

Introduction

Here are some huge boasts. Donald Trump tweeted in 2013: 'Sorry losers and haters, but my IQ is one of the highest - and you all know it'. Kanye West, that same year, said in an interview, "I am the number one living and breathing rock star". In 2015 a North Korean school-teacher's manual claimed that Kim Jong-Un had driven a car at the age of three!

But none of those boasts come close to what Paul wrote in Romans 1:16: "***I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile***". The good news about Jesus is *the* news which saves people. *All* people - '***Jew and Gentile***'. *Only* through faith, belief in the gospel - '***everyone who believes***'. This is a massive boast. Firstly, that all people need saving from a terrible fate, a disaster which will overtake us all. Secondly, that believing the gospel is the only way to be saved. It's like saying, "The world is going to be completely flooded, and only my boat is going to float".

If you are going to make such a huge boast, then you need to back it up with some evidence. Donald Trump should display an IQ test result; Kanye West should show some record sales figures; Kim Jong-Un should produce the pictures. If Paul is going to say that no-one can be saved except through belief in the gospel, he needs to provide the evidence.

Friends this is crucial evidence for us. If we are going to continue to identify as Christians, in a world which is increasingly hostile to Christians, we need to be deeply convinced of the need for the gospel. We live in a country where people who are anti gay-marriage and pro-life, like us, are ridiculed and hated upon every day in the media, in workplaces and in families. We must be firmly convinced in our own minds, and able to explain the reasons for our faith to others.

Today we are going to hear evidence that God has been seen in the world. But people have refused to look at him. God has been felt, verse 18. And God has been known, verses 19-20. Because God has been seen and then rejected by us, we are all without excuse. We need to be forgiven. Saved from his fair justice at the end of time. This is why the gospel is needed. Let's look at the evidence.

God felt in suffering 18

In verse 18, we learn that God is felt by all of us every day. '***The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness***'.

This is present tense, people. The wrath of God *is* being revealed. Now. We Christians rightly want to say to people that God's love is being felt every day. In the care of other people, in his provision of all good things, in his encouraging and peace-giving Spirit. But how often do we say that God's wrath is being felt every day?

In reality, it is unavoidable. People get sick and die. Towers full of people burst into flames. World leaders take nations closer to war. Terrorists blow themselves in crowded streets. Plastic multiplies in our oceans. Tsunamis wipe out whole towns. We see racism and sexism and ageism all around. And there is murder and gossip and envy and greed. Our children have allergies, our elderly have dementia, our young

adults have depression. We all feel these things every day. Why is the world so full of suffering?

According to this verse it is because *'the wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of people'*. God is *angry* with us, personally. It's not that God has lost his temper. His wrath is a considered and patient response to people's wickedness and godlessness. People act wickedly, and act as if God did not exist. And it gets worse. For it's not as though we didn't know any better. The verse says people *'suppress the truth by their wickedness'*. God is angry because we have refused to listen to the truth.

The first piece of evidence is the undeniable fact that we feel God's wrath every day when we experience suffering. God is angry because we have ignored a second piece of evidence - that God has made himself known in creation.

God known in creation 19-20

And now we move to verses 19-20; God known in creation. Verse 19 explains that God is angry with people who suppress the truth, *'since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them'*.

Firstly, the verse tells us that *something 'may be known about God'*. Not everything may be known, for he is eternal and infinite, and we are mortal and limited ... but something may be known about God. When you Skype someone you see an image on the screen, and hear a voice. You relate to the person in some way. You can't feel or smell them, but something can be known about them through Skype, and you can relate to them. So it is with God. We can't know everything about him, but we can know something about him. And therefore we can relate to him.

Secondly, the things that may be known about God are *plain to them*. Plain means obvious, clear, self-evident. We can know something about God in a way that is crystal-clear to us. Because, *God has made it plain to us*. He has left a clear and purposeful imprint of himself. Like a auto-biography, which you might write so that others can know you. It is written for that purpose. God has done something, to make something known about himself to us.

