

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD
--Commentary Sermon on Jonathan Edwards' Sermon--
October 23, 2016 – Romans 3: 21-26 – Old Time Religion Sunday
The Church of the Covenant

I. Introduction:

This sermon began many years ago as a friend who became a commissioned lay preacher became enamored with Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, one of the most famous and influential sermons of all time, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". He would quote from it: "*O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in...you hang by a slender thread...*" Then I would laugh as if it were some quaint joke.

On this Old Time Religion Sunday I remember that Jonathan Edwards preached for no less than ONE HOUR and that a Victorian Hour Glass Sermon, which is how I organize this one today, would be no less than 45 minutes in length. Don't worry. I don't want to be sinful preacher in the hands of an angry congregation! 25 minutes and done. But the Victorian Hour Glass Sermon had two large pieces of it connected by a small bridge between the two, sort of reminiscent of an old fashioned hour glass. You did not understand the point of the sermon until the second hour glass. So, on this Old Time Religion Sunday I am organizing this sermon in an old time, old fashioned way...

II. First part of the Hour Glass –Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God:

Consider Jonathan Edwards' own words in his famous sermon...

"All wicked men's pains and contrivance which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men, do not secure them from hell one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security, in what he is doing now, or what he intends to do...each one imagines that he lays out matters better for his own escape than others have done."

Of course, our Bible text for today notes that we all have sinned and we all sit on the scoffers bench. The Apostle Paul writes in the book of Romans: "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3: 23) So we are all equal in our predicament. No one here is better than anyone else. No one is not a sinner. No one does not need a Savior. God shows no partiality. Our human logic goes something like this --God is a nice God and I am a nice person and so God must do the nice thing for me and let me into heaven. Jonathan Edwards' sermon does not let us off the hook --"*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*"

And then there is Edward's most famous quote in his most famous sermon—"O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder, and you have no interest in any Mediator (or Savior) and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing you have ever done, nothing you can ever do, to induce God to spare you one moment."

WOW! Not exactly Joel Osteen on a bad day, is it? We might say --overly harsh, even judgmental, off-putting; not "seeker-friendly". Some day the silver chord will break, as the old hymn goes, and who will

catch us? Who will save us? Who will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves? Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God –first part of the hourglass complete.

III. The Bridge:

Now for the Bridge between hourglasses. God is like a multi-faceted jewel of great price. His dazzling glory is refracted by thousands upon thousands, myriads upon myriads, countless, infinite, eternal facets of a sparkling jewel. God's intrinsic intense dislike of sin is one of those facets. Justice and wrath and judgment are each parts of the character of God. But they do not capture all of God. Our task is never to reduce God down into those facets which we personally like and disregard those we dislike. Our task is to behold all the infinite facets of the Almighty God in all His radiant glory and splendor.

IV. Second Part of the Hourglass –Sinners in the Hands of a Loving Savior:

Second part of the hourglass –Sinners in the hands of a loving Savior. The great contrast to the judgment of God is the love of Jesus. "*God so loved the world that He sent His Son...*" (*John 3: 16*) God hates sin. But God loves us enough to send a way for us to avoid the consequences of our sin. And that is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God sends Jesus into the world. God sends Him as the only way to heaven. He is the way and the truth and the life. Jesus goes to the cross and dies a horrible death that the wrath of God might be satisfied. Only God's love could satisfy God's wrath. He dies the worst death imaginable and His blood is shed that we might live and that we might not die the second death but have eternal life with Him. To live IS Christ. To remain unchanged is death.

And frankly, we do not understand the immensity of the LOVE of God if we do not also understand the immensity of the extreme dislike of God for sin. We do not understand why Jesus had to go to a cross and die such a horrible death if we do not understand fully the wrath of God related to all our sin. "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" So ALL who have sinned ALL need a Savior to save us from ourselves. Do you see how these facets hold together in the same gem? Sinners in the hands of an angry God AND sinners in the hands of a loving Savior –two aspects of the same God; two facets of the glory of God.

V. Conclusion:

With this I conclude. It is strangely comforting to me that indeed "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*". It means God shows no partiality. No sin is particularly heinous and bars us from heaven and none so small as to be easily excusable. All sin can be erased by the love of God; none is immune from the power of the cross. We all stand together in the presence of God, the preacher no better than the person who thinks they are the worst sinner in Washington. There is great mercy to be found in Jesus. Forgiveness in His blood. New life poured out through His death on a cross for us. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God so ALL have need for a loving Savior in Jesus. We are all equal in the sight of God...

And some day, similarly, equally, the silver chord will break for all of us, we will all pass away and our spirits fly into the presence of God. We are all held by a slender thread; that is true. So in that day when the silver chord will break I guess the question we need to ask ourselves is this: Will Jesus catch me in that day? Will I be saved by falling into the arms of a loving Savior? What must I do today to be saved? Give me that old time religion –its good enough for me. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*