

THE TITLE OF TODAY'S MESSAGE IS "SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD."

IF THAT SOUNDS FAMILIAR IT'S BECAUSE I PREACHED THIS SERMON ABOUT SEVEN YEARS AGO.

ACTUALLY, I MAKE IT A POINT TO PREACH IT ABOUT EVERY SEVEN YEARS BECAUSE IT CONTAINS A MESSAGE THAT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT FOR CHRISTIANS TO HEAR.

IT IS WHAT IS CALLED "FIRE AND BRIMSTONE" PREACHING—A KIND OF PREACHING THAT IS RARELY—IF EVER—HEARD FROM THE PULPITS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN OUR DAY AND AGE.

AND THAT'S A TRAGEDY, BECAUSE WHEN CHRISTIANS AREN'T REMINDED OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF LETTING THEIR FAITH SLIP AWAY THEY TEND TO FORGET THEM

THIS SERMON WAS WRITTEN AND PREACHED BY A GREAT AMERICAN PASTOR AND THEOLOGIAN BY THE NAME OF JONATHAN EDWARDS, WHO LIVED IN NEW ENGLAND IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY—A TIME OF LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA MUCH LIKE OUR OWN.

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD

It is mine to avenge; I will repay.
In due time their foot will slip
their day of disaster is near
and their doom rushes upon them.
...*Deuteronomy 32:35*

In this verse God threatens vengeance upon the wicked unbelieving Israelites who were God's visible people and who lived under the means of grace; but who, in spite of all God's wonderful works towards them, remained void of wisdom and had no understanding.

Under all the showers of God's grace they brought forth only bitter and poisonous fruit.

The verse I have chosen for my text, "***In due time their foot shall slip,***" seems to imply the following things, relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed.

1. That they were continually in danger of being destroyed, as one who stands or walks in slippery places is always in danger of falling.
2. That this destruction would come suddenly and unexpectedly upon them, as he who walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall and cannot foresee from one moment to the next whether he will fall or not.
3. That they are liable to fall by themselves, without being thrown down by the hand of another; as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to thrown him down.
4. That the only reason they are not already fallen is by God's gracious will. For when that appointed time, that due time comes, "***their foot shall slip.***" Then they shall be left to fall,

as they are inclined by their own weight. God will not hold them up in those slippery places any longer, and at that very instant they shall fall into destruction, in the same way as he who stands on a slippery slope at the edge of a pit can only stand with the help of another, and when he is let go, immediately falls and is lost.

From all of this we may conclude that there is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God.

There is no lack of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment.

Nor does justice stand in the way since men **deserve** to be cast into hell.

In fact they are *already* under the sentence of condemnation to hell, as the Scriptures say: ***“He that believeth not is condemned already.”***

God is as angry with them as he is with many of those who are already in the flames of hell.

And make no mistake, the devil stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own as soon as God permits him.

They belong to him, he has their souls in his possession and under his dominion.

In fact the Scriptures represent them as Satan's goods.

It is no security to wicked men that their death does not seem imminent.

It is no security to a man that he is now in health and does not see death approaching.

His own prudence and care to preserve his own life do not secure him for a moment, for the Scriptures say of death that ***“...it will come like a thief in the night.”***

Every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he comforts himself thinking about what he has done, or what he is now doing, or what he intends to do.

If he knows the Scriptures he knows that there are but a few saved and that the greater part of men that have died have gone to hell, for even Jesus said, ***“...wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”***

Still, the unredeemed man imagines that he has planned better for his own escape than others have done.

Or perhaps he comforts himself with the thought that there is no hell.

Like a man who dives headfirst from a 50-foot ledge into two feet of dirty water, he tells himself that since he cannot see the bottom of the pond, the water must be deep.

He makes his own willful ignorance the basis of his confidence.

Thus it is written in *Ecclesiastes*: ***“How dieth the wise man? Even as the fool.”***

God has laid himself under no obligation by any promise to keep any unredeemed man out of hell.

He has tendered no promises of eternal life or preservation from eternal death other than those that are contained in His covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ.

It is plain that whatever pains a man takes in religion and whatever prayers he makes count for nothing apart from Christ.

God is under no manner of obligation to keep him for one moment from eternal destruction.

O unredeemed man, do you not know that your wickedness makes you as heavy as lead, to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell?

If God should let you go you would immediately sink and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution and all of your own care and prudence and righteousness would have no more power to hold you up and keep you out of hell than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

And know for a certainty that God's wrath accumulates against you: every day you are treasuring up more.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors your sin and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire.

He looks upon you as worthy to be cast into the fire; your sin is ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes than the most hateful venomous spider is in your own.

