

The Great Tribulation: The Approaching Storm of God's Wrath (Part 1)

Selected Scriptures

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As I thought about the Great Tribulation, the approaching storm of God's wrath, my mind went to an event that occurred almost half a century ago. During the early evening of August 17, 1969, hurricane Camille unleashed her full fury on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The eye of that huge storm with its 190 mile-per-hour sustained winds, gusts over 200 miles an hour, and a 24-foot storm surge, the height of this building, swept into the Mississippi coast at Pass Christian, Mississippi. 256 people died that night, or in the days that followed in the flooding that occurred up the coast. About 45 miles away from where the eye of the storm came in, on the west side of Mobile not far from the Mississippi border, I huddled with my mom and dad and about five family members in our little 900-square-foot home.

We'd spent several days preparing for this event. We'd boarded up all the windows. We'd moved all of the things from the yard that could become projectiles into the garage. We'd filled our kerosene lanterns. We'd put batteries in all the flashlights. We'd purchased plenty of canned food. We'd filled our bathtub with water. Beginning that morning, the morning of August 17, bands of wind and rain began to come ashore and with each band came more intense rain and higher gusts of wind. By late afternoon that day you could hardly go outside, and by early evening the core of the storm had arrived. It didn't take long for us to lose electrical power, so we all gathered in that boarded-up house – a 900-square foot home about 17 miles from the coast – and watched the storm, or listened, rather, as the storm came in.

We gathered around our dining room table at a small kerosene lantern. My dad did his best to tune the radio to a local station to keep up, as best we could, with what was taking place around us, and we waited. For six hours we sat there, hardly unable to hear one another over the constant cry of the wind. I'll never forget the fury of that massive storm that night. Several times during the night, there were explosions of power transformers nearby, and many times we heard what we later learned was the sound of breaking and falling trees across our yard. As a nine-year-old boy, it seemed at times like it was almost the end of the world. It seemed apocalyptic. Of course,

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it wasn't. I eventually fell asleep about 2 a.m., and when I awoke, sunlight was streaming in the window. The storm had passed. I had survived.

Perhaps you've had a similar kind of experience. Perhaps you've had your own kind of end-of-the-world scenario, when it seemed as if things had gotten so bad that it honestly resembled to you the end of the world. Well the Bible tells us that those are merely faint shadows and echoes of a gathering storm, a storm the Bible calls the Tribulation. The Tribulation, of course, is a future period of time when God will unleash His wrath against the present earth and its inhabitants at that time.

I want us to look, starting tonight and next week at least, at this great event. Tonight, I really want to give you the big picture. I want you to understand what this event is really about, and then Lord-willing next week we'll look at more of the specifics, we'll look at the specific judgments that are unleashed upon the world. But it's important that you understand how the Bible describes this great event. I want us to look at the nature of the Tribulation.

We begin by looking at some key words and phrases – the word “tribulation” itself, as it's used generally in the Bible. The English word “tribulation” comes from the Latin word, “tribulum.” It was an agricultural tool for separating husks from the corn. The process was called “tribulatio.” The Greek word that is translated from, or excuse me, that is translated as “tribulation” in the New Testament is “thlipsis.” It literally means “a pressing together.” Both this Greek word and the corresponding Hebrew word graphically pictured a person being limited, first, then walled in, and finally, gradually squeezed until something has to give. That's the picture behind this word.

If you're claustrophobic you don't want to think about it too long. It often speaks of the pressure that comes with persecution for the sake of Christ. For example, in Matthew 24:9, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.” The Greek word for “tribulation” occurs some 16 times in the New Testament, 11 times in this general sense, and I've listed a few of the passages in which it occurs. That's “tribulation” in the general sense.

Then there's "tribulation" used specifically of eschatology. It's the same Greek word "thlipsis," but when it's used of the study of last things, it refers to a future period of time that will be characterized by first being limited, then being walled in, and eventually being squeezed until something gives. That's the picture behind the word. It's used this way of a future event about 5 times in the New Testament; let me show you those references. In Matthew 24:21, Jesus says, "For then there will be a great tribulation" – "thlipsis," there's our word – "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be."

Just a few verses later in verse 29 of that same chapter, He says, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken," referring back to this great event.

