Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Israel's Failure, Part 3
Scripture: Romans 10:3
Code: 45-77

Romans chapter 10 is our text. We've been going through Romans, I can't even remember how long. But what a wonderful blessed time we've been having. And as we have come to this tenth chapter we have found ourselves sort of stuck on the opening statement of verse 3, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness." And that statement so penetrated my heart and captured my mind that I've been unable just to move on in the exposition of the text without stopping to interact with that.

The history of the people of Israel is really a tragedy. O it ends marvelously, it ends wonderfully, it ends with the fulfillment of all that God had promised, but the process of getting to the end is indeed tragic. Israel is the greatest illustration in the world of lost opportunity, the greatest example in history of missed privilege. When God brought Israel, His chosen people, out of Egypt after centuries of slavery, He gave to them the best land the earth had to offer. He gave them the fulfillment of promise after promise of divine blessing. They stood ready to receive immeasurable providence and benediction at His good and gracious hand. But instead theirs is a saga of cursing, theirs is a saga of judgment.

And even today the same thing continues. As Israel stood on the edge of the new land of Canaan about ready to embark upon the land of blessing and inherit all that God had promised to those who were obedient, Moses said his last farewell, he himself begin barred from the land because of his own impulsive sin, but in that last farewell to his people he said some very sobering things. And this is what Deuteronomy 31 records, listen, verses 16 and following: "Then the Lord appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud and the cloud stood over the entrance to the tent and the Lord said to Moses, You're going to rest with your fathers and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they're entering, they will forsake Me and break the covenant I made with them. On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them. I will hide My face from them and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them and on that day they will ask, Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us? And I will certainly hide My face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods. Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it so that it may be a witness for Me against them, when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting Me and breaking My covenant. And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do even before I bring them into the land, I promised

them an oath. So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites."

Have you ever noticed how a song sticks in your mind...year after year after year after year? And so God wrote a song, a warning song. On the edge of Canaan before they ever entered, He warned them. And Deuteronomy chapter 32 beginning in verse 9 is the song, listen to it. "For the Lord's portion is His people, Jacob His alloted inheritance, In a desert land He found him, in a barren and howling waste, He shielded him and cared for him, He guarded him as the apple of His eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young that spreads its wings to catch them and carry them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him, no foreign God was with him. Jeshurun...meaning Israel...grew fat and kicked, filled with food he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the rock, his savior. They made Him jealous with their foreign gods and angered Him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons which are not God, gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. You deserted the rock who fathered you, you forgot the God who gave you birth. The Lord saw this and rejected them because He was angered by His sons and daughters. I will hide My face from them, He said, and see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. They made Me jealous by what is no God and angered Me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people. I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding, for fire has been kindled by My wrath, one that burns to the realm of deaths below. It will devour the earth and its harvest, and set afire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap calamities upon them and spend My arrows against them. I will send wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague. I will send against them the fangs of wild beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust." We can stop at that point.

Some song, huh? Some song. It is a song of warning against idolatry. It is a song that should act as a constant reminder of what God knew they would be prone to do. It came to pass. Maybe they remembered the melody and forgot the words because they never took any caution, they did exactly what God said they would do. The one who had called him...called them to Himself was rejected. The one who had promised to bless them, to Him they turned a deaf ear. And so their story is a story of tragedy...the tragedy of rejection.

When you come to the New Testament you come to the coming of the Messiah and the tragedy becomes full-blown...because here at the very entrance to the true promise land the King comes to offer them the true Kingdom, and they reject that as well. In fact, John put it this way, "He came unto His own, His own received Him not."

In Romans chapter 10 now the Apostle Paul is lamenting this apostasy. He is bemoaning the unbelief of Israel. He is grieved over the manifest rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is seeking to explain why this is so. And it is germane to his entire argument in the Roman epistle, for he has presented the gospel of justification by grace through faith in the person and work of Christ.

