

The Wounds of God

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part IX

Romans 10:21

Introduction

In the first century, the gods of the Romans were brutal, unfeeling, manipulative, and calloused. They did not really like human beings all that much either!

One of the chief Roman gods was Mars – the god of war. In appearance, he was handsome, yet he was vindictive and cruel toward humanity. At one point, he was almost killed by another god when they got into a fight. In that battle, he was captured and stuffed into a jar by two giants. When he appealed to his father, Zeus, for help, dear ole’ Dad was too busy throwing people off Mount Olympus and sending lightning to strike other gods, to bother. Well, Mars escaped nonetheless, and continued his bloodthirsty antics. He was usually depicted carrying a bloodstained spear, and his throne on Mount Olympus was said to be covered in human skin.

This past summer, I visited a museum in England where there were relics, dating back to the time of Paul, that had been discovered in ancient Roman temples. People had written notes to their gods on pieces of ceramic or stone. I saw the actual notes, from the first century and earlier, where people asked their favorite gods to do all sorts of cruel things to their enemies.

One man requested that his god take the life of his enemy. A woman wrote on a tablet, requesting that her god blind the person who had stolen her jewelry. Another man requested that his god curse all of the efforts of his business competitor.

It is little wonder that the Romans knew nothing of love from their gods, or ever hoped to receive mercy from them. The idea of a patient, loving,

caring god was foreign to them. There was no such thing as love from the gods, or love for the gods. If you got in the way of Zeus and his father before him, you would simply be swallowed . . . or worse.

The apostle Paul eventually stood in Athens, the city by Mount Olympus, the home of the gods, surrounded by temples and statues of gods and goddesses. He remarked about the image they had constructed “to an unknown god”. (Acts 17:22-23)

Six hundred years before Paul’s visit, history recorded that Athens had been overwhelmed with a terrible plague. Hundreds were dying and the city was desperate for a cure. It was assumed that the gods were angry with them – they just did not know which gods were angry.

So the people of Athens devised a plan to pacify the gods that were causing the plague. They let loose a flock of unblemished sheep. The plan was to let the sheep roam the city freely and when any of them lay down, it was to be sacrificed on that very spot to the god of the nearest temple.

The assumption was that the angry gods would actually draw the sheep to themselves. However, when the sheep were turned loose, some of them lay down in places with no temple nearby. The people did not know what to do, so in order to cover all of their religious bases, they sacrificed the sheep, built a monument in that place, and simply named it, “to an unknown god”.

Imagine the irony! Paul would deliver the gospel of Jesus Christ – the physical manifestation of immortal God – who came, not to swallow His enemies, but to voluntarily die for the sins of the

whole world (I John 2:2). He was the physical manifestation of God, who was called the unblemished Lamb.

Imagine that! The only true and living God came in order to be wounded. The gods of the Greeks and Romans did not have wounds – certainly not from mankind!

The true and living God came to be wounded for our transgressions, and by His stripes we are healed. Imagine that – the true and living God has wounds! For us, He was willing to be wounded!

That is the kind of portrait Paul paints of God. And you can easily see that picture of God in Romans, chapter 10, verse 21. It is a portrait of God that not only defies the world’s concept of what God must be like, but encourages the heart of you who believe. God was wounded for you! Look at that verse.

But as for Israel He says, “All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”

There are actually two portraits in this verse. They include:

- a portrait of a patient God;
- a portrait of a defiant nation.

Portrait of a Patient God

Notice, first and foremost, the portrait of a patient God. As you study this particular portrait of God, there are two very dominant themes; two bold colors arrest your attention.

Persistent invitation

1. The first thing that catches your eye is this picture of God, is His persistent invitation.

Paul begins quoting Isaiah, who quotes the Lord,

But as for Israel He says, “All the day long I have stretched out My hands . . .”

When you have waited for something a long time, you tend to use that expression, “all day long”. For example:

- “I’ve been waiting all day long for you to show up.”
- “I’ve been waiting all day long for the phone to ring.”
- “I stood in line all day long.”

We are usually exaggerating, aren’t we?!

God is not exaggerating. In fact, if anything, He is doing the opposite.

“All day long.” How long is that?

Travel back several centuries to the time of Moses, and watch as God patiently invites His people to follow Him, only to have them gripe and complain and rebel over and over again.

Go back even further to the times of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and watch while God waits for His chosen ones to trust and follow Him.

Travel back even further, all the way back to the beginning of human history, when God asks, “Adam, where are you?”

In other words, “I’m waiting . . .”

Do you want a picture of God? It is with His hands out in persistent invitation to mankind.

Personal involvement

2. There is another dominant theme in this portrait. Not only is there the persistent invitation from God, but there is the personal involvement of God.

When we, as humans, become successful, we prove it by having people do our bidding; serve our needs. We send a cadre of people to run our errands, answer our calls, write our letters, arrange our schedules. The more successful we are, the more people we have to do our bidding.

