

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

In my past, I've heard people say, "The God of the Old Testament is sure different than Jesus!" They read the Old Testament, and see God carry out His wrath on sinful man, and they think, "God has changed!" or "I know that God is love, because I've seen that love in Jesus. How can a loving God send His angels to destroy thousands of people?"

If we're not careful with God's word, we can fall into the trap of thinking that **God's love** is only the **sacrificial kind of love**; the love that is willing to give up one's life for another. That's truly God's special love for us! But is that all there is to God? Is He that one-dimensional?

It turns out that God is a God of love **and** justice. From Psalm 33, we read, "[The Lord] loves righteousness and **justice**." Again in Psalm 101, we read, "I will sing of steadfast love and **justice**; to you, O LORD, I will make music." The **theme of God's justice** is a major theme of the Old Testament. God created man to be holy and righteous, in the image of the Creator. Man falls into sin, and God's wrath is kindled against man. But that's not the end of the story (it could have been, had God simply destroyed mankind). God, who loves us and wants what's best for us, instead, promises a savior for mankind (see Genesis 3:15). All who trust in God's promise to deliver them from sin and death, through God's chosen savior, the Messiah, will **not** be condemned, but will live forever. Through faith in this Christ, **God's wrath toward man** is abated (read Hebrews chapter 11 if you want to see how God worked through faith in Old Testament times).

**Rejection of God's promise has always incurred God's wrath.** Read the story of Jonah, in the Old Testament. Notice what Jonah was told by God to do: Go to the enemy, the Assyrians, and tell them that their end was coming. God is giving them their final warning! Notice their reaction to God's warning: They repent of their sin, and acknowledge the God of Israel as Lord! And God's anger toward them is abated! **God does not enjoy the destruction of His creation – especially man – but He is faithful to His Law.** Only those declared "not guilty" by their faith in the Christ (who paid for the sins of all) would be spared.

**Isn't Jesus exactly like this?** Of course, Jesus is the promised savior that generations had been waiting for. But Jesus doesn't bypass the sins of man, as if they don't matter to Him. On the contrary, Jesus is all about warning the people to repent and believe. Read Jesus' own words in Matthew chapter 25:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....<sup>41</sup>' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" (ESV)*

Of course, through Baptism, we have been brought into His Kingdom. But sin didn't end with our adoption into God's family. Sin continues to separate us from God – placing a barrier between us and Him. So **God disciplines us for our own good**. We receive afflictions, suffer persecutions, undergo trials of every sort – and our loving God uses these trials and afflictions to strengthen us and make us more dependent upon Him! **That's tough love!** We don't suffer God's wrath, because Jesus has taken upon Himself the wrath of the Father, when He died on the cross for us. (However, unbelievers are still subject to God's wrath for their rejection of the free gift of salvation, found only in Christ Jesus).

So when someone says that they don't like the Old Testament because God is so harsh and uncaring, remind them that **Jesus is the God of the Old Testament**. Jesus never made light of sin. Instead, He warned of the coming judgment on sinners who refuse to believe in Him. And God continues to call us to repentance and faith, so that one day, we may stand on His right, as He calls us into our eternal home.

Pastor Travis