

“God is Mad, but, Christian He’s not Mad at You”

Isaiah Chapter 34

Sunday, January 22nd, 2023

The most famous sermon in American history was preached on July 8th, 1741 at Enfield, Connecticut by Jonathan Edwards, widely regarded as one of the greatest intellects born on American soil. His sermon is famous for its portrayal of God’s wrath.

Are you familiar with that sermon? That sermon was titled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The biblical text was **Deuteronomy Chapter 32, verse 35** - “I will take revenge; I will pay them back. In due time their feet will slip. Their day of disaster will arrive, and their destiny will overtake them.”

Edwards spoke softly and simply, warning the unconverted that they were dangling over hell like a spider over the fire. Here’s a snippet: “O sinner, consider the fearful danger. The unconverted are now walking over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that it will not bear their weight...Let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let everyone fly out of Sodom.”

One of the most misunderstood attributes of God is His wrath. There are some in the church universal who want nothing to do with the notion of an angry God. God, they say, is a God of love... a God of benevolence and peace. And, we should agree with such an assessment - God is all of those things and many more.

But, try as we might, we cannot escape the truth - God is not merely a God of love, He is also a God of wrath. For certain, we have thus far seen such in our study of Isaiah, God is jealous for His glory. He is angry with those who do not bow the knee to Him. On the other hand, He loves to the end, every one of those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation from their sins. God’s wrath is as much characteristic of Him as is His love.

Today’s text, **Isaiah Chapter 34** reveals the anger of God against sin. It is difficult to find anything positive, uplifting, or comforting in this chapter. It is a chapter on God’s **Judgment**. Persons without saving faith in Jesus Christ will meet a similar end to the nations pictured herein. **Isaiah 34** is meant to shake you up if you don’t associate with Jesus and His people. And, if you already follow Jesus, **Isaiah 34** should jolt you to act to help others escape the coming night.

Isaiah 34 is the second to last chapter in a section of Isaiah we’ve been exploring the last few Sundays. That section begins with **Chapter 28** and runs through **Chapter 35** of **Isaiah**; it is titled, “**Judgment**.” The text for next Sunday, **Isaiah Chapter 35**, is

praiseworthy and positive. It is the polar opposite of today's text. Let's continue by reading the text.

Isaiah Chapter 34:

1 - Come near, you nations, to hear; and heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world and all things that come forth from it.

2 - For the indignation of the Lord *is* against all nations, and *His* fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter.

3 - Also their slain shall be thrown out; their stench shall rise from their corpses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.

4 - All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as *fruit* falling from a fig tree.

5 - For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment.

6 - The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, it is made overflowing with fatness, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

7 - The wild oxen shall come down with them, and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated with fatness."

8 - For *it is* the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.

9 - Its streams shall be turned into pitch, and its dust into brimstone; its land shall become burning pitch.

10 - It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever.

11 - But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it, also the owl and the raven shall dwell in it. And He shall stretch out over it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.

12 - They shall call its nobles to the kingdom, but none *shall be* there, and all its princes shall be nothing.

13 - And thorns shall come up in its palaces, nettles and brambles in its fortresses; it shall be a habitation of jackals, a courtyard for ostriches.

14 - The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the jackals, and the wild goat shall bleat to its companion; also the night creature shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.

15 - There the arrow snake shall make her nest and lay *eggs* and hatch, and gather *them* under her shadow; there also shall the hawks be gathered, every one with her mate.

16 - "Search from the book of the Lord, and read: Not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them.

17 - He has cast the lot for them, and His hand has divided it among them with a measuring Line. They shall possess it forever; from generation to generation they shall dwell in it."

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first (v. 1-4) is a general announcement of judgment on the nations of the earth. Then this announcement is particularized by applying it to the nation of Edom (v. 5-17). **First, the general announcement.**

Assyria, which we discussed last Sunday in our study of **Chapter 33** fades from view, and Isaiah addresses the whole world. Look again at verse 1: "Come near, you nations, to hear; and heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world and all things that come forth from it." The one nation Isaiah does mention in this chapter, in verses 5 &

6, is Edom. Edom was Judah's southern neighbor. Edom was the nation that began with Esau, Jacob's twin brother. (**Genesis 25:30**) Jacob and Esau, you'll recall, often fought with each other. They wrestled in their mother Rebekah's womb even. There's was a relationship founded on conflict. When we trace back through the previous books of the Old Testament, we see Edom opposing God's plan beginning with the Book of **Numbers 20:14-21**:

"**14** Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: "Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardship that we have met: **15** how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time. And the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our fathers. **16** And when we cried to the Lord, he heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. And here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your territory. **17** Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or vineyard, or drink water from a well. We will go along the King's Highway. We will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory." **18** But Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through, lest I come out with the sword against you." **19** And the people of Israel said to him, "We will go up by the highway, and if we drink of your water, I and my livestock, then I will pay for it. Let me only pass through on foot, nothing more." **20** But he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out against them with a large army and with a strong force. **21** Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory, so Israel turned away from him."

