

MAKING A DIFFERENCE BEFORE THE JUDGMENT COMES II PETER 2:4-10

INTRODUCTION:

Dr. Wernher Von Braun wrote, “I believe there are two forces which move us. One is a belief in a last judgment when every one of us has to account for what he did with God’s great gift of life on earth. The other is belief in an immortal soul, a soul which will cherish the award or suffer the penalty decreed in the final judgment.” The famous scientist was surely in agreement with the insights reflected in Holy Scripture.

Simon Peter warns of a coming judgment upon those who mislead others in spiritual matters. In the midst of a chapter in which he denounces the false teachers and prophets who have plagued the human family through the centuries, he sets forth this awesome warning of coming judgment. He warns, “Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping” (II Peter 2:3). However, this coming judgment is not to be limited to those who have assumed spiritual responsibility and misused that responsibility. There is a coming judgment to which the whole of the human family is vulnerable.

This sobering passage on divine judgment has in the midst of it a reminder that we can make a difference before the judgment comes. I want us to consider the awesome dimensions of this coming judgment so that we will appreciate the urgency that we do all we can to make a difference for those who are moving toward judgment.

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE COMING JUDGMENT ON SIN.

Our generation has taken the word “judgment” out of its spiritual vocabulary. We no longer believe that men are responsible for what they do. We have found creative ways to excuse them for their crimes against God and against man. We prefer to see them as victims. We explain their irreverent and destructive behavior with all kinds of psychological hocus-pocus and sociological explanations.

God has not removed the word “judgment” from the Holy Scriptures. These clear words from Simon Peter are a reminder to us of the certainty of the divine judgment.

1. The coming judgment is made certain by the unchanging character of God.

The creator God of this universe does not change. Simon Peter takes us on a mental review of the activities of God in the Old Testament so that we will be aware of His unchanging character. A word that leaps from the text is “spared not.” In the past wherever Holy God has encountered sin He has judged it.

The character of God is seen in his judgment upon the angels. At some point in the hidden past the angels who had always dwelt in the presence of God sinned against God. We are not told the exact nature of their sin in this text so some have speculated about the nature of their sin. Some believe this to be a reference to angelic activity in Genesis 6 where heavenly beings seems to have cohabited with women and produced a generation of physical giants. Others have seen this as a reference to the rebellion that Lucifer led in

heaven when his own heart was lifted up with pride in the presence of God. The nature of the angelic sin is not the important thing. Since we are not told the nature of the sin, we cannot be dogmatic about the sin. The important thing is to realize that even the angels in heaven did not escape or were not spared when sin was found in them. The character of God demanded judgment even upon the angels.

The second stop on this journey of review is at the flood in that ancient day. In the day of Noah the whole world had turned its back upon God in sin. God responded to the sin in the heart of the human family with devastating judgment. God did not spare the whole world when it sinned in Noah's day. This does not give much comfort to those who excuse their sin by saying, "But everybody is doing it!" There is no protection in numbers.

The third stop on this journey is at Sodom and Gormorrah. These two prosperous cities of the plains chose a lifestyle that excluded God and exalted selfish indulgences. They were lifted up with pride and filled with shameful behavior. When God saw the repulsive sin of Sodom and Gormorrah, His character was such that He judged the cities.

The point that Simon Peter is making is this: if God did not spare the sin of the angels, or the sin of the ancient world, or the sin of Sodom and Gormorrah, why should we expect that God will spare the sin of modern man? If he duplicates the sin of the past, God has not changed so He will encounter the same judgment. This means that the judgment of God upon sin is certain because of the unchanging character of God.

2. The coming judgment is certain because of the unchanging nature of sin.

Sin has not changed. God uses the same word to describe our sin as He uses to describe the sins of ancient man. These words are helpful in understanding the character of sin itself. When God spoke of that world on which he sent the flood He described it as “ungodly people.” This word translated “ungodly” means to be destitute of reverential awe toward God: to live a life without any regard or fear for God. Michael Green suggests that it means: “they had no time whatever for God.” They had chosen to live as though there was no God. Is that not an apt word to describe the attitude and response of contemporary man to God? Is this not the generation that has little if any time for God? Is this not the generation that has little if any fear of God? Is this not the generation that has chosen to live by its own standards rather than God’s standards? This would seem to indicate that the human family has not made as much progress as the evolutionist would have us believe. He is still committing the same transgressions against God as humankind did back in the beginning of human history.

