



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 1: 24-32

Romans

“Abandoned by God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This week is Passover week and the Jewish people have begun celebrating it and that means that next Sunday is Easter Sunday or Resurrection Sunday and I suppose that a sermon on the crucifixion would have been appropriate for this morning. I don't have that sermon. We're continuing with our study in the Book of Romans according to the natural course of it, but as I was thinking about that, it occurred to me that the text that we look at this morning really fits with that because we see the spirit, the heart of man that led Him, Jew and gentile alike, to crucify Christ, to put Him on the cross.

It is a disturbing text, but a very revealing one. Our text is Romans 1:24-32. Paul writes, “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them for they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural and in the same way also, the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful,

inventors of evil, disobedient to parents without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful. And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.” May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time this morning when we can come together and read the text of scripture and then consider the meaning of it in some depth and we come to a difficult text of scripture, not a pleasant passage but certainly an important passage. Come to one that presents for us really a dark canvas against which we see the brightness and the glory of your grace. We learn from this text what is the nature of man, what man deserves, he deserves wrath and yet by your grace you save men from that. Men and women, young and old, you deliver them.

And it’s not a deliverance that occurs because we’ve for some reason merit that, because we earn that, because we are individuals in whom you saw some good thing and chose us and saved us as a result of that. There is nothing good within any of us that would commend us to you and gain your favor. We are the people of Romans 1 in and of ourselves. By nature that is mankind. And yet it’s out of that that you save the people for yourself. And so we see against this dark backdrop the brightness of your grace and I pray that we would understand that more clearly, that we would understand the text of scripture, that you would guide us through it, that the spirit of God would teach us.

We thank you for Him, that you have equipped us with a teacher that is divine and can illuminate the page of scripture for us and instruct us in what it means and how we’re to live and make the proper applications and pray for that this morning. Build us up in the faith through our time of study and bless us in other ways as well. We are a needy people in all areas of life in the material as well as the physical and we pray for those who are experiencing various difficulties. We pray for those who are sick and those who are facing surgeries, those who are recovering from them. We pray that your hand of blessing and healing will be upon them.

Bless those who are facing other kinds of difficulties, those who are without employment. We pray that you would open doors of opportunity for them and that you would bless those of us who aren’t experiencing any obvious needs or in good health who are employed, who are enjoying friendships and fellowship, who have

many blessings. Help us to realize that all of that’s a gift from you. It comes down from the Father of Lights and helps us to appreciate what we have and be thankful for it. We are thankful, Father, we give you praise for all the good things we experience and have and most of all, for the salvation that’s ours in Jesus Christ and may that be magnified. May He be glorified in the things that we say and do this morning.

So bless us in this hour, bless us this evening when we return to this room and celebrate the Lord ’s Supper, remember His first coming and the elements that we take and remember that that’s a temporary situation, that it will end when He returns and He is coming again. May we look forward to that day. Bless us to that end in this hour and this evening. And now, Father, bless our final hymn as we sing it, that it would prepare our hearts well for our time of study. Pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] Late Friday night after I finished working on my sermon and had it fresh in my mind, I went into the den. TV was on and a talk show was airing in which a group of people were discussing lyrics in music today, rap and hip hop. I didn’t watch more than four minutes of that program, but in that time, the various subjects of songs, the lyrics were mentioned and they were simply vile. And the host of the show began to ask, how did we get to this place? Didn’t use to be like this. How did we get to this place? And I thought to myself, well, come to Church on Sunday and I’ll tell you.

God gave them over. That’s the refrain that runs down through the rest of Romans 1. It has been called the light motif which is a device in music, usually in opera which is a dominant theme that recurs throughout the piece. Three times we read the words, “God gave them over.” And each time this light motif introduces the theme of judgment. That’s the subject of the remaining verses of Romans 1, verses that Donald Grey Barnhouse called the most terrible in the bible because they give the description of mankind abandoned by God.

