required).

Hence his patience, “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9, Jn3:16). Refusal to repent demands the actions of his wrath hence the great pain of God who created us and loves us.

**The Great Pain of God.**
**Jer 2:1-6** The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; evil came upon them, says the LORD." Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and **went after worthlessness, and became worthless**? They did not say, `Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness.

**Jer 2:10-13** For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, 13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

**Jer 3:19-22** Can a maiden forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD. A voice on the bare heights is heard, the plaintive weeping of Israel's children, because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the LORD their God: Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness.

**Jer 12:7** I have forsaken my house; I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my heart into the hands of her enemies.

**Jer 14:17** Let my eyes run down with tears night and day and let them not cease for the virgin daughter of my people is struck down with a crushing blow.

Clearly, in his dealing with Israel we find that God is not impassable as the Greek philosophers taught. Yahweh is the God who suffers. His suffering is what Moltmann (1993: 23) calls ‘active suffering – the voluntary laying oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by that one; that is to say the suffering of passionate love’. Yahweh is a vulnerable God, affected by the unfaithfulness of those whom he loves. God is not apathetic to human sin. Yahweh is love and in making covenants he has entered into a love relationship with his covenant partners.

Unfaithfulness causes Yahweh to grieve, and Fretheim (1984: 111f) says that, “the grief of God is a current as people’s sin”. In grief and holy love God seeks to bring his people to repentance, judgment is one means by which he does this. (See Psalm 78. It deals with the grief and wrath of God because of the rebellion of his people on the exodus journey.)

**Isaiah 63:7–10 (NRSV) — 7** I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. **8** For he said, “Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely”; and he became their savior **9** in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. **10** But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore, he became their enemy; he himself fought against them.

**Ephesians 4:30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. (Not just for Israel but for us.)

Fretheim continues, “the judgment of God is not like flicking a switch or sending an impersonal command through a subordinate. God is caught up in the matter, and in some respects, God will never be the same again. And so the judgment is a very personal decision, with all the mixed sorrow and anger that go into the making of decisions that affect the people whom one loves. **Grief is always what the Godward side of what judgment looks like”**.

**The Pain of God became the Pain of Jeremiah and the Pain of God’s Prophetic Community.** (Amos, Hosea etc.).

Thompson (1980: 257) comments, “The divine word had become a reproach to Judah and the whole being of Jeremiah was as though united with the being of Yahweh so that he sensed the wrath of Yahweh and could no longer restrain his anger”.

Carrol (1986: 196f) says, “Jeremiah was filled with the wrath of the Lord (Jer 6:11). Jeremiah’s empathy with Yahweh and his consequent pathos stands in contrast to the apathy of the false prophets of whom God says, they have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, `Peace, peace,' when there is no peace (6:14). Such prophets desire office and glory but no pain. As one with Yahweh, Jeremiah speaks the judgment of God upon children in the streets, young men, husbands and wives and even the very old (6:11) but he does so with great pain”.

Jeremiah, filled with the wrath of the Lord, was at the same time filled with love for his nation. ‘His own heart was rich in tenderness and sensitivity to other people’s suffering. **He terrified in order to save**.

The disaster he threatened would be a disaster to him, sorrow and excruciating anguish’, (Heschel 2001: 153).

Jeremiah calls out, “Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God before he brings darkness, and before your feet stumble on the mountains at twilight; while you look for light, he turns it into gloom and makes it deep darkness. But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock has been taken captive”, Jer 13:15-17.

In passages such as Jer 4:19-20, 8:18-19 and 10:19 there are deep cries of anguish such as –

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land is laid waste (Jer 4:19-20).

Jeremiah longed for the nation to escape from the judgments of God that would flow from his own mouth. He tried, without success, to hold back the prophetic word –

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jer 20:9).

(Brueggemann 1998: 22f). The ‘prophetic passion’ was stronger than his will and the fire in his belly gave birth to calls of repentance but also words of judgment that brought destruction, death and exile. Judah’s world would be undone; king captured, temple destroyed, and a new world of exile created for the people of God in the distant land of Babylon. … “Language about the wrath of God is difficult for us to hear. We are wont to think that the love of God overrides such anger, but that surely is not the case in this portrayal of God. … The wrath of God in Jeremiah is not that of an indifferent sovereign who crassly retaliates, but it is that of one who is intimate in covenantal relation and therefore is wounded by infidelity and rejection. While such an outburst may not be congenial to popular theology, it is indeed congruent with the metaphor of hurt turned to vigorous rejection. The God whose outstretched arm saved now outstretches the same arm to terminate.

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. Where are the prophets today?

**The Wrath and pain of God at the cross.**

**Isaiah 53:1–11** Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? **2** For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. **3** He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. **4** Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. **5** But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. **6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and **the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all**. …. **10** Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When **you make his life an offering for sin**, … **11** Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, **and he shall bear their iniquities.**

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