



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

A Rusty Chain

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Romans 1:19-23

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¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

(Pastor prays)

I've entitled this message "A Rusty Chain" because it stands in stark contrast to the golden chain of salvation in Romans Chapter 8. This "rusty chain" drops into the sewer of human depravity and spiritual depression and the next two Sundays will be heavy with reminders of our sin and the sinful world we live in.

This rusty chain is anchored to one pristine, beautiful truth. In Romans 1 versus 16-17, Paul says, ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* God's grace.

So we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It happens at the cross of Jesus. The first link in the rusty chain is verse 18 which tells us why we need the Gospel. Verse 18 says, ¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* So in verses 16–17,

the Gospel is revealed, and in verse 18 we find out why we need the Gospel. It is because of the wrath of God.

In verse 19, the argument takes a downturn. Starting in verse 19 and all the way to the end of the chapter we are told why people, everywhere, who are not under the Gospel of Jesus are actually under the wrath of God, and it's a terrible thing that should give urgency to our witness and strength to our prayers. The seriousness of this passage should incinerate our petty grievances and press us to love the Gospel and point people to the saturating grace of God found in Jesus.

The Witness of Creation Points us to the Creator

God's Witness is universal and unmistakable

What you have here in verses 19 and 20 is the primary New Testament text that explains General Revelation. Verse 19 says what we can know about God is plain because God has made it known. General Revelation is creation and creation is a visible disclosure of the invisible God. Furthermore, verse 19 tells us that creation is God's active revelation. It's plain that there is a God because God has made it plain. Verse 19:1 says the heavens declare the glory of God. The Seraphim, in Isaiah 6, say the whole earth is full of His glory.

What Paul is saying in verses 19 and 20, and especially verse 20, is that people, ever since Adam and Eve, can know that there is a God. They can know His power and glory through general creation, but this knowledge is not enough to save them but to condemn them because they didn't live up to what God has revealed.

Instead, it is suppressed in verse 18. So, at the end of verse 20 they are without excuse. It is against this willful human rebellion that God's wrath is revealed. You have to take verses 19 - 20. It is a key theological statement in scripture. Verse 19, God has revealed Himself as the majestic transcending powerful Creator. In verse 20, He has done that daily, since creation, in the things that are. And because of that, every person everywhere is without excuse.

Also, in verses 19-20, people have never lived up to the highest and best they've known about God. We have enough knowledge to choose right from wrong and we choose wrong. Verse 20 tells us God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived in the things that

have been made. That word **made** is *poema*. It means God has actually crafted and designed. He has intentionally, actively, and forcefully revealed himself; but tragically He's been rejected, and Paul is making it clear that this is why we need the Gospel. People everywhere need the Gospel because general revelation by itself leads to negative results. Verse 21 tells us why we are without excuse. God's witness is universal and unmistakable.

Our Hearts are Dark Without the Gospel

Verse 21. ²¹ For although they knew God, Stop there. They did not know God in a saving way. They knew all the time that there was a God. God has placed eternity in the heart of man. God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind His existence, and man's rejection of God comes in two basic forms throughout the whole of the Bible and they're both listed right here. Let's read them in verse 21.

*They did not honor him as God. The Greek word there is **doxa**. It is where we get the word **doxology, glorify**. Here is the root sin of pride, and it is at the heart of our fallenness. The failure to give God glory, failure to glorify God with your talent, your work, your home, your family, your free time and your body.*

Let me ask you something. Are you glorifying God with your body? Above everything else God is to be glorified. To glorify God is to exalt.

Let's look at the story of the great King in Daniel 4: 28-34. Let's turn there and read it. ²⁸ *All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" ³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." ³³ Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. ³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and*

honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;

God rules and has no rivals. That's only one of the problems.

Look back at Romans 1:21. They didn't honor God or give thanks to Him. Here is the height of rebellion and futility: living under the good grace and constant provision of God and yet seeking your own independence, not realizing that without Christ you are poor, naked, blind and wretched...That whatever we have comes from Him!

Have you ever survived anything? Had close calls? Had provision for your children? But because we are prone to feel self-made, our minds become futile and our hearts become dark and only the light of Christ can change that rigid kind of dark heart.

But He can. Jesus died to save sinners so that sinners can live as saints and bring glory to Him as our creator, sustainer and savior.

We are Deluded by Sin

Verse 22 is short and tragic and universal. And I think it can be rightly used to describe our deluded world. Everyone has developed a concept of God to suit themselves and that God is an idol! Right here in verse 22 is rationalization.

This is the contrast between illusion and reality, and our world is drunk on illusion. Sin deludes us into thinking something obviously **wrong** is actually **right**. The reason there is such a strong delusion in people today is that this is the *original* sin. Remember what Satan said to Eve about the fruit: "God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." I think this delusion shows up in myriad places but I would like to mention two prominent ones.

Thoughts on Abortion

Abortion is wrong and especially the "Born Alive" Act that was debated about a month ago, that is, whether or not to give medical attention to an infant that survives an abortion, and it was voted down.

Now what kind of human impulse do you have to ignore and rationalize, to be able to talk about that with a straight face? "Claiming to be wise, they became fools."

Gender Fluidity

Gender fluidity is especially prevalent in athletes. In New Haven, Connecticut, two biological males are competing as girls and breaking all the records, and the school is at a loss as to what to do about it. "Claiming to be wise, they became fools."

2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us that ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

And that's what leads us to Romans 1:23. It is the first of three exchanges: exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. Look at the descending -- mortal man, birds, animals, and creeping things. It is the *reversal* of creation and that is an extremely bad trade-off.

I want to take your eyes this morning away from that exchange to the Great Exchange. 1 Peter 2:24 tells us ²⁴*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

Come away from that devilish exchange in verse 23 and come to the exchange found at the cross of Jesus. *He* took our sin and *we* get righteousness.

(Pastor prays)