And detail by detail from chapter 3 verse 21 to the conclusion of chapter 8 he has outlined the essence of justification by grace through faith. And he knows the question that's going to come to him is this, if this is true then why do God's people the Jews reject it? And so he writes chapters 9 to 11 to explain how Israel fits into the plan. This is not parenthetical to his argument, this is an apologetic for the integrity of his argument. If it is to be believed that justification by faith is in fact from God, then he must explain how it is that the people who have received all the rest of the revelation from God don't believe it is from Him.

And so in chapter 9 he has already shown us that their rejection was in God's plan and chapter 9 deal with the sovereignty of God. And he points out so lucidly how God never chose all the seed of Abraham. In fact, from the very start we see that in the case of Jacob and Esau. And then in the case of Pharaoh we see that there are some whose hearts God hardened. And the whole point of chapter 9 is to lay out the fact that Israel is in unbelief because that's the way God planned it. And this is no surprise to Him, nor does it thwart His purposes.

But that's only part of it. We're not left with some fatalistic determinism on the part of God because as we come to chapter 10 we find that there is a concurrent reason why Israel rejects the gospel. On the one hand it is the sovereignty of God, on the other hand it is because of their own...what?...unbelief, right? Unbelief. Verse 32 says it in chapter 9. "They sought it not by faith...they sought it not by faith." They didn't come believing. They couldn't get out of their works orientation. They stumbled at the stumbling stone.

Chapter 10 then goes on to explain the reasons for their unbelief. And you have to keep in mind this irreconcilable apparent paradox of the sovereignty of God on the one hand, the responsibility of Israel on the other. Their unbelief was due to ignorance. Their unbelief was due to ignorance. You remember the Apostle Paul said, "I did what I did ignorantly in...what?...unbelief." Their unbelief was due to ignorance. And in chapter 10 Paul outlines five things of which Israel was ignorant. They were ignorant of the person of God. They were ignorant of the provision of Christ. They were ignorant of the place of faith. They were ignorant of the perimeters of salvation. And they were ignorant of the predictions of Scripture. They were ignorant of all those things consequently they were in unbelief.

Now the first thing they were ignorant of, remember, was they were ignorant of the person of God. And we see that, don't we, in verse 3. We've already looked at verses 1 and 2, I don't want to take you back to those. But in verse 3 we read this most dramatic statement, "They being ignorant of God's righteousness." And we've been seeing that God's righteousness is God's rightness, God's absolute freedom from flaw, God's sinless pure holiness. In other words, they were ignorant of how holy God was. They were ignorant of how utterly right God was. They were ignorant of how absolutely pure and intolerant of sin He was. They thought God could tolerate their evil and so they created a God who was less than He was and they made themselves more than they really were, and

they found equality. It was a damning equality, however, that was untrue to the doctrine of God and untrue to the doctrine of man.

But it must have been a devastating thing for a Jewish person to hear the Apostle Paul say, or to read what he wrote, that they were ignorant of God's righteousness because if they celebrated anything it was that they knew God's righteousness, they knew the person of God. Paul says they were ignorant. That's so tragic. They thought that God was altogether as they were, says the Old Testament. They thought God was tolerant of evil and that He would accept their self-righteousness, that their works would be good enough for God because God wasn't really that holy. So they invented a God who could accept them.

And so we decided to talk about that idea a little bit, of being ignorant of God's righteousness. This is the heart of the Christian faith, in many ways, the character of God. We have to understand, people, that the reason we must be redeemed is because God is so infinitely holy that none of us based upon any merit of our own could ever enter into any relationship with Him of any kind, other than one of condemnation and judgment, right? We have to perceive God as so infinitely holy that He is infinitely beyond our attaining. We could never become worthy to enter His presence without being instantly thrown out if we came on our own merits. And therefore we are in desperate need of a Savior. And, you see, that's where the Jews had the problem because they lowered the standard that identified God and raised their own level of understanding about how good they were, they found that they were okay with the God they had created and therefore they never needed a Savior.

