

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

Abusing the Goodness of God

Scripture: Romans 2:1-5

Code: 90-400

Well, we have the theme of the goodness of God and the title of our message, "Abusing the goodness of God." Turn to Romans chapter 2...Romans chapter 2, the great Magna Carta of the gospel, the great book of Romans, chapter 2, and I want to read you the opening five verses of chapter 2 as we focus on abusing the goodness of God.

Romans chapter 2 and verse 1: "Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself that you will escape the judgement of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness or goodness, and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness or goodness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Now the word I want to direct your attention to is found twice in verse 4, translated in the NAS, which I read, as kindness. If you have an Authorized Version, the familiar King James, it will be translated "goodness...goodness." In fact, traditionally it has been translated goodness and in many newer translations, kindness.

Kindness is a good way to explain goodness here because it is not goodness as opposed to badness. It is not that God is good as opposed to bad. It is that He is good in the sense of being benevolent. The word here, *chrestotes* means good in the sense of being generous, good in the sense of merciful, good in the sense of kind, and so kindness is an apt translation of this word. Its equivalent in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *chesed* which basically is translated loving kindness. That is the attribute of God that we want to focus on. God is possessed by an innate good will toward sinners, an innate kindness. God is by nature merciful, tender-hearted, compassionate. God withholds judgment. God grants benevolent favors because it is His nature. It is a reason to praise Him. It is a reason to honor Him. It is a reason to worship Him.

In the New Testament, the word for His goodness or kindness is *chrestotes*. There are two Old Testament words, *hesed*, that very familiar word usually translated loving kindness, and another word *tove(?)* which is also translated goodness or kindness. The Old Testament extols the goodness of God as a reason for worship. In fact, it is most often referred to in the Psalms which is the worship

book of the Old Testament. Psalm 23, very familiar words in the Shepherd's Psalm, verse 6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," says the psalmist. When he contemplates the goodness of God who is a shepherd who cares for his sheep and provides for them goodness and mercy all the days of their lives. In Psalm 25 and verse 8 it says, "Good is the Lord." That is kind, merciful, benevolent, generous. Psalm 31:19 says, "Great is Your goodness." Psalm 52:1 says, "Your goodness...the goodness of the Lord is continual." Psalm 33:5 says, "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." It is everywhere, at all times spread across the world. And so Psalm 107 verse 8 says, "Give thanks to the Lord for His goodness."

Psalm 145 is worthy our focused attention. So turn to it for a moment, Psalm 145. Here is perhaps the most beautiful of expressions of praise toward God for His goodness, His kindness. Psalm 145, verses 1 through 7: "I will extol You, my God, O King. I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another and shall declare Your mighty acts on the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works I will meditate. Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts and I will tell of Your greatness. They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. Throughout history when men and women offer praise to You they will praise You for Your goodness...Your goodness. They will thank You for Your goodness. They will worship You for Your goodness."

You cannot worship God and leave out His goodness, His kindness, His generosity, His benevolence, His mercy. Now this is a very important place to find this theme. If you drop down into chapter 2 verse 4, the term *chrestotes* is used twice and in the NAS translated kindness both times...kindness as goodness expressed in being kind. But it's, in a sense, an odd place to put this because all around this verse are warnings about judgment, warnings about judgment. In fact, in chapter 1 beginning in verse 18 after the introduction to this great book of Romans, we read, "The wrath of God is revealed or unleashed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness because that which is known about God is evident within them for God made it evident to them. Verse 21 says, "Even though they knew God, they didn't honor Him as God or give thanks for futile in their speculation, their foolish hearts were darkened...verse 23 says...they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." What this is describing is the wrath of God unleashed on the Gentile world, a world full of false gods, false religions and idols. And they're without excuse...the end of verse 20...they have no excuse for the truth of God has been revealed in them. Later in chapter 2 he says, "The law of God is written in their hearts. The evidence of God can be seen from the creation of the world...says verse 20." So this section from verse 18 and following is divine judgment on the world. That judgment comes in the form of God giving people up, verse 24, to their lusts, that is to fornication, sexual immorality of all kinds. Verse 26, going beyond that, to degrading passions, namely homosexuality. Going beyond that, verse 28 describes a reprobate

depraved mind. Their behavior is immoral, even to the degree of homosexuality and they can't recover because their brains, their minds, their thinking is so warped. And so, their behavior is unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, etc., etc., etc.

