

“Rebellion and Wrath”  
Sermon for 4 September 2016  
Texts:

Proverbs 14:34  
New King James Version (NKJV)

**34 Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people.**

It was like so *infuriating*. We were in Portland on Sunday evening, headed home from our 40th wedding anniversary. And at the corner of Congress Street, pedestrians were blatantly ignoring their streetlights, the car in front could not turn left even given the green light because the street walkers decided to cross against the light (the red hand!) commanding them to stop and wait. I couldn't go forward because the car in front couldn't go left. My irritation was obvious to my fellow passengers. “Don't let it ruin your night.” One said and then another, “Don't let them rob you of your joy. They just want to get across the street.” No. I was not aggravated because they wanted to get across the street, after all I was stopped at the intersection, despite the green light, and I wanted to continue driving home! So I blurted out, “Actually, the problem is that these folks, these pedestrians are insolent, insubordinate, rebels and sinners.” Their behavior is symptomatic of sin sick hearts.

The silence in the car was deafening. I half expected someone to say, “Hey, pastor, why don't you tell us how you really feel?” But everyone was rather quiet and subdued. Then I added, “And that's the problem with our culture right now . . . everyone wants to do his thing, his way, on his timetable and there's no such thing as rules or boundaries.” Rodney King's plaintive cry, “Why can't we all just get along?” falls upon deaf, or inattentive ears when people insist on doing whatever they want—even in such a little thing as in unsafely crossing the street!

**“America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”**

Alexis de Tocqueville (which I cross checked for accuracy)

Little did I know that this traffic incident would be the inspiration for this week's sermon. How do we convince rule-breaking rebels to respect the law? To heed the warnings? *By preaching the gospel!* I want to preach on man's **real need**: repentance from rebellion and on God's remedy for that rebelliousness, the cross. If we think of our predicament as mere sickness, our diagnosis does not cut deep enough—we are not merely sick, mentally, morally, spiritually and culturally. We are rebels, and if we are not saved, we are rebels under the wrath of God. Our real trouble is not just with pedestrians at cross walks flouting the crossing lights (put there for the benefit and safety of both people and traffic!)—nor with cars trying to turn left, or to move ahead on a green light. No, the problem is we expect everyone to make way for us! To get out of our way as we do what we want, when we want, how we want. **When everyone does what is right in his own eyes**, we are in a desperately dangerous place!

Getting to the next event, the next drink, the next hook-up has, in a sinful—even godless—heart obtained such pre-eminence that it doesn't occur to these law flouters that it is possible, that stuck back in the traffic far from the mess at the corner of Congress Street, a emergency patient may be being delayed, kept from critical services *because of the godless inconsideration of a bunch of rebels, pleasure-seeking jaywalkers*. No, I will grant you that most people on the street are unaware that sin never operates in a vacuum—they are, as it were, *in the dark* about the real, but unseen consequences of sin. For the truth is that if these pedestrians were not sinning, the traffic would be flowing, the hypothetical ambulance would get to the hospital in a timely manner—the man ahead of me could make his turn, I could get home and the party goers could all arrive safely at their destinations— simply delayed by minutes! Not by hours, or even by death.

The alternative to obeying rules of safety and traffic lights is blood, damage and carnage! Yes, actually, **the wages of sin are death**. Road rage, speeding, running red lights all pivot on this lawlessness, on rebellion! Living as if the rules either don't apply to me, or, as my actions suggest, they were written for someone else is sin. We can't "get along" because we all too often simply don't want to . . . or don't even care to because we want to do what we want to do. Stupid and selfish aren't even helpful adjectives: *sin is the operative terms—jaywalking is only a symptom of our lostness*. We are born rebels and prefer rebellion. And we are willing to be oppositional, defiant, lawless and disobedient to obtain our ends. We encourage sin by sinning and by following the crowd when the crowd is lawless.

However, we also err *profoundly* in promoting, in preaching morality *without godliness*. If your life has become a gospel-free zone, everyone's peace and good order are at risk! People need to be good and godly; the problem is not with the traffic lights, or the sequencing of the same traffic lights—the problem is the wicked, uncalibrated godless heart within. That heart must be changed. It is radically sick and in need of gospel treatment—calibration in righteousness.

God, in His mercy, seeing the psychological, social, moral and spiritual mess we are in, apart from Him, separated by sin, chose to do something about it. He knew that better pedestrian lights, more police on the streets, governors on cars and more laws on the books will never, ever regulate (neither rein in, control nor direct) the heart of the rebel sinner! Walking against the lights is a heart problem even before being a traffic problem. We are not the victim of our circumstances, our socialization, or our education in this matter; our misery and our unhappiness come from our sinful rebellion. Salvation is needed, the godless need to be transformed into the godly—and now would be good!

We know (because Scripture teaches us so) that apart from Christ, we are **dead in our trespasses and sins**. We know that apart from the gospel light all is darkness! We know that only God can rescue us from ourselves and from the fallen world that surrounds us. When we choose to sin, we fabricate, for ourselves and for others, an extension of that fallen world! And all of us must deal with the resultant fall-out of sin which we created for everyone. However, the rebel is blind, or indifferent to this sin consequence as well as to his true spiritual condition—he is just making good time to his destination. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:17 man's trouble is that **his understanding is darkened, because he is alienated from the life of God through**

**sin.** It truly is dark outside. The rebel is ignorant. Original sin, personal sin has dumbled him down! Probers 22:3 **A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself**, as the Israelites hid themselves within their houses from the destroying angel, Noah within the Ark, the Christians before the fall of Jerusalem (Luke 21:21) in Pella. (Comp. Isaiah 26:20.) **but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.** Christians having been warned to escape through prophecy did not perish with the defenders of Jerusalem when the walls were breached and the Holy City fell to Titus. Few things enraged the imperial Romans more than insurrection, defiance, sedition in the provinces. Not one stone was left upon another in Jerusalem. They took no prisoners.