But, had they read carefully in the Scriptures they would have known that God was more righteous than they gave Him credit for. Last time we talked about His righteousness. You remember, He gave rules for family life and they were standards that were very straight, very specific. He gave rules about worship. He gave rules about society. He gave rules about how people were to be treated who took a life. He gave rules about lying and cheating and stealing and coveting and about marriage and about the violations of physical love. And He gave rules and laws about wealth and possession and the needy and the poor and about giving and about serving. All kinds of things and they're without compromise and they're without equivocation and they reveal a God who is right, who is infinitely right, without error, without flaw, who has no tolerance for sin.

And as you read through the Old Testament and God lays down the laws of worship and the laws of family and the laws of marriage and the laws of sexual love and the laws of lying and the laws of a social life, regards the needy and the poor and the outcast and the stranger and the widow and the orphan and all of that. As you read all of these things you get the idea that God is a God of righteousness, God does right, God thinks right, God says what's right and never ever varies. And any violation, any violation at all of God's absolutely right standard is damning to the soul of a man. In fact, the Old Testament says the soul that sins it shall...what?...it shall die...the soul that sins, it shall die. What did God say to Adam and Eve? You eat...what? You die...you eat, you die. Always

the standard of the perfect God is the perfect standard, it is perfection.

I suppose there are a lot of passages in the Old Testament that can sum this up. Let me just read one of them to you. In Leviticus 11:45, just listen to it, Leviticus 11:45, "For I am the Lord who bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God...now listen to this...Ye shall therefore be holy for I am holy." God says be holy. You say, "How holy?" Just as holy as I am, now that's God's standard. Now if we don't know how holy God is then we don't know how holy we ought to be. And if we don't know how holy we ought to be, we don't know how holy we aren't. Did you get that? That's the essence of what the Old Testament is endeavoring to communicate that you have an infinitely holy God who conveys an absolutely perfect standard of righteousness against which we fail miserably and are left with the overwhelming guilt of sin to be alleviated by a redeemer who is pictured in all of the sacrifices and symbols of the old covenant.

So, when Peter says, "Be ye holy for I am holy," that isn't anything new to the New Testament, that's something that comes right out of Leviticus 11:45, you be holy. How holy? Because I'm holy, same kind of holy I am.

My daughter asked me this week, "How can God ask us to be perfect like that if we can't be perfect?" And the answer is because God can't ask anything that isn't perfect. You think God's going to lower the standard to accommodate you? You're wrong. He has to always demand perfection because it is His nature to be perfect and a perfect God must demand perfection. So all His laws are always perfect and they are to point up our imperfection and our need of a Savior. And God's grace then and God's mercy come to our rescue because and only because of the provision of Jesus Christ. You say, "What about the people in the Old Testament? If they didn't live up to God's law, by what basis could they be redeemed?" By the death of Jesus Christ. You say, "But it hadn't happened yet." Oh, but in the mind of God Christ was crucified from before the foundation of the world, right? So the death of Jesus Christ was just as efficacious and applicable to people who lived before the cross as it is to people who live after the cross. And it was the death of Jesus Christ that released the grace and the mercy of God.

Now certainly the Jew should have known the righteousness of God. The Jew who received the Old Testament record, who knew all the standards, they should have known how righteous God was. You know, if you read the Old Testament, every once in a while you find some pagans who seemed to know it more than the Jews did. I always think about the Philistines who stole the ark of the covenant. You remember they took the ark of the covenant, in fact the Israelites hadn't paid any attention to God, they got into a war with the Philistines and they said, "Go get the ark. We'll get God, bring God into battle and we'll win." So they ran and got the ark. And the whole bunch of Israelites started yelling, you know, when the ark showed up, "God's here," it's like the Calvary coming to the rescue. They thought they would instantly invincible and they brought the ark and you know what happened? The Philistines stole the ark. If you think that's trouble for the Israelites then you don't

understand where the real trouble was, it was more trouble for the Philistines. Now they've got God on their hands.