So the great section that launches the argument of the book of Romans is that the whole world is under divine judgment. And we're not talking about eschatological judgment, judgment in the future, but cyclical judgment in human history whereby nations that turned their backs on God such as has happened in our own nation, are turned over to sexual immorality, then to homosexuality, and then finally to a corrupted mind from which come all sorts of evils that dominate the culture. This judgment has gone on throughout human history. Acts 14 says God has allowed all the nations to go their own way. This is the cycle of history being repeated in our own country and in the western world and around the globe even now.

Now if that's all there was in the book of Romans, the Jews would say, "Yeah, you're right, Paul, you're absolutely right. The nations of the world should be under judgment for their immorality, homosexuality and corruption that flows out of their depraved and perverted minds. We agree." Moral people, religious people would agree with that condemnation, they would agree with that assessment.

There are in our own culture today moral voices crying out against the immorality of our times, crying out against the abuses of our times, crying out against the massive corruptions and people who live those corrupt lives wanting to have all equal rights with everybody else, including things like homosexual marriage and tolerance for every imaginable kind of iniquity. Moral people and religious people, legalistic people cry out against that and they would say absolutely that's wrong and God will judge that. So those kind of moral people would agree with the assessment that Paul gives on the judgment of God that is going to fall and continually falls on a pagan, corrupt, immoral world.

But those same religious people, those same legalistic people, those same outwardly moral people feel that they will be exempt from that judgment, that somehow they're going to escape the cycle of wrath and the Holy Spirit will not let them get away with that. So in chapter 2 the attention is turned to the moral people who agree with the judgment in chapter 1. "Therefore you have no excuse," verse 1. "Every one of you who passes judgment." You people who say, "I agree with Romans 1, I agree that God is going to judge and punish these people who are living in these openly sinful ways. I agree and because I'm religious and because I'm moral and because I'm a righteous person and I try to do what's right, I agree with that, but I'm exempt from that."

Really. Every one of you who passes judgment because when you pass judgment, you condemn yourself for you practice the same things. Who are you kidding? You may not practice them overtly. You may not make demands that they be allowed and tolerated in public. But secretly and privately as a legalist, you've just pushed those things down. They're a part of your thought life. They're a part

of your hidden, secret life. And since you know they're wrong, you know enough of the law of God to know those things are wrong, you then become responsible for what you know and when you do them, even if you do them secretly and privately, and in your heart, you condemn yourself by the very knowledge that you have that they are wrong. You don't get off the hook at all. You know the truth and you know the judgment of God that falls on those who violate His Law and you do the same things secretly and privately. Do you think, verse 3 then, that when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself that you're going to escape the judgment of God? You're not...you're not.

Moral people like the Jews of Paul's day and others who would agree with the assessment and the judgment that comes...the wrath that comes on those who practice the things in chapter 1 feel exempt from judgment because they're good people on the outside, moral people, religious people and they think they've escaped this judgment. In fact, they rise up and become very self-exalting and self-justifying, sitting in judgment on everybody else.

The truth of the matter is, they're in deep trouble. That's why verse 1 begins, "You have no excuse. If you know enough to condemn these sins, then you know enough to be condemned by practicing them. So you have no excuse, really, for two things. One, you know the Law of God. Two, you have experienced the goodness of God. Verse 4, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you're storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Two things make the religious moral, self-righteous, good sinner culpable. One, you know the Law of God. And two, you've experienced the goodness of God, and especially in the case of Israel. They knew the Law of God. They were given the Law of God. Paul will express that later on in chapter 3, and then again in chapter 9, and then again in chapter 10, that you received the Law and the covenants and the promises and the Messiah. You are really without excuse. If the nations have the Law of God written in their hearts, you have the Law of God written by the Holy Spirit on documents by the Old Testament writers. If the rest of the world has experienced the goodness of God in common grace, you have received the greater goodness of God by being a covenant people. You don't escape the judgment, you're going to be held to an even higher standard because you have a greater knowledge of the truth and because you have a greater experience of the goodness of God. You pass judgment on others, huh, you therefore are condemning yourself by your knowledge of the Law and by your greater experience of the goodness of God. Anyone who sits in the seat of moral judgment proves he is inexcusable if he can condemn other people since he knows the standard and in reality does the same thing if in a secret hidden fashion.

