

When the Lord shoots to kill

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now for our reading this evening, which you'll find near to the end of the Old Testament in the prophet Ezekiel, after Jeremiah, before Daniel.

If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, I think you'll find it on page 694. Is that correct? Yeah. My order of service says 2 Corinthians, but I think I've got an old one that wasn't correct. But page 694 is right, yes? Okay. And we're going to read Ezekiel chapter 4 and 5.

So brace yourselves, and I'll do my best. Ezekiel chapter 4, then, at verse 1. And so the Lord says, and you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem, and put siege works against it and build a siege wall against it and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it and plant battering rams against it all around. And you take an iron griddle and place it as an iron wall between you and the city and set your face towards it and let it be in a state of siege and press the siege against it.

[1 : 36] This is a sign for the house of Israel. Then lie on your left side and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it.

For the number of days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment. For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah.

Forty days I assign to you, a day for each year. And you shall set your face towards the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared, and you shall prophesy against the city.

And behold, I will place cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege. And you take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer, and put them into a single vessel and make your bread from them.

[2 : 48] During the number of days that you lie on your side, 390 days, you shall eat it. And your food that you shall eat shall be by weight, 20 shekels a day.

From day to day you shall eat it. And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hymn. From day to day you shall drink. And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.

And the Lord said, Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them.

Then I said, Ah, Lord God, behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself, or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth. Then he said to me, See, I assign to you cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread. Moreover he said to me, Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem.

[3 : 54] They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. I will do this, that they may lack bread and water, and look to one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment.

And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword, use it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing, and divide the hair.

A third part, you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part, you shall take and strike with the sword all round the city.

And a third part, you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. You shall take from these a small number, and bind them in the skirts of your robe.

And of these again, you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there, a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.

[5 : 07] Thus says the Lord God, this is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. And she has rebelled against my rules, by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her.

For they have rejected my rules, and have not walked in my statutes. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes, or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments in your midst, in the sight of the nations.

Because of all your abominations, I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again.

Therefore, fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive, I will scatter to the winds.

[6 : 36] Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary, with all your detestable things, and with your abominations, therefore, I will withdraw.

My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. A third part of you shall die with pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst.

A third part shall fall by the sword all around you. And a third part I will scatter to all the winds, and will unsheath the sword after them.

Thus, shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them, and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord, that I have spoken in my jealousy, and I spend my fury upon you. Moreover, I will make you a desolation, and an object of reproach among the nations all around you, and in the sight of all who pass by, you shall be a reproach, and a taunt, a warning, and a horror to the nations all around you.

[7 : 59] When I execute judgments on you in anger, and fury, and with furious rebukes, I am the Lord, I have spoken. When I send against you the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you.

And when I bring more, and more famine upon you, and break your supply of bread, I will send famine, and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children.

Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord. I have spoken.

Amen. And may God bless us, this is word, and help us to receive it and understand it.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. About 20 years ago, I was participating in a mission at DICU, Durham Intercollegiate Christian Union.

[9 : 21] One session, we always called Grill a Christian. A few hundred students asked questions of three of us.

One question ran something like this. What do you make of the fact that the God of the Old Testament supports war, pillage, hate, and genocide, while the God of the New Testament seems to be a gentler, kinder kind of God?

Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek. I don't see how this can square with your claim that one God stands behind the whole Bible. It's a common view, isn't it?

Even among many of us who are Christians, although we wouldn't put it quite as bluntly as that, nevertheless, deep down, we are a wee bit puzzled by this perceived discrepancy, are we not?

Oh, we know the standard answers, but, well, isn't it true that God is a tad harsher in the Old Testament? In fact, the passage before us might be thought to lend classic support to this thesis.

[10 : 39] Did you hear some of these verses as Willie Philip read them to us? 5.10. Therefore, in your midst, parents will eat their children and children will eat their parents.

It's the description of a city under siege running out of food. 5.14. I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you in the sight of all who pass by.