They took the ark and put it in the temple of Dagon the fish god. The next morning Dagon was dumped over, bowed down to the ark. They figured this was an idol, we'll put it where we keep our own idol. So they wondered how Dagon fell over, they set him back up. The next day they came back, he was fallen over again only this time his head and his hands were chopped off. And this was God's way of saying, "I don't tolerate other gods."

And then all through the land of Philistia there were plagues. And people began to receive plagues that were brought by rats...terrible death plagues swept the Philistines. And they had a meeting of their wise men. And this is what they said. "We better confess our sin and we better give glory to the God of Israel." In other words, these pagans said somehow, some way we have offended the rightness, the righteousness, the holiness of this God and we better make it right. That was more than the Israelites were doing on the other side of the battle lines. And you think about the Ninevites. Jonah came preaching judgment and what did all of Nineveh do? They repented.

But the Jews seem so resistant to that. They just went century after century, ignorant of how really righteous God is. And I believe, and we said all that in the background to say what we want to say for the few minutes we have lest...left. I really believe that people today don't understand how righteous God is. And I've talked about this a lot and I wrote a book on worship and I tried to pour my heart out in that particular theme. But, for example, I want you to look at this just the way you hear people look at it today. People read the Bible and they read about the God of the Bible and the average guy on the street who's sort of skeptical or cynical about Christianity will conclude that God is really not a very nice guy. And they'll pick out little things here and there to make God look like an ogre. As one writer said, "Like a cosmic killjoy." They really don't understand how righteous God is. In fact, some people are sort of embarrassed about the God of the Bible...the God who wipes out nations, the God who kills people in tragedies, who drowns the whole world, the God who rather capriciously seems to snuff out somebody's life over here and let somebody here who does worse things live. And so there's a certain amount of embarrassment.

I remember reading about a group in Europe who published a hymn book and they removed some of the Psalms because they were an offense to their view of God. Well, can God be looked at as a righteous God in view of some of the things He's done? Let's...let's look and see. Some critics say that God is, first of all, whimsical. They say that God is capricious, that God is like an irritated parent who finally knocks the head off his kid. And it may not be for anything big it's just that it's a piling up, right? And finally he happens to be in reach and maybe he hasn't done anything that severe but you're on the edge and you're a little uptight and you've got a little anxiety cranking in you and he does something that just isn't quite right and kablooie. And some people have accused God of being that same sort of irritated...same sort of irritated parent who once in a while you just catch Him in a

bad mood and if you happen to be there, you get it. He kills some, He lets some live with no apparent difference in the sin. How can we explain this?

Well the answer is very simple. The wages of sin is...what? What is it? Death. How many deserve to die? All, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Then the question isn't why do some die, the question is why do any live? It's a different question, isn't it? That's mercy. And you're back to Luke 13 where they came to Jesus and they said, the other day there were these people walking down the street, a tower fell over and killed them. Were they worse than anybody else? And He said, in effect, you better shape up or it might happen to you. What kind of an answer is that? They weren't any better or any worse, they were just examples.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, would you turn to it for a moment? First Corinthians chapter 10, verse 8, "Neither let us commit fornication," we all agree with that, don't we? Don't commit sexual sin of any kind. "As some of them committed and fell in one day 23,000." Twenty-three thousand fornicators died in one day. And the message is, don't commit fornication like the people whom God judged with instant death. Don't do that. Verse 9, "Don't put Christ to the test as some of them also tested Him and were destroyed by serpents...serpents." Don't put the Lord to the test, be destroyed by serpents. You remember those who were bitten by the serpents? And then verse 10, "And don't murmur as some of them also murmured and were destroyed by the destroyer."

