

An Outrageous Fortune

22 September 2011

*Laced with tones of sarcasm are the words of Wilbur Rees: “I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don’t want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb not a new birth. I want a pound of the *Eternal* in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God please.”*

Sadly, many people in the world may have a view of God similar to that. They may want just enough of God to feel good...or they may want God to come and go at their bidding like Batman, Wonder Woman, or Superman. Perhaps they want God to keep a low profile like Clark Kent and when the alarm sounds and terrorists attack—as they did back on September 11, 2001—they want him to leap into action and save people. And then have the decency to disappear until he’s needed again—his real identity known to only a few people—not an intrusive god, but a god they create!

- God defines Himself; He is the Creator! Genesis 1:1 “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” He created all the people in the world and he planned for us to have *relationship* with him and to bring him the glory that is *so* due him. Sin, however, separated us from God...and so, God sent his only beloved Son to this earth to live and then die for the sins of the world—the sins of every person. When we accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, then, and only then, are we reconciled to Holy God. J. I. Packer was right when he said that **to be a Christian is an outrageous fortune!**

These two words—outrageous and fortune—used together may surprise us—they don’t appear to go together under any circumstances. *Webster* defines: OUTRAGEOUS as **extremely offensive, insulting, shameful and shocking** (Jeremiah 29:23 “*For they have done outrageous things in Israel;*”), and *FORTUNE* as **prosperity attained through chance**.

There’s the matter of *SIN*—which is extremely offensive, insulting, shameful and shocking to God Almighty. And then there is the fortune for us that God’s love made a way to pay for our sins. So it is **God’s severity** in dealing with *sin* juxtaposed to the fortune of **God’s love**—undeserved—toward us, not by chance, but by God’s great design!

• **An outrageous fortune is God’s severity up against God’s love** and what that means for us. God’s severity toward the outrage of sin is on one side and God’s love for his creation is on the other. Pastor, and author of *A Love Worth Giving*, Max Lucado, simply says, “The cost of your sins is more than you can pay. The gift of your God is more than you can imagine.”

I. God’s severity—Why is the cost of our sins more than we can pay? **First, sin is outrageous to God!** And His severity in punishing sin is perhaps shocking to us. **Punishment for sin always was and is God’s plan.** God is the supreme lawgiver, judge and executioner. He has committed himself to judge the world. There are more references in the Bible to God’s anger, fury and wrath toward sin than on his love for sinners. The Bible labors the point that just as God is good to those who trust in him, so he is terrible to those who do not. He will by no means clear the guilty. As God’s love and our love differ, so God’s wrath differs from ours. His is *righteous!*

It will help us to understand that **no one stands under the wrath of God except those who have chosen to do so.** Example in Genesis chapter 3: We see that Adam and Eve, after they’d sinned, **had already chosen to hide from God, and keep clear of his presence,** before God drove them from the garden. Our sin separates us from God and from wanting to be in his presence. This same principle applies throughout the Bible and even today.

As sad as it is to think about, people are in hell—separated from God for eternity—because they made a **willful choice** to bypass and reject God’s terms for sins’ payment. They rejected God’s plan for salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and **chose** to be out of God’s presence for eternity.

Example in Luke 16:19-31:

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

*“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and **send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.**’*

Skipping to verse 26, Abraham answered the rich man:

*“‘And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He (the rich man) answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, **send Lazarus to***

my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'"

The rich man was in hell by **choice**, because he'd **chosen** to reject God's plan for his sins to be dealt with, and had **chosen** to be separated from God—not to be in His presence. How do we know this? Notice that while he did make two requests, he did not ask for mercy and forgiveness of his sins—a **chance to change his choice**—so that he could be reconciled to God and be with Him in heaven. Of course, that would have been just as impossible as Lazarus coming to him or going back to earth to preach to his brothers, but **the rich man didn't ask. He had made his choice!**

Regret is not repentance! Peter verbally denied the Lord Jesus and was repentant—receiving forgiveness. Judas Iscariot denied the Lord Jesus with thirty pieces of silver and, when regret set in, he took his own life rather than receive forgiveness from Jesus and relationship with God.

