

The Good News of God's Judgment

Introduction

The Text

⁴ “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

⁵ “Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.”

⁶ Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!” ⁷ Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

⁹ “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! ¹⁰ You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. ¹¹ For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.

¹² “Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! ¹³ Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁵ “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink— you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! ¹⁶ You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD’S right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! ¹⁷ The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

¹⁸ “What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. ²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” (Hab. 2:4–20)

Considering God's Judgment

A. I wonder: how do you feel about the idea of God's judgment?

1. When you come to a discussion of his wrath or hell or things like this in your Bible reading;
2. when one of your friends who's not a Christian asks you about it in some way;
3. when your pastor brings up the subject on a Sunday . . .

a. How do you feel?

- i. Is it heartwarming, chicken soup for the soul?
- ii. Or is it disturbing—more like battery acid than chicken soup. It eats away at your insides and leaves your stomach turning and ulcerous?

- B. It's my sense that here in America, when it comes time to talk about God's judgment, we often do so a bit reluctantly, with sweaty palms and hushed tones, as if we're a bit embarrassed by it all.
 - 1. And if we're honest we sometimes wish we could just strike these parts out of our Bibles, don't we? We wish we could cut and paste and craft a God to our own liking. We appreciate the love and the grace and all that's wonderful. But the wrath and the fury, no thank you.
 - a. So we avoid the subject if we can. But, when we're at last forced to talk of it, we feel as if we need to somehow apologize to the world for what we perceive to be this "mean streak" in God.
 - i. And that's just it isn't it? God's judgment seems mean to us. It seems unkind, uncharitable, crusty, cranky, rigid. It seems . . . bad.
- C. But I want you to understand something (I want you to take this in deep, let the truth of it settle into your soul, because the culture is going to push against this, and your own flesh will as well.) You ready for it? Here it is: God's judgement is good news. It's actually a critical part of the gospel.
 - 1. It's not bad that he judges, that he pours out his wrath, that he throws the rebellious, the wicked, the unrepentant sinner, into hell. It's good.
 - 2. It's not a mean streak in him. It's not something off in him for which we need to apologize. It's right.

We Don't Whisper . . . We Sing!

- A. God's judgment is not something for us to sheepishly whisper about; it's actually something for us to lift our voices and joyously sing about!
 - 1. At least that's what we see all over the Scriptures.
- B. So, when God judges the Egyptians and brings his people out from under Pharaoh's thumb, what do the people do there along the banks of the Red Sea?
 - 1. They sing: "¹Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, 'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. ²The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. ³The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name'" (Exod. 15:1–3).
 - a. And it goes on for a whole chapter like that—praising God for his righteous judgment of evil and, the flip-side of it, his gracious saving of his people.
 - i. God's righteous judgment of evil and his gracious saving of those who trust in him always go hand in hand. They are two sides of the same coin. It's a package deal.

- (1) There would be no salvation for the Israelites if God said: “Well, I don’t want to be unkind to the Egyptians. I know they’ve been enslaving and abusing you, but who am I to judge. I think I’ll just let them pass on through the Red Sea along with you.”
- (2) No! That would not be salvation. There would be no song. They’d be back in shackles by sundown.

C. How do you think they’re feeling in Ukraine right now—with missiles popping off all around them?

1. If God were to intervene and pour out his wrath upon their oppressor, would it seem unfair or unkind to them? No, I tell you, it would be their salvation!

D. Or, to give you another example from the Scriptures, think of how the people of God respond in the book of Revelation, when Babylon, symbolizing the archetypal city of fallen man, depraved and debauched as it is, is thrown down in judgement. Do you remember? What do they do?

1. They rejoice with loud cries! [Rev. 19:1-3](#): “¹After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,² for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’³ Once more they cried out, ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.’”

- a. You say, that sounds a bit dark, doesn’t it? That sounds a bit over the top. It sounds a bit mean, “unchristian” even.

E. Well, if that’s how you respond (and I’ve certainly struggled with this), all it really does is expose the fact that you’ve not yet brushed up against much bald-faced evil in your life, that you’ve not yet been wronged to the core, in a way that shakes your very soul.

