

Part 1: Getting Serious About Judgement

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This week I was really wrestling with the writing of this sermon, so I took a break and went to my usual coffee shop to try gain some traction. While I was there I mentioned to the barista that I was hoping this coffee would help me with my writer's block.

But then I began to panic on the inside for fear that he would ask me what I was writing about. I've been going to the same shop for a long time for two reasons. The first is that they make good coffee. The second is that as an introvert, I want to be really intentional of investing in the same relationships over a long period of time.

So any other week I probably would have welcomed the question. I hope I would have talked about the wonder of God's word, the love of Jesus for his people, or the beautiful community of the church. But the theme which dominates our text today is the certainty of God's judgement.

That specific topic generally doesn't warrant a great conversation in passing.

Why is that? Well perhaps it's because even in our increasingly post-Christian world there is still an assumed influence of the fire and brimstone preacher. Maybe their only context for judgement is the street preachers with signs and shouts downtown. Or perhaps the judgment that came from churches or Christians when they were younger.

If you're not Christian but visiting today or watching online those same fears might be gathering in your gut as come to realize what it is you might have walked into. But what I hope you will see today are two things in our text. First, to hear the doctrine of God's judgment is ultimately good news for you. It's actually in hearing about judgement that you are afforded an opportunity to escape it. We will talk more of that later. But second, people who do not believe in God are not the primary subject of our text today in 2 Peter.

In fact Peter is writing not to non-believers who deny God's judgment, but to professed believers who deny God's judgement. It is natural for someone who doesn't believe in God to wrestle with the nature of judgment. But Peter's point today is that it is inconsistent with the very nature of Christianity for a Christian to deny what Peter calls today, the day of the Lord.

One of the biggest threats Peter sees for his churches is not unbelievers who are uncomfortable with the idea of punishment, but believers who themselves deny the return of Jesus and the subsequent judgment.

Look at how Peter opens this passage today: **2 Peter 3:1-2**.

This is the second time Peter has said he wrote this letter to "stir up the church." As I mentioned last time that word "stir" is not only a gentle nudge but it carries the idea of waking one up. Like an alarm clock on a groggy morning or a good cup of coffee, it's meant to make us alert to something we have grown dull towards.

What is that something? Believing all that the Bible says. Specifically he is calling the church to trust that what the prophets said in the Old Testament is true, and that the New Testament apostles also wrote what they were taught by Jesus himself.

The key implication of this authority of scripture which he is emphasizing today is the reality of judgment. Today Peter wants to help us become comfortably uncomfortable with the doctrine of judgement. The big picture we are going to see today is that **God's judgement is a universal weight which can only be relieved through the gospel.**

We are going to see this in three parts today. In 2 Peter 3:3-4 we are going to see **How Easy it is to Forget Judgement.** In this passage we will see the logic of Peter's false teachers and we will see how dangerously easy it is to live our own lives with the same assumptions.

Second we are going to see **How Inconsistent it is to Deny Judgment.** In verses 5-8, we are going to see that to believe in God at all is to see how God has spoken and acted in relationship to his creation.

And lastly we are going to see **How Merciful it is to Escape Judgement.** In the final verses of this text we are going to see that a clear understanding of judgment doesn't lead us to question God's anger but instead to marvel at his mercy.

But the first thing we want to do is understand the context of debate between Peter and these false teachers.

In chapter one he warned the church to not overlook the doctrine of conversion. But in chapters 2 and 3 he warns us to not overlook the doctrine of what the Bible calls in verse 10: the day of the Lord.

Now the day of the Lord includes some wild things. Things which Peter's churches and our own churches today are prone to forget.

It is something that Peter says both the Old Testament Prophets and the New Testament apostles were clear on. While there are many aspects tied into this day there are really two primary themes in it. First on the day of the Lord, Jesus Christ would return for a second time.

Jesus says this: **Matthew 25:31-33.** On this day Jesus will come back, but he comes back to judge, to separate the sheep from the goats. The first aspect of the day of the Lord is the return of God's messiah and the second is the judgment which follows. This judgment will lead some into salvation and glory and others into destruction and punishment.

Look at what **Obadiah 15-17.** Here we see the two themes of judgment and salvation.

This specific event is mentioned by eleven biblical authors in 14 biblical books. So why is it that these false teachers and their followers are so quick to forget this future event?