No way to escape then because you know the Law. No way to escape because you've been exposed to the greater goodness. What did Israel need? They needed a day of repentance. They needed a

national day of repentance like the one back in Nehemiah chapter 9. Go back to the book of Nehemiah, a few books left of Psalms. The people had come back from captivity. The Word of God had been recovered and restored and read to them and explained to them. And they responded to it, chapter 8, tells about the finding of the book of the Law, the reading of the book of the Law. The people understood it as it was explained to them. They were heartbroken over the fact that they had ignored the Law of God, that they had rejected the Law of God, that they had disobeyed the Law of God. So in chapter 9 verse 1, "They assembled with fasting and sack cloth and dirt on them." That was a way to express humiliation. "They separated themselves from foreigners. They stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. They stood in their place and read from the book of the Law of the Lord, their God for a fourth of the day, for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God." It was a long day of penitence. And the worship is basically given to us, starting down in verse 5. "Arise, bless the Lord your God forever and ever. O may Your glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise."

They blessed the Lord. And what do they bless Him for? His amazing care of the nation, His goodness, His kindness and His mercy. And keep in mind, this was a recalcitrant, this was a rebellious, this was an impenitent, this was an idolatrous people, this nation Israel. And yet He continued to be good to them. "You made the heavens, the heaven of heavens, the earth, all that is in them, the seas, all that is in them. You give life to all of them and the heavenly hosts bows down before You. You are Lord God. You chose Abraham, You brought Him out from Ur of the Chaldeas, gave him the name Abraham, found his heart faithful before You, made a covenant with him. Gave him the land of the Canaanite, Hittite, Amorite, Perizzite, Jebusite and Girgashite and gave it to his descendants, the promised land. And You have fulfilled Your promise for You're righteous. You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, heard their cry by the Red Sea. You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh." And the history goes on.

Verse 11, "You divided the sea." Verse 12, "You led them with a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire by night." Verse 13, "You came down from Mount Sinai and gave just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, laid down for them commandments, statutes and laws, provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger and water from a rock and told them to enter in order to possess the land which You swore to them."

Just a quick brief history of God's goodness to Israel. But verse 16, "They, our fathers, acted arrogantly; became stubborn, wouldn't listen to Your commandments, refused to listen, didn't remember, your wondrous deeds which You had performed among You, became stubborn, appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt." Listen to this, "But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness." There's that word goodness, kindness. You have so much kindness, so much mercy, so generous in Your goodness and You did not forsake them, even when they made a molten calf, You were compassionate toward them, in verse 19. Verse 20, "You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them."

“For forty years, verse 20, when You provided for them in the wilderness and they were not in want.” Then in verse 22, “You gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them as a boundary. They took possession of the land of Sihon, the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og the king of Bashan on the way to taking the land of Canaan. You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven, You brought them into the land.” This is the history of God’s goodness to a disobedient, sinful, idolatrous Israel.

“You blessed the land, verse 25, with vineyards and olive groves and fruit trees and abundance and they ate and were filled and grew fat and reveled in Your great goodness. They became disobedient, rebelled against You, cast Your Law behind their backs, killed Your prophets, committed great blasphemies.”

That’s how they responded to God’s goodness. But He kept being good to them. Verse 31, “In Your compassion You didn’t make an end to them or forsake them, for You’re a gracious and compassionate God.”

Verse 35, “With Your great goodness which You gave them, with the broad and rich land which You set before them, they didn’t serve You, they didn’t turn from their evil deeds.”

This is the story of rebellious, sinful, impenitent, disobedient people in the face of constant goodness...constant goodness. It was 700 years of God’s goodness to a rebellious idolatrous northern kingdom before God hauled them off in judgment. It was 800 years for the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel needed another moment like that moment in Nehemiah, a moment when the people take a look at their history, a look at their condition and repent and be led, as verse 4 puts it, by the goodness of God to repentance. What caused the repentance at the great revival in Nehemiah 8 and 9? What caused it was a remembering of the goodness of the Lord, led them to repentance. They had God’s Word, the revelation written not just written in their hearts like the Gentile nations, they had God’s goodness in vast measure, God’s covenant protection and provision. They abused the goodness of God. They trampled on His mercy, spurned His kindness, mocked His love, rejected His grace as people continue to do in this nation, in the western world exposed to Christianity and all its fullness, and all its richness, this society in which we live abuses God’s tolerance and goodness, tramples on His mercy, spurns His goodness, mocks His love, rejects His grace, just like the people of the past.

In fact, Matthew Henry said, “There is in every willful sin a contempt for the goodness of God.”

