

July 10th, 2016

GOD IN THE HANDS OF ANGRY SINNERS

John 8:48-59

Jonathan Edwards' preached his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" exactly 275 years ago on July 8th, 1741 to a congregation in Enfield, Connecticut. It was a lightning rod on the continent, becoming part of the spiritual fabric of the Great Awakening.

In our passage this morning, we are going to see the opposite truth: "God in the Hands of Angry Sinners." Jesus began chapter eight by delivering His second "I AM" statement: "I AM the light of the world." (John 8:12) Jesus Christ is to our souls what the sun is to the earth. Without the sun, this earth would perish in an frozen coffin of misery. Without Christ, our souls are blind, cut off from God, unable to find forgiveness, destined to be forever ruined. As Jesus continues to unpack this truth, his opponents become more and more enraged. And then Jesus ends with the clearest, most plainspoken declaration that He is God in all the gospels: v.58 "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Jesus could have said '...before Abraham was, *I was.*' That would have been audacious enough, if He were to claim that He existed before Abraham. But instead, He speaks the very words that God spoke to Moses. When God instructed Moses to bring His people out of their slavery in Egypt, Moses asked God whom he should tell the Israelites was sending him when they asked. **Exodus 3:14** "God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

When Jesus took these words on his lips "I AM" *egō eimi*, He spoke words about Himself that only God had the right to say. Jesus was claiming that He is Yahweh; that He is the God who brought Israel out of Egypt; that He is greater than Abraham the father of Israel, because He made Abraham; that

He is the Lord God from whom all nations were given birth and to whom all nations must one day bow and give homage.

And the Jews knew Jesus was claiming this which was why they picked up stones to stone Him (v.59) They were overcome with anger, ready to kill God. That is how chapter eight ends: God in the hands of angry sinners.

Doctrine

Sinners are angry at God because He claims all the glory for Himself

- ☆ The Anger of Sinners at a Glory-Seeking God
- ☆ The Glory-Seeking God Who Calls to Angry Sinners

I. The Anger of Sinners at a Glory-Seeking God

Racism comes from angry sinners

Last week we heard Jesus say in v.47 “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” Jesus levels all pride. If we hear and believe the words of Christ, it is only because He has made us to. If He doesn’t take possession of us, we won’t believe.

The Jews could no longer resist Jesus’ reasoning so they resort to a personal attack (ad hominem). v.48 “The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a *Samaritan* and have a demon?” The Jews hated the Samaritans and viewed them as half-breeds because they had intermarried with non-Jews when they were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 b.c. This was a racial slur. This was racism.

Dear congregation, the events of this past week have been tragic.¹ Racism is alive and well in America. Americans like all humans are natural born racists, because we are natural born children of the devil. Remember what Jesus said last week in v.44 “You are of your father the devil, and *your will* is to do your father's desires.” The Jews in our passage are resorting to racial slurs against Jesus. Why? Because *their will* is to do their father's desires. The devil hates all races, and his children do the same. But what's important to see is that racism is a natural fruit of a self-righteous heart. **Luke 18:9** says that those who trust in themselves *that they are righteous treat others with contempt*. Racism is the result of self-righteousness. Racism comes from thinking you are a *pretty good person*. But wait! the whole world thinks that they are pretty good people. That is why the whole world is swallowed up in racism. It is only when we see ourselves as vile sinners in the sight of a holy God, in desperate and constant need of the blood of Jesus Christ that the root of racism can begin to be eradicated.²

These Jews were racists *mainly* because they rejected the claims of Jesus Christ, specifically that apart from Him they are children of the devil. And so they respond with this racial slur and add double the insult by saying that He is demon possessed.

Angry sinners cherish their self-righteousness more than Christ

Jesus responds to this in v.49-51. We'll come back to this, but first let's see how the Jews respond after Jesus says “If anyone keeps my word, he will

¹ We've seen the nightly news broadcast the death of Alton Sterling, a black man shot by police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Philando Castile also a black man shot by a police officer in St. Paul Minnesota; and then a black sniper kill multiple police officers in Dallas, Texas in retaliation.

² One of the fruits of the gospel is racial reconciliation. The promise was made to Abraham: “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”—Genesis 12:3; and Paul made it clear in Ephesians 2:14-18 “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

never see death.” v.52-53 “The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”

These men were stubbornly interpreting Jesus to mean *mere* physical death. So their reasoning was something like this: ‘Abraham and the prophets could not stop themselves from dying, and so who is this Jesus who is claiming that those who keep His word will never die!? He must be demon possessed!’ Why were they so angry? **Because they heard Jesus claiming to have a greater glory than every major significant figure in their entire history.** In effect, Jesus is saying “Everything that you have believed is insufficient! Your law keeping, your Abraham-honoring, your sin hating, your circumcising, your Scripture-preserving—all of it is utterly defective and completely worthless without Me!’ Jesus was stripping them naked of any thought of their being pretty good people. Jesus gave them a really hard choice. **Submitting to Christ meant they had to admit that they had no goodness in themselves. This is the hardest thing for any human being to do.** It’s the hardest thing for you and I to do. Let’s test ourselves. What if I were to calmly (not viciously) call you a Pharisee? I think most of us if called that would be outraged and scream NO! Those are fighting words. But “Are we saying that we are *too good* to be a Pharisee?”