In a helpful description of our sin Peter writes, “This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.” Those two expressions uncover the nature of sin. Sin is man pursuing the satisfaction of the desires of his sinful nature rather than the satisfaction of the will of God. Sin is man preferring his own way to God’s way and thus daring to despise one who has authority. He does not want to acknowledge that God has rightful authority as Creator and Redeemer over his

life. The nature of sin has not changed so the judgment of God is predictable and certain for the human situation.

II. THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT ON SIN.

From these inspired words we can gather some idea about the nature of the divine judgment.

1. The divine judgment is righteous.

This text makes clear that there is a direct correlation between the sin of man and the judgment of God. The judgment of God is always God's righteous response to human sin.

What God did in heaven when the angels sinned was righteous. The angels had been given the privilege of dwelling in his presence and doing his bidding, but when they sinned all of that privilege was taken away from them. They were confined in the lowest hell as punishment for their sin. The sin of the ancient world was one of rebellion against the Creator. They wanted to take the world that God had made and treat it as though it were their own. They wanted to live their lives as though there was no God. The Creator God acted righteously when he swept them away from the face of the earth in the waters of the flood. They had surely forfeited their right to occupy a place on God's earth if they were going to live in rebellion against the Owner-Creator of the earth.

The cities of the plains had sinned against God and against their own bodies. They had given themselves over to the control of the fires of lust and greed that burned within them. The righteous God responds to their sin with the fire of divine wrath and divine anger. They were buried in a volcanic like eruption of the judgment of God upon the cities of the plains. The judgment of God is always righteous. Since God Himself embodies all righteousness, He cannot do anything that is not righteous.

2. The judgment is devastating.

In his warning to the false teachers Peter spoke of their “destruction” that has not been sleeping. The judgment of God is always destructive and devastating. When He had finished judging the world in Noah’s day, there was only eight souls left alive and every living creature except those in the ark had perished. When the judgment of God falls, men perish.

When the judgment of God fell upon Sodom and Gormorrah only Lot and his two daughters escaped. Every living being in those cities perished. The judgment of God is a destructive force when it falls upon human sin.

This reminds me of a humorous story that I read. A certain religiously inclined woman had bought a parrot for companionship. When she bought the parrot, the pet shop owner warned her that it had belonged to a man who was very profane and had taught the Parrot to curse. The man had been a bar keeper, and the parrot had spent most of its time in a bar. He assured her however, that he thought she would be able to teach the parrot to

speaking correctly and to give up its bad habits of profanity. Everything went well for about a month with the new parrot. He learned to say, "Praise the Lord" and a number of other Christian words and phrases. One day she forgot to feed him and when she came into the house she heard him cursing. She grabbed him up and said, "I told you not to talk that way. I'll teach you never to do it again." So she put him in the deep freeze and shut the door. A few minutes later she took him out and asked, "Have you learned your lesson?" The bird shivered and replied, "Yes, ma'm." She asked, "Are you going to talk that way anymore?" The parrot replied, "No, ma'm."

About seven months went by and not a bit of bad language. Apparently the bird was cured of his terrible habit of profanity. Then one day she forgot to feed him, water him, or change his cage. When she returned home that day he was carrying on worse than ever. She grabbed him and put him back in the freezer and forgot him for some time. He was almost frozen to death when she thought of him. She put him in his cage to thaw out. Finally he began to move and talk. "Did you learn your lesson?" "Yes, ma'm" he retorted. Then he sat there quietly for a few more minutes shivering and said, "Can I ask you a question?" She answered "Yes." The parrot said, "I thought I knew all the bad words there were, but just what did that turkey in there say?"

When God's judgment falls upon you, it will be more devastating than the human mind can ever imagine.

3. The judgment is inescapable.

When God decides to judge, there is no way out. Peter assures us in our text that this is true. He says, “If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.” God knows how! When God decided to judge the angels, not one sinful angel escaped. When God judged the ancient world, not one condemned soul escaped! When God judged the cities of the plains, not one condemned soul escaped! When God judges our world, not one will escape! God knows how to preserve those for judgment that deserve His judgment.

