

The Gospel of Perfect Wrath

Revelation 14:19–16:1

#29 in our series “The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation”

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Prayer

Father, I pray that you would help us to preach so this isn't just me rambling on but that you, would speak to us, maybe even through my lips and through your Spirit in our hearts. So, Lord God, we offer ourselves to you and we ask that we would preach that it wouldn't just be me, it would be us, it would be you. May you be glorified in Jesus' name.

Message

Revelation 16:1 *“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.’”*

If you haven't been to church in a while you picked a great day to come. We're preaching through the Revelation and today we're beginning to discuss the seven bowls of the wrath of God... Yippee!

Wrath translates the Greek word: *thumos*. That noun appears to come from a verb that means to sacrifice. It's also translated passion or fury; it refers to a burst of passion or anger... In one way, it may seem very esoteric and hard to understand... And yet I think y'all have a pretty good idea as to what it means.



Figure 1 Image credit: Peter Hiett

This is a picture of the rearview mirror and windshield in our old Dodge Durango. It died a couple of months ago and before I left it at my friend's shop, I took this picture.

I took the picture, because of the spitball stuck to the mirror. About seventeen years ago on family vacation, my son shot this spitball at me. It stuck to the mirror and I left it there to remind me of him. To me, it's worth more than the car.

To the right of the mirror, you can see something like an impact crater. It's not directly related to the spitball, but it might help explain my wrath. About seventeen years ago, we were driving down a freeway in Phoenix Arizona on our family vacation. Jonathan, Elizabeth, Becky, and Coleman were in the back. My bride Susan was sitting next to me in the front.

All at once, I caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of my eye and almost immediately heard an impact that sounded like a bomb. A huge chunk of mud and rock had hit the windshield on the passenger side and, for an instant, I thought my bride was dead.

In front of me—just far enough away so you couldn't see the sign on the back: "*Not responsible for broken windshields*"—was a huge gravel truck changing lanes and dropping dirt and rocks onto the freeway.

Once I saw that Susan was alive, I was suddenly overwhelmed by this raging passionate fury that just seemed to well up from somewhere deep in my soul. I started chasing this huge gravel truck with my Dodge Durango... I pulled up next to it honking, pointing to the windshield and pointing to the truck, and I'm not sure that I always used the appropriate finger.

I wanted to run this gravel truck off the freeway, but the Dodge Durango was too small and this guy wouldn't pull over... I wanted to catch him and consume him with a raging ball of *thumos* fire. I couldn't stop. I couldn't rest. It was like my blood was on fire. It freaked the kids out and later it freaked me out.

But you see, for a second I thought he took my bride's life and maybe my children's lives... and now I wanted to take his life. In the words of John Rambo, "*He drew first blood...*" and now I wanted his blood. And that's pretty much a summary of the history of our world, isn't it?

- It's why armies ride war horses into war... (They want blood).
- It's why people demand blood for blood until the whole world is swimming in blood...

And yet, that wrath of mine was a testament to my love. I mean I wouldn't have felt wrath if I didn't first feel Love my bride, my children, and even my self. I mean, I knew that what happened was so wrong because my wife and kids were so right... so good... And to take the Good, which is the Life, is the very definition of evil. "The life is in the blood," says Scripture. If you've never felt wrath, I highly doubt that you've ever felt love... not even for yourself.

CS Lewis wrote, "Wrath is the fluid love bleeds."

Well, the *thumos* didn't subside until I remembered that I'd been a truck driver and not always a good one. I once drove a supply truck the wrong way down a parking garage exit destroying thousands of dollars worth of high-pressure sprinkling system and creating a flood of water and *thumos*...

So anyway, I think that was *thumos* that day; it's the fluid love bleeds.

Now, I'm kind of a coward, and not much of a fighter, so it surprised me that day and it really surprised me as a new father. A husband loves his Bride and Scripture says that our Maker is our Husband. And a father loves his children and Jesus taught us to pray, *"Our Father..."*

One day when I was a new father, I took my son Jonathan with me to Walgreens. Along with him, he brought this little Mickey Mouse Candy Pez Dispenser that I had bought him earlier in the day.

All that day he'd been interrupting me saying, *"See Mickey Mouse, see Mickey Mouse,"* which really meant, *"See me, see me, see me."* I'd stop what I was doing and say, *"Wow that's awesome. You're awesome!"*

Well, while we were at the counter at Walgreens, Jon was standing on his tippy toes, held up his Mickey Mouse candy Pez dispenser and said, *"See Mickey Mouse. See Mickey Mouse. See Mickey Mouse."* Some high school kid was checking us out... and he just wouldn't stop and see...

Finally, Jon was just screaming, ***"See Mickey Mouse, See Mickey Mouse,"*** when this kid finally stopped and said, *"Yeah kid, I see Mickey Mouse"* and went right back to ringing up our items, and I don't think he saw Mickey Mouse.

All of a sudden, I felt it. I remember grabbing the railing behind me because my blood began to boil. I pictured myself jumping the counter grabbing that kid by the throat and screaming, *"Look at Mickey Mouse; that's the best Mickey Mouse candy Pez dispenser in this whole damn world. **See Mickey Mouse and see my son!**"* That's *thumos*.

I was about to go off on this kid: *"See my son you moron. See my son."* When I think I felt God go off on me: I think I heard Him say, *"See my son, Peter. See My son."* *"See my son behind the counter, having a hard day."*

Jon is twenty-nine now, and he's had some hard days and I can easily imagine him, on one of those days, not truly seeing a four-year-old and his candy Pez dispenser.

