

# Sermon Text for July 10, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

***Job 1:20-22, Romans 3:21-26***

***“Sinners in the hands of a righteous God”***

I sense that within our family there is a bit of a heaviness that is manifesting itself as a result of some very serious and tragic events in the life of our family. Death has a way of bringing to our mind the presence of God and the frailty of life. It is within the context of death that we can either understand God better, or cease to want to know God at all, rarely is it something in between. But it isn't just death that causes this to come to our mind. The frailty of the human body reveals itself in a myriad of ways, through strokes, through a change in our quality of life which many of us are experiencing. On a bit of a lighter note, we took a group of middle school kids to Philly on Friday and of the 7 adult chaperons I think I was the only one who wasn't complaining about aches and pains in our knees or back or something that was going wrong with our body as we spent 5 hours on our feet.

In 1741 a Presbyterian preacher, Jonathan Edwards, preached a sermon on July 8 entitled: “Sinners in the hand of an angry God”. When we went to the liberty bell and the revolution museum, and then finished with independence hall the guide said something that struck me and that I hope struck the kids as well. History touches every generation, it is just up to that generation to understand how it touches you and how you are able to change it yourselves. Jonathan Edward's sermon was the spark for the Great Awakening that changes the religious landscape of America forever.

Here are some things that he said in his sermon: Our attempts to avoid falling into a bottomless gulf are insufficient as “a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.” He finished his sermon with this statement: Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. Only by returning to Christ can we escape hell. Let's be clear, I agree with all of those statements that he has made. It's just that I have not tended to use the type of language that he does.

Our Scriptures today address the fact that we are sinners. Every Sunday I remind us of our sin, that we are sinners, but I quickly transition to the fact that we are forgiven of our sin. But today, we are going to dwell a little bit longer on this fact that we are sinners and the repercussions of that sin and how it is not something that we can or should quickly pass over to an assurance of our pardon as if our sin were so easily tossed aside because we would like for it

to be tossed aside. It is not. Our sin makes us sinners, makes us wretched, makes us deserve hell. There is no nice way to say that.

We don't talk a lot about sin, so maybe this is taking you a bit off guard. Normally we focus on the love of God. I mentioned a few weeks ago that we also don't spend a lot of time talking about heaven and its description and what it looks like and what it is going to be like. We will remedy that soon enough. But conversely we don't speak a lot about hell. I have said a number of times that I believe it exists and that it isn't just metaphorical but a real place and Scripture does state, in my reading of it, that those who do not follow Jesus, well, since he is the only way to heaven, then those who do not believe in Jesus will go to hell. It sounds judgmental even to say that. But that is what I read.

Today we will talk about and hopefully unpack our status as sinners. Our Scriptures address God not as angry, but as righteous. There is quite a difference between angry and righteous. One seeks retribution, the other seeks reconciliation. We will see how it is the other, reconciliation, that God seeks as part of his character of being righteous. We will define what we mean when we say we are in the hand, as sinners, of a righteous God. Let's read.

## **READ**

When we read our first Scripture it is one of those moments when you have to admit that you can't imagine anything going any worse for anyone than it has for Job. He has everything that he could ever ask for, and then in one day he loses all of it. He loses his house, all of his possessions, and all of his children die. Nothing could get worse. What we don't read is the beginning of chapter 2 where we see that it does actually get worse, he loses his health as well and his quality of life deteriorates to the point that he feels as if it just might be better to die than to live. But before we get there, we find ourselves with Job after he hears about having lost everything, house, possessions and his children.

His reaction is textbook. Look at the Scripture: He rises from his seat, he tears his robe, he shaves his head, he falls on the ground. And then he worships God. He makes the statement, naked I came into this world and naked I return. There is nothing that I have done in this life where I deserve anything more than nakedness. That is all I am. I am blessed by my nothingness. God gives and God takes away. Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

In this Scripture, in this person of Job, he recognizes his lot before God and he completely recognizes that he is a sinner. Naked and with nothing, helpless in the hand of God,

but still even in that lowly wretched state, able to bless the Lord even for his nothingness and his nakedness. What a faith.

Sinners in the hand of a righteous God. In Romans, vs.23 leaves no doubt about our status before God. We are sinners. Let's read that again just in case any of us have any doubt about our status before God: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The verse before he also takes away any of our attempts to line up the reasons for why maybe he isn't talking about us: I've been a member here forever, I've spent more time here at the church than at home, I sacrificially give to this church so that has to count for something. Paul says: there is no distinction, whether you are an ingrate off the street, or an ingrate in this church, we are sinners, we are wretched before God. There is no distinction. No matter who we are, we are sinners.

Last week we talked about our penchant for idolatry and for chasing after idols and for loving those things that take us away from God. Our sin then ultimately separates us from God. It is our actions, it is our inaction, it is our thinking, our desires, our apathy, not our nature because God created us in His image, but over time that image has become clouded because of our sin. As nice as I like to be and as much as I want you to like me, I can't sugar coat this, we are all sinners.

And just as true is the fact that we are sinners, so equally is true the fact that we serve and live under a righteous God. Four times this term righteous is used in these verses. Traditionally people have interpreted this term in a juridical way. God as righteous judge, judges us innocent or guilty. God is righteous in that he is the judge that decides our fate based upon fairness, and when it comes down to it we do not deserve forgiveness, so the righteous judge must declare us guilty. That has been the traditional interpretation of this term righteous, in a juridical sense.

But I would argue that Paul's ubiquitous use of this term has nothing to do with a court, but has everything to do with relationship. Let me explain. Paul in his writings uses righteous as the opposite of the abandonment of humanity to its own desires. There is a universal scope to God's actions: all have sinned, all have received God's righteousness. This is the point that Paul is making in Romans and specifically here in these verses. One will have to have a positive relationship to God on God's terms or one won't have it at all.

To say it another way, in Christ Jesus, God has shown his willingness to forgive our sins, whoever we are, and to welcome us back into fellowship with him. Trust in that kind of God allows a life to survive the worst storm it may encounter. But still, what do we mean when we say God is righteous as a foil or a counter to sin?

Righteous means always working to restore relationships. If sin ruptures our relationship with God, and it does, to be made righteous is to claim the Lordship of Jesus Christ as a desire for the relationship. Righteous is not a legal term but a relational term. A righteous person is not one who follows the law, but one who pursues a relationship with God. A righteous God, therefore, is one who always seeks a relationship with us and will do everything to maintain and repair that relationship even if our unrighteousness manifests itself continuously and completely.

When Paul speaks of righteous those four times, it is always in reference to God. God's act in Christ is both the sign of God's righteousness and the means of our being righteous. It is the good news of the Gospel that Christ represents God's decision to uphold the relationship and give humanity a new chance to enter into it. God could choose to drop the hammer on us because we deserve it. But we are able to enter into a relationship with God because God has upheld it, not because we deserve it.

So our struggle and our joy is found in this tension to recognize these two truths which ought to define our lives. We are sinners and God is righteous. When we come to terms with that and when we hold these two in tension, then it will produce a will to live for Christ that is unmatched. Amen.