

## GIVEN OVER TO EVIL

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### Text: Romans 1:18-32

A very tragic story from Yosemite National Park reveals a truth we frequently resist. On October 22, 1999, Jan Davis joined four other parachutists to protest a law. The extreme sport of parachuting off the top of thirty-two-hundred-foot El Capitan was banned from the National Park because of its relative danger. This protest was designed to demonstrate that these jumps can be made safely. The first three protesters successfully completed their jumps and floated safely to the ground. Sixty-year-old Davis was the fourth to jump, but her parachute never opened. Even though she was a seasoned paratrooper with 70 such jumps and three thousand sky dives, she did not escape death. This somber and tragic event strikes a familiar chord with the way we so often approach God's laws. He has designed guidelines to protect us, but we regularly protest them and try to prove we can navigate safely through life without submitting to his laws. Unfortunately, it is often in the midst of our protests that we discover the truth and validity of his protective laws. We break God's laws at the risk of destroying ourselves. --

Houston Chronicle, Oct. 23, 1999, p. 12A

Just with natural laws, humans being have always resisted the *warnings* concerning God's wrath on the disobedient and evil. Many today scoff at the very idea that God's word is the final word citing the inconsistent manner in which some seem to be getting away with doing the very thing they were warned by God not to do, while at the same time godly people seem to suffer adversity.

However as we approach this passage of scripture, once again we can hear these *warnings*. Once again, we are reminded that just because the judgment of God appears to be inconsistent, it does not mean that God is unaware or unconcerned about the condition of this world. In fact, there is a deeper truth that can be found in the apparent inconsistency. The truth is that in reality the wrath of God is a revelation of God's divine mercy and the apparent absence of the wrath of God is in reality the judgment of God.

### I. THE WRATH OF GOD IS A REVELATION OF HIS DIVINE MERCY (vv. 18-23).

#### A. God's wrath on sin is ACTUALLY God's mercy in action (v. 18).

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...*

If God were not merciful and just, He would not care if humanity rebelled against the truth, therefore His wrath and judgment reveals that He is a merciful God.

**B. Through His mercy the testimony of nature is given to all people so that people may avoid judgment (vv. 19-20).**

*“Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*

God is so merciful that He has designed the universe in such a way that even if people never hear a gospel message they can see and hear the witness of the created world order.

**C. God desires mercy, but it is the refusal of the wicked to reverence God that brings judgment (vv. 21-23).**

*“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

God will not force His good will on anyone. Humanity has a choice of whom they serve.

**II. THE ABSENCE OF THE WRATH OF GOD REVEALS HIS HAND OF JUDGMENT (vv. 24-32).**

**A. The refusal to repent causes God to withdraw the working of His Spirit (vv. 24-27).**

When God no longer deals with the heart of a person, it is probable that judgment has been passed on that individual. Because he/she will not listen to the Spirit of God, God will cease to deal with them.

*Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

## **B. Indulgence in acts of depravity is a sign of God's judgment (vv. 28-32).**

*Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

When the knowledge of God is dismissed from an individual's mind and accountability to God is ignored, the natural result is depravity.

## **C. When what they know is right has no effect on their action it is likely that God is no longer dealing with them.**

*Ted Koppel, in a speech to the International Radio and Television Society said, "What is largely missing in American life today is a sense of context, of saying or doing anything that is intended or even expected to live beyond the moment. There is no culture in the world that is so obsessed as ours with immediacy. In our journalism, the trivial displaces the momentous because we tend to measure the importance of events by how recently they happened. We have become so obsessed with facts that we have lost all touch with truth."*

-- Ted Koppel in a speech to the International Radio and Television Society, quoted in Harper's (Jan. 1986). Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 8.

## **CONCLUSION**

The May 1984 National Geographic showed through color photos and drawings the swift and terrible destruction that wiped out the Roman Cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in A.D. 79. The explosion of Mount Vesuvius was so sudden, the residents were killed while in their routine: men and women were at the market, the rich in their luxurious baths, slaves at toil. They died amid volcanic ash and superheated gasses. Even family pets suffered the same quick and final fate. It takes little imagination to picture the panic of that terrible day.

The saddest part is that these people did not have to die. Scientists confirm what ancient Roman writers record--weeks of rumblings and shakings preceded the actual explosion. Even an ominous plume of smoke was clearly visible from the mountain days before the eruption. If only they had been able to read and respond to Vesuvius's warning!

There are similar "rumblings" in our world: warfare, earthquakes, the nuclear threat, economic woes, breakdown of the family and moral standards. While not exactly new, these

things do point to a coming day of Judgment (Matt. 24). People need not be caught unprepared. God warns and provides an escape to those who will heed the rumblings.

-- Michael Bogart, Lemoore, California. Leadership, Vol. 6, no. 4.

Certainly, some feel that the threat of God's wrath holds little incentive for them to change their life and behavior. Maybe others feel that God demands a higher level of devotion of them than He does of others. However, as we have seen, it is better to have God convict and deal with our hearts than to feel that we are free of any of the restraints of His word.