The goodness of God is not to be thought of lightly. Now let’s go to verse 4, that’s where our focus is. “Do you think lightly of the riches of His goodness?” *Kataphroneo*, to think lightly, to despise, the verb means, to treat with contempt, to belittle, to scorn, to mock, to repudiate. Do you underestimate the

true value of God's kindness? This is the severest of all sins. Mercy despised.

And the basic attitude of society today is God is harsh. People look at Haiti, a quarter of a million people killed. People look at Pakistan, or some other place where monsoonal rains and floods obliterate hundreds and thousands of people. They look at Indonesia where another quarter of a million people died in the tsunami and they say, "How can God allow this? What kind of God is God?" They see the judgment of God from time to time, the cataclysmic judgment of God from time to time and they conclude that this must mean that God is harsh and without mercy and without kindness.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that all the sinners who perish in those disasters should have perished long before, right? The wages of sin is...what?...death. The fact that they lived to that event is an extension of mercy.

Here in this verse, we are reminded not to think lightly, not to despise, not to belittle the riches, the fullness, the richness of goodness, kindness, tolerance and patience. Kindness, *chrestotes*, the positive, divine generosity. Tolerance, *anochē*, the word for a truce, that's the negative word, the absence of hostility. That's what that means. God holds back His anger and God grants blessing. And the third word is the word long-suffering, *makrothumia*, patience with people. He is benevolent for a long time. He holds back His hostility for a long time. He has the power to bless and the power to avenge and He blesses and He holds back vengeance. Romans 9:22 says, "He endures with patience vessels fit for destruction."

If all God was was justice, He would have long ago taken His hand and wiped out the world as He once did in the Flood. But not before patience for hundreds of years and 120 years of a preacher of righteousness named Noah warning people about their sins. God is by nature good, kind, giving benefits to sinners. This is called common grace, makes the sun, the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He has tolerance, which means He withholds the justice that sinners deserve and He does these both for a long period of time. In Nehemiah 9:17 it puts it this way. "He is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, that's the negative. Slow to anger, that's the positive, abounding in loving kindness. That's what these first two words convey. He is good to men.

Jesus said in Matthew 19, "There's only one good and that is God."

I remember the first time I was on the Larry King Show, it was right after 9-11, and he said to me. "Why did God let this happen? What's the lesson here?" And in our conversation, both on the air and off the air, I said, "The lesson here is that we're all sinners and the wages of sin is death and we all deserve to die and we don't know when it's going to happen, but you better be ready." Sinners live and sinners prosper and sinners enjoy life and they are blessed in life with temporal blessings, earthly blessings, all the joys of life. But we all live pass the point of justice. The wages of sin is death. We should all be dead after one sin. God has every reason to wipe us out, every reason to wipe out the

whole human race. But His goodness and His forbearance cause Him to bring positive blessings into the lives of sinners and to withhold judgment.

A.W. Pink wrote, "How wondrous God's patience is with the world. On every side people are sinning with a high hand. The divine Law is trampled underfoot and God Himself openly despised. It is truly amazing that He doesn't instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy Him. Why does He not suddenly cut off the haughty infidel and blatant blasphemer as He did Ananias and Sapphira? Why does He not cause the earth to open and devour the persecutors of His people so that like Dathan and Abiram they shall go down alive into the pit? And what about apostate Christendom where every possible form of sin is now tolerated and practiced undercover of the holy name of Christ? Why does not the righteous wrath of heaven make an end of such an abominations?"

"Only one answer is possible," says Pink. "Because God bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Romans 9:22. He's so very patient...so very patient. Why is He patient?

Back to verse 4. "In order to lead you to repentance, to turn from sin." To repent, to believe the gospel, to come to Christ for forgiveness, to see that God is by nature a Savior because of His goodness, because He withholds just judgment.

But men despise God's goodness. They abuse His kindness. Sinners have a kind of vague, undefined hope of impunity. They just think they're going to be okay. The kind of feeling that, "This can't happen to me, I'm basically a good person." They sort of openly claim exemption from judgment.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Jews took God's goodness for granted. People take it for granted today, the truth which they know in the Scripture in those places where the Scripture has gone. They take love and friendship and beauty and warmth and emotions and food and drink and clothing and nature and children and pleasure for granted. They live in mercy. They live in the kindness of God, blessing them and withholding judgment. They live there so long and so comfortably that they get used to grace and think they deserve it. And what they don't see is what's in verse 5, that as long as they continue in a stubborn unrepentant way there's an accumulation of wrath going on, storing up until the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. All their sin is accumulating in the books. We will be judged out of the books for every single sin, no sin will be left out.