5.16. When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food.

Now, what I want to do this evening is to work through these two chapters with you to listen attentively to what God has to say to us through it.

First, in the context of Ezekiel and his ministry, six centuries before Christ, but also in the larger context of several Bible themes.

[11:47] It's important to remember the situation in which Ezekiel finds himself. He has been transported into exile to Babylon, 700 miles away from home when 700 miles was a long distance.

I flew 4,000 miles to get here. It's not a long distance, but when you are walking or riding a camel, 700 miles is a long distance.

He turned 30 years of age in exile in 593 BC. 30 years of age from a priestly family. He should have been entering into his duties as a priest at the temple in Jerusalem.

Instead, he's in exile 700 miles from home. And so far as the records show, he never did get home. when he turned 30 and should normally have been entering the most active part of his priestly ministry, Ezekiel was called to a different, we might say, a higher ministry.

He was called to be God's prophet to a people in declining circumstances. One of the great burdens of his ministry for the first six years as he speaks, what God gives him to say is that Jerusalem and Judah back home 700 miles away are far more wicked than anyone thought.

[13:18] And in consequence, God himself had determined to destroy them. Can you imagine what that sounded like to his fellow exiles by the Kibar Canal in Babylon?

Could God actually destroy the temple? Could God abandon Jerusalem, the city of the great king? There had been so many other instances when war and havoc had come right up to the walls, but God had always spared Jerusalem.

Besides, if Jerusalem were destroyed, there would be no home to go home to. And where would the promises of God rest if the very temple, the priestly system, the sacrificial system that God himself had ordained for his people were wiped off the face of the earth?

Can you imagine what that message sounded like to the exiles? But that does not mean that Ezekiel softens his words.

Indeed, if you read the first three chapters, you discover that Ezekiel is under strict restraint from God to speak during these six years only what God gives him to say and otherwise to keep silence, not a word, until Jerusalem falls, still six years away.

[14:52] So that even that silence broken by utterances conveying the truth of God would add enormous weight to his repeated messages of impending doom.

From this beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel pronounces a dominant note of judgment. Only in Ezekiel 33, when a young man arrives six years later to say that Jerusalem has fallen, does the message turn to become one of hope.

God has not written off his people after all, and the rest of Ezekiel is full of hope. But for these first six years, there is only judgment. everywhere. And in the two chapters before us, Ezekiel tells us by parabolic actions and by explicit words, what happens when the Lord shoots to kill.

First, the acted parables of the judgment from 4.1 to 5.4. probably probably the strange acts Ezekiel now performs take place just outside his house, some sort of mud brick hut.

In the relatively small exilic community, the story of his strange actions and long silences and mighty words would spread like wildfire. And his people went out into the fields to work as dirt farmers starting their lives all over again.

[16:24] they would go by Ezekiel's house and see what that strange nut this prophet was up to this day. The centerpiece is a large sun-baked clay tablet on which Ezekiel draws the city of Jerusalem.

Now son of man take a block of clay put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. You know how cities can be identified by their profiles.

You draw a profile of Paris and you know that it's Paris. You draw a profile of London and you know that it's London. You draw a profile of New York and you know that it's New York. You draw a profile of Glasgow you know it's Glasgow.

So now he takes this large piece of clay and he draws on it scraping it out a profile of Jerusalem so that everybody sees that this clay tablet represents Jerusalem and then it's as if he's playing toy soldiers.

A walled city in the ancient world was taken down militarily by siege. You circle it with your troops so that nobody can get in and out and you start starving them out.