1. Because when you have, listen, the only way you don’t spiral into hopeless despair on the one hand or bitter vengeance on the other, is if you know: God is coming soon, and he will make all the wrong right. He will judge the evildoer. He will rescue his righteous ones.

- a. So I don’t have to lose hope on the one side.
- b. And I don’t have to strike back on the other.

- i. I can love and even pray for my enemy, because I know my God, in the end, will judge and save.

F. To give one final example on this idea of singing in view of God’s saving judgment, I read [Ps. 68](#) in my devotions just the other day. And here’s how it begins: “¹God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!² As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away; as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God!³ But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy!⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him!⁵ Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.⁶ God settles

the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land” (vv. 1–6).

1. And here’s what I love about this, you see, God is both tough and tender. He’s a holy and judging God, but he’s also merciful and gracious. And, in fact, the two go together here so wonderfully.
 - a. That’s why in the midst of saying God’s going to drive out all his enemies, the Psalmist also says God is “[f]ather of the fatherless and protector of widows” (v. 5).
 - i. Orphans and widows were the most vulnerable of people at the time, and in many ways they still are. They had no covering, no protection. They were just open to the elements, easily exploited and oppressed.
 - (1) And so God says: “I’ll cover you, I’ll protect you. I’ll save you by judging those that would come against you.” You see, he’s tough and tender, just and merciful.

G. God’s judgment is good news.

Deep Down We All Get It

A. Deep down, even if we may initially object to this sort of idea, I think we all get it.

1. I’ll give you a cultural example and then a more personal one. (And then I promise I’ll show you how all this relates to Habakkuk and where we’re going next!)

Example #1: How San Francisco Became a Failed City

- A. For the first, I recently read a simply stunning article in the Atlantic entitled [How San Francisco Became a Failed City](#) by Nellie Bowles. I highly recommend you search for it and give it a read.
 1. It’s essentially a reflection on the recent recalling of San Francisco’s district attorney Chesa Boudin. In the article she outlines the sorts of things that led to such an historic and seismic event.
- B. And, at the end of the day, do want to know what she concludes (she’s not a conservative by any stretch, by the way—I’m not trying to make a political point, but a theological one): she says people finally got fed up because Boudin’s approach towards the criminal-justice system ultimately ended up seeming like he was siding with the victimizer over the victim.
 1. People didn’t feel safe in their city because perpetrators were allowed to do what they wanted and get away with it.
 - a. It sounds good: give them grace, be gentler on the criminal and things—and there’s some truth to that.
 - b. But the bottom line is: when there’s no judgment, when there’s no justice, there’s also (as people have been chanting lately) “no peace.” It’s not good for anyone.

C. Let me just read you a few of the more notable selections from this article:

1. Nellie grew up in San Francisco and only recently left it during the pandemic when things became too much. And reflecting on some of her experiences, she writes: “I’d gotten used to the crime, rarely violent but often brazen; to leaving the car empty and the doors unlocked so thieves would at least quit breaking my windows. A lot of people leave notes on the glass stating some variation of Nothing’s in the car. Don’t smash the windows. One time someone smashed our windows just to steal a scarf. Once, when I was walking and a guy tore my jacket off my back and sprinted away with it, I didn’t even shout for help. I was embarrassed—what was I, a tourist? Living in a failing city does weird things to you. The normal thing to do then was to yell, to try to get help—even, dare I say it, from a police officer—but this felt somehow lame and maybe racist.”
2. She goes on later to speak of Boudin: “Residents had hoped Boudin would reform the criminal-justice system and treat low-level offenders more humanely. Instead, critics argued that his policies victimized victims, allowed criminals to go free to reoffend, and did nothing to help the city’s most vulnerable.”
3. She continues, referring in context to the decriminalization of shoplifting and things where stealing merchandise less than \$950 is now considered only a misdemeanor: “It has become no big deal to see someone stealing in San Francisco. Videos of crimes in process go viral fairly often. One from last year shows a group of people fleeing a Neiman Marcus with goods in broad daylight. Others show people grabbing what they can from drugstores and walking out. When a theft happens in a Walgreens or a CVS, there’s no big chase. The cashiers are blasé about it. Aisle after aisle of deodorant and shampoo are under lock and key. Press a button for the attendant to get your dish soap.”
4. And lastly, again, reflecting on Boudin, she writes: “About 60 prosecutors had left since Boudin took office—close to half of his team. Some retired or were fired, but others quit in protest. I talked with two who joined the recall campaign. One of them, a homicide prosecutor named Brooke Jenkins, told me she left in part because Boudin was pressuring some lawyers to prosecute major crimes as lesser offenses. . . . She couldn’t be part of it. ‘The victims feel hopeless,’ Jenkins told me. ‘They feel he has lost their opportunity for justice. Right now what they see and feel is that his only concern is the criminal offender.’”