For people to rise up and say God is unjust because there was an earthquake, God is unjust because there was a tsunami, God is unjust because somebody got cancer, God is unjust because people die in terrorist acts is an incredible turn around from the truth that God is so good and merciful that He withholds judgment, that He pours out mercy though it is undeserved.

William Gurnalwrote in 1660, "When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of His mind that said, The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world."

People look at the Old Testament and say, "Ah, what a brutal God, He turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt. He bids Abraham to offer his son on an altar as a sacrifice. He sends snakes to bite disobedient Israelites. He causes the ground to swallow up certain people. He sends His servant Elijah to bring down a fire from heaven and wipe out a hundred soldiers and He has bears come out of the woods and shred forty young men who spoke evil of the prophet Elisha. He seems to choose favorites, Jacob over Esau. He hardens Pharaoh's heart, sends plagues on Egyptians. He commands the extermination of every man, woman and child among the Canaanites. What kind of a God is this?"

One writer said, "Perhaps now that the Bible is written in a language, the New English Bible when it came out, all can understand the Old Testament will be seen for what it is, an obscene chronicle of man's cruelty to man, or worse, His cruelty to woman and of man's selfishness and cupidity backed up by his appeal to his God a horror story if ever there was one. It is hoped that it will at last be proscribed as totally inappropriate to the ethical instruction of school children." Wow! Lord Platt, writing in the London Times, criticizing the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament. The fact that that man lived another day was evidence of the goodness of God.

Sinners get used to goodness. They become comfortable with goodness. They become comfortable with kindness and grace. And all they can see is something that appears to be a unjust act, way too severe, almost whimsical, almost arbitrary. The reason we feel God is cruel or unjust is because we don't understand how sinful we are and because we're unwilling to come to the provision He has made to rescue us from His justice and to bring us into eternal bliss, namely the grace of the gospel of Christ and the cross.

Sin should produce death, instantaneous death. God said to Adam, "In the day you eat, you die." The Old Testament there were at least thirty specific sins, including disobedience to parents, that were basically worthy of capital punishment. God doesn't owe us life. Any sin brings death and death can come at any moment. God gives life freely to man for the purpose of showing His kindness in the face of man's cosmic treason. And He has every right at any point to take life back from any sinner in an act of just punishment.

God is so kind and so merciful, however, that He has sent His Son into the world to take the punishment for all who will repent and come to Him. He is patient that He has provided more than just patience, He has provided a sacrifice in our place. We're so used to mercy, so used to sinning and getting away with it, so used to iniquities without instant punishment, so accustomed to abusing grace and goodness and kindness that when justice does appear, we think it's injustice. We're offended if

God is not merciful because we don't understand what we deserve. There are times when His mercy runs out. "My Spirit will not always strive with man," He said, "I'm not going to do this forever," and He brought the Flood.

We would never tolerate the insubordination that He tolerates. We would never tolerate the rebellion from subordinates to us that He tolerates. He is far more merciful than we are. Sinners tread on His mercy and treat on His kindness.

Turn in your Bible, for a moment, to Luke 13 and we'll wrap up in this passage, just briefly cause it's an appropriate one. If you were living in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord, you probably would have known about these two events. They would have been in the Jerusalem Gazette, if there was one. Certainly they were word of mouth spread around town. Verse 1 of Luke 13 on the same occasion as the prior passage, there were some present who reported to Him, some people in the crowd gave this report to Jesus that some Galileans had their blood spilt by Pilate and mixed with their sacrifices. Pretty scene...easy scene to construct, this cryptic language, but we get the picture. Galileans, Jews from the north from Galilee had come to Jerusalem. There was every day a morning sacrifice, an evening sacrifice and so they went in to offer sacrifices, either in the morning or the evening. They were worshipers, these were good devout Jews to whatever extent you could assert their devotion by their willingness and their eagerness to offer sacrifices. So they go to the temple, they're in there. They're offering sacrifices to God, acts of worship, acts of obedience, ostensibly. And Pilate's soldiers come in and slice them up to death and their blood is mingled with the blood of the sacrifice.