*"See my son behind the counter. See my son in the last and the least of these."
"See my son in the poor and naked. See my son in the sick and imprisoned."
"He calls out to you... and Peter you don't see... you don't even want to look."
"Peter? Did you know I'm a father? Don't you think that I feel wrath?"*

"I'm his father, and I'm Jon's father and I'm your father."

What does a good father do when one of his children won't see another one of his children... ?

What do I do when Jon won't see Elizabeth and Elizabeth won't see Jon...?

What do I do when Jon won't see himself and love himself?

What do I do when one of my kids becomes his own worst enemy?

What do I do if my bride becomes her own worst enemy?

What do I do if my son wants to harm himself?

Do I kill him or do I kiss him? Or maybe both?

What does a good father do with all his wrath?

Jesus said, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger."

How does God not let the sun go down on His anger?

What does a good father do with all his wrath?

When I read the word wrath in Revelation 15, I immediately thought of those two experiences of wrath... And then I thought of a third.

It was a spring night almost thirty-seven years ago...

I was sitting in the back of a large ornate sanctuary and I was watching as my dad was being tried by the Presbytery of Denver . . . (that was the local governing body of the Presbyterian Church USA.) I knew my father to be the most loving and honest person I'd ever met. But there were some people that wanted power and they felt that they could get it by accusing my father and taking his church. (The Church is the Bride of Christ and consists of the children of God the Father.)

A man from a committee had just stood up and called my dad a liar. And then I watched as they took his church away, took my church away, and took my life away. They took the church away and they were the church—I watched the church crucify my father. Last week, Karl's sermon was entitled "Healing the church wound." Well, the church wounded me and yet, I am the church. And blood was just gushing from every wound.

I remember this absolutely intense rage... I wanted to beat the hell out of that guy and consume that entire place with a giant bowl of burning *thumos*... but I couldn't without being arrested...

I honestly did not know what to do with all my anger... I was angry at the church, I think maybe even angry with my dad for letting it happen, and maybe most of all angry at God—because God did let it happen.

Ironically, it was around that time that I decided to go into the ministry. I had wanted to be a geologist, but now I wanted to be a pastor. I didn't know what to do with all my anger. I was so angry, and, even more, angry that God didn't seem to get angry.

I think that's why most folks don't believe in God. And by that I mean, they don't trust God, and usually, hate God. Because God won't get angry the way they get angry.

I think that's why we crucified Jesus.

He didn't seem to get angry at the right people in the right way.

He obviously didn't condone robbery and prostitution...

And yet, He would host dinners for tax collectors and whores.

He obviously didn't condone Roman tyranny and oppression, but instead of leading an insurrection against Rome, He allowed Romans to nail Him to a tree in a garden just outside the walls of Jerusalem. He allowed it and He obviously could've stopped it.

Most seem to think He messed up on His first visit and that's why He needs to come again...

[Image of Jesus with a halo over his head and holding a machine gun]

"The first time He was nice, but the second time He'll be mean," they say. But Scripture says that Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever, and it says that God does not change.

People don't trust God, and people don't trust the Gospel we're called to preach. Whenever I point out what Scripture clearly says about God reconciling all things to Himself making peace by the blood of Jesus, someone will invariably say, "*What about Hitler?*"

And by that, they mean "*What about my ex-wife, who broke my heart*" or

"What about the man who abused me as a child?"

You see, they don't trust that God is angry enough;
they don't trust that God hates evil enough.

And so, even though the Bible *never* teaches this, it's pretty popular to preach...

It's pretty popular to preach,

"Well God is forgiving now, but you just wait, one day He'll change."

"God is Love, but also justice... and by justice, we mean the opposite of love."

"God is Love, and the very opposite of Love."

"One day God will be angry, and the sun will never go down on His anger because

He'll stop the sun and be angry forever without end...

"He will torture people forever without end."

That's popular to preach...

There are a lot of folks that really like that message.

It's good news to them, but it's not good news to God.

It would mean that He's endlessly angry, which means that He can never rest—*Shabbat*—Seventh Day.

It would mean that He must be endlessly unsatisfied with His own creation.

It would mean that He must endlessly hate His own children.
It would mean that He must endlessly endure the work of the devil.
It would mean that His wrath has no purpose, no goal... so God tortures people just for the hell of it... and that *doesn't* sound like God, but everything God is not... It sounds like the devil.

Well, I'm just pointing out that some folks don't believe in God 'cause they think He doesn't get angry enough...
And some folks don't believe in God cause they hear He gets so angry that His wrath never comes to an end...
Some don't trust God 'cause He doesn't seem to have enough wrath.
Some don't trust God 'cause He seems to have too much wrath.
And all don't trust God 'cause His wrath seems to be indiscriminate.

You know what I mean:
Some very good things seem to happen to some very bad people.
And some very bad things seem to happen to some very good people—like Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Job... or Jesus.

Well, we're all angry about God's anger... aren't we? And that because we've all judged God's judgment... That's why I was angry with the truck driver in Phoenix: He had bad judgment; he should've never driven that truck without sweeping the dirt clods off of the fender. And God should've never put two naked people in a garden with an evil talking snake and a tree in the middle of that garden that could get a person killed... or crucified.

Well anyway, our text begins where we left off last time (we've been building up to this in the previous sermons of this series):

So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia. Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last (the eschatos), for with them the wrath (thumos) of God is finished (from teleo, "to end" and telos "the end").