I remember as a seminary student, running errands for a very successful commercial real-estate company. The president and founder of the company was very wealthy. I will never forget the day I discovered that he never had to go to the clothing store. He never went to buy his own clothes; he had someone come to his office with fabric samples and tape measures. They measured him, took down his ideas and desires, and then left to meet with the tailors to design his suits, shirts, and even his belts. Someone took care of all of that for him. He never had to go to the store, someone went for him. There was no doubt – he was somebody!

But wait a second, God is the ultimate Somebody! Surely someone will do His bidding for Him!

Would you notice the personal pronouns of this text,

. . . ***I have stretched out My hands . . .***

I . . . My hands.”

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory . . .

As John, chapter 1, verse 14, tells us – He came personally!

He Himself, according to Luke, chapter 19, verse 10,

. . . came to seek and to save that which was lost.

We are told in Revelation, chapter 3, verse 20,
Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . .

Even in this errand, Christ could have sent someone else to invite the wayward church to fellowship. But even in this, our Lord is portrayed as the One doing the knocking.

Salvation and fellowship comes from the personal invitation and personal involvement of God.

. . . All the day long I have stretched out My hands . . .

Hands represent labor and effort and strength and purpose. If you trust in your own labor and good works and strength and purpose, you will go to hell. If you come to the hands of Christ and trust in His labor and His perfect work and His strength, you will go to heaven.

The *News and Observer* ran an article a couple of months ago that, had I not spent time overseas observing the superstition of world religions, I would have had a hard time believing. Tens of thousands of people lined up on a Thursday in Hong Kong, to see one of Buddha's fingers. It was on loan from China for ten days. Although the people were herded past in a hurry, many people said the relic offered Hong Kong fresh hope of peace and calm.

It had been flown in on Wednesday for a temporary display as locals were celebrating Buddha's birthday. Several hundred thousand people paid their respects. Saffron-robed Buddhist monks chanted prayers as visitors quickly filed past the finger, being shown with three giant golden Buddha statues as a backdrop.

Chiu Dan-yin said to a reporter, "I hope the relic can help people become happier."

Seventy year old Margaret Luk's eyes welled with tears after spending a few moments gazing at the bone fragment, encased in bulletproof glass. She said, "I think this finger will protect me through the pains of life."¹

Whose hands are you trusting today?

When I read this invitation of God to Israel, which was first given in Isaiah, I could not help but fast-forward the tape. We can fast-forward from Isaiah, chapter 65, to Matthew, chapter 27, where Jesus Christ will indeed stretch out His hands on the cross – stretch them out to then be nailed there. And even in His dying, His arms are spread out as if to say, "Whosoever will may come . . . come to Me and I will never cast you out!"

What a beautiful picture of God,
. . . All the day long I have stretched out My hands . . .

This is a portrait that is made even more beautiful by its contrast to the second portrait that Paul paints. This first portrait is of a patient, persistent God.

Portrait of a Defiant Nation

Secondly, Paul reveals to us the portrait of a defiant nation.

Paul continues in this text to quote,

. . . I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.

There are again, two dominant themes.

Disobedience

1. The first is the theme of disobedience!

. . . I stretched out My hands to a disobedient . . . people.

The Greek word translated "disobedient" refers to someone spurning belief. They simply refuse to believe.

It is interesting that the New Testament translates the same word as "disobey" and "disbelieve". They are interchangeable truths.

Paul calls the world of unbelievers, "sons of disobedience."

Unbelief is tantamount to disobedience.

In Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 6, Paul warns the believer,

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

So God is seen here, stretching His hands out toward a disobedient people – a nation that refuses to believe – and to this day, refuses at large, to believe. They simply turned a blind eye to the evidence that God provided.

Imagine the shocking nature of this piece of evidence. When Jesus Christ was crucified, God the Father did something that should have profoundly shaken every Jew who heard the news. You may remember that as soon as Jesus uttered His last words, Mark recorded, in chapter 15, verses 37 and 38,

... Jesus ... breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

This was the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. For centuries, the holy of holies (the most holy place) was barred to everyone but the high priest. No one had access to the presence of God. Now, however, the veil has been ripped apart. Starting at the top, it was torn to the bottom. It was perhaps as high as twenty-eight cubits or forty-eight feet high. No man could have done such a thing, unless he had some scaffolding or ladders.

We are also told that this was at the very moment of the evening sacrifices. Can you imagine the sight and the sound of that veil tearing apart?!

This signified access into the holy of holies! All believers are now priests (I Peter 2:9), with direct access into the holy presence of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19).

What would you have done?

“Wow! Look at that! What are we gonna do?!”

“I know, let’s sew it back together and pretend it didn’t happen! We like our religion . . . don’t mess it up. Somebody get some blue thread!”

That is exactly what they did. They sewed it back together and went on with their sacrifices and their rituals and their religion.

... All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient . . . people.

It gets worse, however.

Obstinance

2. The second theme is the theme of obstinance!

... I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.