In the parallel passages you find the same reference. Matthew 13:19, "For those days will be a *time of tribulation* such as (not has-,) has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will." This is a once in eternity event. Mark 13:24, "But in those days, after that tribulation," and the same prophecy of the "powers of heaven being shaken." In Revelation 7:14, "I said to him," that is, John said to the angel, "'My lord, you know who these people are.' And he said to me, 'They are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"

Now notice one important point: in every case, it was future when Jesus spoke these words and even when John wrote there in Revelation. And unless the signs in the heavens that are referenced in these verses have been redefined, it's still future because we certainly haven't experience the sun being darkened, the moon not giving light, and the stars falling from the sky, and the powers of heaven being shaken. So, unless you redefine all of that, as we've talked about before, then this has not yet occurred, this event called the Tribulation.

Now, there's another phrase we need to understand as we look at key words and phrases, and that's "Great Tribulation." As you may have noticed, a couple of times in the verses we just looked at, the adjective "great" was added. Actually, it occurs, "Great Tribulation" occurs three

times in the New Testament; one of those times in Revelation 2:22 is probably not a reference to this future period of time. Two of them are, to the great future cataclysm. In Matthew 24:21 – (and by the way our Lord’s expression here is very reminiscent of Daniel 12:1, where Daniel writes, “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.”

Probably what informed our Lord’s teaching was His understanding of Daniel’s prophecy. The other occurrence is in Revelation 7:14. There also you read, as we did a moment ago, of the Great Tribulation. Now, this phrase “Great Tribulation” we often use to speak of the entire period of time. But more specifically, more exactly, the Great Tribulation likely refers not to the entire Tribulation, but to the last half. If you look at Matthew 24:21, it begins, “For then there will be great tribulation.” Verses 15 to 20 leading up to that verse describe an event called “the abomination of desolation.” We’ll talk more about that next week, but Daniel tells us that occurs in the middle of the Tribulation. So, the abomination of desolation marks the beginning of the second half of the Tribulation, in a period called the Great Tribulation. The whole period, the whole seven-year period is the Tribulation, and the second half can properly be called the Great Tribulation. It’s the Great Tribulation not because it’s different in character or in nature from the first half, but because it is more intense.

Now, I want you to see some of the key descriptions of this great event, the Tribulation, that we’re studying tonight. First of all, let’s look at some descriptions from the human perspective. These are labels for the Great Tribulation that sort of look at the event from our side, or from the side of those who are on earth at that time, from human perspective. First of all, it’s called “birth pains”. It’s a very descriptive expression. We understand that birth is a process beginning often with false birth pains, or Braxton Hicks, and then eventually becoming true birth pangs. And as those labor pains increase, or as birth grows nearer, the labor pains increase, both in frequency and intensity. That’s a graphic picture of this period of time called the Tribulation. That’s what it’s like. It begins painful but slow and infrequent, and then as it builds toward the end of the period, just as labor pains, it grows in frequency and in intensity.

It's called "the day of trouble," or "the time of Jacob's trouble" in a couple of passages. It's a time of difficulty and trouble and distress, of pressure. In fact, Zephaniah calls it "a day of distress." It's called in Joel as well as in Zephaniah, "a day of darkness, of gloom and clouds." Having studied this this week it's hard for me not to think of this morning as I stood at my window just before I was getting ready for church, and I watched that thunderstorm group cluster come across the Metroplex. And I watched as, what had begun as a clear, or at least bright, day, suddenly the clouds loomed, and it grew dark and gloomy, threatening. That's the kind of period it is. That's a way to describe this period of time.

Those are the human perspectives, but the emphasis in scripture is not primarily on the human side of the Tribulation, but rather on the divine side, or the divine perspective. Let me show you some of the titles that describe this period of time from God's perspective. Here's how God thinks of the Tribulation. It's called "the Day of the LORD" in a number of places. This expression, "Day of the LORD" is used about 19 times in the Old Testament, about 4 times in the New Testament. The prophets used it to describe historical judgments by God – that is, those judgments that happened in history, those were the Day of the LORD. But always, they were previews of coming attractions. They were like a little glimpse into the true Day of the LORD when He would deal with sin and sinners, not in a localized way, not by sending locusts into Israel as Joel prophesied in his first chapter, but rather by destroying and upheaving the whole earth. It's the Day of the LORD, it's His day. We use that expression, don't we? "Your day's coming." Well, God's day is coming, but not in the sense we use it, but the sense when He will deal with people as He needs to. There's an ultimate Day of the LORD coming, of which all of those in the Old Testament point and reflect.