[17:35] The city might have its own water supply but sooner or later it will run out of food. Sieges could go on two years four years six years eight years in the ancient world and then eventually you

start building up siege ramps these ramps that would eventually enable soldiers to climb over the wall and to do so took courage because up on the wall they were ready to pour boiling oil on your head and shoot down with arrows you started building up siege ramps and it took time and care and discretion to build these things until eventually you could climb over the wall and meanwhile you were building battery ramps to take down the gates and here is Ezekiel playing with his toy soldiers all around the city of Jerusalem he has warned the people that judgment is coming and now they walk by his house day by day and they see that he is preparing to destroy Jerusalem verse 3 this iron pan probably one of those used for baking barley loaves like a large walk of the various symbolic suggestions that have been made the most obvious is this he takes this walk and he himself represents

God and he holds this walk over the city that he's made as if he's about to smash it down and destroy the clay city and he stares at it as the people walk by morning and evening he stares at it holding this walk ready to smash the city the threat of judgment probably verses 1 and 3 set up a more or less permanent prop as a visual aid for everything that takes place in the following verses while Ezekiel performs these actions around the setup or beside it in verses 4 to 8 the drama changes here Ezekiel represents first Israel the northern kingdom which went into captivity a century and a half earlier and then Judah the southern kingdom some people had gone into captivity but the city had not yet been destroyed that would take place six years hence if he's lying east west with his head toward

Jerusalem verse 7 Ezekiel if he lies on his left side is facing north toward Israel which had already gone into captivity and in some ways was no concern of Judah they deserved it they had abandoned the Davidic line as far as the Judahites were concerned Israel got what they deserved Jerusalem is still spared but they got what they deserved in the north and for 390 days he lies on his left side now don't think that he did nothing but lie on his left side all day there would be medical problems that would quickly accrue it becomes very obvious in the following verses that although he lies there and people watch him lying there and facing the north yet nevertheless he then stands up and does various other activities some of which I'll describe in a moment but every day threatening threat of judgment toward the north toward the north 390 days and each day is to represent a year probably from the onset of the northern rebellion under

Jeroboam the son of Nebat who taught Israel to sin in 931 BC to the end of the exile and so for a whole year plus every day the people come by on their way to the fields and he's lying there threatening judgment on his left side facing judgment to the north and the next day they come again and he's lying there threatening judgment toward the north 390 days and then the next day they come again and he's lying there and he's facing south with the weight of his body representing the weight of sin and punishment and now it's toward Judah and Jerusalem can you imagine the psychological impact of that and he does it for 40 days each day representing a year there are various ways of course in which you calculate the history of

Judah in the south Jeremiah speaks of 70 years in Jeremiah 25 but not 70 years of exile 70 years under Babylonian supremacy and then from the time of Ezekiel's captivity to the exile it was 59 years from the fall of Jerusalem to the end 49 years it gets rounded off to 40 years here so for 40 days he lies and denounces the south and then in verses 9 to 17 we discover what other actions he is taking day by day now the prophet's action draws attention to the famine that would take place in Jerusalem as Jerusalem is under siege and then later when the folks are in exile verse 8 verse 9 take wheat and barley beans and lentils millet and spelt and believe and some group of Americans who now call this the

[23 : 03] Ezekiel diet god help you if this is really the diet you're on you're heading for famine circumstances the point is that this diet is not recommended it is a step of desperation instead of bread being made from wheat and barley you take whatever you've got you're making your bread of a little bit of wheat and a little bit of barley then dried beans and dried lentils whatever you get that's organic and put it together and smash it down and make some powder out of it then you put them in a storage drawer and you use this to make bread for yourself and you are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side so he's got to get up and make the bread you see he weighs out 20 shekels of food to eat each day 20 shekels a shekel is 11.4 grams 20 shekels means about 8 ounces that's not a lot of bread especially when it's made out of beans and then he's to drink a sixth of a hen of water that is a bit over an imperial pint the whole point is that these are the kinds of restrictions you put on yourself when you're under famine under siege undoubtedly

Ezekiel the prophet when he went home at night got something more to eat this would have killed him in Babylonian heat a pint of water a day I don't think so but it's a way of getting across what siege conditions look like and now the people that come by day by day before his house they see him lying on his left side and when they come home they see him eating the day at set times we're told eat it at set times not when you're hungry not when you're thirsty you don't do that under siege you do it at set times with the whole scattered across the day because you're under famine you're under siege you don't dare take it all down when you want it and worse is yet to come verses 12 and 13 eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread bake it in the sight of the people using human excrement for fuel the