Well because when Peter wrote this book it had been nearly a decade since Paul said it was coming soon, it had twenty or thirty years since Jesus warned of its nearness, and over 500 years since Obadiah reminded his people of it.

In other words we are often quick to forget the certainty of Christ's return and all that goes with it because we think God might not have meant it. It's actually not hard to think this. Here is where we see our first point today: **How easy it is to Forget Judgment.**

Look at the argument these so called Christians are saying regarding this day of the Lord: **2 Peter 3:1-4.**

What's interesting about this text is that Peter calls these teachers "scoffers." Another way you can translate it is, "mockers." These teachers begin to mock those who believe that God will actually, physically, and historically intervene in this world by judgement.

Why do they mock? Because they look around and see that nothing has changed.

They say, it's been a long time since those prophets spoke. It's been even longer since the fathers of the faith like Abraham and Isaac and Moses died. We are still here. There's been no melting of the world. No sky turning to blood. No judgment seat.

Therefore we might safely conclude that God sent Jesus and that as long as we know that we can live however we want to live. There is no promise of future reward, no looming future judgment. This is all there is.

Due to the ordinary, un-miraculous, and ever moving pace of life they are left to draw their own conclusions on the end for which the world is headed. It's not that these people don't know God's word. It's that they do what Peter condemns them for in 2 Peter 2:10, they despise God's authority in his word.

These scoffers are the same people Peter called heretics spewing destructive doctrine in chapter 2. The same people whose very lives lead people away from the true gospel of God. These are the very people who we would want to distance ourselves from and yet, if we are not careful we can functionally live under the same assumptions.

What do I mean by this? I mean that if I tell my kids that they need to eat vegetables because it's good for them, but I don't actually eat vegetables myself, I'm showing them that in all reality I myself function as if that statement were not true though I claim to believe it. If I did believe it, I would eat veggies myself.

Wrapped up in this passage I think there are three tests we can give ourselves to assess regardless of what we confess, if we are functionally living in a forgetfulness of this day of the Lord.

The first test is the test that Peter gives these teachers. That is he tests their ***License to Sin.***

This is the primary freedom these scoffers feel. I went to a Christian school growing up and I remember one student saying to me that he could live his life how he wanted because Jesus gives him grace.

That's license. Look at how Paul speaks of this: **Romans 6:1-4.** Jesus saves us to change us, and he changes us by saving us. If you think that sinning is ok, you are denying the fact that Jesus saves us from sin and that God promises that those who continue to live in sin will be judged for their actions.

This test of license is a pretty bold one that most people will avoid but the next two are more subtle.

The next test is ***Lust for the World.***

I love fireworks. I love the sound of them and the smell of them. But can you really think of a more foolish thing to spend your money on than fireworks? It's estimated that Americans spend 1 billion dollars a year on fireworks. That is one billion dollars lit on fire for 2-10 seconds of glimmering glory.

Firewood keeps us warm for far longer. Food satisfies us for hours and even days. Even a TV can be returned to again and again. But we flock to fireworks because for a split second we might be attracted by their shine or enticed by their momentary heat. But he who invests his whole wealth into it would easily be a fool.

Yet if you as a Christian deny the second coming of Jesus, and the wonderful promise of an eternity with him in a New Heavens and New Earth, you are doing just that. The only promise of real lasting joy is in our restoration to the God who made us to be satisfied in him.

But in a world of fireworks it's easy to buy into the short and temporary glory of the world and to hook our comfort and pleasure to those fleeting pleasures.

When discomfort or distress creep into our lives we want to find comfort our adventures in the mountains, our exploits in the bedroom or the expenses in our homes.

These things aren't bad, but they certainly aren't meant to last. Look at how Peter speaks of the pleasures of this world: **2 Peter 3:10**. To live for the lusts of the world is to place your hope in fireworks which will always leave you wanting more. But to hope in Jesus is eternal.

And finally the last test is the ***Legacy of Self***. Just like these scoffers if we look around and do not see a visible ruling and radiant king, it's easy to think that our best life is living like we are king.

We want to live our lives in such a way where we craft a legacy which vindicates our own existence. We want people to validate us because of how we lived or by what we accomplished in our life. This can be robed in both hedonism and charity. But to live for a legacy of self denies that you will only be validated by your standing in Jesus and nothing else.

Again look back at **2 Peter 3:10**. It is not only the items of the world which will one day be exposed, but the works of man. They will amount to nothing.