That must have seemed terrible to Paul as well and I don’t suspect that he enjoyed writing these verses, but he knew that they were necessary. He is explaining why man needs the gospel, that he is not ashamed to preach, that he was eager to reach in Rome why man needs the gift of righteousness which is received by faith alone. It is because man is guilty. And man is under divine judgment. Man lacks righteousness. He lacks a right standing with God. Doesn’t lack religion. Man is

very religious. He’s always been very religious, but his religion is futile. It’s vain. It doesn’t produce righteousness. In fact, as Paul now explains, it results in just the opposite.

The consequence of human religion, of exchanging the glory of God for images of men and beasts, the consequence of that is more sin. That’s how verse 24 begins, “Therefore,” he writes, meaning because the gentiles rejected God’s revelation in nature, God gave them over in the lusts of their heart to impurity. And with that Paul begins to explain the statement that he made back in verse 18 about God’s wrath being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. How was it revealed? Well, it is revealed in the downward path of human corruption, first from unbelief then to sexual immorality and perversion and finally to mental depravity with people who not only commit sin but they applaud others who commit it.

It may be terrible and it is, but it is just. It is giving to man what Paul calls in verse 27 the due penalty of their error. Swiss commentator Frederic Godet wrote of a law that broods over human existence which is as you make your God, you make yourself. When men make their gods into beasts, when they worship animals, they soon become like them. We see that in our text. That’s the wrath of God. Now there is a future day of wrath. There is the great and terrible day of the Lord that is coming when He will pour out His wrath on mankind, there is a great right throne judgment that will come on the earth. But in the present time, God’s wrath is manifested in the downward path of human corruption.

And it’s not a work that God does with joy. It is a terrible work. As He said in Ezekiel 33:11, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, rather that the wicked turn from his way and life.” That’s God’s desire, that’s His pleasure, but still, He judges. Some have tried to minimize God’s involvement in this and treat it as non-interference by God who is merely allowing the processes of sin to work their course and that’s the meaning of God gave them over. We might illustrate it with a kettle of water that we place on the stove and as we turn up the heat it begins to simmer and that becomes the natural process. We can take that kettle off the water and it will stop the process, but if we just leave it, it will eventually boil over following the natural course of events and some have explained God’s giving over in that way.

But that is not the sense of Paul’s statement. That may be a part of the meaning of it, but that’s not the sense. It is a deliberate positive act. God gave them

over Paul writes. It's the same word that's used later in 8:32 of God delivering up His son to death for us all. God did that. It was a deliberate purposeful act and here God actively gives men over to the consequences of their sin, to the outworking of their lusts. It is a judicial act by God. He, in effect, puts people in the prison of their own passions where their lusts only intensify where lust becomes a slave master.

People like to think of sexual license as liberation. That's really bondage with terrible consequences. People are driven by passions that they cannot control. They cannot stop themselves and become slaves of their passion. The result is their bodies are dishonored, Paul says. That's the end of sexual immorality. That's what it produces, abused bodies. Now that's not the product of sex. Sex is a gift of God. It is good, it is designed to be enjoyed but enjoyed within the right context, within monogamous marriage.

And when it is not, when people decide that it is too restrictive, when they want sexual freedom in order to carry out their desires, they experience consequences in both body and soul. There are psychological effects to immorality with depression and guilt along with an increasing callousness, an increasing insensitivity to sin which makes it all the easier to do it. And there are physical problems with various diseases associated with immorality. We're familiar with all of that.

Well, all of this is simply the principle of Proverbs 6:27, “Can a make take fire to his chest and his clothes not be burned?” The question's rhetorical, obviously no. No one can take fire to his chest and not be burned by it and no one can play with the fire of promiscuity and not be burned by it. This is God's wrath. And the cause of it is unbelief. Paul has developed that quite thoroughly in the earlier verses, in verses 18 through 23, “They suppressed the truth in unrighteousness,” that's the reason for judgment.