Lord said in this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will send them that is it's not only a picture of the siege but of the fact that they will themselves be exiled and they will be so desperately poor where they are that they will use human excrement for food to bake their bread Ezekiel is scandalized he's been a kosher Jew all his life not so sovereign Lord I've never defiled myself no impure meat has ever injured my mouth very well God says you can use cow poo instead in other words they are facing not only years of siege they are facing years and years of desperate situations even in captivity and the point verses 16 and 17 son of man

I am about to cut off the food supply in Jerusalem the people will eat rationed food and anxiety and drink rationed water and despair for food and water will be scarce they will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin do you hear what's been said verses one to three drive home the inevitability of the siege of Jerusalem verses four to eight drive home the duration of the banishment verses nine to seventeen drive home the famine conditions of siege and exile and now chapter five verses one to four here we find depicted what will happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem Ezekiel is told to take a sharp sword razor sharp like a straight razor in which he cuts off scrapes off his thick bushy beard and he divides it into three parts he takes a few strands and tucks them in his belt then one third he drops into the city of

Jerusalem that is this clay tablet of Jerusalem drops in a hot coal the hair burns up and then he takes another third scatters around the city and then takes the sharp sword and wax it and wax it and wax it until it's all little pieces of cut up hair then he takes the last third the people are watching him now and he throws a few hairs up in the wind until it's all blown away and then the few remaining hairs he's got in his belt he drops them back into the city where the fire is still smoldering and they're gone too we don't have to wonder what the application is 512 a third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you that is inside the city a third will fall by the sword outside your walls and a third

[29 : 27] I will scatter to the winds and pursue withdrawn sword these these are the acted parables of judgment second what are God's reasons for this judgment verses 5 to 12 the fundamental reason given by God in these verses is that Judah has not only rebelled against God and his covenant but has actually become more wicked than the surrounding nations this is what the sovereign Lord says this is Jerusalem that is this clay tablet as Ezekiel utters these words in the name of God he's pointing to Jerusalem where you have the small there ash still there and he says this is Jerusalem which I have set in the center of the nations with countries all around her yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her she has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees therefore verse 7 this is what the sovereign

Lord says you have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws you have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you therefore this is what the sovereign Lord says I am against you Jerusalem and do you think that the western world will be preserved that the western church gets off scot-free let me tell you sexual standards are much much much more honorable in Saudi Arabia than they are in Scotland or America we may not like that heavy hand but it's a lot harder to get addicted to porn in Turkey than it is here and while we're laughing at their strictness and their harshness and their violence let me tell you it's fun to raise a family in

Turkey they love their kids in Turkey what does Jesus say woe to you Beth Seda woe to you Capernaum if the miracles done in you and the gospel preached in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon pagan cities of the coast or in Sodom and Gomorrah proverbial for wickedness they would have remained to this day woe to you Glasgow woe to you New York if the gospel preached in you the revivals you have seen the history of the covenanters let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of

the word had been done in Kabul it would have been a lighthouse to the nations that's what God says here you have become more unruly than the surrounding nations and God's covenant people are here involved in more sin than amongst the Moabites third God's purposes in the judgment verses 13 to 17 then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside and I will be avenged God's first declared purpose in this judgment is not the result of bad temper or losing it but of principled holiness against folk who are amoral and utterly self distancing themselves from