—Revelation 14:19-15:1

The *thumos* of God is finished.
On the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished" same Greek word *teleo*.
And John points out that Jesus was referring to all things.
Jesus is the *eschatos*, (which means "the last"), and Jesus is the *telos* (which means "the end.")

As you remember, according to Scripture, and Jesus, and even some physicists, time looks like this.

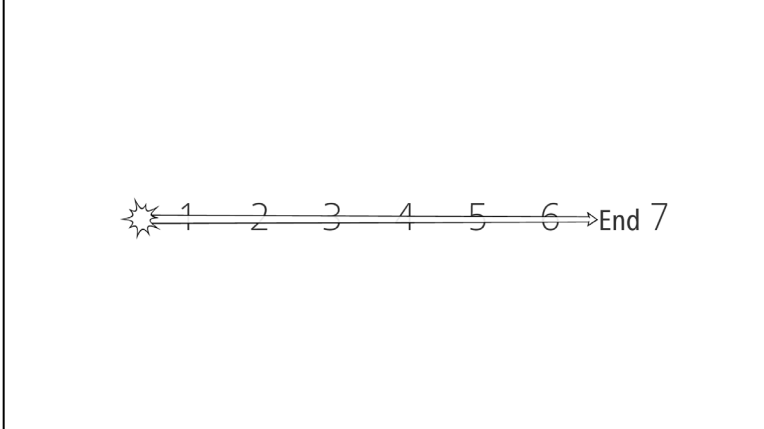


Figure 2 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

Six days are six ages that, to us, appear to be about 14 billion years. Humanity is created in the 6th day and finished by the Seventh Day when everything is Good and you are good and so God rests from all His labor. So, if you aren't perfectly good, God is still working, making you in His Image and God is not yet finished, and so for you, it must still be the sixth day of creation. Scripture says that we come to the end of the ages, the end of days, the end of time, when we come to Jesus and He cries, "It is finished."

So, time looks something like this.

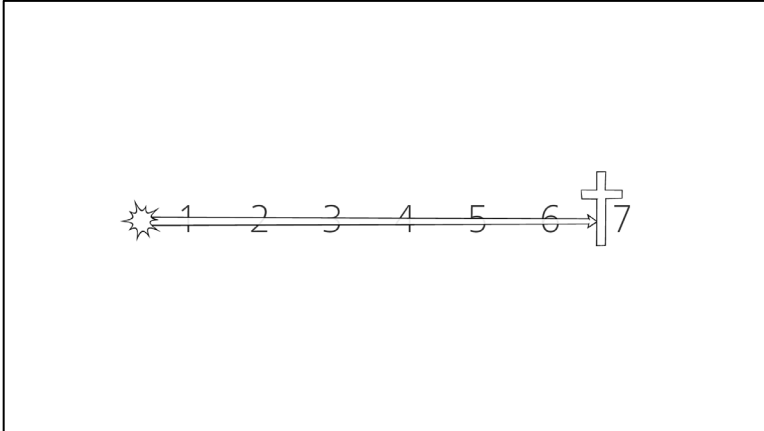


Figure 3 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

Or maybe something like this.

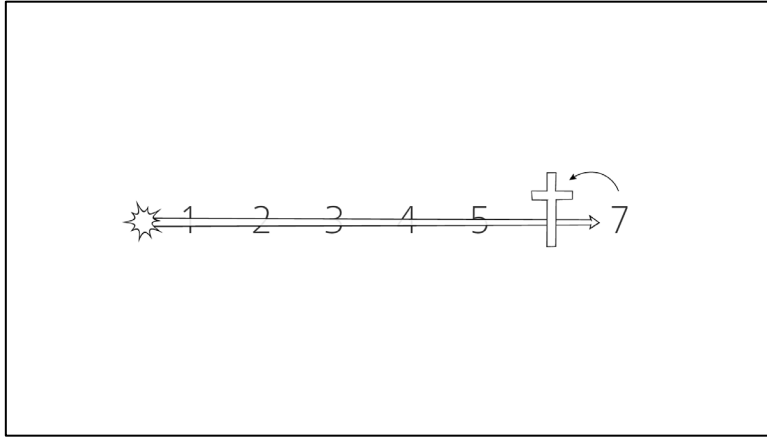


Figure 4 Image credit: Peter Hiett

Or maybe something like this. We've talked about all of that.

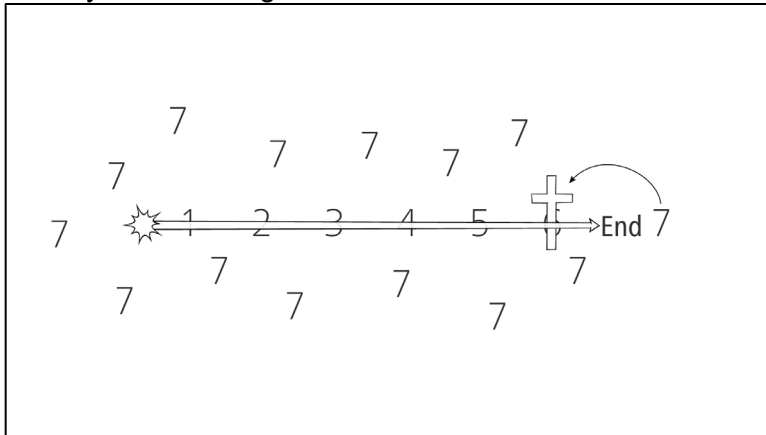


Figure 5 Image credit: Peter Hiett

Whatever the case, Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead is the door from time into eternity... The door from the sixth day when God creates man, to the endless Seventh Day, when all is finished and everything, everything, *everything* is Good.