It's also called "the Day of Vengeance," when God takes revenge on His enemies. Not in a sinful sense, but in the sense of a just and holy God dealing with those who have for so long rebelled against Him. It's called "the Day of Punishment" in Isaiah 24; "the Day of Destruction" in 1 Thessalonians 5; "the Day of Judgment" in the book of Revelation. It's called "the Day of the LORD's Anger" in Zephaniah. And also, in Zephaniah it's called "the Day of Wrath," or "the Day of the Lord's Wrath."

Now, you see the emphasis from God's perspective? It's pretty clear, isn't it? You see that the phrase "great tribulation" or "tribulation" is actually an interesting play on words, because it actually alludes to two realities when you look at it. There will be tribulation for those who are true believers on earth at that time, for those who come to faith during that terrible time. They will experience *thlipsis*, pressure, affliction, distress, trouble from the enemies of God who are on earth. But there's another reality going on at the same time. Just as pressure will be brought to bear on God's people by Antichrist and God's enemies, so pressure, affliction, trouble will be brought upon the unbelieving world by God Himself. That's the essence of the Tribulation. It's the Day of the LORD, it's the Day of Vengeance, it's the Day of Punishment, it's the Day of Destruction, it's the Day of Judgment, it's the Day of the LORD's Anger, it's the Day of His Wrath, or the LORD's Wrath.

Now let's go through, briefly, some key passages. I'm going to come back to a couple of these next week in more detail, but I want you to see sort of a sweep. The first one I want to call to your attention that deals with this issue is Deuteronomy 4:30. As early as the time of Moses, there was an anticipation that God would put His people through distressing times at the end so that they would turn and listen to His voice. We'll talk more about the purpose of the Tribulation next week.

One of those purposes has to do with Israel and the people of God, and here you have the first hint of that. "When you are in distress," Moses says, "and all those things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and you will listen to His voice." Now what makes this verse interesting is this: (as John MacArthur points out,) whenever the phrase "the latter days" occurs in the rest of the Pentateuch (the five books Moses wrote), it refers always to a future time when Messiah will establish a Kingdom. Genesis 49:1, Genesis 49:8-12, Numbers 24:14 and following, Deuteronomy 32:39 and following; in all those passages you'll find that to be true.

So, that means that Moses was describing a time when Israel would repent in the time around Messiah's Kingdom, and that they would be brought to repentance by a time of deep distress.

This, just as Genesis 3:15 is the gospel in seed form, here in Deuteronomy 4 you have the Tribulation in seed form.

We move on to the Prophets, and I'm not going to turn there tonight, we'll look at a couple of these passages next week, but in Isaiah 24:1 through Isaiah 27:13, the prophet Isaiah deals with this terrible period of time. The prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 30 (and I would like for you to turn there for a moment), Jeremiah 30. In verse 1 we read, "The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah." The LORD says, "I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it."' Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah." So, we're dealing now with Israel. We're dealing – it's obvious in the context here – Israel and Judah. They're going to be brought back to a physical piece of land that God promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, their forefathers. They're going to possess that land. So, the question is, when, under what context? Verse 4,

Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah:

"For thus says the LORD,

'I have heard a sound of terror,

Of dread, and there is no peace.

Ask now, and see If a male can give birth.

Why do I see every man

With his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth?

And *why* have all faces turned pale?" [In other words, people are terrified.]

"Alas! for that day is great, [and]

There is none like it;

And it is the time of Jacob's distress, [and] ... he will be saved from it," [or,

"but] "he will be saved from it.

It shall come about on that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no

longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king,” [a reference to David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ,] “whom I will raise up for them.

Fear not, O Jacob My servant,’ declares the LORD,

‘And do not be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar

And your offspring from the land of their captivity.