D. We say we don’t like judgment, that God is mean when he comes to do so. But when we’re in trouble, judgment is actually what we long for, it’s salvation.

Example #2: The Biker Boys

A. I said I’d also give you a personal example. Well, it’s a bit silly, but it’s kind of related to what we’ve just been considering:

1. Just last Sunday, after hanging out and talking with all of you, I was the last one to leave, and when I was closing down the school and things, it was just me and the janitor, Jose, and suddenly I hear this profanity coming from the side hallway near the entrance.

2. And I walk out into the sanctuary, and there are these two boys, probably somewhere in the high school years, and they're on these big mountain bikes, and they're just riding around in here, popping wheelies, skidding in the carpet, like they don't even care.
3. And I look at Jose, and I'm like: "Do you want me to say something?" And he's nodding.
4. So I'm thinking alright, I try to use my big man voice: "Hey guys, you can't be riding your bikes in here. You can cruise around all you want in the parking lot out there, but not in here. We're closing things up." And they literally just ignore me.
5. And I'm thinking: what exactly do I do now? So I say, "Guys, I'm sorry, but you're going to have to go." Still they ignore me. And they're now circling me with their bikes, getting closer and closer.
6. So I say: "Bros, am I really going to have to physically stop your bikes and escort you outside." And then one of the kids goes: "Oh, you want to fight? You don't think we know how to fight?" And I'm saying, "No, of course I'm not going to fight, but you do need to leave." And they continue to just ignore me and ride around wherever they want.
7. And finally I'm thinking: what now? I have to call the cops. So I do, and then finally they peace out.
8. But they're still circling around when I come out, so I'm waiting to be jumped or have my car keyed or something.

B. But you see what happens?

1. If I didn't have authorities to call, how do I get them out? Brute force? Look at me! I'm scrappy, but I don't know—if they have a knife or something, or an older brother. You're left to fend for yourself.
2. You see how, authority, used to bring forth justice, it's a good thing. If I have cops I can call, cops that will judge righteously, man, if these kids didn't leave, if they got more and more rowdy, when I heard the sirens approaching off in the distance, that wouldn't be a downer, that would be great news!

Returning to Habakkuk

A. Now, why do I go into all of this? Aren't we supposed to be talking about Habakkuk? Well, if you recall, this is precisely the kind of situation Habakkuk finds himself in.

1. Remember, first of all, he's lamented to God because of the rampant evil God seems to have been permitting among his people there in Judah.
 - a. God says: "No, I'm going to judge them. I'm going to raise the Babylonians up and they're going to lay siege to the holy city, destroy the temple, and spew all the rebellious Jews out of the promised land."
2. And so Habakkuk cries out to God once more: "That's not the kind of answer I was hoping for. That's like promising to put out the fire with a bucket of gasoline. It only makes it worse. Your answer to the injustice in Judah is to use a nation even more unjust and evil to punish them? What about Babylon, then? Are you really going to side with them?!"