He's crucified on the sixth day of creation, on the sixth day of the week, during the sixth hour of the day (666). And they make sure His body is taken down from the tree before the sun goes down and the Sabbath begins... the Seventh Day. So you see, maybe God doesn't allow the sun to go down upon His anger.

Well, no matter whether you followed that or not, did you notice that the *thumos* of God comes to an end? God is not angry forever without end.

But not only does his anger come to an end, it comes to a *telos*.

That means it comes to perfection.

That means that all of God's *thumos* has a purpose.
That means that with His *thumos* in time, God accomplishes His purpose for all eternity... and God has purposed to make us in His own image.

You know God's wrath is not like our wrath.
In Scripture, God even like plans His wrath.
Paul writes, "He consigned all to disobedience..." (And disobedience is what ticks Him off). "*He consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.*" He plans His wrath and His wrath accomplishes His purpose, and unless you're already perfect, haven't yet seen what His wrath will accomplish.

Well, you see, we get angry 'cause we don't trust God's anger.
That is, we judge God 'cause we don't trust His judgment.
But we haven't yet seen what it is that His Judgment will accomplish.

Remember this cartoon?

[Cartoon: "The Far Side" by Gary Larson: God taking the planet Earth out of the oven, thinks to himself, "Something tells me this thing's only half-baked."]

"Something tells me this thing is only half-baked," says God...
But we look at the world, assume it's finished, and get angry 'cause it's not Good.
Well if it's not all good, God is still creating it, and still creating you, and we just learned that He uses *thumos* to do it. (It needs to go back in the oven for a time.)

The *thumos* of God has a *telos* (a goal) .
It means that one day you'll see things as they truly are and you'll thank God for His wrath, for it accomplishes that for which it is sent.
It's perfect.
It's not too little, and it's not too much, and it's not indiscriminate...
It's applied to each in just the right way to create just the right person that is the absolutely perfect and eternal you... and each one of us is gloriously different.

Now I can't fully explain God's judgment or His wrath, especially as it's applied to over seven billion utterly unique, but equally loved, people...

I can't fully explain His wrath, but I can believe what He says about his wrath:

It comes to an End and the End is Good. The End is perfect.

I can't fully explain it, but I can believe it, and maybe I can even see it.

What is John looking at?

Remember this book is titled *The Revelation of Jesus*. It is NOT titled
The Revelation of Weird Things That Might Happen 2500 Years From Now.

What is John looking at?

Revelation 14:19-16:1

So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia. (That's the length of the land of Israel.)

- This winepress is just outside Jerusalem & just where Jesus was crucified.
- It makes blood that's wine and wine that's blood.
- It forms a river that fills the land to the depths of a horse's bridle.
- In John's day horses were used almost exclusively for war.
- The warhorses come to a stop in a sea of blood that flows from the winepress. (Like... "You wanted blood...now you got blood.")

Then I saw another sign in heaven...

[“another sign,” I think it's the same thing from a different angle.]

Then I saw another sign in heaven great and amazing, seven angels...

[angelos that means messengers in Greek]

with seven plagues...

[pleges in Greek. It's where we get the English word plague, but it means wound or

more literally “stripe” like the mark made from a whip... like the prophecy in Isaiah 53: “with his stripes we are healed”. Jesus already told us, “I am the eschatos—the last.”]

seven angels with seven wounds, which are the last (the eschatos), for with them the wrath (the thumos) of God is finished.

[“It is finished. It is accomplished. It is perfected.” In chapter 22, Jesus will say, I Am the End.”]

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number [666] of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps [kitharas: “guitars”] of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?

*For you alone are holy. All nations [not some, **all**] will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, (pleges, stripes or wounds) clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath (the passion) of God who lives forever and ever, ⁸ and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no

one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues (stripes or wounds) of the seven angels were finished (teleo). Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth (the land) the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

And as we'll see next time, these wounds from heaven become wounds on earth, just like the wounds you see every night on the evening news.

So, what is John looking at?

Well it starts with a vision of this.



Figure 6 Image credit (photo by): Dieter Horst Steinmetz [CC BY-SA 2.0], via Wikimedia Commons

The winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.

Last time we saw, what the early church saw, and that is that the winepress must be the cross of Christ. And *the grapes of wrath*, which are *vessels of wrath*, must be the *human soul*. God is angry at the human soul that is separated from Him. He's angry at the separation because He loves every soul, for each soul contains His breath, His life.