Now the message here is don't commit fornication and don't test God and don't gripe. Now I'm not going to ask for hands, but I daresay we have in this collective assembly tonight people who have committed fornication, people who have put God to the test and some murmurers. You're still here. The question is not, why did they die; the question is, why do you live? Cause God has every right to take every life. He's not whimsical, He's gracious. He's merciful and He gives space and opportunity for repentance. But that doesn't change His standard because if you don't repent you will die and after that the judgment. But if you do repent, He has a provision in the Savior to cover that sin on your behalf.

Now other people say God is variable. This is another criticism. How can you say the God of the Bible is righteous? How can you say God is a righteous holy God, a pure God who never has a flaw or an error when He's so variable? And this is what they usually like to get, Genesis 6:6, "And it repented the Lord that He made man." Have you heard that? Now there you have God repenting. And then you can compare with it Numbers 23:19, you know what that says? "God is not a man that He should repent." So Genesis 6:6 says He repented and Numbers 23:19 says He can't repent. Hum...well, let me compound your problem a little. Thirty eight times in the Old Testament the word "repent" or the act of repentance occurs and most of those 38 it is God repenting. You say, "I knew it...God doesn't know what He's doing. He makes up His mind and then He changes it." Is that it? How can He repent if He can't repent? Well listen very carefully. God does change in His actions and His responses toward men because He cannot change in His nature. So in the Numbers 23

when it says God is not a man that He should repent, it is to say that God can't change His basic nature. But when it says it repented Him that He made man, He can change in His outward response. Now let me see if I can explain it more to you.

Take the Ninevites, city of Nineveh. God says I'm going to wipe you out...I'm going to wipe you out because of your sin. And then He sends that reluctant prophet by the name of Jonah who takes a short ride on a long fish and then gets to the task. And he gets there and he preaches and what did Nineveh do? What did they do? The whole city...what?...repented. And what was God going to do? Was God going to say, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore I don't care what you do, I am going to destroy you?" If He had done that by not changing His response, He would have changed His nature and He would have punished the righteous. So the point is, in order not to change His nature, He must sometimes change His response. Do you understand that? God creates man for blessing. And man becomes wicked and evil and vile. And God's nature has always been to punish sin, so God has to change from blessing man to punishing man so as not to change in His nature, do you understand that? It's very very basic.

If God was as angry and God was as damning and God was as condemning at the penitence of the Ninevites as He was at their wickedness, then He would be an inconsistent God who sometimes punishes the wicked and sometimes punishes the righteous. His nature never changes. His responses have to so His nature never does. So these people who accuse God of changing, just don't understand. He's not changing.

Now others have suggested that God is not only whimsical and variable but God is hateful. He's hateful. They say God lacks love. And they'll go to the Old Testament and they'll pick out a whole of passages where God has done things that are very very strong, very judgmental. Let me give you the illustration.

Turn in your Bible to Malachi chapter 1...Malachi chapter 1. And here comes the burden of the Word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi, verse 2, "I have loved you, says the Lord, yet you say in what way hast Thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother, saith the Lord? Yet I loved Jacob and I hated Esau...I hated Esau. And laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the jackals of the wilderness." They say, "How can God hate?" And that's quoted, by the way, in Romans 9:13, we've been through it in detail, I'm not going to go back over it.

What you must remember is this. If love is God's blessed response to obedience, then hate is God's judgmental response to disobedience. And when you read the word "hate" in terms of God, it is a perfect anger with sin...that is the very backside of a perfect love of righteousness. It is not illegitimate, ugly, vengeful human animosity, it is a characteristic of God by which He detests evil as much as He loves righteousness. And Esau was a profane man. Esau was a man who treated blessedness with disdain. Esau was a man who cursed sacred privilege. And naturally if God has an

infinitely loving and blessing response to obedience, He has an infinitely judgmental and hating response to disobedience because all of His attributes know an infinity and yet in them there is no self-seeking human bitterness and vengeance by which we define hate.