If you take a look at the issues in the N.T., you find that saints act like Pharisees all the time. There were Pharisee saints in Corinth—**1 Corinthians 1:12.** “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos” or “I follow Cephas” Peter and the other Jewish Christians played the part of Pharisees in Antioch. **Galatians 2:14** “But...I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.” Jesus’ own disciples played the part of Pharisees when they were on mission with Him—**Luke 9:46** “An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.” **Our natural default mode is thinking we are pretty good people.** We can make the same mistake these Jews made, leaning our righteousness on our spiritual heritage. “Jesus are you greater than our father

Calvin who died?” And the Puritans? Who do you make yourself out to be?” Our righteousness doesn’t come from great church fathers, or from what *flavor* of a Christian we are. It comes from Jesus Christ alone. We are not truly reformed unless we see ourselves naked and undone without Jesus Christ. These Jews were angry because they heard that message loud and clear.

Angry sinners will not allow themselves to be de-throned

At the end of our passage in v.56 Jesus says “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” It is not clear to me what specific occasion Jesus was referring to here, but I don’t believe that is the point.³ Jesus’ point was that the Jews were pitting Abraham against Jesus. But Abraham’s highest joy was the prospect of seeing the Messiah. He knew through the promises of the covenant that the coming Christ was the only hope of mankind—Genesis 22:18 “...in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”⁴ But the Jews again stubbornly interpret Jesus from a **merely** physical point of view. v. 57 “So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ‘Abraham lived two thousand years ago, how could you possibly have seen Abraham?’

Then Jesus demolishes any remaining questions about His identity: v. 58 “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” Truly, Truly (or most certainly)—I AM God. Not only does Jesus claim that He existed before Abraham, but that He is the very God—Yahweh—who delivered Israel from their slavery in Egypt.

³ Certainly Hebrews 11:13-16 applies “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

⁴ Paul makes clear that this offspring is singular in Galatians 3:16 “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to man, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”

What did the Jews do when they heard this? v.59 “So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”⁵ I believe that the main explanation for them trying to kill Jesus was because they felt the threat of being de-throned. We have all eaten of that forbidden fruit under the pretense that “You will be like God...” (Genesis 3:15) Jesus’ claim threatened their Lordship over their own lives. But we’ll see this more in our application.

In summary for this first section, we see three things that those who reject the gospel do in this passage: 1) They hold others in contempt—the Jews racially slurred Jesus and accused him of being a demon (v.48). 2) They refused to admit that they have no good in themselves—the Jews saw their allegiance to Abraham and the prophets all that was necessary (v.52-53) 3) They are willing to kill God Himself when He challenges this notion—the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus (v.59)

II. The Glory-Seeking God Who Calls to Angry Sinners

Jesus sought the glory of His Father

We must not miss how many times **glory** is mentioned in this text. The Jews underlying accusation against Jesus was that He was seeking His own **glory**. Which is why Jesus responds in v.49-50 “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own **glory**; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.” And then again in v. 54 “Jesus answered, “If I **glorify** myself, my **glory** is nothing. It is my Father who **glorifies** me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ These are strong statements by Jesus “I do not seek my own glory...[and]...if I glorify myself, glory is nothing.” What does He mean? He means that His coming into the world was not in order to bring glory to Himself—privately. Jesus was not after a private self-promotion. **Hebrews 5:5** “So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but

⁵ There is a long history in the Scripture of God’s people turning against His leaders to stone them. Israel wanted to stone Moses (Exodus 17:4); they wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:10); and even King David was almost stoned by His own men (1 Samuel 30:6).

was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” Jesus mission was not a private self-glorifying as the Jews thought but to glorify the Father—v. 49 “...but I honor my Father...”

Without this, salvation is impossible! It is very easy to adopt a half-way gospel thinking that Jesus dying on the cross is all we need. If all that Jesus did was die on the cross for our sins, there would be no salvation! If we don’t have Christ’s righteous *imputed* to our account then we are lost. **Imputed means credited.** Like when you swipe your debit card in the store and money is moved from your account and *credited* to the store’s account. When we believe in Christ savingly, all of His righteousness is imputed to our account. Forever. Meaning, when God looks at us, He sees the perfection of His Son.