And Jacob will return and be quiet and at ease,

And no one will (make him) make him afraid.

‘For I am with you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to save you;

For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you,

Only I will not destroy you completely.

But I will chasten you justly

And will by no means leave you unpunished.”

Here, in this context, we learn several things about that great period of time when God will restore His people. It obviously has great reference, this period of Tribulation, to God’s work with the people Israel, with the ethnic nation of Israel, and His promises to their forefathers. And so, we’ll learn more about that purpose next week and several other purposes as well, but obviously that’s related. Part of the purpose of the Tribulation period concerns ethnic Jews in their own land. You see that, by the way, in Daniel as well. Daniel 11:41 says, speaking of Antichrist: “He also will enter the Beautiful Land,” that is Israel, “and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab, and the foremost of the sons of Ammon.” There’s coming a time when the Beautiful Land, Israel, will be in great distress because God has a redeeming purpose for them.

(The third, or) another passage that I want us to look at, the fourth passage is Daniel 9. This is Daniel’s seventieth week. Turn to Daniel and his prophecy; I’m just going to turn your attention to it tonight. We’re going to look at this in much greater detail next week as we get into the events of the Tribulation, but essentially this is a prophecy of Israel’s history. Verse 24 of Daniel 9,

“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city....” [and then he gives several reasons for that; we’ll look at all of that in detail.] So, verse 25, “So you are to know,” [here’s, here’s how it’s going to work,] “... you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;” [that is, there will be 69 weeks.] “It will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off,” [so after 69 weeks, the Messiah will be cut off – that is killed, crucified] “and have nothing.” [And, again, we’ll look at all of this, and we’ll work our way through it next week.] “... and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.” [There is the prophecy, after the death of Christ, of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.] “And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

And he,” now the question is, who is “he”? It could be Messiah, or it could be the prince who is to come. We’ll, next week, see I think we can make a strong case for this is the prince who is to come. “He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week,” that last week, “but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

Now all of that is not immediately obvious on the surface. Here’s the thing I want you to get when you look at this passage, Daniel identifies for us the start of this period, the midpoint, and the end of this period. We’re going to look at it in much greater detail next week. This is a key passage. The reason I say it’s a key passage is because Jesus cites this passage in His Olivet Discourse about the future in Matthew 24 and in the parallel passage Mark 13.

Paul refers back to this passage and the events that are recorded here in his discourse about the Day of the LORD in 2 Thessalonians 3. So, this passage is foundational and key for us to understand, and we’ll look at it in great detail next week.

Let's move on to Daniel 12; I read this earlier, so I won't read it again. But notice that "there will be a time," verse 1 says, "of distress." "Your people ... will be rescued," an obvious reference to ethnic Israel. This is what Zechariah prophesied as well in his prophecy. In Zechariah 12 - 14, we learn that a time is coming when they, Israel that is, "will look on Him whom they pierced, they will mourn for Him as an only son, and a fountain of cleansing will be open for them." This is what Daniel's referring to about those written in the book being rescued.

In Zephaniah 1:14 - 18 we read about this period of time. In Zechariah 12 - 14 is another key passage. We looked a couple weeks ago at Matthew 24 and Jesus' Olivet Discourse; He deals with this as well. And then in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul talks about the Day of the LORD, verses 1 - 3. He comes back in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 - 12 and fills that out a little more. We'll look at that passage next time as well.

But probably the fullest passage about the Tribulation period is in Revelation, because we learn about the details (of Revelat-, or about the details) of Tribulation, rather, from John's pen in Revelation 6 - 19. Now, as I said, next time I want to walk through the various judgments that fall upon the earth in these chapters. But tonight, I want to walk you through this description of the Tribulation in Revelation, and I want you to see the theme and the focus of these chapters about the events of the Tribulation period. Turn first to chapter 6, Revelation 6. See if you can pick up on a theme. Revelation 6:12,

"I looked when He," [that is the Lamb, that's Jesus Christ,] "broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll and it rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." [This is huge, cataclysmic events.] "Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man," in other words, everybody of all background, of all economic status "hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains." Why?

“They said the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne,’” [and watch this,] “‘and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come and who is able to stand?’”