Others have accused God of being deceptive. They've said that God is not righteous because God is deceptive. And the illustration is 1 Kings chapter 22. Look at it, very interesting passage. And you may face this accusation against God. In 1 Kings 22 verse 22, you need to maybe know a little bit of the background. Ahab was king. He sought victory in battle against Ramoth-gilead. He wanted a victory and so he wanted a prophet who would give the prophecy of victory. That was one of the things they did in those days, try to find a prophet who will prophesy a victory before you go into the battle. And a lying prophet appears. In verse 22, "The Lord said unto him, By what means? And he said I will go forth and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also, go forth and do so."

Here is a lying demon spirit. And the lying demon spirit says I'm going to go and I'm going to put a lie in all the mouths of the prophets and I'm going to have them tell Ahab that he's going to win. And then Ahab will go into the battle and he did, and he lost and he was killed. So this demon says I'm going to go as a lying spirit and fill all the mouths of the prophets that tell Ahab and they're all going to tell him that he'll win and so he'll go to the battle and he will lose and he will not only lose the battle, he will lose his own life. And people say, "What kind of God dispatches a demon to deceive a man, to send him into a battle so he'll lose his life?" In this case, I want you to understand the answer that I think is very simple. The evil was already there...the evil was already there. And that demon was simply allowed to do what it desired to do by God, no different than when Satan came before the throne of God and God allowed Satan to test what man? Job.

In other words, God will use even the demons and the devil himself for His own purposes. God took the evil that was already present, evil that if uncontrolled would only bring evil, but if controlled by God could bring about good. And may I suggest to you that the death of Ahab was good? It fulfilled God's purpose. God's purpose was served by allowing that evil spirit to do its work. And since Ahab had abandoned God, God allowed him to be destroyed by the very instrument he sought for his well being. God does not do evil things and God is not a deceiver, but God will even overrule the purposes of Satan to gain His own ends, never compromising His rightness. But He uses all the evil of the world ultimately to accomplish His own ends. And I suppose if you think that's a problem, you'll have even more trouble with the cross where He allowed all the evil of hell and earth combined in the death of His Son to be the act that ultimately redeems all believers of all time. It's not a question of God deceiving, it's a question of God overruling, overriding and controlling even the evil to bring about His own ends.

Some critics say God is vengeful. They say, "How can God be the God whose righteous and holy and pure and without error when He's so full of vengeance?" Did you know 375 times in the Old

Testament the anger of God is referred to and only 80 times the anger of men? Men are angry 80 times in the Old Testament, God nearly 400 times. And what is God always angry with? Sin. And that's consistent with His holiness. You see, His love and His compassion do not obviate His holiness. They don't eliminate that. His anger is not the emotional need for personal revenge. It is not a desire to hurt for sake of retaliation. It is a perfect holy reaction to sin. And we read this morning, didn't we, in Psalm 30, the Lord is angry but for a moment. Psalm 77:9 says, "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" And the answer is no. In the midst of His anger as He moves in wrath against sin, there is...as the Bible says...that cry to God in wrath, remember mercy and God does. And even while feeling that wrath there is opportunity for repentance. We look at the time of the future in the book of Revelation, we see men under the judgment of God in that period of time and they are given space to repent. I'm sure there will be many who repent. There, in fact, will be so many they can't be numbered, from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. But then there are those others who curse God and blaspheme His name under the feeling of His judgment, right? And so even in His judgment He remembers mercy for those who rightly respond.

And then there are those people who say God is cruel. And they go back and they would take a passage, say like Exodus 32...or Exodus 23 verse 32...no, that isn't it. Yes, 23 verse 32, it says, "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods." And you remember that when the Lord put His people in the land He said don't make any covenant with those Canaanites, don't you get near any of their deities, don't you come close to the things that they believe in. And then in verse 33 He says, "They shall not dwell in thy land lest they make thee sin against Me." In other words, I don't want them in your land, you get them out of your land. And you go further on into Exodus, I think it's over in chapter 34 and it...yes it is, it starts about verse 12, he says, "You've got to make sure you don't make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, destroy their altars, break their images, cut down their idols, worship no other God. I don't want you to play the harlot," He says in verse 15, "with their gods. I don't want you to have anything to do with their daughters, taking them to your sons and their daughters playing the harlots with their gods and making their sons play harlot with their gods, and making melted gods," and all of this. In other words, He said I don't want you to have anything to do with that.

