

## Notes for Good Friday 2020-04-09

A song we love singing is: In Christ Alone. It sings dramatically about the cross and resurrection, but one line has long troubled me:

“Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.”

That latter phrase -“the wrath of God was satisfied”- is a description of the cross with a long history and many difficulties! Otherwise it's a great song!

I want to consider this in a way that opens up the awful beauty of the cross so that when we next sing that line it may be a treasure.

When we consider the cross of Jesus Christ it is confronting.  
We see a man broken in every way.

We are stirred to see such suffering brutally inflicted on every dimension of Jesus.  
The Gospel accounts do not linger on the details offering brief and to the point accounts saying:

“and they crucified him.”

People of the day knew the gory details.

It's the modern films that bring out the systematic destruction of a human being in body, mind and spirit by being impaled alive on a torture rack to die in slow agony after flogging and mistreatment.

So back to that song lyric:  
Was the cross about **‘the wrath of God being satisfied’**?

There are three words that determine meaning in that sentence. ‘Wrath’, ‘God’ and ‘Satisfied’.<sup>1</sup>  
It depends on what those words mean?

Two of those words are biblical and one is not.  
‘God’ and ‘Wrath’ are deeply biblical while ‘Satisfaction’ is not, unless you relate it to full stomachs.

As you may know that word was taken up in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Anselm of Canterbury to describe how Jesus’ death was received by God the Father for our salvation.

Let me illustrate:  
If I drive over the speed limit I may get a letter in the post with a speeding fine. It has happened!  
I am told I have been noted at a specific time and place breaking the speed limit and told to make this **right** by paying anything from €30 upwards.

This is close to how breeches of vertical relationship were handled in Medieval Europe where people who failed to honour their obligations to their feudal superiors were required to make **satisfaction**.

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<sup>1</sup> I’ll leave ‘of’ from my short list.

So as with traffic fines today, if I pay the fine, those concerned are satisfied. ‘**Justice**’ is done and everything can move on. If I fail to make satisfaction as specified, consequences will follow.

Anselm described the cross of Jesus as an exercise in **satisfaction**.

God was the aggrieved overlord, not at all happy about human sin on his world.

Jesus’ saving role was to provide ‘satisfaction’ for the human account, something that would pay off the vast accumulated debt of guilt for sin.

So having taken his key concept from the world of his day, Anselm and others read the Bible this way to arrive at a theory of God’s atoning work in the cross of Jesus. This explanation took hold for the next 1000 years and still appears in contemporary song lyrics.

So with the angry King, Duke or Baron in mind, Anselm and followers viewed the **Wrath of God** as God’s indignant anger and fury over the sin of the world that had to be paid for.

**Justice** was seen as satisfaction in the form of a worthy **blood sacrifice** that could pay for the debt of sin owed to God as the wronged overlord.

Who could pay this **price**?

“There was no other good enough to pay the price.”

The **Good News** became that: Jesus could. He provided the **perfect blood sacrifice** providing satisfaction so those who trust in his merit can hope to enjoy the remission of guilt. If you ask you will benefit.<sup>2</sup>

The **Cross** was thus seen as an outworking of both **God’s Justice and God’s Mercy** where his Mercy provided what his Justice required.

In most basic terms it became the way to heaven, an insurance against hell because, ‘The wrath of God had been satisfied’.

I want to offer a different appreciation of God’s wrath against sin.

The Bible speaks of **God’s wrath** in terms of ‘**handing over**’.

When God’s people of Israel resolutely broke covenant faith and despised the prophets raised by God, He **handed them over** to their enemies. This ‘handing over’ is God’s wrath. What follows is something else.

In Romans 1.18 St Paul says:

“**The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness**”

He then describes why and how God’s wrath is manifest:

**Q** Why?

**A** Because people choose

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<sup>2</sup> How you claim that benefit or grace is another controversy.

- to ignore God despite what can be seen in creation,
- to worship created idols (false gods) instead of the living God,
- and choose for all manner of sexual perversions, and unrighteousness.

Those are bad choices which God allows people to choose:

**Q** How is God's wrath revealed?

**A** At three points in Paul's description of the descending consequences of human rebellion against God, we hear "Therefore God gave them up" and we are told what results from this as people reap the consequences of their own rebellion without God's restraining.

So to be clear:

God's wrath as detailed in the Bible is about God turning away and handing over the rebellious to their rebellion. It is not about inflicting punishment, extracting blood or requiring a life destroyed.

At the same time, in his steadfast patient love, God's wrath is redemptive and not destructive in purpose.

Jesus illustrated in the story of the **Lost** or **Prodigal Son** where the younger son is allowed to languish in his sinful decadence going on to suffer hunger and shame with the pigs.

That was the loving Father's wrath at work. He did not save the younger son from himself and his sinful foolishness. Instead after being insulted into handing over the inheritance while still alive, The Father let the younger son go, and waited. That's wrath in action and, very tough parenting.

On the cross God's one faithful Son went willingly to a place of destruction and utter abandonment

**The Cross** was the world's response to One who was perfectly faithful to his Father, The Lord God of Israel.

In being totally true to his heavenly Father he had become the world's most hated villain.

Jesus also willingly bore that cross as a man representing his people, and all people.

He went there to be the ultimate innocent victim of sin's evil power – this would involve God's wrath.

As the powers of sin claimed Jesus for themselves, **God's wrath** was at work.

But it was not The Father inflicting crude punishment on a human representative or substitute.

It was much more profound: In Jesus crucified, the power and pain of sin was being absorbed within God as Trinity. God's wrath was within God's being.

Instead of wrath being the tormenting of a distant Jesus at the cost of his blood, it was the Father's anguished looking away from his beloved as he handed him over to the powers that were killing him.

It was felt at the point Jesus cried out record still in the original Aramaic:

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This was the deepest moment of wrath.

A song that does celebrate this well is Graham Kendrick’s:

How Deep The Father’s Love For Us

How Vast Beyond All Measure

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How Great The Pain Of Searing Loss

The Father Turns His Face Away

This was a Father’s love that could allow the very worst so that the very worst could be redeemed. It’s a love we struggle to understand.

**Q** Would not true love stop evil or prevent pain?

**A** Within the deeper love between Father, Son and Spirit it was understood.

As St Paul would later write to the Corinthians: (2:5.21)

<sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This instance of wrath, The Father’s turning away from the **Beloved Son** as he is destroyed by sin would allow a deeper love to prevail.

So back to our song line:

“The wrath of God was satisfied”?

**Q** How may we sing those words right?

**A** In his wrath God turned away from all the sin and evil of the world - as it was laid on Jesus. Jesus felt this as abandonment.

This wrath was not thunderbolts from heaven nor the demand for blood price.

This was a wrath within the Trinity that would be satisfied by the faithfulness of the Son and redeemed by the love of the Father in the resurrection.

God is bigger than all that comes against him and even death can be swallowed.

## References

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keith-getty-on-what-makes-in-christ-alone-beloved-and-contested/>

<https://www.eterinitynews.com.au/archive/the-wrath-against-wrath/>

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/05/presbyterians-decision-to-drop-hymn-stirs-debate/2618833/>

Extras:

- **OT Animal Sacrifice** was never a simple settlement of an outstanding fine.
  - Neither was it a way of buying back God's acceptance.
  - The offering of a life with blood shed was a profound exercise in recognising the grave costs of sin.
  - Old Testament sacrifice was an anticipation of the awaited ultimate engagement between God, humanity and sin that would happen in God's time on a cross outside Jerusalem.