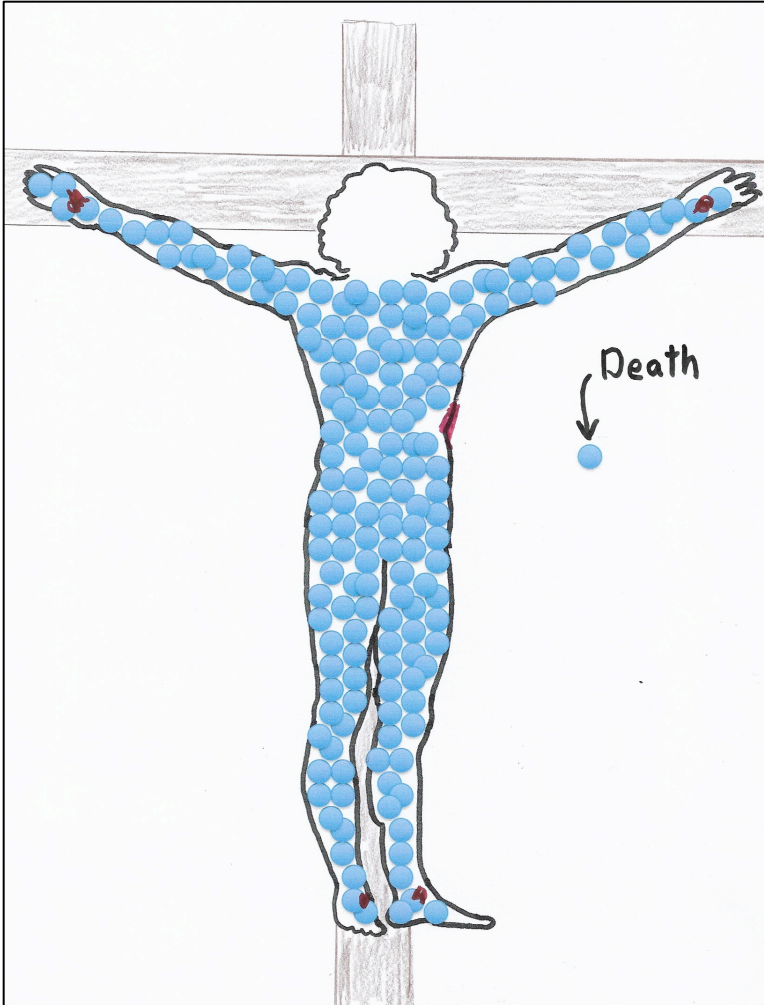


Figure 7 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

Our souls are separated from God for we each take our life and claim it as our own life... and yet Jesus is the Life. Taking "the Life" is the definition of sin and the day we do, we die.

Every sin is saying, to God I take the life but I won't surrender my life.

- It's like breathing in and refusing to breathe out.
- It's like a body part that receives blood but won't bleed blood... and so it can't receive more blood... it dies.
- It's like being totally self-centered and never learning to love. It's death.

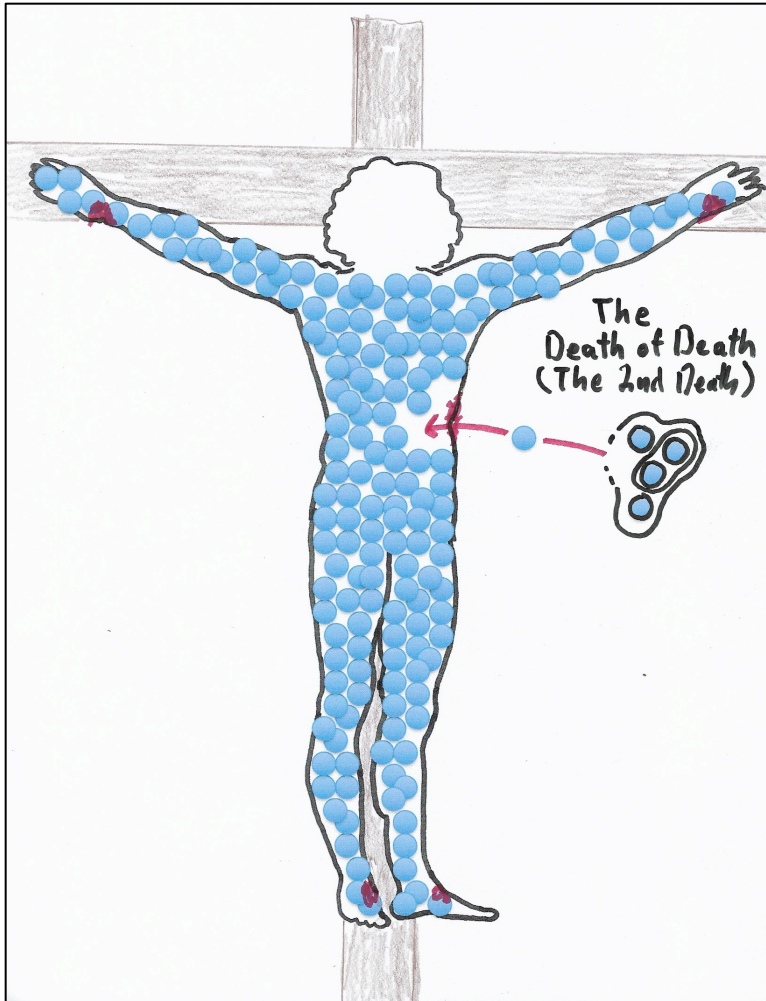


Figure 8 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

The cross works the death of death, which is the resurrection and life.

- At the cross, God turns vessels of wrath into vessels of Mercy.
- At the cross, He turns blood clots into blood vessels.
- At the cross, God gives us the will to love, which is the will to give life to others.
Jesus is the very Will of God bleeding into us.
- At the cross God takes our sin and turns it into His Wine—it's called Grace.
It's His river of life that flows through all the members of His Body.