Well, the upshot of all of that was the Lord basically said go in and wipe them out. Just go in and take the Canaanites and obliterate them, clean them out of the land. In Deuteronomy 7, when you go to the land, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, smite them, utterly destroy them. And people look at that and say, "What kind of a God does that? What kind of a God goes on and takes a whole civilization of people...we name the Canaanites in general...and just says wipe them out?"

Listen carefully. How can a loving God do that? I'll tell you how. Ask yourself the same question, how can a loving surgeon cut off a cancerous limb? How can he do that, you say? Of course we

know how he can do that, because he's protecting the healthy part of the body, right? How can a loving God eliminate a civilization or society? Because He's loving, because He desires to preserve the rest of the world. And the Canaanites were the worst. They practiced homosexuality. They practiced bestiality. They practiced incest. It is said by some authors that they buried live babies in the wall of each new building. They were a gross civilization. In fact, in Leviticus 18 it says the land itself began to vomit them out...the land itself began to vomit them out like a body that rejects poison. That's why people vomit, their body rejects poison. And the land itself began to vomit out the Canaanites, so polluted were they.

And they had space to repent. They had 40 years. What do you think they were doing while Israel was wandering in the wilderness? Do you ever think about that? They knew about the story of Israel coming out. You say, "How did they know?" They must have known, how else would Rahab have known, right? How else would Rahab have known when they arrived at her place and she wanted to be sure that she was faithful to the true God? They heard about the destruction of the kings in the wilderness. They had space to repent and acknowledge the true God. They failed to do it and they were judged because they were a pollution that could have brought cancer to the whole of their world. You see, the cup of Canaan's iniquity is full.

It's no different than the flood. No different than Sodom and Gomorrah. No different than the drowning of Pharaoh's army. And so when you ask the question: how can God be holy and pure and right and do that? The answer to the question is He has to do that in order to be that way. If He is a loving God He'll preserve the world from those whose corruption is already such a given fact that they'll not turn from it.

And then one last. The atheist, Robert Engersol(?), used to like to use this one to attack the character of God. Look at 2 Kings 2 verse 23. Robert Engersol who waved his fist at God and cursed God and mocked God used to read this and use it as a source of mockery. Second Kings 2:23, "He went up from there into Bethel and as he was going up by the way there came forth youths out of the city and mocked him." This is Elisha. "And said to him, Go up, thou baldhead, go up, thou baldhead! And he turned back and looked on them and cursed them in the name of the Lord and there came forth two she-bears out of the woods and tore forty-two youths of them." And the atheist, Robert Engersol, said, "And this is your God of love who sends two ravenous bears of the woods to tear to shreds 42 little kids?"

Well he showed his abysmal ignorance. May I suggest to you that some versions say "little children." And that is not the Hebrew. The Hebrew refers to young men...older boys or young men. So they aren't little children. They're older boys or young men. "Little" is a way to distinguish them as younger than Elisha, who by the way, couldn't have been older than 25 because he lived beyond this, 60 years. And so "little" simply indicates their youthfulness comparitively to Elisha. And they say, "Go up, thou baldhead, go up, thou baldhead," and you have wonder how he got bald at 25 unless you

remember that one of the first indicating signs of leprosy was baldness. Very scarce among Jewish young men. They may have been shouting to him that he was an outcast...that he was a leper. And go up...go up...it has been suggested that that was a mockery of the translation of his predecessor Elijah. Do you remember how Elijah went to heaven? How did he go? In a chariot. And what these young men are saying to him is a mocking thing, "You think you're the prophet of God, then go up...go up, you leper." And so to speak to the man of God is to blaspheme the God he serves. And he turned back in verse 24 and looked on them and cursed them because he was angry, is that what it says? He cursed them for whose sake? The name of the Lord, for they had blasphemed the Lord. There's no profanity in his mouth. There's no anger. He pronounced a curse.