This hostility continued through the Kingdom period with one king after another having to face warfare with the Edomites. Ultimately, the conflict manifested itself in the Edomites assisting Babylon in overthrowing Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The section in this chapter on Edom can be divided into two parts. The first, verses 5-8, speaks to the **bloody destruction** that would fall upon Edom for Israel's sake. Hear again how Isaiah describes it:

- The sword of the Lord, which came down from heaven on the people of Edom, was filled with the blood of lambs and goats, and overflowed with the fat of the kidneys of rams;
- That is the language of sacrifice, which the Lord had in Bozrah (the capital city of Edom);
- There would be a great slaughter; the Edomites' land soaked with blood...."
- *It was* the day of the Lord's vengeance (revenge), the year of recompense (payback) for the cause of Zion.

Let's hear again from Jonathan Edwards who illustrates God's wrath in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God:" "It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not yet been executed; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the

mean time is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more **wrath**; the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, that holds the waters back...and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw His hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and **wrath of God**, would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power.”

The second part of this section (v. 9-17) speaks of the **desert that Edom will become**. In short, it will become a home for unclean birds and animals. Verses 9 & 10 bring to mind the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis Chapter 19**. Isaiah describes:

- Streams turned into pitch (tar), dust into brimstone; and land into burning pitch.
- Its smoke shall ascend forever. It will lie waste from generation to generation; no one shall pass through it forever and ever

Verses 11-15 uncover this newly destroyed environment:

- Pelicans, porcupines, owls and ravens.
- Jackals, wild goats, snakes, hawks, and ostriches.
- Everything encompassed by thorns, nettles and brambles.

Essentially, no human being could live there, and if they could, they would not want to!

It seems Isaiah's burden in **Chapters 34** and **35** is to show the contrast between two realities - God's judgment and His salvation. "**Chapter 34** shows us what will become of everyone who buys into this world, and **Chapter 35** will show us what becomes of those who bank everything on the promised salvation of God." (Ortlund, 196)

Warnings like we have here in **Isaiah 34** should capture the attention of those who do not walk with Jesus; who do not have time for Jesus; and ultimately, don't care for Jesus. If you keep that up, what we've touched on here today is in your future.

But, if you do walk with Jesus, He absorbed the wrath of God so that you might have life in this current context, and life everlasting. He took your punishment, to include all the assaults, threats, and tortures of hell so you don't have to! Yes, dear one, as Steve Brown often says, "God's not mad at you." He goes on to explain:

"I'm not telling you that God is simply nice and safe and will pat you on the back and tell you how wonderful you are and how all you have done that is evil, hateful, and sinful doesn't matter. It does matter. It mattered enough for God to give us his Son to die on a cross, bearing our penalty for the rebellion. He is still holy and righteous, and justice

is always exacted. But in the case of those who go to Him, justice and mercy have met on a hill in Palestine in the shape of a skull—Golgotha. That's where God's Son died, between two thieves, that we might go boldly to a God whose face is love." (Steve Brown, *Approaching God*)

I close with a poignant illustration.

The Great Chicago Fire began about 9:00 PM Sunday, October 8, 1871. This rapidly spreading fire killed 300 individuals, destroyed 3.3 square miles Chicago, and left over 100,000 residents homeless. This devastating fire would greatly impact the life of American evangelist D.L. Moody.

Moody's church was destroyed by the fire, as was his family's home, and the homes of many of his congregation. But there was a more disturbing aspect to the Great Chicago Fire that involved Moody, however.

D. L. Moody held his usual service the Sunday evening the fire broke out. At the close of the service, he asked his congregation to evaluate their relationship to Christ and to return the following week to make a decision. This, he thought, would give them time to really think things over. He wanted to make sure that they were sure about receiving Jesus Christ, not wanting to pressure them into making a decision they wouldn't stick with.

The next Sunday would be one that many in that meeting hall would not live to see. Within a matter of hours, many of those who sat under Moody's words were dead. There is no way of knowing how many that night could have gotten their hearts made right with God, and there is no way of knowing how many sat under Moody's voice that night and died in the fire not ready to meet God.

Moody would never be the same after that incident. He became very ill because of the guilt he carried. As a dedicated soul winner, D.L. Moody took such missed opportunities very seriously.

"I have never since dared," Moody later said, "to give an audience a week to think of their salvation. If they were lost they might rise up in judgment against me. I have never seen that congregation since. I will never meet those people until I meet them in another world. But I want to tell you of one lesson that I learned that night which I have never forgotten, and that is, when I preach, to press Christ upon the people then and there. I would rather have that right hand cut off than to give an audience a week now to decide what to do with Jesus."