Jesus had to *earn* this righteousness. In order to *substitute* for sinners, He had to obey from His human nature the life that God demands from us.⁶ **That is what all this talk about him not seeking his own glory but the glory of the Father means.**⁷ As our substitute, He needed to honor the Father, not Himself.

But Jesus is quick to point out that the Father seeks His glory—v.50 “...there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.”⁸ And v.54 “It is my Father who glorifies me.” One might ask, ‘how exactly was the Father glorifying the Son?’

The main way that the Father glorified the Son was by punishing Him on the cross for sinners. The highest display of God’s glory that this universe has ever or will ever see was on calvary. God showed that He is a holy God and that

⁶ **Jesus was completely dependent upon Father.** Beloved that is what true faith is—absolute dependency upon Father. You and I have never done that perfectly for one second in our lives. But Jesus did. He points this out in **v.55** “ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.”

⁷ Chrysostom points out that when the Jews insult him personally He seems to be more gentle with them than when they insult His Father. He says “When they said, ‘We have God and Abraham for our Father,’ He touched them sharply (v.44); but when they called Him a demoniac, He spake submissively, thus teaching us to avenge insults offered to God, but to overlook such as are offered to ourselves.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 14*, Ed. Philipp Schaff, (Peabody, MA,: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), pg. 197

⁸ See Augustine for a helpful clarification on the end of v. 50 “...he is the judge” and John 5:22 which says “The Father judges no one...” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 7*, Ed. Phillip Schaff (Peabody, MA,: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), pg. 241-242

He will never allow sin to go unpunished and so He poured out His wrath upon Christ. And God showed that He is a loving and compassionate God who desires to save poor ruined sinners and so He accepts Christ's payment for their sin. No higher display of glory could ever be conceived. Jesus swallowed hell and earned heaven for us in one act upon the cross. That's how the Father glorifies the Son.

Jesus calls on angry sinners to escape death

In spite of everything that the Jews have said to Jesus in this passage, calling Him a Samaritan, accusing Him of being possessed by a demon, He declares open pardon for any who would come to Him—v.51 “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” Mankind is acutely aware of death. Hebrews 2:15 says that the human race “...who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” The fear of dying brings men under a horrible task master. There was a Pulitzer Prize winning book written in 1973 called *The Denial of Death*. John Piper summarizes its main thesis:

“The main thesis of this book is that the fear of death *haunts* the human animal like nothing else; it is a *mainspring*⁹ of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that is is the final destiny for all man.”¹⁰

The fear of death *haunts* the human animal. Or as Hebrews says it all the human race “...through the *fear of death* were subject to lifelong slavery.” The fear of death is a slave master. However when Jesus says “...if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death,” it is not *physical death* that He is speaking about. Jesus is speaking about another death that is far worse. He is speaking about *real death*. When people die physically, their spirit leaves the body.

⁹ A **mainspring** is a spiral torsion spring of metal ribbon - commonly spring steel - used as a power source in mechanical watches, some clocks, and other clockwork mechanisms. Winding the timepiece, by turning a knob or key, stores energy in the **mainspring** by twisting the spiral tighter. Source Wikipedia accessed July 9th, 2016

¹⁰ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/you-will-never-see-death>

Everyone that has ever lived, since Adam and Eve are very much alive in their spirits. They are conscious, they are aware, in fact I would argue more so than us. Though they have died, they are not dead. But real death, which the Bible calls *the second death* is what Jesus speaks of. **Revelation 20:14-15** “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the **second death**, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” This death is the one to be feared.¹¹

If anyone keeps my word...

Jesus gives a condition in order to escape this death, He says “If anyone keeps my word...” What is Jesus word? It’s a word of absolute dependence.

John 5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and **believes** him who sent me has eternal life....”

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; **whoever comes to me** shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. **Whoever follows me** will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

It’s the same word in each of these verses! Absolute dependency on Christ. Picture it this way. Much has been said about the welfare state of America. America has made a great number of its citizens *dependent* upon the government for healthcare, education, food, housing, such that if the government stopped giving these benefits, those citizens would be ruined, many to their deaths. That’s Jesus’ word to us v. 51. ‘Keep my word—be dependent upon Me, see Me as your only rescue from ruin.’

¹¹ In fact Jesus compares the two ways in which people die. **Matthew 10:28** “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

The message of Jesus is not: ‘be a productive contributor in my Kingdom and I will let you in.’ The message is Jesus is that you and I are spiritual welfare recipients—bankrupt, diseased, addicted, unclean degenerates. And He’s saying come to me just like that, and I will take care of you. The message of Jesus is not ‘clean up your sin and then come to Me.’ The message of Jesus is ‘come to Me and I will clean up your sin.’ “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” If anyone comes to be abandoning all hope in any other rescue, I will rescue you. If you depend on Me, you will not go to Hell. That is the voice of Christ calling through this verse. And He is not making this invitation to good people. He’s making it to children of the devil like you and me.