The word “obstinate” is “anti-legontia,” or literally, “anti-speaking”. In other words, the unbeliever does not just disbelieve in Jesus Christ, he speaks against Him.

The late nineteenth century philosopher Nietzsche profoundly influenced the western world. He wrote, “I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion, the one great instinct of revenge . . . Christianity is the one immortal blemish on mankind.”

Nietzsche was followed by other atheists; such as, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, who believed religion was a mere fantasy of man’s creation.ⁱⁱ

A recent issue of *Time Magazine* devoted several pages to Dean Hamer, a molecular biologist at the National Cancer Institute. Hamer has written a new book called, *The God Gene*, which postulates that our most profound feelings of spirituality may be due to little more than an occasional shot of intoxicating brain chemicals governed by our DNA. God, he concludes, is an artifact of our evolved brains.ⁱⁱⁱ

Why is man so intensely interested in denigrating God? Why not just not believe in God and go on to something else?

Paul answers by saying that the human heart is not only disobedient to God, but obstinate – it must give anti-God speech.

Why doesn’t someone produce a movie that Buddha was really a homosexual? Or that he never meant to teach the way to enlightenment . . . he was mistaken . . . he was just a good moral teacher?

Why is Jesus Christ’s name the name used in cursing? Have you ever heard anyone hit their thumb with a hammer and say, “Oh Buddha, that hurts!” Or, “Oh, Confucius . . .” Or “Krishna!”

No, it is Jesus Christ this and Jesus Christ that.

If I were God, I would do something about it!

He did,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son [“ monogenes,” His only unique Son], that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

... All the day long, I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.

This does not only apply to the nation Israel, which is the specific people group in mind. They rejected the Messiah; so does the world of Gentiles.

Israel refused to believe – so does the world. Israel speaks against Christ – so does the world.

The amazing news is this – God is still holding out His hands; they have not yet dropped to His sides! The invitation is still open for you.

Invitations From God Today

I have thought of several different kinds of invitations that God would be extending today – several applications of this universal invitation to Jew and Gentile alike.

To those who are tired of living up to religion

1. First, God is holding out His hands toward those who are tired of living up to religion.

Jesus Christ once said, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 11, verse 28,

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

In other words, you who are weary of the heavy yoke of religion; the heavy demand of ritual; the heavy burden of trying to do more good works than bad works – hoping against hope that the mountain of your good deeds will block God’s view of your sin.

The gospel is an invitation, not to requirements and regulations and religious rituals, but to a relationship that is personal.

For those of you who are tired of living up to your religion, His hands are held out. And remember, they are held out to disobedient people; obstinate people. His hands are held out to sinners.

To those who are tired of running away in rebellion

2. Secondly, God is holding out His hands toward those who are tired of, not only living up to religion, but running away in rebellion.

He offers the obstinate and rebellious renegades a peace treaty – it is in the form of a wooden cross.

The same prophet quoted by Paul in Romans, chapter 10, also quotes God giving you His personal invitation. Isaiah, in chapter 1, verse 18, quotes,

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins are as scarlet [permanently stained], they will be [I will wash them] as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”

We had some unexpected guests the other day, traveling from another state, and they had five wonderful children. We had a great time of fellowship. Just as we were saying, “Goodbye,” one of their little guys ran inside and into the living room. We have white carpet in the living room. He had red clay on one of his tennis shoes. We now have a

permanent reminder of their visit. It is the slightest brownish/orange tint. You would never know it was there, if you did not know where to look. I know – because I tried everything to get it out. I could not get it completely out.

God says, “Do you have permanent reminders of the past; permanent blots on your record? Let Me take care of that.”

He says, “I will turn the condition of your heart to that of fresh fallen snow; I will renew crimson stains as new white wool.”

No matter what you have done; no matter how weighted your past is with sin; no matter how heavy the load, He stands before you like He did before Thomas, and He says, “See My hands!”

In other words, “I have been wounded for you, and I have chosen to retain these wounds as eternal reminders of My love for you.”

My friend, with a God like that – a God with hands like that – can you do anything less than fall at His feet and say, “My Lord and my God!”?

To those who are tired of serving out of their own resources

3. Thirdly, He is holding out His hands toward the believer who is tired of serving out of his own resources.

The hand of God not only redeems, but it refreshes, reinvigorates, and redirects.

Is this invitation not for us, too?!

Believers can be obstinate, can’t they? Not you – the person next to you!

It is in the heart of all of us to talk back to God. It is in the nature of us all to wander away on our own.

One of my favorite hymns is a prayer that reminds me to return to the hand of God – the strength and purpose of God. William Williams, a Welch preacher and friend of George Whitefield and the Wesleys, wrote these words in his hymn, *Guide Me, Oh Thou Great Jehovah*,

*Guide me, Oh Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land,
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.*

Oh how I thank my God that all day long He holds out His hands to a rebellious and obstinate people.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/24/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ News and Observer (May 28, 2004).

ⁱⁱ World Magazine (May/June, 2002).

ⁱⁱⁱ Time Magazine (Oct. 25, 2004).