And there is no other reason why you have not dropped into hell since you arose this very morning but that God's hand has held you up.

You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder.

Therefore you will do well to pray to the Holy Spirit to give you fear of God, for as the Scriptures say: ***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”***

Know too that God's wrath is fierce.

Through Isaiah he says: ***“...his fury will be shown to his foes. See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire...”***

And again: **"I will tread them in mine anger, and will trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments...."**

And through Ezekiel he says: **"Therefore will I also deal in fury. Mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice yet I will not hear them."**

O unredeemed man, know that God is glorified not only by the greatness of His love, but also by the magnitude of his wrath.

For Paul writes, **"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?"**

For God can and does use His wrath to make His name great for salvation among those who are far off: **"And the people shall be as the burnings of lime, as thorns cut up shall they be burnt in the fire. Hear ye that are far off, what I have done? And ye that are near, acknowledge my might."**

Finally, God's wrath is everlasting.

It would be dreadful to suffer the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God for one moment; but those who fall into it must suffer it for all eternity.

There will be no end to their exquisite horrible misery.

For **"who knows the power of God's anger?"** and **"It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God."**

Certainly this great and terrible and fierce wrath of God is hanging over the heads of some who are here today, however moral and strict and sober and religious they may otherwise be.

Their damnation does not slumber: it will come swiftly, and suddenly upon them, when the Lord breaks in upon their pleasant daydreams and says: **"Fool! This very night your soul will be required of you!"**

But now, today, this moment, all of you over whom this doom is hovering have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown open the door of mercy and stands crying with a loud voice to all sinners: **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."**

Let every one that is yet out of Christ and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle aged, or young people, or little children, now hearken to the loud calls of God's Word and Spirit, for this is the acceptable season of the Lord's favor. But the daylight will not last long, for **"...the axe is laid at the root of the tree and every tree which brings not forth good fruit, will be hewn down and cast into the fire."**

Let everyone look into his own heart, then, and see if he has faith in the living Christ, for as the Lord said to Lot and his family: *"Haste and escape for your lives. Look not behind you but escape to the mountains lest you be consumed."*

Here ends Jonathan Edwards' sermon.

This is the kind of message that one associates with backwoods Bible-thumpers.

But make no mistake, every word of this sermon is Scriptural and absolutely true.

If preachers have left off preaching about sin and hell and damnation simply because their flocks don't want to hear it, or because they might be amused by it, or because it doesn't seem "intellectual," or because it isn't "upbeat" and doesn't leave people "feeling better,"—then woe to the preachers AND their flocks.

And worse than woe to the preachers, because they have taken vows to preach the entire counsel of God, including the Biblical doctrines of sin and hell and Satan.

And God will hold them to their vows, for as he says to Ezekiel, ***"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die in his sin and I will hold you accountable for his blood."***

I take those words very seriously.

And so it is my bounden duty before God to say to you, whether you like hearing it or not, that we are ALL poor and miserable sinners deserving of hell, and if we wish to escape the consequences of our sins, both in this life and in the next, we have only one way out, and that is the grace of God which He offers us through Jesus Christ, Who is the way and the truth and the life.

May God engrave this truth in the hearts and minds of everyone here today, and may it light our way to heaven.

Amen.

FATHER IN HEAVEN,

We live at a time when most people doze in a spiritual slumber. They dream dreams of gaining more and more of what this world has to offer and are convinced that that is all that there is to life. They do not fear that there are eternal consequences to the manner in which we live our life here at this time and in this world. They do not think about eternity at all. The sum of their fears amounts to little more than the daily total of their present anxieties: what to say about this; what to do about that. Yet You have told as clearly and repeatedly that there is a life after this one and that whether we spend that life in incomprehensible pain or unimaginable glory depends entirely upon what we do in this life. Do we call upon You in the Name of our blessed Savior and ask you to forgive our sins and be our stay and guide? Or do

we go our own way, imagining that You are not relevant to our lives? Do we ask, with the Psalmist, "*Does God really know? Is there really knowledge on the part of the Most High?*" Or do we trust that the man is blessed who "*...delights in the instruction of the Lord and meditates on his Word day and night.*" Will we be swept away with the rest of the wicked like chaff before the wind, or will we walk in the way God has marked out for us, calling always on His Name and rejoicing in His lovingkindness?

Father, increase our faith. Draw us ever closer to you. Help us to know and to understand that the riches of heaven far surpass the vanities of this world. Answer us when we call upon you, O God of our righteousness, for you have relieved us in our distress, time and time again. Be gracious to us and hear our prayer.

We raise up to you all among us who are in pain or distress, who suffer with physical illness or emotional distress, whose marriages are troubled or who are seeking employment. Visit them with the peace which You alone can give, and help them in their need.