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JESUS WHO SAVES US FROM THE WRATH TO COME

BY D.B. KNOX

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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When you think of Jesus with what do you connect his name? In summarizing the christian gospel Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about "Jesus who saves us from the wrath to come", (1 Thes. 1:10). When Jesus summed up his own life work He told His disciples that He came to serve other people not to be served Himself, and the form that His service took was giving His life a ransom. A ransom has an object and the object was to save us from the wrath to come. Mankind, that means each one of us, is by nature enslaved by Satan. Of course we do not know it because this slavery takes the form of blindness.

We are blinded by the devil. But Jesus came to give sight to the blind and to set the captives free. It is a mistake to think that this means political freedom or economical freedom or that the Christian hope is on this side of eternity. It is from wrath that Jesus rescues us. We can only think in terms of economical or political freedom if we fail to realize the severeness of that wrath to come. But the Bible is clear, God visits His wrath on all unrighteousness unless it has been forgiven and covered through his grace in Jesus, that Jesus saves us from the wrath was upper-most in Paul's mind when he spoke about Jesus. God's wrath against us because of our sin is an alien thought to us, and we do not take to it easily. We do not like it, we do not accept it, yet the Bible is clear about it. How are we to include the concept of the wrath of God in our message so that it is real and acceptable? Firstly we must ourselves realize the heinousness of wrong doing. In a word we must imitate the anger of Jesus. He was very sensitive to the wickedness of Satan's work in the world; he reacted immediately to Peter's suggestion that he should not go up to risk his life at Jerusalem.

"Get thee behind me Satan" he told his friend, "your views are not of God but of the devil". Or remember the snorting anger that Jesus expressed as he saw the sorrow of Lazarus' friends at Lazarus' tomb. Death is the consequence of Satan's work and Jesus was very angry at it. He expressed the same snorting anger when he felt obliged to tell those whom he had healed to keep quiet about God's marvelous work of healing. Had they spread the good news, it simply would have made his ministry impossible as in fact it did in the end. Are we angry when we see Satan ruining God's handywork of humanity? If we have the mind of Jesus we may be able to understand a little of the overwhelming anger and wrath that God has towards sin. God's long suffering postpones the day of vengeance but it is inevitable and will overwhelm all sin and sinners. This makes the message of Jesus who saves us from the wrath to come very relevant and very important.

Secondly if we are to speak acceptably to others about the wrath of God, urging them to accept the salvation that Christ provides, we need to stand with our hearers rather than over against them. We need to realize that we ourselves are as much under the wrath of God as they are, "for God's wrath is revealed amongst all unrighteous of men" including ours. If by God's mercy we have passed out of judgement into life through faith in Jesus this is a very real benefit which we have experienced, we should share it with others standing beside them as equally deserving of God's wrath and yet pointing them to Jesus and urging them to accept Him as their Lord, for He alone saves from the wrath to come.

Thirdly, our message is not wrath but salvation from wrath. God so loved the world that He gave His son to be the Saviour of the world, so that whoever believes in Jesus as Lord is saved from the wrath he deserves. Sin and all unrighteousness is hateful and has hateful consequences, namely judgement and wrath. But love is also real. Jesus has died for our sins. He delivers us from the wrath, the right-ful and inevitable consequence of the way we live, and restores us, through forgiveness, to His fellow-ship for ever.

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