They were pretty, they will be pretty good theologians. They understand what’s happening, they understand what’s going on. This is about the Lamb and His wrath. Turn over to 11:18, you see this same theme. Here you have the 24 elders worshiping God, and they say in verse 18,

“And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” [Notice what they say to God as they praise Him.] “You are in the process of destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Chapter 14, we’re still in the middle of this (para-, this) huge section of scripture that describes the Tribulation period, and this theme keeps coming up.] Chapter 14:10, an angel shouts with a loud voice,

... “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger;” [This is about God’s wrath.]

Verse 14, Then I looked and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud *was* one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, the harvest of the earth is ripe,” [an agricultural metaphor]. And then He ... [swings] His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. Another angel came

out of the temple, which is in heaven, and had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” [And then look at the application,] verse 19, “[And] So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered *the clusters from* the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.”

What a graphic metaphor; God reaping sinners from the earth, throwing them in the wine vat where He will trample them in His wrath. Those are not pleasant images. Those are not images we like to think of. But this is how the Bible describes that approaching storm of the wrath of God. Chapter 15:1, “... I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them,” [watch this] “in them the wrath of God is finished.” [It’s filled up, it’s completed, as He pours it out upon the earth.]

Verse 7, “Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls,” [here are those bowls, more-more realistically like saucers. They’re not so much deep bowls like you would mix something in, but more like flat saucers that are easily tipped and the contents spilled. And the angels are given these seven bowls, and these bowls] are full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.

And in chapter 16 following, they spill those bowls over onto the earth. In fact, look at 16:1, “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls,’” [and those bowls are characterized as bowls] “‘of the wrath of God.’”

Verse 19 of the same chapter, “The great city was split into the three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her,” [here’s how He remembered her,] “to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” [Here, drink this to the dregs; it is My wrath.]

Chapter 19:15, we see the end of all of this, the end of the Tribulation. Chapter 19:15. Here heaven opens, and out comes Jesus Christ. “His name,” verse 13, “is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, and white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword,” [talking about His Word. Jesus does what He does by His Word. He created with a Word, He sustains by a Word, He practices His Lordship over your life and my life and the church with His Word, and someday He will destroy His enemies with His Word.] Notice verse 15, “[The] ... sharp sword, ... with it He ... strike[s] down the nations, ... He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”

Now remember, just a couple of passages ago, we read the angels with sickles throwing the reaped grapes into the winepress. And here comes Christ, the Lamb, the Redeemer, but also the Lion, treading the grapes, crushing the grapes that are in the winepress of the wrath of God. What a picture.

You see, the point of the Tribulation (don’t miss it) the point of the Tribulation is not about what the beast or the false prophet or the nations of the world are doing to the Christians who are here, or doing to Israel. Those things will happen, but that’s not the point of the Tribulation. The point of the Tribulation lies in God. The Tribulation is (at its heart) the unleashing of the wrath of God, His just wrath and the wrath of the Lamb against this rebel world. God’s day is coming. If you really believe these passages we just read, it is a frightening reality to think of God like that.

In fact, there are two words for God’s wrath that are used in these passages I’ve read you from Revelation. One of them is the Greek word “orge.” You recognize it. We get our word “orgy” from it. You say, “what connection could there be between those?” You see, in worshiping the gods, the pagan gods, the ancient peoples of Greece and Rome would literally go out of their minds, sometimes drug-induced, out of their minds, beside themselves with passion, and that’s why that term “orgy”, that’s how it got its connotation – “out of one’s mind with passion.” God doesn’t have passions like you and I have, but there is something in God that can best be described when God responds to this rebel world as His being beside Himself with passion, (not

sinfully, but righteously), to pour out His anger upon rebellious mankind. That's what the Tribulation is all about.

Just a couple thoughts as far as how it applies. Folks, we need to be warned that the storm is coming, and we need to get prepared. Revelation tells us that people living in that time will want to die in order to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb that will be poured out on the earth during that time. They'll want to die. Be prepared. Are you sure that you belong to the Lamb? Revelation 7:14 speaks of those who come out of the Great Tribulation and have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." You see, mankind can either face Jesus Christ as Redeemer, as Savior, they can experience His grace, the grace of forgiveness, they can wash themselves in the sacrifice He made, or they will face Him in His wrath and fury.