But to make that very clear, to show the correctness of that judgment, the rightness of it, Paul returns to that idea. He repeats it in verse 25, “For the exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever. Amen.” They sinned against the light. What Paul said in verse 20 was clearly seen, revelation in nature, that was very obvious. It's clear from looking at the heavens above and all that God has made that there is a creator, there is a supreme being. We had the evidence in that, the testimony in all

that’s around us of His deity and His attributes, His power. I saw that clearly. They sinned against that.

So what follows in Paul’s description in our text is the result of apostasy, of turning away from the truth, of recognizing the truth and rejecting it. Sin in the religious realm is punished by sin in the moral realm. We see that principle illustrated in the well-known parable of the prodigal son. The younger son, you’ll remember, doesn’t want to live in his father’s house any longer. Evidently he doesn’t like the rules, he doesn’t like the restrictions, he doesn’t like the discipline that is involved with living with his father. He wants to go out on his own and he wants to live life his way.

And so he demands his inheritance and the father gives it. He releases his boy to his rebellion. He goes off to a far country where he squanders his wealth and he ends up living with the pigs. Now that squalid existence didn’t begin in a few country, didn’t begin with his debauchery, it began in his father’s house when he rejected him and life with him. That’s what Paul is describing here. Men don’t want to live in God’s house. They reject Him; they reject His law. They choose the far country and God not only allows them go to into the far country, He consigns them to it. He gave them over in the lusts of their heart.

Now He did not give them over to lust. He did not create lust in their heart. He found them in that condition, so to speak. He found them with lust and gave them over to the consequences of it. Now there is nothing stable about lust. There’s not a stability to it. In other words, a person can’t enjoy just a little bit of it, sin a little bit, sample some of that sin and be done with it. We’d like to think that we could do that. Sin’s very intriguing and the idea of sipping a little sin and putting it aside and having nothing more to do with it is intriguing, but that is impossible.

Lust has an appetite that only increases and the consequences of feeding it is lust only intensifies and leads to greater sins which lead to further judgment. That’s the course that sin follows. That’s what Paul is developing and so in verse 26 we read for a second time God gave them over. This time to degrading passions. And this second stage of abandonment is sexual perversion. Their women exchange the natural function for that which is unnatural and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one

another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error.

The gentile world was notorious for this kind of behavior. Archaeology has found ample evidence of that. The Jews called it The Greek Sin. But it was Roman too. Both societies glorified homosexuality in their literature and art. The Greeks depicted scenes of it on their urns and their vases. But neither the Greeks nor the Romans had a monopoly on this. It was a problem in the orient as well. It is older than Sodom and Gomorrah. It is as contemporary as today. Paul is describing any of the great cities of America and the world because man hasn't changed. Man is essentially what he was when the fall occurred. He is still in unbelief, he is rejecting the revelation, whether it be the revelation of nature, general revelation or special revelation, the revelation of the gospel where God's light appears to man, man instinctively rejects it. That's his nature.

And wherever there is spiritual darkness, there will be moral perversion. And Paul identifies these sins of lesbianism and male homosexuality as perversion. He calls them unnatural. Fornication and adultery are sins as well. They are the violation of God's law and they carry with them terrible consequences. Paul's already spoken of those earlier about the debasement of the body. But they are not called unnatural. Homosexuality is because it is contrary to God's design. That is what makes it especially grave. It not only is a rejection of God's moral law, but it is a rejection of His wisdom, of His design, of His purpose in creation. So as wrong and as bad as adultery is, homosexuality is worse. It is a further step down in degeneracy.

Now in saying that, I'm not saying it is the worst sin that there is. In fact, I believe that Jesus, based on Matthew 11:23 which say that the proud self-righteous Pharisee is worse than the catamite. But this sin is more obvious, particularly in the gentile world and that's what Paul is describing here. And the degeneracy of it is further indicated in the description of it. They abandoned the natural function and burned in their desire. That is a graphic way of describing their insatiable lust. They were enflamed with lust, with something that can't be satisfied.