The truly converted wait for the lights to change! In I Tim. 2:4 Paul writes that salvation is **coming to a knowledge of the truth**. And because of our radical need, the need of all men to be saved, and come to knowledge of the truth, we must say to the pedestrians crossing against the light, to those who are speeding, or brazenly running red lights, driving with their emotions(!)—come out, come out of the darkness, come out of your ignorance, seek healing for your blindness, repentance from rebellion and sin **and**, because this is the only way out *for any of us and for all of us*, **be reconciled to God.** (2 Corinthians 5:20) That is the cure for all our warring madness, for all our foolishness and folly. **See the light, return to God, come out of darkness and into God's marvelous light** (1 Peter 2:9).

Premise: The greatest need of mankind arises out of spiritual ignorance, and that ignorance is the inevitable consequence of sin (variously expressed as rebellion, pride, treason, idolatry and self-serving godlessness), we *must be told that we are the problem!* Hence the necessity of preaching! *Only if we are confronted with the truth about ourselves, the truth about the trajectory of our values, stupidity, the catastrophe of unbelief, only then will we repent of trying to live our lives on our terms, yes, as in stupidly, ignorantly and dangerously*—like a slue of autonomous drivers in a demolition derby (MAD)?! Breaking the law, flaunting the rules, dissing authority, denying Christ, disparaging church and defying God are not expressions of freedom at all! No, they are each plain, apparent and damning evidence that we have never put behind ourselves rebellion, sin and spiritual ignorance. If indeed we are not infidels, we should stop living like them—and even outsiders should be able to see the difference!

An eighteen wheeler of divine judgment is barreling down the road, and, under the legitimating auspices of a green light, turning the corner, which we, being impatient and impudent as well as imprudent, have chosen to presume upon our flimsy prerogatives as a pedestrian, to foolishly step into its path, *we shall surely die*. One would hope that we be not so oblivious! And the terrible truth is that our death will be at our own hands, the truck that mowed you down which was not in the hands of a murderous terrorist at a public celebration abroad, will be perfectly exonerated. God is not mocked.

Scripture has been given to us—just like traffic lights—the warnings and directions are fully functional. Of course, we can ignore them, of course one can cross the street, any street, any time he wishes . . . and of course, one can die. **But why choose death when one can choose life?** When we are slain in our folly, when we are dead in the road, it is way too late to hear: repent, turn from your sin, acknowledge your rebellion. So perhaps you can hear my plea today. Perhaps you can decide not to

step from the curb without looking, perhaps you can decide to obey the lights, stay within the rules (even admit and embrace that there are rules) and even teach others to repent of rebellion because rebellion is always deadly as in lethal!

Parents know to warn their children about the dangers of the road. It is their peculiar, special, or exceptional duty to do so. What we, Americans don't need are leaders who tell us by corruption and lying, forget the rules! Educators who say that our desires and our feelings are all we need to give heed to. Why increase the fallenness of the world through thoughtless and sinful choices? Lord, have mercy! Oh, if only we would "hear" the gospel call to preach the truth—as Paul relates in Ephesians 3:8-10: **Unto me, who am less than the least of the saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.** This is our calling, this is our peculiar task. Substitute pedestrians or speeders, or rage addicts, or drug addicts, or sex, money, politics and fame addicts for "the Gentiles," and suddenly our mission field will come into focus. All who see what is going on, all who see the stupidity and danger, all who have been redeemed, rescued and equipped, surely, we all see that it was for this purpose we are saved, as Joseph said, **that many lives might be preserved.** On the street corners, in the board room at the church we attend.

You see, it doesn't matter as much how we got where we are. What matters is that we have the right assessment of that situation and attend to our business from here on out! There are many agencies out there, in the world, that do many useful, even palliative things, but whatever they do to alleviate the needs, to ease the pain and address the symptoms *may never address the problem at its root, or its sin source.*

The trouble with our primaries is that we are in *primary* trouble: our challenge is not to educate, or to improve, or to heal people physically, or psychologically—or even to make people happy. We may do all these things incidentally, but what we do explicitly, that is imperative, essential and necessary!— is to help people get right with God! To reconcile offending man to his offended God—to apply the remedy of the cross to the repentant and broken hearted! Then God will integrate their lives, God will relieve their suffering, God will redeem the whole human condition. ***Our calling is to address the root cause, of which all these things—are but symptoms!*** Noble causes these (education, housing development, medical services, social services) in themselves perhaps—***but we are about healing, not treating.*** Our goals are not remediation only, but wholeness, forgiveness, true freedom; therefore we must take aim at the real disease—a spiritual disease, yes, sin. Christ is the treatment, redemption is the treatment plan. Yes, we must read the symptoms to discover the cause—we certainly do not make people feel better and better about being worse and worse! No, we pursue the cause to apply the cure! Repentance. Let us turn from our wicked ways.

The need of the hour? Preach the gospel. Indispensable! Will you help?

**Amen.**