

Dear Lord Jesus, enlighten us in such a way that we understand Your sole purpose and aim in the revelation of the Gospel: to lead us to salvation as a completely free gift of your manifold grace. Amen.

(John [the Baptizer] bore witness about [Jesus], and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'") And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

In Christ Jesus, who brought the truth of God's everlasting love from the very courts of heaven to us who dwell in this broken and dark place, dear fellow redeemed:

Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes makes this observation: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." What is the current season or time in spiritual matters for you? Do you need to be born or die; planted or uprooted; killed or healed; brought low, or built up; weep or laugh; mourn or dance?

You may think you know what you need, but you may not. God knows. We have three preachers mentioned in our text: John the Baptizer, Moses and Jesus. All three were called to preach both God's Law and His Gospel to sinners. We shall observe today that whoever is called to proclaim the Word of God to sinners like you and me will find that there are **The Seasons of God's Wrath and Grace.**

### I

But for the preacher who is but a sinner himself to know what season it exactly is for his hearers can be well hidden. It is not strange for the preacher to hear from those gathered to hear the Word that some found the Law appropriately pointing to them and they are rightly appreciative to hear the wrath of God toward their specific sins. That is so because they also get to hear the good news of forgiveness as a rescuing call of cherished deliverance.

The Apostle Paul writing to Pastor Timothy encourages him in this daunting task: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing

and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth ... do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Notice Pastor Timothy was to speak both messages of wrath – rebuking the sinner; and with patience forgive sins through the Gospel. Moses of old was known as the lawgiver, but some of the most precious Gospel declarations also came from his lips and from his pen. John the Baptizer was truly a preacher of stern repentance but could not have been bolder in proclaiming the Gospel, especially as he applied the gracious waters of life in Holy Baptism.

Jesus was not a new lawgiver. He upheld the Law of God once given, being clear that not one jot or one tittle would be removed from it by Him. It demanded perfect obedience from God's beloved creatures, mankind, with the same severity as it always did. But the holy Gospel of forgiveness, life and salvation was the message that came out in all that Jesus said and did. Jesus, in His person and His work, is the very Gospel, who came and still comes us to us today.

Christ Jesus still sends His Gospel preachers who bring the message of joy and peace to a world broken with the despondency and cursedness of sin. Often sinners assume this message is not what they need to hear. My fellow sinners, are your ears itching to hear something different, so that the ugliness of your sins is **not** exposed, your utter dependency upon God's rescuing love **is not** needed? The season of hearing God's Word continues as long as you remain in this life. It is not only for the others, it is for you now, right here in the present. As Jesus would often say: *"If you have ears to hear, listen!"*

## II

God's wrath is not His proper voice, which He desires you to hear, but hear it you must. It is the Holy Spirit's alien language for His beloved creatures. Good parents and teachers know this well. We do not want to rebuke and scold, to threaten and enforce. But if we do not, the other most important Word cannot be heard and cherished, namely, the Word of love and forgiveness.

Jesus said to the paralyzed man lowered through the roof before Him: "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you." To the woman caught in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you." To the Father about those who affixed Jesus to the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." To the doubting disciples after His resurrection: "Peace be unto."

Truly “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” and still does to this day. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” But I know you, because I know myself, the seasons of God’s wrath burn hot at times and you eagerly long to enter the season of God’s manifold grace.

The believers of Moses’ day recognized this. They asked for God to come to them as did Moses. Moses responded: “just as you desired of the LORD your God ... when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD ..., ‘They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”

John was committed to this same task of preaching in season and out of season and even made reference to Jesus doing the same: “when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ... Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ... He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Oh that our Lord would graciously preserve us from our naturally itching ears, seeking to hear only what we think we need to hear. Your sinful natures are like the hearts of unbelievers who hate the Word of God’s Law, which condemns you and even despise the Gospel as though you are not good enough on your own. Your new man of faith willingly hears the Law of God and rejoices to hear the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ.

Our Lord’s faithful preachers are never to be worshipped. Moses failed in his office as preacher by giving God’s people a season of wrath instead of grace, when in addition to speaking to rock for water, he struck it with anger. Consequently he was not allowed to enter the promise land, but seeing it afar he died. John, languishing in Herod’s prison as we heard in the Gospel for today, appeared to doubt Jesus was the Christ. Jesus send his disciples back to him reported His fulfillment, especially the part of preaching the Gospel to the poor. Both of these preachers, Moses and John, in their sin needed to be purified through the very word they were called to

preach. Christ was the only perfect preacher who needed no purification. He was the perfect preacher of God's Word for them.

Despite the imperfection of those our Lord calls to preach His Word to us, He wants us to hear them and receive Him, the One who has come from the Father's side. And while His people are regularly to experience the season of His wrath, predominately they are to experience the season of His grace. This holy One born of the Virgin, who took His holy life to the cross, did it for you, every one of you sinners. God's gracious forgiveness is found in that One alone, in His holy life and perfect sacrifice. 'Tis truly the season of great peace and joy for all people. If you have ears, listen and rejoice. Amen.