



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Wrath and Mercy

March 1, 2020

Romans 9:19-33

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¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

*“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”*

*²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”*

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,

*“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”*

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written,

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

(Pastor prays)

Some have called Romans Chapter 8 the Mount Everest of God's grace, and in many ways I think that is a great assessment, because in that chapter we are told that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose. And that chapter ends with the great promise for believers that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That's a great mountaintop to stand on and look out at life.

Well, if Romans Chapter 8 is the Mount Everest of God's grace, then Romans 9 is the Grand Canyon of God's sovereignty as we stand on the edge and look out over the vastness and depth and striations and colors and wonder at its bigness— and if you ever go into the Grand Canyon you get a sense of how *big* it is and just how *small* you are. And really what I want to do today is peek over the edge into the beautiful and vast sovereignty of God and just look and see some things that will strengthen your faith, encourage your soul and make you want to praise God For Jesus, seeing how big He is and yet in grace and at the cross He saved sinners like you and me. Because...

Our God is an Awesome God

He is an inscrutable God beyond our understanding

Let me show you what I mean. Let's pick up with the question in verse 19. *You will say to me then, "why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"* Paul is assuming that we would have this question after what he said in verse 18 about Pharaoh and God having mercy on whomever He wills and hardening whomever He wills because Paul knows that violates our sense of fairness.

But instead of answering our call for fairness, Paul addresses our sense of pride. See it in verse 20: *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?* The first part of verse 20 is very emphatic and deeply emotional. Look at the sentence structure. "Oh man" is in the front of the sentence and is balanced by placing the word "God" at the end of the sentence in the most emphatic place. Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?! (You understand emphasis and inflection. We use it all the time in language. An illustration would be an advertisement for a chili cheeseburger that is a vegan burger. I might say "You want me to eat *that?!!*")

In verse 20, Paul is not saying that there is no answer to the question. He's saying the question is illegitimate. He's leaving no doubt that man is in sharp contrast with God. Even the verb "answer back" is not one we would expect to be used of action directed toward God. What you

have is a little finite man who loses his keys and can't remember phone numbers and has to have a GPS for directions and bifocals to read, set over against the great, infinite, creator God whose purpose runs through the whole creation, who moves people and nations and is beyond being scrutinized or analyzed or investigated.

So in verse 20 the question is turned back on us. It's like Paul says in verse 20, "I hear the question but the love and mercy and justice and goodness and grace of God are not up for debate." Those attributes have been fully displayed in Jesus at the cross. Who are you? Do you know who you are? What kind of relationship do you think exists between us and God?

Without Christ, we are not only far from God, we are dead in sin, children of wrath and going to Hell. And the only way that relationship changes is for you to put your faith in the perfect life, atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. I want you to know and love Jesus and experience the saving power of putting your faith in Jesus. Our God is an awesome God. He is an inscrutable God beyond our understanding.

He is a sovereign God who has prerogative

Let's take the rest of verse 20 and go into verse 21. Watch the questions. ²⁰ *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"* ²¹ *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?* See the rhetorical question with the assumed answers? Verse 20 says will what is *molded* say to the *molder*, "Why have you made me like this?" And the assumed answer is: of course not. Then verse 21, has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? And the assumed answer is: yes of course the potter has prerogative to do what he wants with his clay! This analogy of the potter and the clay is one you might recognize. It's found in Jeremiah 18 but also in Isaiah 29: 16 and Isaiah 45: 19, and my favorite is Isaiah 45: 9. *"Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'?"* I wanted handles. Why couldn't you give me some handles? So the Lord gave you love handles and you're still not happy! You see at issue here is God being God and we His people finding contentment in that, trusting that our all-wise and all-good God knows what to do with his children. He is a sovereign God who has full prerogative to do what He wants when He wants with whomever He wants. But His prerogative is always displayed in His character of holiness, mercy, grace and love fully displayed at the cross of Jesus. You should

come to Him. Come in faith and be forgiven and adopted by God the father through Jesus the son to find contentment in how God made you and redeemed you in Christ. Our God is an awesome God. He is an inscrutable God, above our understanding. He is a sovereign God who has prerogative.

He is a holy God that hates sin and saves sinners

What a remarkable contrast verses 22 and 23 are. Let's read both verses and talk about them both. ²² *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,* ²³ *in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—* In verse 22 there are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. I daresay there is not a more tragic description of unbelievers in the entire Bible. Let's breakdown verse 22 before we rejoice in verse 23. Verse 22 shows a holy God who hates sin. God desires to show His wrath and anger at sin. Sin isn't just a breaking of God's law; it's an insult to God's character, and the Bible says that the one who sins will surely die.

I'm reading in the book of Numbers right now, and often the people would sin and God would send a plague or fire or swallow them up in the earth. We forget how offensive our sin is. Your foul mouth or porn addiction or anger or disrespect or racism is a death-deserving offense. It's an act of grace that God doesn't instantly kill us when we sin because His wrath is being stored up, and our only hope is to run to the cross of Christ where His wrath was poured out on our substitute Jesus and we can find forgiveness there. He's not only a holy God who hates sin...

He is a powerful God who punishes sin

He desires to show His wrath and make known His power much like what He did with Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods. He displayed His mighty hand not just by saving His people but also by punishing His enemies. Because there is no escaping or out-running the justice of our all-powerful God who will punish in Hell every person who is not found in Christ. But what's remarkable is that He is not only a holy God who hates sin and a powerful God who punishes sin ...

He's a patient God who waits on sinners

Let's read verse 22 again. *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,* God has

endured with much patience and put up with people like He did with Pharaoh. He's endured with much patience the vessels of wrath. Instead of visiting judgment immediately, the indication seemed to be that God's forbearance in delaying the hour of judgment is another indicator of His mercy on vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. You've got to get technical with me just for a moment. I want you to compare verse 22 (the vessels of wrath) and verse 23 (the vessels of mercy). ²² *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,* ²³ *in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—*

In verse 23, Paul describes the vessels of mercy that He (God) has prepared beforehand. It's in an *active* voice. God is obviously *doing* it. In verse 22, the vessels of wrath are prepared beforehand; that is a passive voice. The people, vessels of God's wrath, are ripe or ready or prepared for destruction because of their own sins. Whatever God's sovereignty means in its fullest, it doesn't not make Him the author of sin but the savior of sinners. God has allowed sin into creation because it was the avenue for Him to display wrath and make His power and holiness known.

God created people, people became sinners and God deals with sinners in light of the cross. His powerful wrath and judgment on those without Christ is unimaginable. His mercy for those who are in Christ is glory. In verse 23 and 24 listen to it as I read it: ²³ *in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—* and verse 24 ²⁴ *even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*

Paul says even *us*, Jews and Gentiles, God has called to Himself to show love and grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. Isn't that what the psalmist said in Psalm 103: 8? *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.* And He's been so patient with so many here who have shown yourselves to be a vessel of wrath because of your own sin.

And I am asking you to examine who you are. Are you in Christ and safe and wrapped in mercy or are you in rebellion against our awesome and loving God?

Our God is above understanding, has prerogative, hates sin. But by His grace He saves sinners and He will save you. He will forgive you and cleanse and renew your heart and strengthen your soul and make your life worth something. Because our God is an awesome God and has shown His love to us at the cross of Jesus.

(Pastor prays)