

Jesus: Angry Executioner or Baby of Bethlehem?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | December 25, 2009



Last weekend our class started the lesson guide for the new year, *The Fruit of the Spirit*. I was so shocked by one paragraph, from Thursday, December 31, that I had to blog about it. Here is the paragraph:

Between 1730 and 1745 the American colonies from Maine to Georgia experienced a religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards was a leader in this movement of spiritual renewal. In July of 1741 he preached a sermon entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which for some has become a symbol of the bleak, cruel, and hell-bent outlook of many Christians. However polemical, **this sermon did express the truth about the awful weight of sin, the attitude of an infinitely holy God toward sin, and the surety of the day of judgment.** [emphasis mine].

In case you are not familiar with the specific sermon cited above, here is an excerpt from Jonathan Edwards Sermon preached July 8, 1741:

Consider this, you that are here present, that yet remain in an unregenerate state. That God will

execute the fierceness of his anger, implies, that he will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds the ineffable extremity of your case, and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportioned to your strength, and sees how your poor soul is crushed, and sinks down, as it were, into an infinite gloom; he will have no compassion upon you, he will not forbear the executions of his wrath, or in the least lighten his hand; there shall be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay his rough wind; he will have no regard to your welfare, nor be at all careful lest you should suffer too much in any other sense, than only that you shall not suffer beyond what strict justice requires.

The misery you are exposed to is that which God will inflict to that end, that he might show what that wrath of Jehovah is.

It is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long for ever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite.

Do you find this sermon presents the “truth about the awful weight of sin, the attitude of an infinitely holy God toward sin, and the surety of a day of judgment”?

Let’s consider another Christian writer and speaker who came about 100 years after Jonathan Edwards. Below is Ellen White’s perspective on sin and God and judgment:

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. **By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death.** {1SM 235.2} [emphasis mine]

Does this sound like the same God that Jonathan Edwards was describing?

Jonathan Edwards describes a universe in which God is angry, wrathful, without mercy or pity and inflicts pain and immeasurable suffering upon His creatures. It is absolutely mind boggling that our Study Guide would quote such a grossly distorted representation of God as a “source of truth” about Him.

The Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death and sin, if unremedied results in death (Romans 6:23, James 1:15). But Jonathan Edwards describes an existence in which God is the source of death, the cause of suffering, the inflictor of torment. Nothing could be further from the truth. Satan is the father of lies and his primary lies are about God. If we believe Satan’s lies about God then we distrust God, fear Him and remain separated from Him.

Christmas is a time to remember God who became human. One of the reasons Christ came as a baby

was to refute such twisted ideas about God. After all who is afraid of a baby? Imagine for a moment that you are one of the wise men who came to worship Jesus shortly after His birth and Mary puts the little infant in your arms. Imagine holding Him, the King of the Universe, a baby. He grasps your hand and looks into your eyes as you rock Him in your arms. What do you experience? Fear? Far from it,. Your heart melts in absolute love and trust for the God who loves so much He is willing to become a baby, trusting His life to us!

This Christmas see God for who He is in the face of Jesus - One altogether lovely and completely trustworthy! In that knowledge have a truly Merry Christmas!