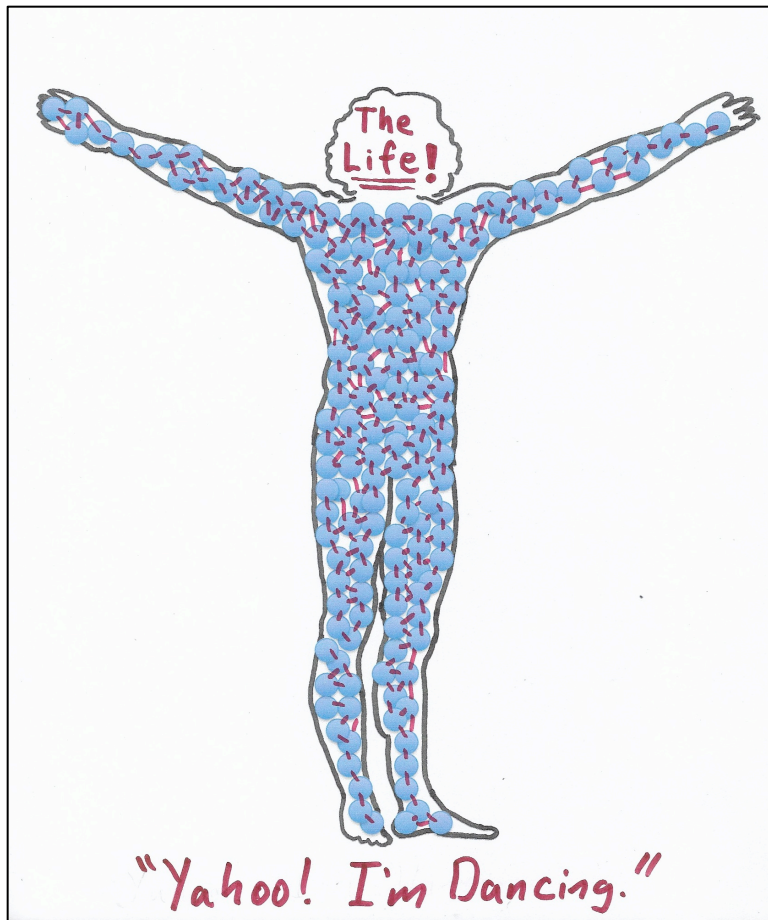


Figure 9 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

At the cross, we die with Christ and rise with Christ.
Your life is not your own; you are His Body.

Well, John sees the winepress...

And then he sees the angels that come out of the Sanctuary.

And this is a wild thought, but according to John, Paul, and Jesus, we are
Christ's temple, which is His Body, which is His Sanctuary.

The seven angels are like the seven angels in the seven churches.

They're either the spirit of Christ or messengers of Christ.

They're dressed just like Christ was dressed at the start of John's vision...

And they're dressed and just like the priests who served in the temple.

They come out of the temple with *pleges*, wounds, or stripes.

"He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all... with his stripes we are healed," wrote Isaiah.

The wounds are poured out on the earth, and yet they originate in heaven.

As if it was God's plan to bear our wounds and sorrows all along.
As if He was crucified from the foundation of the earth.
As if He subjected creation to futility and all men to disobedience just so that we would see and believe the wonder of His Mercy...
As if He wanted to show us—this is how much I love you: “See my hands. See my feet. Place your fingers in my wounds. Your wounds are my wounds. My wounds are your wounds.”

And now I hope you see why God's wrath is not indiscriminate:

Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to Him...

You take their life and you take His life.

And check this out: Whenever someone tries to take your life (in big ways or small ways) because they've judged you the last and the least... they aren't just taking your life, they're taking Christ's life . . . because your life *is* Christ's life.

Jesus weeps your every tear.

Jesus knows your every sorrow.

Jesus feels your every wound, even more intensely than you do, because He literally is the blood you bleed.

His wrath is not indiscriminate. It's perfect and it accomplishes its purpose.

John sees the wine press; John sees the wounds; John sees the temple, and John sees the sea of glass mingled with fire.

In the temple, God instructed Solomon to build a “molten sea” (1 Kings 7:23). It was a huge basin in which the priests were to wash before they approached the throne of God, so the glory of God wouldn't kill them. (Ex. 30:18)

John sees people that appear to have passed through the sea...ⁱ

The Sea is fire. And God is Fire and God is Love.

He's not part fire and part love; He's all Love and Love is Fire.

The Sea is Fire and water like glass. It burns and comforts.

We'll talk more about that in the next sermon in this series.

But John sees the winepress; he sees the wounds; he sees the temple and he sees the baptism of fire with which we must all be baptized...

And He sees the bowls... the seven *phialas*... in Greek.

- It's a special word in Greek used to refer to broad flat bowls in which pagan priests would offer wine to the gods.
- It's also used to refer to broad flat bowls in which priests in the temple in Jerusalem would take the blood of sacrifice and then sprinkle it on the altar and even the people, and once a year it was sprinkled behind the curtain on the very throne of God—the Mercy Seat of God.

So what's in these bowls?

- It's something that's poured . . . a liquid.

- In the next chapter an angel cries, “You have given them blood to drink.”
- In the last chapter, sinners are made to drink the wine of God’s wrath.
- In the Old Testament over and over, God’s wrath is pictured as wine in a cup that God makes us drink.
- We just read how God makes wine that is blood and blood that is wine.
- This whole vision is about a slaughtered Lamb standing on a throne called the Mercy Seat on which the blood of sacrifice is sprinkled and from which flows a river of life and the life is in the blood.

So what’s in the bowls of wrath?

Well, it’s the blood of the Lamb.

And why do you come to worship each week?

Isn’t it to drink the blood of the Lamb, which is the Grace of God?

And what is John seeing?