Here's the big summary assumption that all these tests actually reveal in your heart. To affirm faith in Jesus but to live for your own desire in these areas is to look at life and assume that God is no longer working for your good, and God is now inactive and uninvolved in the world.

But believers should understand that God is not uninvolved with the world and he is not distant from his promise to judge. This is Peter's second point: **How Inconsistent it is to Deny Judgement.**

Read with me **2 Peter 3:5-7**.

If this text sounded a bit confusing to you, that's ok. Remember Peter is writing to people who seem to be Christian and so Peter is using a profoundly Christian argument to show them their inconsistencies.

He says you might live this way, but you are choosing to overlook certain truths of the God you claim to believe in.

Remember in verse four these scoffers affirm that God created. Peter now says that if you affirm God as creator of the world, you also must affirm God's sustaining and involved role in the world.

This includes God's ability to intercede in judgment. Peter says that one of the first acts God did in creation was draw up dry land out of the water by his word. But then he points forward to Noah's day and says that by that same word he also sent the flood of water to judge the world he created.

At one point in history, God showed his nearness to his creation by judging it for the immense corruption during the days of Noah. In that event the wicked were judged, but Noah and his family who obeyed God were saved.

That's why Peter makes these parallels between water and fire in this text he is showing that this next judgment that comes is like the flood, but different. It is not only a physical judgment, but also a spiritual one, not just for some people, but for all people.

And the same word which created the world, the same word which sent the waters of the flood, is the same word that will bring about the second coming and the judgment of fire. To believe in God yet to deny the word about the second coming and the judgement is not to have an alternative interpretation on God's word it is to make up a new god altogether.

So how are we then to look at our world which seems to be spinning out of control and believe that God is still in control? That blessing will come for the righteous and punishment for those who do evil? **2 Peter 3:8.** We should not overlook this reality that God's timing is not like our timing.

You've probably heard me say this before but maturity is simply having elongated time horizons. I'm generally drinking coffee on the couch when my kids get up and I've found that each of them has a different demand when it comes to breakfast.

The very first thing they all tell me is that they want to eat cereal. When Addley asks, I ask her to hold on and she normally lets me finish my devotions. Owen will let me finish my devotions and my coffee. But when Ellie asks, you must get her cereal now. She cannot understand why it wouldn't happen in that moment.

Believers must learn to understand that God's time horizons are different than ours. Just because he hasn't come yet does not mean that he has forgotten, or that he has stopped working for your good.

In fact quite the opposite. Whereas these false teachers assume that God's delay means that he doesn't know what's good for them and instead they must get the good for themselves. True believers see God's delay as being ultimately for their good.

And this is our last point today where we see **How merciful it is to escape judgement.**

Read with me **2 Peter 3:9-10.**

Peter has helped us see that whether you are willing to accept it or not, our world is on a crash course with this cosmic event where Jesus will return and humanity will be judged. One day the value of the world's pleasures and the works of all your life will be exposed.

It's this idea of assessment and judgement leads non-Christians to sometimes resent a God who would judge and leaves some who claim to be Christian talking away this reality. We paint this picture that God is the world's most insidious "Gotcha" journalist who is just waiting for one random day to shine the light on you and expose you for all your rebellion.

But here we see that God is not a "gotcha" journalist looking for someone to entrap. Nor is he an old man who has fallen asleep at the wheel.

When you look at your life and consider that things are as they have been Peter says that this is for two reasons: 1. **God is patient**. God is not slow to fulfill his promise he is patient to do so. Meaning that the day to day, year to year, century to century churn of our world doesn't show God's distance but instead God's active and sustaining power.

Look at **Hebrews 1:1-3a**. Paul says something similar in **Colossians 1:17**. The mundane and seemingly casual events of daily existence are not proof of untethered humanism but instead divine miracles in that for every second of life God is holding through Jesus Christ, every proton and neutron in place. He guides the every collision of atoms, every elemental substance holds its shape by the word of his command, the rotation of the earth, the car that cuts you off in traffic, the itch on your nose, every single cell constituting every single COVID virus in our world is sustained, ordained and patiently purposed by the hand of God himself.

Why? So that you might not perish in judgement but instead reach repentance (**God desires repentance**).

If you want a sign that God exists and desires you to know him consider your breath this very moment.