They're like Tantalus, a favorite child of Zeus and given the privilege of dining with the gods, but he behaved badly and as a consequence of that was condemned forever to stand before water that would recede whenever he stooped to drink it and stand under a fruit tree that would be blown away from his grasp

whenever he reached for the fruit. That was Hades. He was always seeking to be satisfied, but he was never achieving that satisfaction; he was doomed to be unfulfilled. So even the myths had some truth and that myth illustrated a part of the wrath revealed from heaven against ungodliness and unrighteousness and that is that it does not satisfy. People enter into it to gain satisfaction and they don't gain that satisfaction and it's a constant quest for satisfaction that is never, never obtained. They burned in their desire, Paul adds, received in their own person the due penalty of their error.

It happens with sexual diseases and other things. It's what Paul described earlier in verse 24 only more extreme. But the wrath of God on apostasy is not restricted to sexual sin and in verse 28 through the end of the chapter Paul shows God's abandonment to all kinds of vice. Paul writes that they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, meaning they refused to have God in their thoughts. They did not consider God to be worthy of their thoughts. And so for the third time we read, “God gave them over.” This time to a depraved mind which is a morally useless mind, one that is untrustworthy as a moral guide.

This is the worst of all that Paul has described. It's worse than the darkened mind, the foolish mind that he mentioned earlier in the text. This is not only a dark and foolish mind, this is a twisted mind. They call evil good and good evil. That is a depraved mind. And what follows is the full-blown expression of depravity which Paul describes in a list of 21 vices.

Now they don't seem to be classified in any particular order. Commentators have tried to find some order, some logic to them, but it seems more likely that Paul just gives a free or loose list of sins. He just surveyed the various sins that take place and he lists them. But they all do fit under one heading and that is the heading that theologians have given: Total Depravity. I'll just list or read the list and make a few comments on it. Verse 29, “Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.”

Most of them are self-explanatory, but I think a few call for some comment. In verse 30 Paul lists haters of God and inventors of evil. Some years ago, John Gerstner wrote, “Man is sinner, hates God, hates man and hates himself. He would

kill God if he could. He does kill his fellow man when he can. He commits spiritual suicide every day of his life.” Now if that sounds harsh, like an overstatement, then read Paul’s list again. That is exactly what Paul is saying. Later in chapter 8, he describes man as being at war with God, hostile towards God. Men hate God and they love evil. Some people are particularly adept at inventing new forms of it and there is a large market for it.

There’s a story about Napoleon that if true shows that he had a good understanding of human nature. He was very concerned that Paris would rise up against him after his terrible losses during the retreat from Moscow and so he sent an order that the women dancers of Paris in the Paris ballet were to perform with bare legs. For weeks people of the city could talk of nothing else and Napoleon survived. In Paul’s day, the Colosseum had not yet been built. It was dedicated, I believe, by Titus in the year 80. But it soon would be built. It could seat 50,000 spectators who filled it to watch the gladiators and the gore and the carnage. If the Romans didn’t invent blood sport they certainly perfected it.

Men are inventors of evil and spectators of it. And they are because their hearts are full of it. That’s how Paul begins this list, being filled – filled – with all unrighteousness. Third verse to notice is in verse 31, unloving. That is from the Greek word *storge* which is a word for love, particularly the idea of it is family affection. Commentators have connected this lack of family affection with the common practice among the Greeks and the Romans of exposing children, leaving an unwanted baby out in the elements to die.