Application

Our Doctrine: Sinners are angry at God because He claims all the glory for Himself

Our passage ends today with the Jews picking up stones to stone Jesus. v.59 says that “...Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” Christ wasn’t afraid of them or ashamed of what He had said,¹² but this was not the death that was needed for sinners, nor had He accomplished all the Father’s work, and so He left. Nonetheless, chapter eight ends with *God in the hands of anger sinners*. Why do Jesus’ claims make us angry?

Because we like our first parents Adam and Eve have believed the lie that we can “...be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5) Why is that lie so compelling to believe? Because it promises that we can be independent, self-sufficient, complete, and good in ourselves.¹³ Beloved the lie that brought down the human race was that we can be good enough with out God’s help. That is

¹² Matthew Henry, Unabridged Commentary On The Whole Bible, OSNOVA’s Kindle Edition, location 244290

¹³ <http://home.nwciowa.edu/wacome/sin.htm>

Note: This author provided some well written lines in his sermon, but some of what he said was very problematic.

the essence Satan's temptation that we can be good in ourselves apart from God. Why is that attractive? Because then we get the credit. We get the glory. We don't have to give glory to someone else for our virtues, because we've done it all ourselves. We are the hero. Unbelief is mainly an issue of self-worship. We naturally disbelieve the gospel because we want to be good without anyone's help so that we get the praise. And when Jesus comes on the scene and says "... apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), sinners like you and me get angry. That's why these Jews were angry in this chapter, because Jesus stripped them of their fig leaves of righteousness and exposed them for what they really were.

Our Duty: ~~Lay down our stones and receive the grace of Christ~~
Repent of our righteousness

This text is calling us to repent of our righteousness. Beloved think carefully on this. How do you judge yourself? Do you ever look back on your week and think you've had a pretty good week? —I read my Bible this week, I prayed, I shared the gospel with someone. And you feel really good about yourself. Or conversely, you look back on your week and feel horrible because you didn't open your Bible, instead you indulged in sin, and instead of praying your cursed those close to you. And so you resolve within yourself to moral reform, so that you can feel good again. And I know that all of us do this. Many of you have confessed sin to me in repentance and tears. But all too often in our repentance we beat ourselves up and say "I can do better than this, I am better than this." Our sins can be our best indicators of how we view our righteousness. If we think we were doing really good before we blew it, we need to repent of our righteousness.

Beloved, you have never had a good week according to God's standard in your whole life. Not a good day, not a good hour. **Isaiah 64:6** says that "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a *polluted garment*." Which means this, God would be perfectly just to punish you

for the best things that you have ever done. Consider that next time you think you've had a good day: God would be equally as just for punishing you for best day as for your worst day. **That's the gospel brothers and sisters, the good news is that Christ forgives you for your righteousness.** You and I never have, nor ever will do one good thing that will put God in our debt. Romans 11:35 "...who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" Rather God is looking at our good deeds and saying "Yes, my Son shed His blood for that good deed as well."

So brothers and sisters, please repent of your righteousness. Repent of ever thinking that God accepts you, or is more pleased with you, because of what you have done, or what you are doing, or what you will do. If Christ is your Savior, He has saved you from the wickedness of your own righteousness. And we need to see this, because most often our righteous deeds can become the biggest stones that we would throw at Christ in the gospel. Just as the Jews picked up stones to protect their righteousness from being taken away by Jesus, so we can use our righteous deeds as stones to chase Jesus out of our heart.

Our Delight: The gospel is for murderers like us

As we look back on the events of the past week, I wonder how we as Christians are interpreting them. God forbid that we would not pray for justice to be done in human courts. God requires that human justice would be done. We should be applying the truths of 1 Timothy 2 to pray for our leaders, politicians and judges that all that did wrong be punished according to justice.

And at the same time we need to see these events through the gospel. **Question:** How did you interpret the events of this week: the killing of these two black men by police officers? How did you interpret the cops being killed in Dallas, TX? Were you angry? Angry for what reason? That the image of God has been vandalized in the public arena, and the resulting train wreck in human relationships? Or were you angry that you can't believe how stupidly wicked some people are compared to you?

Dear congregation, there are murderers sitting in this congregation this very morning. The Scripture tells us in **1 John 3:15** "Everybody who hates his brother is a **murderer.**" According to God's law, which is perfect, never subject to error or exaggeration, I am a murderer. And so are you. Most of the N.T. was written by a former murdering racist—the apostle Paul. That is who the gospel is for, for the worst of offenders like you and me. "The good news, as Luther once put it is this: "God sent his son into the world...and said to him: 'Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer and assaulter; David the adultery; the sinner who ate the apple in paradise; the thief on the cross.'¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://home.nwciowa.edu/wacome/sin.htm>

Note: This author provided some well written lines in his sermon, but some of what he said was very problematic.