If God were simply a stodgy old man who wanted to judge, he could have judged the world on the third page of scripture. History does not continue primarily because wants to judge but instead because God desires to save.

Now don't misunderstand this. When Peter says that God is not willing that any should perish it means that apart from God's works in the gospel, all would perish.

It also doesn't mean that none will perish. Look back at what Peter has said already. Speaking of these false teacher Peters says: "**But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed...**" (2 Peter 2:12), "**for them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.**" (2 Peter 2:17).

We also see that for some people this period of life between creation and Christ's second coming adds to the sum of their punishment. **Romans 2:5**. For the ungodly their actions continue to add to their tab which will be paid out on the day of the Lord.

And yet Peter's point here is that God's patience provides another way: escape. Though all of us have sinned, there is a way apart from your judgement. There is a response which you can have that is rooted in God's patient desire for you: repentance.

I'm going to talk about what repentance is in a moment. But here I want to pause for just one moment to show the nature of how repentance comes about. Here we see that repentance is the result of God's patient desire for his beloved. Repentance is not a works done by man, it is the result of God's direct will in the world.

Paul says that repentance is the result of God's kindness. Writing to the same people who see the delay of judgment and thing that it means God has abdicated his involvement in the world he says: **Romans 2:4.**

Why does the world turn? Why do the nations rage? Why is the sky blue? So that you might experience God's kind desire for you, repent of your sins and escape judgment.

This is where we see the wonderful mercy of the gospel. To have every lived if even for a moment in license or lust or for your own legacy is to have earned just and proper punishment for your sins.

Yet God in his mercy provides a way of salvation. The way isn't weighted in your own ability to undo all of the bad works you have done by doing good works as the solution. The way is through repentance.

What is repentance? It is turning away from your sin and towards Jesus. Repentance is not feeling sorry. Repentance is not believing that Jesus exists. Repentance is a directional change. One of my favorite illustrations of this is a baseball player hitting a homerun. When that ball is hit, it repents. It changes direction entirely.

Now if you've ever thrown a baseball, you've probably realized that the balls don't turn around on their own merit. They turn because they've been struck by something. When believers turn from their sins and repent, they only do so because they have been struck by the patient and kind grace of God in Jesus Christ.

How does repentance save us? It realizes that Jesus Christ took the weight of our judgment for us, and it runs to him. Repentance sees the weight of sins and the relief of Jesus. Repentance refuses to despise authority and by it those who do so through Jesus endure and are saved.

So I have three points of application for us today in light of this message.

First, if you are not a believer in here today, I pray that this might be the day of your repentance. I pray that you see the wages of your sin and the inevitable nature of judgment and instead you choose to believe in the King who took that for you.

John Bunyan once wrote a little book answering the fears of those who are coming to Jesus. He did this in a question and answer format. One of his questions was this: **"But, says another, I fear I come too late; I doubt I have stayed too long; I am afraid the door is shut."** His answer: **"Thou canst never come too late to Jesus Christ, if thou dost come."**

Come. This repentance might disrupt the entire world view you have of license, lust and legacy. But it's worth it. You get the pleasure of God in Jesus Christ now, and you get the wonderful joy of an eternity with him later. If you feel you need to do this, please don't leave here today without talking to someone.

Secondly, for the individual Christian in here. Peter has warned us of the dangers of thinking too casually of Jesus' second coming. He has told us that at the end of all things our works will be exposed and that those who continue to live in ungodly ways are those who have never been changed by Jesus Christ.

So may we as Christians assess our own lives and realize that repentance calls us to live in a new way not by our own might, but by the power of grace through Jesus Christ. Repentance starts by taking scripture at its word and realizing that its desire for you to pursue holiness and labor for the glory of God is not an option it is the way of living. And that living in this way is a reminder of God's daily desire and kindness in your life to show his love in Jesus.

And lastly, for our whole church. We are here today so that we also might call others to this repentance. Let us not forget that Peter wrote this letter to the church. Meaning that in this room are confessing believers who still need to repent. But also in this room are true brothers and sisters who will look at the lives of those struggling with sin and in grace call them back to repentance.

There are members in our church who will at times seemingly fall away. God has given us the task of calling them back to mercy. Mercy not undefined, but mercy through repentance and grace.

In seeing the doctrine of judgment, we see more clearly the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. I pray that that grace changes us as individuals and as Jesus' church.