God and he will vent his wrath would it be better if God didn't do that would God be more admirable if he didn't vent his wrath against Hitler supposing he said I don't really care what Hitler does I don't really care what what Stalin does I really go ahead I'm too distant for that I'm actually the God of deism I'm busy in some other corner of the universe you little people down there don't really count would that make God more admirable but if he is so holy that his character the perfection of his goodness demands that he vent his just wrath against wickedness it's not just Hitler who doesn't escape it's me second his purpose is to make his people realize that he has done it 13b and when [35 : 23] I have spent my wrath on them they will know that I the Lord have spoken in my zeal the reason for Ezekiel's prophecy is in part so that when the judgment has fallen and Jerusalem has been destroyed it won't look like an accident of history one of those things that just happens maybe God let it slip by him but it is in fact the result of the judging purposes of God himself number three he openly wants his people to become a reproach so as to humble them verses 14 and 15 I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you in the sight of all who pass by you will be a reproach and a taunt a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and in stinging rebuke I the Lord have spoken and quite frankly number four his purpose is to destroy them verses 16 and 17 when

I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine I will shoot to destroy you I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food I will send famine and wild beasts against you and they will leave you childless plague and bloodshed will sweep through you and I will bring the sword against you I the Lord have spoken thus says the Lord but as important as it is to understand these two chapters in the context of Ezekiel it is important to understand them in broader biblical frameworks first set this passage within the framework of Old Testament history set this passage within the framework of Old Testament history the reason that is important is because we must not let ourselves off the hook by suggesting well it's just

Ezekiel it's it's one prophet it's not usually that bad but you move from the fall to the flood when God wipes out most of humanity in judgment so great is the degradation and it's only an act of God's grace that makes God promise that he won't destroy humanity again the same way and then there's Abraham a great man a man of faith to whom is given the promise that in him and in his seat all the nations of the earth will be blessed but this great man of faith is also a liar and a deceiver and Isaac is a bit of a wimp Jacob is a deceiver and the twelve well one of them is sleeping with his father's concubine another is sleeping with his daughter in law and ten can't decide whether they want to kill or sell into slavery the eleventh and these are the patriarchs eventually the people of God are rescued by

God from slavery with all the miracles surrounding the exodus give them the first break and within a year at Mount Sinai they're building a golden calf and they come up to the edge of the promised land when they have seen so much of God's work and they can't believe that God would actually be strong enough to get them in there so they rebel and spend 40 years in the wilderness dying off eventually they get into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua but there are cycles of decline and cycles of decline until you come to chapters in public they are so disgusting the difference between the good guys and the bad guys is so slim that they are a revolting bunch of people in those days people did what was right in their own eyes there was no king in Israel but when they asked for a king they asked for all the wrong reasons so they can become like pagans around them that didn't work out too God's own heart David who commits adultery and murder one wonders what he would have done if he hadn't been a man after God's own heart two generations and the small empire splits twelve tribes now become ten and two and in the ten tribes to the north dynasty follows dynasty follows dynasty never more than a generation or two before some soldier comes in and bumps off all the old guys kill all they end up in slavery and captivity under the Assyrians in 721 BC and in the south it's only the grace of God that keeps that Davidic line surviving the predations of Anathali and others that come along set this passage within the

framework of

[40 : 49] Old Testament history and you discover that it's not rare it's not out of line it's not out of step judgment falls again and again set this passage within the framework of New Testament history after all predictions are made in the New Testament that Jerusalem itself will fall again and it does in AD 70 did you notice the words in 5 9 Ezekiel 5 9 because of all your detestable idols I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again that becomes almost a formula that is repeated at every new catastrophic judgment the same thing is said about the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem in Matthew 24 21 for then there will be great distress unequal from the beginning of the world until now and never will be equaled again it's a formula that's not to be worked out in logic it's a formula that means this is as bad as it gets and it happens again and again and again and