Well, it must be something like this:

[A clip from the movie *The Passion* is shown in which Jesus is covered in stripes, wounds, and blood and is lifted up on the cross before John’s eyes. The scene shifts to wine being poured out into a cup and Jesus drinking it while John looks on. Jesus says, “Take this and drink. The scene changes again to Jesus hanging on the cross. Blood drips down the cross into the ground. As He breathes His last breaths, He says, “It is accomplished.”]

When we come to the cross what do we see?

We see that we’ve taken the Life of God.

And we see that God has always given the Life of God.

The Life is in the blood, and all the Life, in all the blood, in all the world is *Him*.

He is the Life! God is Love and He constantly bleeds Mercy.

God’s Wrath *is* His Mercy...

John sees God’s eternal Mercy and it’s poured out over all the days of time...

God’s Wrath is His eternal Mercy applied to our sin in all the days of *our* time...

When people take blood, we take blood in return—that’s human vengeance.

And when we take blood, what does God do?

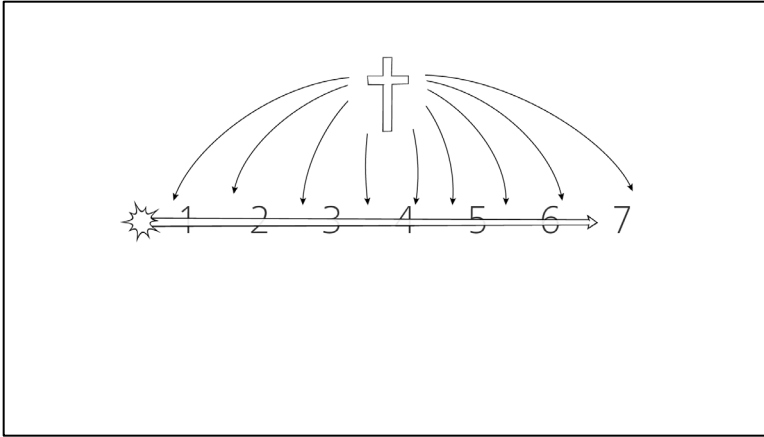


Figure 10 Image credit: Peter Hiatt

God gives blood—His Vengeance is Absolute Mercy. It is the fluid Love bleeds.

And now, if you think it's only sweet—and nothing could be sweeter.

If you think it's only sweet and does not burn, you've probably never taken a very deep drink from the cup of the Lord.

You've never consciously experienced the terrifying Grace of God.

About twenty years ago, I had an encounter with God that most of you know about...

I was at a conference in a hotel in Canada.

I was holding hands with a little old Roman Catholic lady on one side... and a huge fat Native American Pentecostal man on the other.

As we began to pray, for the first time, and only time, I heard God audibly.

I heard him say, "Peter, you don't love my bride very much do you?"

Immediately, I knew he wasn't talking about Susan, He was talking about the Church.

Immediately, I knew that I had gone into the ministry because I hated the Church, and I was going to fix the Church; I would teach it a lesson. I knew that I had decided to be a pastor because of that day about fifteen years before when I saw my Dad tried on the floor of the Denver Presbytery and I just didn't know what to do with all my anger... all my wrath.

In an instant, I saw that all my good deeds were laced with evil.

I saw I didn't love the Church; I wanted to use the Church to create my life, heal all my wounds and get vengeance on those who had hurt me. I lay on the floor of this ballroom and wept uncontrollably for about an hour.

See? It burns the ego to be exposed to absolute Love and realize that all your good deeds are the very worst deeds. But here's the weird thing... It was unbelievably sweet. I mean there was no condemnation in God's voice, only compassion: (whispering) "I'm sorry for you." It didn't imprison me in shame, but set me free and filled me with

gratitude. And it felt like the tears I wept weren't mine but His... Christ in me.

Later that night, God literally pinned me to the floor and showed me that He was everywhere, and everywhen, loving me, and He wanted me to stop doubting His Love.

His Wrath is His Mercy encountering our sin.

You see? It utterly annihilates the human ego and sets us free to live in Love.

That was an absolutely earth-shattering experience, and yet, I soon realized it was just the beginning of the lesson. Ten years later, my dad had died, and my church had grown like crazy, and it appeared that I had "fixed" the Church.

And yet, I had been getting in some trouble, for I'd been preaching what I'd learned: God's wrath is God's mercy... and He's fixin' to make all things new. Some people were taking advantage of the opportunity and trying to take my life and take my church because, at that time, my church (not that you aren't) was really sexy . . .

I was about to be tried on the floor of my Presbytery. It was a Sunday and I had just come down from the stage while people were coming forward for communion. Susan was goofing around and I was thinking, "*Act serious woman, I'm in hot water and we need to impress the troops.*" Just about then she grabbed my arm and I knew something big had just happened.

She said,

"Peter I just saw your dad, and he was so young and he was so alive and his eyes... they like burned with fire. He was standing right in front of us... He leaned forward, holding this like bowl in his hands... (I remember that she was fascinated by this weird bowl). He was holding out this like bowl in his hands and he said, '*Susan and Peter, do not be afraid to drink from the cup that the Lord has for you.*' And then... he vanished."

I immediately thought, "*How cool,*" and then, "*Oh Shit.*" And within just a few weeks I saw everything that happened to my dad happen to me... only worse. And I wondered about that cup that was also a bowl that was in the hands of my father.

At first, I thought that it meant that I was sharing in Christ's sufferings...

And I'm sure it *does* mean something like that... but not *simply* that.