Charles Cranfield in his commentary refers to Paul’s contemporary Seneca who was a philosopher of ethics, a man known as very ethical and quotes him as taking it for granted that weakly or deformed babies would be drowned. That was the gentile world. Depraved, brutal, lacking family affection, unloving, unnatural in its desires. Sounds like modern times. But the last verse is what John Murray calls the culminating indictment, it is the worst state of all. Verse 32, “And although they know the ordinances of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

These people have been around for a long time. Isaiah warned against them, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness.” And what is so damning about this is that Paul says they know

that such things are worthy of death. They know the ordinance of God. And that word death is not physical death, it's damnation. That's what he's speaking of. That's clear from the fact that this list of vices on any code of ethics among a people would not be punishable by death, not all of them, some would. But they know that all these things are punishable by death because they recognize that they are sinful and God will deal with them.

They know that inherently. Even the pagan had a belief in Hades. Even the pagan had an idea of retribution after death which indicates that though God abandons men, He never abandons them completely. Even the most abandoned of people always have within them a little bit of light. They know right from wrong, they're convicted of it. They know that and they know that it is worthy of death, that it is a damnable thing that they think and that they do, still they do evil. Deny that it's evil and encourage others to follow them in it.

This is the bottom of the downward slide into depravity. These are the predators, people who draw the naive into their sordid life of sin and the propagandists, the opinion makers, those who influence moral standards in society. We see it today in regard to the very things that Paul has written about in this text in regard to homosexuality with the push for acceptance, labeling it as an alternative lifestyle, defining it as a genetic or a biological condition, no more blameworthy than left-handedness. So it's not bad, it's just different. It's not a choice, it's a condition. It can't be helped, it can't be changed and it shouldn't be changed. We see this kind of reasoning in the media, among educators and even among ministers which really shouldn't surprise us. They often disguise themselves as angel of life so we should actually expect it among ministers and many modern theologians have tried to reinterpret Paul's statements here as not a condemnation of responsible homosexuality as they call it but an abuse of the practice.

So he's condemning abuses of this behavior. But Paul in the bible don't make such a distinction and nowhere does the bible recognize any such thing as responsible homosexuality. It is called unnatural. And even if there were good evidence for a genetic predisposition toward it, that wouldn't excuse it. There may be some evidence for a genetic predisposition toward anger and alcoholism, but that doesn't elevate murder and drunkenness to acceptable forms of behavior. The same kind of reasoning goes on with other issues like abortion and euthanasia, they are justified in

various ways by various people. Medically they're justified or justified in the name of compassion.

The tragedy is this kind of justification, this kind of argumentation only reassures people, confirms people in behavior that is destructive, behavior with a high percentage of infectious diseases, behavior that leads to regret and crippling guilt. That's why this last group is so bad. They appear wise, they appear broadminded, they appear compassionate, that's how they pass themselves off. It's what they may believe about themselves when the reality is they are destructive. They put a smiley face on sin and encourage the practice of it.

And what we see is that over time the exposure to these issues and the justification for them takes its toll on society. People are less and less shocked and more and more accepting. Many years ago Alexander Pope explained the process in the lines, “Vice is a monster of so frightful mean as to be hated needs but to be seen, yet seen too oft familiar with her face, we first endure then pity then embrace.” That's the process in the decline of civilization. People hate evil then they endure evil and finally embrace evil.

But it's a process that begins with unbelief, with rejecting the truth of God, turning from Him. Moral corruption begins with apostasy. Dostoyevsky had some sense of that, of the consequence of unbelief in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. He made his character Ivan say that if man's belief in immortality is destroyed, everything would be permitted, for those who don't believe in God or immortality, he said, crime is the wisest and noblest course.

In other words, if there is no God, there is no higher authority. There is no standard for right and wrong. And who's to say what is right? Every man then does what's right in his own eyes. Men do what they want and the strong prevail. History is filled with examples of it. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century is filled with examples of it. Years after Dostoyevsky wrote those lines, his own country experienced that in Russia. We can give many, many examples of man's inhumanity to man of nation's rising and falling throughout history, civilizations becoming decadent and passing away. It happens whenever men reject God's revelation and go their own way.