How could this happen? This is a disaster that has to be explained. Jesus said to them who told Him the story, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?" Is that the human answer to this? These people died because they're worse than everybody else? The people in Indonesia who died were worse than the people who didn't die? The people in Haiti who died worse than the people who didn't die? The people in the twin towers that died, worse than the people who survived? Is that what we're saying here? The people who are alive are a lot better than the people who are dead? The people who don't get cancer and die are better than the people who do get cancer and die? Is that what this is about?

No. Verse 3, "I tell you no...no." What's the message? "Unless you repent, you'll all likewise perish." Wow! What He says is, you're going to die too and you don't know when. You better repent...you better repent. You're going to die the same sad death with the same sad and eternal results if you don't repent. You're living on borrowed time. You're living under mercy, extended kindness and goodness from an infinitely holy God who while on the one hand He cannot tolerate sin. On the other hand, tolerates sinners in order that He might lead them to repentance by His kindness, His goodness.

Another event had happened in town. Jesus referred to it. Eighteen people, verse 4, had been killed when a tower down in Siloam fell. Siloam was a water source and history tells us the Romans were building some kind of an aqueduct and they had built a scaffolding to hold their construction, hold the aqueduct and it had collapsed and you have eighteen innocent bystanders. So the first account, you have eighteen worshipers, and the next one, you have eighteen innocent bystanders and they're killed on the spot. Do you suppose...verse 4 says...that they were killed because they were worse than all the men who live in Jerusalem? Were they worse than the people who didn't get crushed by the collapsing tower?

"I tell you no," verse 5, "unless you repent, you'll all likewise perish." Whenever there is a disaster, whenever there is a death whether it's an individual one or some kind of collective one, whether it's a person who dies because of an illness or an accident, or whether it's a community that perishes under a terrorist act or whether it's a portion of a nation that perishes under a horrendous disaster, the message is always the same...you're going to die, you better repent. You don't know when and it is the goodness of God under which you live and the kindness of God under which you currently survive that is intended to lead you to repentance. Don't get caught with a hard and impenitent heart.

Go back to chapter 2 verse 5, "Because of your stubbornness, *sklerotes*, from which we get arterial sclerosis or sclerosis of the liver hardening, or the arteries hardening of the liver. If you had a sclerosis of the heart, an unrepentant, unconverted heart, what's happening is, you're going to die and you're simply storing up wrath for yourself until the day that wrath explodes in the righteous judgment of God.

So the self-righteous moral man who would say, "Wow, I agree with the assessment of the pagan world in chapter 1," better examine his own life because if you know enough to sit in judgment on other people and their violation of God's standards, then you know that you do the same thing and you condemn yourself.

Furthermore, all sinners live under some degree of the goodness of God. Those of you who certainly are Jews, or those of you who have been exposed to the church and been benefitted and blessed by being around believers and the spilling of the blessing that comes on them, has come also on you. You have experienced even a greater measure of the goodness of God. And the purpose of all of that is to lead you to repentance. But if you do not repent and you continue in a hard-hearted impenitent fashion, you are simply accumulating wrath. God may not bring that wrath soon, but He will bring that wrath finally...finally.

So sinners must face the truth, that if the goodness of God toward you is not leading you to repentance, then drop by drop, sin by sin, you're filling up the reservoir of God's patience until some day the dam breaks and you drown in the flood of your own sin.

There is an alternative to that. You come to Christ, you come to the cross, you embrace the Savior who died, God offers forgiveness of sin, wipes the slate clean, remembers your sins no more. Listen to this, Psalm 86:5, "For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon You."

That's the alternative...call upon the Lord. Ask Him to forgive you through the provision of Christ on Your behalf at the cross.

Father, we thank You that You have by grace extended to us time to repent, time to believe, time to embrace our Savior. I pray, Lord, that this day, this very hour this morning there will be an awakening in the heart of those who have been hard and impenitent and who have abused Your goodness, despised Your kindness, maybe even criticized You, blasphemed You, mocked Your name. May they see with spiritual eyes the reality, the fact that any sinner survives is because of Your mercy, Your goodness, Your kindness and it's intended to show us that You by nature are a saving God, a gracious, merciful, loving, tender-hearted, compassionate, kind Redeemer and that that salvation, that forgiveness which You offer and provided for us through the sacrifice of Christ is available to all who call on Your name. As the psalmist said, "You are good and ready to forgive and ready to forgive all who call upon You. May sinners do that even now, we pray, in Your Son's name. Amen....Amen.

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