- a. God’s answer begins to come there in [Hab. 2:2](#) and carries on through the end of the chapter as we read. And there we see him say: “Of course I’m not going to side with the Babylonians. They too will answer for their sins. I will judge them as well. And when I do I will redeem my people, I will purify my people, I will bring them back to the land, but more than that, I will bring them back to me.”
 - i. Salvation will come. But it will come through judgment.
- B. Don’t you see, in our text, it’s this judgment of Babylon now that is ultimately good news to Habakkuk.
 - 1. He needs to know that God is going to make the wrong right in the end, that it’s not up to him to figure it out for himself, that God will be faithful to him as he puts his faith in him.
- C. Which is why by the way, when Habakkuk hears this—even though he knows the judgement of Babylon is still yet far off—because he trusts his God’s word is as good as gold, what does he do?
 - 1. He sings. [Hab. 3](#), the whole chapter, is the prophet’s song.
- D. Now, we read a quite a few verses at the beginning of this message, and this morning we’re really only going to fly over top of them. In later weeks I’ll dig us in much deeper.
 - 1. For now, I just want you to see that the landscape of this book has shifted a bit and now we’ve come to this subject of God’s judgment. The whole thing is really this promise from him that he sees what Babylon is up to and he’s going to come and hold them to account. He’s going to make it right.
 - a. So as we begin to fly over this text now, there are at least three features I want to bring your attention to. We’ll look at: (1) The Taunt Song of God’s People; (2) The Foul Engine of God’s Enemies; and (3) The Rugged Cross of God’s Son.

(1) The Taunt Song of God’s People

“Na Na Na Na Boo Boo”

- A. For this, I first want to bring your attention to the beginning part of [v. 6](#), where God says the following: “[Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him . . .](#)”
 - 1. The “[him](#)” in context here is the Babylonian enemy, the “[puffed up](#)” ones from [v. 4](#).
 - 2. And the “[all these](#)” who are taking up their taunt are God’s people, the “[righteous](#)” by faith ones from [v.4](#).
 - a. And God says: “Listen, though it may look hopeless for my people now, though Babylon may let it all go to their heads, and they think themselves unstoppable—the ultimate triumph of my people is so sure, they can taunt their enemies today, like they’re not even afraid of them, because they know how this story is going to end!”

- B. The word here translated “taunt” is *mashal* in the Hebrew, and it’s a word that refers to a song of jest or mockery.
1. I’m reminded of that childhood taunt song you’ve probably heard on the playground back in the day: “Na na na na boo boo, you can’t catch me!” It’s kind of silly, but I think that’s the idea here. Go ahead say that to the Babylonians.
- C. It’s crazy! Seen from the perspective of sheer strength and military might and things, the people of God have no chance.
1. It’s like I saw just the other day, these dogs being walked by their owners—one was huge and the other was like a little chihuahua or something.
 - a. The big guy hardly made a sound.
 - b. But the little guy was going off. Just barking and growling and pulling against his leash—like “Hold me back, you better hope this leash holds, or I’m coming for you big man. You think you’re so special.” And you want to say, “Bro, look in the mirror. You’re tiny. That pit bull would open his mouth and with one snap of his jaws, you’d be gone. You’d be breakfast. I applaud the courage but this is ridiculous.”
 - i. And that’s on the surface at least how this taunt song would appear, right? It’s like: “Who are you?!”
 - ii. But you see it’s not about who we are. It’s about who our God is. He says: “I’ve got this. So go ahead, you can be so sure in me, that you can even taunt the enemy.”

Oracles of Woe

- A. And then God gives us the words to this taunt song. And that’s what continues on from here to the end of the chapter.
1. If you noticed, the whole thing is really structured around what we might call these “oracles of woe”:
 - a. That’s where it starts there in the latter part of v. 6: “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!”
 - b. And he goes off on this for a few verses and then in v. 9, we come to another declaration of woe: “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm!”
 - c. And then again in v. 12: “Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!”
 - d. And then again in v. 15: “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink— you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness!”
 - e. And then once more in v. 19, referring to the Babylonian idolatry: “Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.”