God gives them over to their desires and the consequences of those desires, God abandons them. That is His wrath. That is how we've gotten to this place. So as Christians, what is to be our response to all of this? What's to be our response to the

things we read here in Romans 1? Well, let me make a few suggestions. First of all, we are to take sin seriously. We live in a day that doesn't. We live in a day that dismisses the idea of sin as old-fashion. What the bible condemns, modern culture accepts. And there is a danger in that for us because the world is very influential, society has its pressure upon us. Paul speaks of that in Romans 12:1-2, the inclination to be conformed to this world, to its influences.

And so that's the danger we face. It's possible for Christians to take on the same attitude that they see so prevalently, so constantly in the world and begin to be swayed by it so they become insensitive towards sin, becomes somewhat indifferent towards sin since the world itself is so indifferent toward it. And gradually, the result is we can begin to conform to the standards of the world. Well, that's the danger. Paul recognizes that later on in chapter 12 so to avoid that we need to pay close attention to the word of God which transforms our minds he says.

This is the only way our minds are transformed. And they are in constant need of transformation. It's through the reading of the word of God, the study of the word of God, it is the only standard by which we can know right from wrong and have discernment when we come under the influence of those people of verse 32. Secondly, we need to take our relationship with God seriously. And really of the two, that has the priority. But we achieve it through giving attention to the word of God. But we need to take Him seriously. There is a tendency in evangelicalism not to do that, to lower Him to be more like us.

And as a result we neglect the truths of God, His attributes of holiness, justice wrath. We recognize God is a God of love, of infinite love. But He's a holy God, He's a just God, and we need to understand that and not lose a sense of His transcendence. When we lose that, our relationship with Him become casual and then indifferent and He ceases to occupy our thoughts. He's just about the same as us and he's not much more important than us. And so we stop thinking about Him. That's really the sin of this chapter.

This catalog of sins is really not the main point of the passage. Paul's not giving us a terrible list of sins and indictments on society to stir us up and galvanize us to change society and go out and make a protest and try to make a more godly society in which we live. He's not doing that at all. What he's saying is this is the world, this is the way it is. This is it. Remove the veneer and underneath this is what

you see. This is the real nature of the world and it will be the real nature of the world until Christ comes back. He’s bringing an indictment on the human race. He’s not telling us to go out and try to change society, He’s saying we are guilty, we lack righteousness, we need faith. That’s what man needs. He needs the righteousness of God that can only be obtained through faith and that’s what man lacks and what results is what follows in this text. Unbelief is the cause of it. Sin that’s listed here is the consequence of that.

So we need to be strong in our faith and to strengthen our faith, we need to keep our eyes on Christ who is the author and perfecter of faith. And by that, I mean we need to keep thinking about Him. We need to study Him, we need to reverence Him, we need to approach the father through Him in prayer regularly. He is the opposite of all that we study in this passage. As a man, He was obedient. No one had faith as pure as Christ, He had perfect faith, perfect obedience. He is pure and wise and we gained purity and we learn wisdom by considering him. We’re transformed as we consider Christ in the scriptures.

It is when we take our eyes off Him that we begin to drift. And we never drift in the right direction. Christ is the loadstar. Ancient mariners could always take their bearings on the sea at night by looking to the North Star. When the night sky was covered with clouds and the star was veiled, they were lost. The same is true with us, Christ is our guide. If we ignore Him, we lose our way and stumble. That is certainly an application of Romans 1. Nothing is more worthy of our thoughts than the Lord God. We never obtain our highest level beyond that. That is the great thing we can do, fill our thoughts, meditate upon the Lord God. He is worthy of them; nothing is as worthy.

Thirdly, we need to be humble. We need to ask ourselves the question that Paul asked the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:7, who made you to differ? Who made you superior? Why are you not like the reprobate of Romans 1? It’s not because you made yourself different from them. It’s not because you raised yourself up, it’s not because God saw something commendable in you that He didn’t see in them. You and I are no different from these people in Romans 1. The reason we differ from them, the reason we have faith is because of God’s grace and God’s grace alone.