So what is the 'something' which may be known about God? The 'something' that we have responded badly to, provoking God's wrath. Verse 20 gives us the answer. *'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.'*

This world is our Skype screen. We can look at it and relate to God who is *clearly seen*. John Calvin said that were 'created to be spectators of this formed world, and eyes were given to us, that we might, by looking on so beautiful a picture, be led up to the Author himself'. We are not talking here about what God looks like, or sounds like. Creation tells us about God's *invisible qualities*, says the verse. In particular, two qualities of God have been revealed to us: *his eternal power and divine nature*. Let's consider these in turn.

Firstly, God's eternal power. I don't think Paul here has in mind how big and awesome the world is. I suppose you could say, 'wow, the stars are so huge and they have so much energy, that whoever made it must be even bigger and have more

energy'. But logically that doesn't follow. We make buildings that last longer than we do, cars that go faster than we do, and bombs that have more force than many of us.

No, I think God's eternal power is seen in such things as the *order* of creation. The laws of the universe are finely tuned, and this earth is so delicately balanced. Also in the *complexity* of the world. Even microbes are complex beings, and the way our bodies move and how blood and electricity flow through our internals ... There must be a powerful intellect behind creation, mustn't there?

We also see God's eternal power in the *beauty* of creation. Picture a sunset on a snow-covered mountain range, behind by a green forest, which gives way to a crystal clear lake. That's on the front of your bulletin today. The artist is powerfully gifted.

God is intellectually and artistically powerful.

Secondly, we know of God's divine nature. It's possible Paul here means things such as God's kindness and love, which are indeed shown in creation (Acts 14:17, Matt 5:45). But the word used here, I think, leads us in another direction. God is *divine*. That is, he is not part of this creation. He doesn't need this creation in order to exist. He is beyond all this, just as you and I are beyond our computers and cars. It's true that we make a lot of things which are very helpful to us. But we could all live naked in the jungle, eat fruit and vegetables and be quite happy. We don't need most of the things we make. God is *divine*; he needs nothing that he has made. This is self-evident, because he takes nothing from this world. We don't have to feed him, or clothe him or keep him happy.

We know God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature. We can look around and figure this out pretty easily. And react accordingly. When you see a beautiful piece of art, or a complex machine, and you are standing next to the artist or the designer, what should you do? You should say, 'This is fantastic. You are a gifted artist (or clever designer)'. How should we react to God's power in creating all this? By glorifying him. By expressing delight and wonder and appreciation for what he has done. And when you think that God didn't need to make all this, shouldn't we thank him?

Without excuse

But, we don't. Verse 21 says that people '*neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him*'. Ooh ... so that is why God is angry. He has made himself known in creation, his qualities can be clearly seen, but we suppress this evidence. We are wicked and godless, verse 18. That's bad, isn't it? That means that all people are '*without excuse*', verse 20. God is felt and known, and we ignore him. It's like he's sitting there in the Skype window, waiting for us to talk to him, and we keep walking past the screen, doing our own thing, and ignoring him.

Friends, we are going to understand further, over the next few weeks, how people suppress the truth, as verse 18 says. We'll understand why most of this world doesn't believe in Jesus. For now, we have learnt enough to be worried about them. God has shown himself plainly, but people have rejected him. His wrath is justified! And when Jesus returns, people will be *without excuse*. Exposed to eternal punishment. Hell. You and I, if we have believed in Jesus, have had our wickedness and

godlessness paid for, by Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus is our excuse, our salvation, our shield. They have ... nothing.

It doesn't matter if someone has lived in a remote pacific Island and has never even heard of Jesus. They are without excuse. It doesn't matter if someone was raised a Muslim. They are without excuse. It doesn't matter if someone has been abused by a so-called Christian husband or father. They are without excuse. They all have the same eyes and minds as we have. God has made himself felt and known, and they have rejected him. They need the love of Jesus. They need to know the gospel.

This week I would like you to reflect upon seeing God in the world. Seeing his wrath being revealed in suffering. And in his qualities being seen in what has been made. Drive these truths deep into your psyche by looking around, and noting the evidence. Then pray about it. Tell God you accept this evidence. And ask Jesus to share with you his compassion for those who suppress the truth. Observe, pray and ask for compassion. Amen?