- My daughter Stephanie gave me an example she'd heard about a woman leaving a store with her cart full of groceries without paying. Once she was outside the store with the cart, she was a thief—a criminal—and there would be nothing she could do when apprehended. **She had made her choice to steal, and her regret would only be the result of being caught.** An apology wouldn't get her cleared. Saying that she hadn't meant to do it wouldn't change a thing. Even trying to run the cart back into the store would not undo **her decision to steal**. She would have to pay the price of a thief! When we leave this life as an unrepentant sinner—rejecting Christ's payment for our sins—our choice is sealed and becomes **our final answer!**

Everybody seems to want to go to heaven—as they envision it—but not everyone wants to be in the presence of God for eternity. If they have had no desire to come to Jesus in repentance and be reconciled to God the Father on this earth, then there is nothing which would cause them to want to forever be in his presence without his forgiveness—if that were possible, which it's not. They don't want to be in hell, but they do not want to be with God!

- **Second**, to the outrageousness of our sin and God's severity toward it, is to realize what an **extremely offensive, insulting, shameful and shocking outrage** was borne by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross in order that you and I might experience relationship with the Father and a home in heaven with him. God is not a game-show host calling out to people saying, "Let's make a deal". He is the Almighty, Everlasting God seated on His royal throne pointing to his Son, Jesus Christ, and proclaiming, "This is the deal!"

Jesus says in John 14:6 *“I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Jesus is the one and only way to a relationship with God, the Father, and to the eternal kingdom God has established in heaven.

1 John 2:2 *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”* Isaiah records about Jesus, *“He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”*

Romans 8:3-4: *“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.** And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”*

Before we begin to feel that some don't have the opportunity to make the right **choice**, remember that God has four powerful witnesses operating in the world to draw people to himself. They are:

1. Creation (God's handiwork and majesty)
2. Bible—the Word of God (Jesus: *“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”*)
3. Holy Spirit—in the world: John 16:7 *“He will convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.”*
4. Believers—the Holy Spirit dwelling in us authenticates our witness.

C. S. Lewis: *“If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon.”*

II. God's love—Why is the gift of our God more than we can imagine?

Beth Moore on God: *“God is huge. He is awesome, indeed terrifying. He is powerful. He holds all the keys to life and death, ecstasy and agony. Our futures are entirely in His hands. He is sovereign, and He answers to no one. He holds the oceans in the palm of His hands. The lightning checks in with Him. But for His mercy we would all be consumed. He is Holy and does not wink at wickedness. He lifts up and He casts down. He makes the mind and can break the mind. When He rises from His throne, His enemies scatter. He has no equal. He is complete, pure, unadulterated *otherness*.... We must never take lightly all that is involved in our redemption and restoration. If we do, we will have to deal with the Creator of the universe.”*

Ephesians 1:7-8 *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”*

And by him we inherit the riches and wealth of God beyond measure. Philippians 4:19 “*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*” Max Lucado calls it *credit where credit is not due!*

Choose the gift of God—*the fortune*. The gift received is eternal life and an abundant and blessed life on this earth—a life that counts! 2 Corinthians 9:15 “*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.*” Packer says,

“My **grace**, says God, shall be yours to pardon you, and my **power** shall be yours to protect you.

My **wisdom** shall be yours to direct you, and my **goodness** shall be yours to relieve you, and my **mercy** shall be yours to supply you, and my **glory** shall be yours to crown you.

“Living becomes an awesome business when you realize that you spend every moment of your life in the sight and company of an omniscient, omnipresent Creator.”

Romans 8:1-2: “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*”

Max asks, “Would you do what Jesus did? He swapped a spotless castle for a grimy stable...He could hold the universe in his palm but gave it up to float in the womb of a maiden. If you were God, would you sleep on straw, nurse from a breast, and be clothed in a diaper? I wouldn’t, but Christ did. If you knew that only a few would care that you came, would you still come?”

“Jesus always knocks before entering. He doesn’t have to. He owns your heart. If anyone has the right to barge in, Christ does. But he doesn’t. That gentle tap you hear? It’s Christ. ‘Here I am!’ He says, ‘I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in....’”

When we accept Christ’s payment for our sins, we receive a fortunate destiny and destination. He waits for us to invite him in, and receive his outrageous fortune!