You say, "Was he justified to pronounce such a curse?" Listen to Leviticus 26:21, "And if you walk contrary to Me and will not hearken unto Me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins, and I will send wild beasts among you which shall rob you of your children." There it is. He had biblical grounds for what he did, for the preservation of the holiness of the name of God.

Now you can say that God is whimsical and you can say that God changes His mind and you can say that God is unloving and vengeful and hateful, inconsistent, cruel. It's not so. It's not so. What God is is holy. He is holy. Ask Nadab and Abihu who thought they could fool around a little the first day in the priesthood and they offered strange fire and instantly dropped dead on their very day of ordination. Ask Uzzah who thought he ought to reach his hand and steady the ark so it not fall off and was instantaneously dead. Ask those who were swallowed in the ground when they tried to usurp the role of a priest. Ask Ananias and Sapphira who gave a lot, they just didn't give all they said they'd give and dropped dead in front of the whole congregation. God is an infinitely holy God and history is marked with illustrations of what every man deserves. And listen, we look at that and we say that's unjust but that's because we're so used to mercy that we think justice is unjust. We are so used to mercy. We are so used to grace. That when God does what an infinitely holy God has every right to do, we think He's unfair. Why? Because we don't know how righteous God is. And if we knew how righteous He was, we would know how utterly unrighteous we are. And that is the message of our Lord when He cried out to them and says, "If you want to come to My Kingdom, come mourning over your sin, come begging for a righteousness you know you don't have, come meek without resources, begging."

Men don't come that way. They think God to be less holy than He is and therefore more easily will He accept them. And you hear the idiocy of statements like, "Well, I'm a pretty good guy, God certainly wouldn't send me to hell." See, you're ignorant of God's righteousness. You have to be perfect. So how do I get perfect? Well the only way is to have your sin cared for. He eliminated that in the death of Jesus Christ for those who believe and then the righteousness of Christ is given to us, isn't it? That's what we've been learning in Romans.

But Romans 10:3, look at it and we'll close. "They were ignorant of God's righteousness and they went about to establish their own righteousness and they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." That's just the first element of their ignorance, but it's so true of so many people...so true of so many people. The tragedy is that we don't preach the holiness of God. We don't preach the infinite majesty of God. We don't understand the Sermon on the Mount that it was intended to show them that no matter how holy they thought they were, they weren't holy enough. Jesus says, "Well, your tradition says...but this is what God says...your standard's down here, this is God's standard...your standard's down here, this is God's standard." He devastated them every way they could be devastated. Their religion was inadequate, their praying was inadequate, their giving was inadequate. Everything, it all came short and He was trying to drive them to the point where they confessed the need for a savior, a savior that all of us desperately needed, who alone can forgive us for the offense against an infinitely holy God and apply His righteousness to us and make us in Him acceptable. Let's pray.

Blessed God, what a wonderful wonderful passage that opens up our understanding to so many things. Thank You that we've been able to spend this time in Your great truth.

Just a moment before we bring things to a conclusion. Ask the Spirit of God to make clear the truth of God, to filter from your mind anything that was human, anything that was in error, anything that was an inadequate representation of God's divine truth and to retain in your mind that which spoke from Him.

Father, we ask that You would do Your work in every life and with thanksgiving we praise Your name that we who could never come to the standard of a holy God have been forgiven for the myriad offenses against Your holiness, forgiven because Christ paid the price for our sin and then to us has been imputed, granted, His holiness that we might be acceptable to You in Him. We thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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