III. THE ESCAPE FROM THE DIVINE JUDGMENT ON SIN.

There were some that escaped the divine judgment. There were angels in heaven who were not condemned but who continue to serve God day by day. Eight souls were spared in the judgment that fell in the flood. One man and his two daughters escaped the judgment that fell on the cities of the plains. These two incidents, the ones relating to Noah and Lot, remind us of an important reality in connection with judgment. There is a way that we can make a difference for some that are facing the judgment of God. What we do will determine whether or not they escape the coming judgment.

1. We can make a difference through proclamation.

We are reminded in these words of Peter that Noah was a preacher of righteousness to that generation that was subjected to the flood. The first inclination may be to think that all of his preaching was in vain, but nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, his

preaching was very effective. At least seven important souls join him in the ark. His wife, his sons, and his daughter-in-laws entered with him into the ark. They were affected by the preaching of the husband and father in that family. If a man preached for a whole life time and the only people who escaped the judgment because of his preaching are the members of his own family, surely no one would think that he had preached in vain! At least his family would not think that he has preached in vain.

When we consider the divine judgment that is coming upon the world, we need to remember that we can make a difference through our witness and our proclamation of the word of God. We can help some escape the judgment that is to come. If we do not warn them of the coming judgment upon sin, who will?

2. We can make a difference through our prayers.

Peter gives us only one side of Lot's escape from the fiery judgment. He reminds us that God Himself delivered Lot from that terrible devastation. But if you are familiar with the Genesis account of that incident, you will remember that Lot was actually delivered because Abraham prayed. You will recall that Abraham stood before God and plead for the cities to be spared. He bargained with God in his prayers asking that God spare the cities if there could be found fifty righteous souls in the city. He finally brought God to a commitment that the cities would be spared if there were ten righteous souls in the city. Actually, a search of the city failed to find even ten. However, Moses records in Genesis, "so when God destroyed the cities of the plains, He remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived" (Genesis

19:29). It seems rather obvious that Moses wanted us to see a connection between God's deliverance of Lot and Abraham's prayers before God for Lot and the cities of the plains.

You and I can do for family and friends what Abraham did. We can stand before God and plead for their salvation so that they will escape the coming judgment. Someone asked Dr. Harry A. Ironside, "If you had prayed all your life for the salvation of a loved one, and then you got word that this person had died without giving any evidence of being saved, would your belief in prayer or faith in God be shattered?" Dr. Ironside answered this question by telling the story of an unsaved man who had gone to sea. One night his mother awakened with a deep sense of need. A burden for her unsaved boy rested heavily upon her heart. She earnestly pled for his salvation.

Weeks passed. Then, one day, there was a knock at her door and there stood her son! "Mother, I am saved!" he exclaimed joyfully. Then he told her: "A few weeks ago, our ship was caught in a fearful storm. The waves seemed mountain high. Hope of our out-riding the storm vanished. Suddenly the ship gave a lurch and I was swept overboard. As I began to sink, the awful thought came to me: I am lost forever! Where will I spend eternity?" In agony of heart I cried out, "Oh, God have mercy on me! I look to Jesus!" Then I lost consciousness. After the storm had abated, the sailors came out to clear the deck, they found me lying unconscious, against a bulwark!"

Oh, God does hear the prayers of His people for others. Throughout the scriptures we are encouraged to stand before Him on behalf of those who have wandered into sin and are in

danger of the judgment to come. In light of the awesome terrible judgment that is coming upon this world, there is compelling need for us to recommit ourselves to be a people of prayer. We need to have an intercessory prayer room where we pray around the clock, seven days a week, pleading with God for the salvation of our lost friends. We need to have extended periods of prayer like the prayer vigil this weekend in which we pray for God's saving mercy upon our unsaved friends. We need to have prayer groups where we meet regularly to pray for the salvation of the lost. We need to have our own individual times of prayer in to pray for the salvation of the lost. Even though judgment is coming, we can make a difference!

Witness and prayer! There is something you can do to make a difference in light of the terrible judgment that is coming upon the world. If we can, we must.

Some of you need to take heed to the warning concerning judgment to come, and make your escape today. Let me urge you to do this even now.