It was John Bradford, the English reformer who when we saw a murderer led off to his death said the famous line, “There but for the grace of God go I.” As we

read this text of Romans 1, we should say the same thing. It should make us grateful. It should make us humble. But it should also make us hopeful. That’s the fourth point. Judgment comes because God must vindicate His righteousness and truth. But that justice, that judgment can also produce repentance. In Isaiah 19:22, the prophet gives a prophecy against Egypt but also for Egypt. The prophet said that God would strike the nation, striking but healing so that they will return to the Lord. Sometimes the Lord smites in order to save.

It is when men come to the end of themselves, when they lose all hope, when they are brought to the point of complete despair that they quit hoping in themselves and they turn to the Lord God and are saved. And Paul wrote this first chapter to show men and women that they should despair. There’s no reason for anything but despair. They are depraved. Mankind is under God’s wrath. We have in and of ourself no righteousness of our own. We can’t produce it by our efforts, by our religions. Things become only worse. It’s only reason for despair, but the glorious truth that comes out of this is that Christ can save the worst of sinners. He’s done that. He saved sinners just like those that Paul mentions in this text. He saved a murderer who was hung on a cross next to Him. He saved homosexuals.

1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul gives a list of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God and among them are idolaters, adulterers, effeminate and homosexuals. And then Paul adds such were some of you. Some of you were idolaters, some of you are homosexuals, but you have been washed, sanctified, justified, you’ve been saved. God can save anyone regardless of how far he or she has slipped into sin. He promises to save everyone who believes. He promises to receive everyone who comes to Him without exception.

The prodigal son is the great illustration of that. After squandering his inheritance in the far country and ending up living with the pigs, he remembered his father, he came to his senses the text says. He had followed a course of madness. There was insanity in his mind, the kind of insanity that Paul describes here in Romans 1, but he came to his senses. Doesn’t say how he came to his senses, but we know he came to his senses by the grace of God. Light broke into the darkness. He remembered his father and returned home to find his father waiting for him. Before he could even confess his sin, his father had run to him, embraced him and received him back as his son lost but found.

That is a picture of God, the Father, how He has compassion on sinners and receives all who come to Him, even great and willful sinners and receives them freely. Now how can He do that? How can God freely receive sinners? He can do it because He gave His own son over to death. The one who on the cross bore our sins, became sin on our behalf, experienced God’s wrath. Darkness fell over the land and Jesus was abandoned by God. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” He forsook Him so that He might receive us. He punished Christ as our substitute so that we would escape that punishment.

All who believe in Christ do. All who believe in Him escape that punishment because He has paid for it fully on the cross. He bore our sins completely, paid the penalty in our place. He is the substitute for sinners. So if you’re here without Christ this morning, you’re lost. You’re the person of Romans 1. The wrath of God is against you, but there’s a way of escape, only one way of escape. God made that and He made it through His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So believe in him. The moment you do, you are completely forgiven and received into God’s family as one of His children. You are given a glorious inheritance that cannot be squandered reserved for you in heaven for all eternity, become one of God’s children. So trust in Him. May God help you to do that and help all of us to rejoice in His grace, to fill our minds with Him. He’s more than worthy of our thoughts and to live to His glory. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this text. Perhaps it is the most terrible in the bible. It is a grim picture of mankind abandoned by you under your wrath and yet we thank you for it because it shows us what we are by nature and we need to know that. We need to be smitten in order to be saved. We thank you most of all that this text is not where the bible ends. We go on to learn the good news of salvation in your son. We learn of the righteousness that is your gift to all who believe that clothes us and gives us acceptance before you. Thank you for Christ for His death, for the life we have in Him. May our lives be lived with an increasing appreciation for you filling our minds with the knowledge of you and living to your glory. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.