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist was preaching. Turn there for a moment, Matthew 3:7. Verse 5 says that all, "Jerusalem was going out to him, ... all Judea, all the district around Jordan." [It was the thing to do, Let's go hear this, this eccentric preacher out in the desert.] "But when ... [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism," [the baptism of repentance,] "he said to them, 'You bunch of snakes,'" [that's what he said] "'you brood of vipers! [You bunch of snakes!] Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'"

That's a graphic picture, isn't it? He says, "You know what you're like? You're like snakes that flee from a grass fire. You strike a grassfire and the snakes that are in front of it flee in front of that fire." He says, "Who told you to do that?" And then he says to them, "'Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.'"

Verse 11, "'As for me, I baptize with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me,'" [that is, Christ,] "'is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" So, there's baptism for repentance, that's what John did, but when Christ came, He was going to have two different kinds of baptisms. You're going to be baptized by Christ one way or the other. Every human being will be baptized by Christ one way or the other, and here they are: it will either be with the Holy Spirit, or it will be with fire. It will either be with the new life that comes through His life and death, or it will be with judgment. Verse 12,

“His winnowing fork is in His hand, He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Folks, we just need to make sure that we're in Christ. We need to make sure that we know the Lamb. How do you know that? You come to Him in repentance and faith. You're willing to leave everything you know that's sin and turn to Christ and embrace Him as Lord and Savior.

There's a second application for all of us who are in Christ. Be grateful that you belong to the Lamb, and that you will never, ever, ever face His wrath. It's not going to happen. If you're in Christ, you will never experience His wrath. Romans 5:9, “Having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath through Him.” No wrath for you if you're in Christ. You'll never experience it. 1 Thessalonians 1:10, “We are those who wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus.” [And notice what Jesus does] “[He] ... rescues us from the wrath to come.”

One last passage I want you to turn to, turn to Psalm 2. Here's an Old Testament passage that really makes the same point. This Psalm is about the reign of God and His Son. Verse 11 comes to the application,

Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, [literally] “kiss the Son.” “Kiss the Son of God, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled.”

You believe that? Listen, forget the little sweet pictures you've seen of Jesus Christ. He is both the Lamb having been slain and the Lion. His wrath may soon be kindled. You better fear Him, you better kiss Him, you better do homage to Him, you better bow down before Him so that He not become angry and you perish in the way. But here's the other side, look at the end of verse 12: “[Oh to be envied] ... are all those who [find their] ... refuge in Him.” You know how we're shielded from the wrath of the Lamb? Because we're in the Lamb. “There is therefore now,” what? “No condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus.” We shall be (s-, we shall be) saved from the wrath of God through Him. Jesus rescues us from the wrath to come. How blessed are

all those who take refuge in Him. Folks, it's coming. We live our lives as though it's not, but the day of His wrath is coming. But we can rejoice. We can thank Him every day that we will never experience the smallest drop of the cup of the wrath of God.

Let's pray together.

Father, we're honestly frightened by some of the passages we've read tonight. We're reminded of Your holiness, and of Your greatness, and even of Your wrath. Lord, that's not something that we really like to think about. And yet, Father, it's exactly how You've described Yourself.

Help us to honestly read Your Word, to reflect on You with all sincerity and honesty, to learn You as You have revealed Yourself.

Father, our hearts are heavy tonight because we know people who, if this terrible period of time were to start in our lifetime, we know people who would experience the wrath of the Lamb.

Lord, help us to open our mouths, to open our hearts to love them, to open our mouths to speak to them about the wonderful grace and forgiveness that's in Jesus Christ. And Father, I pray that You would help us to be prepared personally.

Lord, I know there are people here tonight, people who are a part of our church, who don't know Christ and who will someday face the wrath of the Lamb. Father, don't let that happen. I pray that You would in grace stir their hearts, draw them to Yourself.

And Father, for those of us who know You through Your Son, it's impossible to adequately thank You for the grace You've shown us in Him. We deserve the wrath, and yet Christ took it in our place. We thank You that in Him we find refuge. We are rescued from the wrath to come. We love You, Father, and we thank You for such amazing grace.

It's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.