AD 70 isn't the end of it either it happens again in 132 135 until Jerusalem is razed to the ground and it becomes a capital offense for any Jew to live anywhere in Jerusalem and Virens but set this passage within the framework of the New Testament church the New Testament people of God then what shall we do with Revelation 2 and 3 when for five of the seven churches God says unless you repent of your sin which varies from false teaching to immorality to heartless coldness before the living God unless you repent of your sin I will remove your candlestick which means I will destroy you as a church you will no longer be a church and in fact in this seven churches area the western third of modern Turkey in due course every trace of biblical Christianity was wiped off the land as recently as 1975 there were only 35 known evangelical in all of Turkey in a population of 60 million and a third of them were actually converted at Tyndale house in Cambridge today in God's great mercy the church is rising again there are about 5,000 evangelical Christians in Turkey Peter reminds us that judgment will begin with the house of God 1 Peter 4 17 if judgment will come upon this land judgment will begin with the house of God does this sound reasonable today then consider warnings against nations that are nothing more than historical manifestations of the Antichrist Revelation 13 the beginning of Revelation 14 Revelation 17

Revelation 18 huge judgment called upon the nations not just upon the church because of sin that is multiplying warnings against individuals do you know who it is that talks most about hell in the New Testament Gentle Jesus meek and mild there are many who try to argue that when you move from the Old Testament to the New Testament you move from a picture of God's judgment to a picture of God's grace that simply isn't true the reason why we think it's true is because we're not frightened by hell the way we're frightened by war famine and pestilence that's why but when you take the scriptures seriously I do not see how the God of the New Testament is somehow a softer God take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine because the grapes are ripe the angel swung a sickle on the earth gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath they were trampled in the winepress outside the city and blood flowed out of the press rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1600 miles granted it's metaphorical it's metaphorical of horror no it's not the case that when you move from the Old Testament to the New you move from harshness to sweetness rather as you move from the Old Testament to the New just as the pictures of God's wrath are ratcheted up to hell itself so the pictures of God's love are ratcheted up to the cross itself that's why you read the argument of Hebrews chapter 2 we must pay more careful attention therefore to what we have heard so that we do not drift away for if the message spoken by angels was binding and every violation of disobedience received its just reward that is under the old covenant how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation it's ratcheted up don't you see but that brings me to the last point set this passage within the framework of the cross for the truth of the matter is that we find two massive themes barreling through the scriptures on the one hand these pictures of sin and rebellion calling down the judgment of

[47 : 01] God in most horrific categories without apology as part of the function of God's holiness and it is high time that we in the West faced those texts square on and refused to duck them but also barreling through the scripture as early as the chapter of the fall God promising to raise up the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head promising to raise up the seed of Abraham the seed of Abraham who would call men and women from every tongue and tribe and people and nation giving his law under Moses and another like Moses will be called up to him will the people listen raising up a great David looking forward to great David's greater son we recite some of these

texts every Christmas do we not or listen to them as we hum along with Handel's Messiah unto us a child is born unto us a son is given he shall reign on the throne of his father

David of the increase of his kingdom there shall be no end and he shall be called wonderful counselor the mighty God the everlasting father the prince of peace and then a few chapters later he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the chastisement of our peace was upon him with his stripes we are healed barreling through the scripture barreling through the scripture without any resolution until finally they collide in the cross and that's why the apostle Paul in Romans can begin by saying the wrath of God is disclosed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men and take two and a half chapters to lay out the damnable situation in which we find ourselves all men and women under the wrath of

God before he introduces the most glorious passage on the cross in all of Paul's writings Romans 3 21 to 26 where through the cross we learn how God could justify could declare just those who are unjust because one bore their sins in his own body on the tree he could he could declare them just while being just himself if he had declared them just without providing a sacrifice he would be unjust but in the cross these two massive barreling themes through all of scripture come together so that God may be just and the one who justifies the ungodly do you want to see the most massive picture of the wrath of God do you want to see the most massive picture of the love of

God they're the same come and see come and see come and see the king of love see the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears soldiers mock rulers sneer as he lifts the cruel cross lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill we worship at your feet where wrath and mercy meet let us pray open open open our eyes merciful father we beg of you to see the enormity of our sin and the wrath that it rightly attracts that we may repent and cry for mercy open our eyes merciful heavenly father that we may see afresh the limitless dimensions of your love disclosed in so many ways in our lives and supremely in the cross and open our minds and hearts and wills to believe and obey and trust and worship for

Jesus sake Amen