- i. In all, there are five of these woe oracles, all linked together here, building upon each other.
 - (1) In the weeks to come, I anticipate really just considering these one at a time, but for now I simply wanted to alert you to the basic structure and development in all of this.
- B. Woe oracles are not unique to Habakkuk in the Scriptures. We find them in many other places.
 - 1. [Isa. 5](#) for example, the prophet goes off with one woe after another, in that case being declared with respect to the people of Judah in particular.
 - 2. Jesus also takes up this form of communication in places like [Luke 6:24-26](#) placed alongside the Beatitudes and [Matt. 23](#) where he calls out the Scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.
- C. And in every case, there's essentially two parts that compose these woe oracles.
 - 1. First, there's a statement of offense—God makes plain what's been done wrong.
 - 2. And then, second, there's a promise of judgment—God's going to come and make it right. He's going to reverse the fortunes, as it were.
- D. If I were to try to sum up the lesson learned in each of the five woes we see in our text, I'd put it like this:
 - 1. Woe #1 ([vv. 6-8](#)): He who would plunder others now will himself be plundered in the end.
 - 2. Woe #2 ([vv. 9-11](#)): He who would save his life now will lose it in the end.
 - 3. Woe #3 ([vv. 12-14](#)): He who would make a name for himself now will be nameless and forgotten in the end.
 - 4. Woe #4 ([vv. 15-17](#)): He who would shame others now will himself be shamed in the end.
 - 5. Woe #5 ([vv. 18-20](#)): He who would make idols for himself now will be made like them in the end.
- E. You've probably perceived there's this ironic twist in each of these, but I do wonder if you see the way they develop and build off of one another.
 - 1. So in the first case it's: get me money, let me amass more, I don't care if I get it unjustly.
 - 2. Then in the second case we see they wanted more so they can build their empire and find stability and security.
 - 3. Then in the third we realize they are after more than just security in all of this: they are trying to make a name for themselves, a legacy.
 - 4. Then in the fourth we see that, as is typical: if you want to make yourself look good and honorable, you have to shame others and cut them down. You compare and compete. You expose. You embarrass.
 - 5. And finally we see that all this has been built upon false worship, idolatry.
- F. And God's going to bring judgment for all this injustice, oppression, and spiritual rebellion. And he encourages his people: "Don't be afraid of Babylon, don't worry about their apparent power and success, I will make it right in the end."

G. But I wonder: do you have a Babylon? Have you been wronged, wounded, crushed to the core by someone else's sin.?

1. Listen: God sees, and he's going to do something about it.

a. I don't know if I'd tell you to go around taunting the other person, but you get the underlying truth in all of this: ultimate triumph will always go to God and his people. Don't worry. He's got you.

(2) The Foul Engine of God's Enemies

Emptiness and Arrogance

A. At this point I wanted to press in a little bit more to consider what's driving the Babylonians here. What's the engine that keeps all this in motion for them?

1. Because I think it's easy for us to, at first at least, think that they're somehow these monsters to whom we can't relate.

a. These brutes murder and rape and pillage and burn cities to the ground and bow down to idols and things.

b. What could be further from us here in civilized Silicon Valley, in church, doing good, religious things?

i. But, it's a bit sobering, when we actually get inside the machinery, when we actually investigate the engine that's driving all of this, we realize that, in many ways, we're just like them.

B. Let me show you what I mean. Look back up at v. 5. This is where we're told what's underneath all this Babylonian activity.

1. Admittedly, it's a tricky verse to translate and interpret, but there are just two things I wanted to bring out here: "Moreover, wine [or some mss 'wealth'] is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

C. Two things I want you to see:

1. First, emptiness. "His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough." There's this feeling in the heart of these people of emptiness. There's this longing to be filled. There's unrealized desire. There's this hole and we want it filled.

2. But then, second, there's not just emptiness, there's also arrogance. You see there this reference to "an arrogant man who is never at rest." Or back up in v. 4, we were told "his soul is puffed up."

- a. The two ideas come together here like this: “I know I’m empty and in need, but I don’t want to go to God. I want to do it in my way, on my terms, in my time.”
 - i. Hence, the foul engine that keeps this train barreling on. Because you keep looking and trying and grasping for something, and you get more and more desperate, and you never really find it.