I think it means that where I once took Christ's life, He had given His life.

And when people took life from me, He wanted me to freely give it to them.

I think it meant that He wanted me to learn to love His Bride the way He loved Bride...

The way He loves each of us.

I think it meant that He wanted me to learn to forgive.

Within a few weeks of getting defrocked and losing what I thought was my life, Frances and I were walking through downtown Denver looking for a place to rent for our new little church that would be meeting on Sunday nights. We found a big old Presbyterian

Church that would let us do just that. I called my mom and said, "Hey we're gonna meet at Central Presbyterian on Sunday nights.."

My mom was quiet for a moment and then she said, "Peter don't you know what that place is? Why that's the place you watched your dad get tried on the floor of the Denver Presbytery." And suddenly I remembered every little detail of the room...

And so God had me stand in the very spot I saw my dad get tried, the very spot I watched the Church attempt to take the life of my Father.

-He had me stand there for a year and give the life of my Father.

-He had me stand there and preach the Gospel.

-He had me stand there and learn to forgive and, you see, I'm just beginning...

When one person forgives it looks like a man crucified on a tree.

When two people forgive it looks like a good marriage.

When all people forgive, it is a great party called the Kingdom of God.

And it's rather impossible to sin, for the moment you take someone's life, they've already given their life; before you could even take blood it's already been given. When everyone forgives, everyone bleeds—they bleed life one into the other like members in a Body because it is a body, it's the Body of Christ.

God is Love and His Judgment is Mercy.

When His Mercy encounters our sin, we experience it as wrath.

It destroys our ego—that's our pride and our shame.

It destroys our ego and it frees us to live in Love; it kills the old man and gives birth to the New Man.

The wrath of God is finished at the cross.

It's how God makes us in His Image and saves Himself from the pain of our sin.

The wrath of God is Perfect.

In Romans 12 Paul wrote this:

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'..."

We don't leave it to the wrath of God, because we don't trust the wrath of God.

And so we refuse to forgive others and we refuse to forgive ourselves.

We make others pay and we make ourselves pay... and we can't pay.

We refuse to forgive because we think it means that evil goes unpunished and people will stay just as they are, and Hitler will get into heaven with his wicked old evil heart... But forgiveness does not mean, that we will stay just as we are and that people are not repaid for their sin.

God repays our sin with His Mercy, but that Mercy utterly destroys our sin and creates us in His Image... with the wrath of God we are finished.

Mercy is the fluid Love bleeds, and when you forgive you bleed fire.

You bleed the vengeance of God and are used by Him to make all things new.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Therefore, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

—Romans 12:19-21

This is the Good.

[Peter points to the communion table.]

Communion

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body for you." And He took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you."

This is the Good and this is the Judgment of God. If you run from it, the only place to hide is "outer darkness" where men weep and gnash their teeth. And even that will come to an End in a sea of burning hot Mercy.

This is the Judgment of God:

You have been forgiven.

That means that you are not worse than anybody else.

It also means that you are not better than anybody else.

You may be a little further along in your journey...

But you are not better than anybody else—not even your worst enemy.

That burns . . .

In the words of Karl Barth, it burns you right down to faith.

It burns you right down to a little child playing in His Father's Garden.

But now you know something you did not know before.

What is it that you know?

You know the Good, which is manifest in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

He is the Judgment of God.

For the last few minutes, you may have been thinking of the name of someone God is asking you to forgive. Sometimes people don't forgive someone because they think that means God will just let that person off the hook...No... Believe me! You can trust the wrath of God to do its work. So, forgiving someone is entrusting them to the wrath of God. The wrath of God is Good; it works. It's just that we can't administer it well.

So, maybe you have someone you need to forgive. In your mind, let them go and hand them over to God; forgive them.

Let's pray. In your heart say:

"Father I forgive [insert their name]".

(Forgiving them means you will no longer try to make them pay.)

And maybe there's another name that some of you have in mind, and that's your own. And maybe this is the hardest of all to forgive. You need to forgive yourself and stop trying to make yourself and everyone else pay. That's what leads to all the bloodshed in this world, when God has already provided more than enough blood from His winepress.

So, just say, "Father, in the name of Jesus, I forgive myself. And Father, I forgive you. Not that you've done anything wrong, but I've been angry at you. Father, I will entrust myself to you, to your Judgment because wow...it's good! Thank you that you make yourself pay for what you require. When you demand blood, you bleed the blood, you are Life and you are Love."

So, come to the table, tear off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and ingest the Judgment of God, the Mercy of God, the wrath of God, for with it you are made complete.

[Several worship songs are sung.]

Prayer

Lord God, I confess to you that I have been a slave to fear and anger in ways I couldn't understand. In being a slave to anger, that anger sometimes takes the form of despair, shame, drivenness, resentment, rage... Lord, sometimes it takes the form of registering to go to seminary. Lord, I thank you that you forgive us and you shower us with your Mercy. I thank you that I am no longer a slave to fear. I thank you for forgiving me when I doubt that. Thank you that even for that faith—your Gospel, which is a gift of Grace. You're giving it to me all the days of my life. We thank you that you are Good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Benediction

Believe the Gospel! It means Good News! In Jesus' name, live!

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio or video version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.

¹ John sees people that appear to have passed through the sea...
like the priests passed through the sea to approach the altar...
like the Israelites passed through the red sea to get to the Promised Land...
and like you pass through the sea on the day you're baptized...
Baptism symbolizes dying to your self and rising with Christ.