

“Our Jealous God; A Christmas Gift”

When we think of the character of God, we rarely think of God being a jealous God. At one time the people of Israel couldn't imagine the Messiah in the way that Jesus came either. Jesus came in the flesh as a baby, helpless and plain and not as a conqueror of Rome. And yet 700 years prior Isaiah describes a virgin giving birth to a son in Isaiah 7:14. It is said that this is the passage that inspired Jerome to label the book of Isaiah as the fifth Gospel. 700 years prior to Jesus' incarnation, Isaiah 53 also speaks of a Messiah as despised and rejected by men, pierced for our transgressions. The Lord reveals Himself through the prophets and in these last days by His son. Yet, so many people didn't see it coming. Likewise, when we think of God as a Jealous God, we rarely include Jealousy in our list of things we love about God. We certainly think of mercy and grace but rarely jealousy. Yet, on many occasions the Lord refers to Himself as a jealous God. Deuteronomy 4:24; “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” Exodus 20:5 “I the Lord am a jealous God.” There are many.

Why bring it up then? Within God's jealousy is the passion for His creation and for our salvation. Before we go any farther let us first clarify that jealousy and envy are not the same. They routinely get confused. Envy longs to have what it does not already possess. Envy can quickly turn into coveting as was the case with David and Bathsheba 2 Samuel 11 or the events surrounding Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21. Coveting is not something of God and is condemned in the 9th and 10th commandments. On the other hand, Jealousy is a desire to protect and savor what one already has. God's jealousy is a strong and passionate desire to keep us from idols, essentially being lost to him in unbelief and idolatry as was the case with Israel. God's jealousy wants us to be with Jesus in the Father's House for all eternity (John 14:1-3).

To be sure, God's jealousy indicates that we matter to the Lord. Our relationship with Him matters which also means that our salvation matters to Him. If a wife's husband committed adultery with another woman jealousy would naturally cause her to be angry, hurt, and call him out on it. So why be surprised when God calls out our sin and commands us to repent. Deuteronomy 32:16 tells us, “The Israelites made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols.” 2 Timothy 3 speaks about the end times and warns us to stay away. “²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” God calls out sin because He doesn't want us to be lost to sin. What kind of Savior would Jesus be if He was indifferent about us or about our salvation? What kind of marriage would it be if a spouse was indifferent toward the other? Where would the relationship be? To be jealous is to have a moral perception. It is to love and be loved.

God's jealousy is also different than a sinful jealousy. God's aim is to protect and save. Sinful jealousy seeks to exploit and smother. God's jealousy is based on love and righteousness where as sinful jealousy is self-centered and often turns into destructive anger. God's anger is connected to holiness. His jealousy desires to make us holy and in holy living draw into a deeper relationship with the Lord.

What then is the response? J.I. Packer in his book on Knowing God speaks about Jealousy in chapter 17. The natural response to God's jealousy is zeal he writes. Zeal is where the challenge is for us. Zeal is to pursue the Lord with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Rarely, does anyone truly reach the depths of this verse. We are often too distracted by pursuits, worries, and being consumed by what's on Netflix. Yet, this is the desire because this gives us the best of grace for eternity.

We see in Jesus what it means to be zealous. Jesus was of one will with the Father. He wanted what the Father wanted. A relationship on the same path brings one closer to the others. Jesus prayed in John 17 that we may be one with each other and with Jesus in this mindset. Jesus also loved what the Father loved even to the point of the cross (Philippians 2). We also saw how Jesus also hated sin. In John 2 we see Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers saying: “How dare you turn my father's house into a den of thieves.” After the disciples witnessed this, they remembered what was written, “Zeal for my house will consume me.” Zeal is to love what God loves. And according to Packer it is important that we also don't envy sinners. Proverbs 23:17 says, “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.” Envy takes us out of

the relationship with the Lord or with others and desires something to replace it. This is the nature of idolatry. It is utterly destructive because it replaces the relationship with the Lord with a relationship with a piece of wood or stone. Jesus however, does everything to give us the same relationship with the Father that He has—to be one as they are one.

Jealousy is also proactive in its devotion--zealous. Zealousness is a godly jealousy in action. As a Christian man I am also a jealous husband. Therefore, I will work hard to love my wife, be helpful, and serve her in sickness and in health. I am a jealous father who will work to be a godly example to my boys, who tries to train them up in the way they should go, who made sure they were fed, educated, and ones who know the Lord, so that they will themselves be men of character, godly husbands, and good examples at work and among others. I am a jealous pastor, always trying to be encouraging, one who calls out sins, who strives for the truth of things, one who tries to be creative, and focused on the Word. I am a jealous grandfather, one who will do everything in my power to protect and bless my grandchildren. And in each kind of relationship there is a deep passion and desire for them to be blessed, to do well, remain strong and healthy, and to have faith in Jesus. Most of us understand this and have been zealous ourselves about loved ones. Jealousy without zeal is dead just as faith without works is dead. Which is why we see the Lord actively involved with His people.

The apostle Paul viewed himself as zealous for his people too. Consider what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:1-3 when he compares himself to the false prophets who, with their smooth words are trying to woo the Corinthians into sinful lifestyles. Paul says, “I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! 2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Paul’s zeal was to write a letter. If there was no zeal there would be no effort to correct the Corinthians. But there was and there is.

So, as we come to it; jealousy is a characteristic of godliness. God is a jealous God. Jesus is a jealous Son, passionate for the Father’s will. And because of that we have Christmas; we have Immanuel, God with us. God’s people are also Jealous for the Lord and express it in zeal; holy living, in love toward others, and in faithfulness. Godly jealousy is a sign of a healthy faith and zeal is a signal of a godly jealousy. May the Lord bless us in our zealous faith. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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John 3:30