(1) Emptiness and arrogance

D. Can anyone relate? Who doesn’t, right?

1. We feel empty, we want satisfaction, pleasure, fullness, and we don’t want to wait for God. We’ve got it.
2. We don’t try to get it by burning down cities and building empires and stuff, but we do our own destructive things don’t we?
 - a. We burn through relationships trying to find someone that might fill the hole.
 - b. We move from job to job thinking if we just get the right position we won’t feel so empty.
 - c. We cut corners to get money to get stuff to get what we think will bring us security, status, satisfaction, joy.
 - d. We do this even with religion.
 - i. You realize that’s what the Pharisees were doing right? They knew they were empty. They even knew they needed God in some sense. But they were still arrogant. They didn’t think they were that bad and needed forgiveness and regeneration. “I can clean myself up. I can climb that ladder. I can do it myself.”

(1) This is why all those woes in [Matt. 23](#) and [Isa. 5](#) were delivered against, not the worldly, pagan Gentiles, but against religious people.

The Dilemma

A. We all do this, even the best of us.

1. And so here’s the dilemma: these woes delivered to the Babylonians in our text, if we’re not all that different from them at the heart of it, what’s to say they’re not also for us?

B. It’s like the realization Isaiah came to. I’ve mentioned this before, but [Isa. 5](#) gives way to [Isa. 6](#).

1. In [Isa. 5](#), he’s got some swagger, doesn’t he? “Woe to you. Woe to you. Woe to you. How could you? Look at you? Woe to you!”
2. But then in [Isa. 6](#), he’s given this vision of the glory of the Lord, sitting on his throne, with all the angels around crying out: “[Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts](#)” (v. 3).

- a. And Isaiah sees all of this and then he sees himself in light of it, and it's no longer "Woe to you" . . . it's: "Woe is me—I'm unclean!": "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (v. 5).
- C. And so, again, we're left with this dilemma: how can I call on God to come in judgement of all his enemies if I myself am, by virtue of my own sin, one of his enemies as well?!
- 1. How naïve, how ignorant to think that God's coming judgment would mean ultimate salvation for me. It would be my undoing. It's not good news. It's not something to wait for, like Habakkuk here. It's something to run from.
 - a. For me to hope in God's coming judgment would be like calling the cops on someone trying to break into a car you yourself actually stole from someone else. It's not a good idea. You're going to implicate yourself in the process.
 - b. If you're a kid, it would be like trying to tell on your sibling for something they're doing with the TV, while your hand is in the cookie jar. Daddy comes in and you both are in trouble.
- D. So how does this work? How do I get on the right side of things? How can we say that God's judgment is a part of the good news?

(3) The Rugged Cross of God's Son

- A. The answer to our dilemma is pictured there in Isaiah. You imagine the prophet in a similar place. "I'm a man of unclean lips. I deserve to be judged by this holy God, not saved."
- 1. So what does God do? Drop the hammer on him then and there? No.
 - 2. "⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for'" (Isa. 6:6–7).
 - a. An angel takes a coal from the altar, presumably the altar of sacrifice, the altar where God said something else would be judged in your place, killed in your place, and through that there is atonement and forgiveness. He pours out his wrath on a substitute, not you.
 - i. Hence, his justice is satisfied, and his mercy is extended, at one and the same time.
- B. And, of course, this is a foretaste of what ultimately comes for us in Jesus with that rugged cross.
- 1. He's what the altar of sacrifice was anticipating.
 - 2. He's the one through whom we have true atonement and forgiveness of sins.
 - 3. Because he's the one who, though spotless and perfectly righteous, is judged by God in our place.

- a. He gets the judgment in wrath so that we get the salvation in grace.
- C. When they were tying him up in Gethsemane, when they were driving him towards Calvary's hill, he could have called the cops. He tells Peter, "I could ask my Father to dispense legions of angels right now and all you evildoers would be destroyed."
- 1. But he doesn't call for his Father's just wrath to be poured out against us. Instead, he lets it be poured out upon him. He throws himself in between!
- D. The only reason the coming judgment of God is good news for us is because Jesus has already taken the punishment we deserved at the cross.
- 1. It's as the author of Hebrews says: "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28).
 - a. So have you humbled yourself and placed your faith in him? Salvation, and satisfaction, is truly found nowhere else!