

Judgement must begin at the house of God

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- [0 : 00] So with a view to God's help, can we turn to look at words in the chapter read in the first epistle general of Peter and chapter 4 and we shall read again from the 17th verse.
- 1 Peter chapter 4 at verse 17, for the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, so where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?
- Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their sins, falls to human well-doing, are done to a faithful Creator.
- The Apostle Peter has been dealing in this chapter with one of the great enigma of the world world in which we live. He's been dealing with the mystery of Christians having to suffer when others seem to get off the hook and to have such an easy way and an easy passage through this life.
- And indeed that is an enigma. It was the mystery behind Psalm 73. You remember how the psalmist there and that psalm speaks about the fact that his feet near sleuth, he almost fell because he had looked on the prosperity of the prosperity of the wicked and at the same time he had viewed the difficulties that were in the life of the Lord's people.
- [2 : 47] Now, here is this psalmist, this apostle Peter, and he's saying to these Christians to whom he is writing, not to think it's strange when they fall into this fiery trial. Don't think that a strange thing at all. Because he says in the next verse, they are a blessed people who suffer for Christ.
- And then in verse 17. And then in verse 17, he comes to this great statement, for the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God.
- Now it seems that in verse 17. Now it seems that in this last three verses of the chapter, we have first of all two general statements about Christian people.
- And the two statements are these, the time has come when judgment must begin at the house of God. And then in verse 18. And then in verse 18. And then in verse 18, there is this statement, for if the righteous scarcely be saved.
- So, you have these two questions, these two statements regarding converted men and women. That the time has come when judgment must begin at God's house and that the righteous will scarcely be saved.
- [4 : 24] And I want us to look at the same thing. And I want us to look at these two statements together. And then, in order that there might be a balance in the apostle's approach, he turns from the converted to the unconverted.
- And he asks two questions of unconverted men and women. In the light of the truth. In the light of the truth. In the light of these statements that he has made to the Lord's people.
- He says, the time has come when judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it begin at us, where will the end be of those that disobey the gospel of God?
- That obey not the gospel. And then, if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly man and the sinner appear?

Now, these two questions concern unconverted men. And I want you, if you're unconverted here, to consider very, very solemnly tonight.

[5 : 40] The implications of these two questions on your own life. If the righteous scarcely be saved, where will the ungodly man and the sinner appear?

And if judgment begins with us, what will the end be of those that obey not the gospel of God? Then, thirdly, I want us to pass on to try and give an answer to these dilemmas.

To try and answer the question concerning the ungodly man and the sinner. The question concerning those who obey not the gospel.

And finally, I want us to look at the response of the Lord's people to all of this. Wherefore, he says, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator.

And who of us doesn't need to commit the keeping of our soul tonight to the Lord? First of all, then, we have here two statements about those who are saved.

[7 : 05] And the first strikes us as being a very, very strange statement. And I'm sure it's a statement that has struck terror into the hearts of many of God's children down through the ages.

That the time has come when judgment must begin at the house of God. Now, it's a strange thing that God's house should be the place of judgment, isn't it?

Because I thought that the Bible says that judgment is not yet. I thought that the Bible said concerning the judgment of this world, that it was something that would take place at the end of the age.

And yet, here is this text of Scripture telling us that the time has already arrived for the judgment of God's children.

And you know, that's one of the differences between God's people and the men and women of this world. The judgment of God's people, it takes place here in the world.

[8 : 35] The judgment of the ungodly takes place in eternity. Because, you see, God's people are chastened for their sins while they are here in the world.

Which would you prefer tonight? To be chastened for your sins in the world? Or to be judged with the penalty of God and the sentence of God's eternal judgment?

At the end of the age, which, my friend, would you prefer? Oh, well, I know that I would prefer to be amongst those who are in the situation of the people of God, whose judgment begins now in this world.

God says that the time must come when judgment must begin at the house of God. Do you realize, if you're a Christian, that God doesn't blink at your sin?

Do you realize, my friend, that as a believer in Christ, the Lord takes notice of your sins? And the Lord is going to deal with your sins?

[9 : 56] There are some people who think that God has a standard for his own people, and another standard for the world, and that he's dealing with people with a double standard.

Never let yourself think that for one moment. God doesn't deal in double standards. God always has the same standard of judgment.

And God is going to deal with the sins of his people in two ways. He has dealt, he has dealt, he has dealt in a, as far as their condemnation is concerned.

He has dealt in a forensic sense with them, in the cross of Calvary. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

But remember this, the people of God are going to have their sin, they are going to have the chastisement of their sin. Do you remember what Jeremiah said?

[10 : 55] Considering this great facet of the Christian life, he said this, Wherefore should a living man complain?

A man for the chastisement of his sins. My friend, if you are a living man, if you are a living soul, if you are a believer in Christ, why should you complain for the chastisement of your sins?

Because this is the time when judgment begins at the house of God. This is the time when the people of God suffer for their sins.

This is the time when God visits his people to correct their sins. You see, God's visits to the people of God are always...

God's visits and chastisement to the people of God are always corrective. They're always corrective measures. God is putting their sins right in the judgment that begins at the house of God.

[12 : 08] God is putting them right for their sins. And oh, what a blessing it is to you if as a child of God you are chastened here for your sins.

How better, how much better that is than to be condemned with the world. But you know it means something. The fact that God chastens his church for their sins means this, that while God's people are here they are being saved with difficulty.

And that's what Peter means when he's talking here about the righteous scarcely being saved. If the righteous scarcely be saved.

Now there are some people who think that that word scarcely and the word if there are some people who think that that entails that the Lord's people might not be saved in the end.

That there's some question mark about the salvation of the righteous. Do you believe that? My friend, let me tell you this.

[13 : 23] There's no question mark about the salvation of the righteous. There's no doubt whatsoever that God's people are going to be saved. There's no doubt about it.

Not one of them will be lost. They shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one, he says.

They're never going to be lost. And yet, what does this word scarcely mean? It means just what I said, that the righteous are going to be saved with difficulty.

My friend, do you realise that if you're going to be amongst the people of God who are going to heaven and who are going to be with Christ, your life isn't going to be an easy life.

your life isn't going to be all plain sailing. The wind will be against you. The storm and the tide will often go against you as a Christian.

[14 : 34] Don't expect that your way through this world will be a bed of roses if you are a Christian. there are many who feel that it would be all wrong for me to say such a thing to a congregation that God's people are going to be saved with difficulty and they'll take us there a cue from that that if I'm saying that God's people are going to be saved with difficulty then who will ever be attracted to become a Christian?

Well, my friend, let me tell you, if you, my unconverted friend, will ever become a Christian, you will be faced with difficulties that you never knew existed in your unconverted state.

You will be faced with temptations. You will be faced with trials. You will be faced with problems that you never dreamt of in the unconverted life that you had.

I'm sure there are some of you who look at Christians and you think, oh, how easy it is to be a Christian, how easy it is to be a believer in Christ.

Well, it is true in a sense everyone who became a Christian sat back and wondered how wonderfully childlike it was, how easy it was to become one.

[16 : 10] In the end of the day, when God enlightened your mind and the knowledge of Christ, when God renewed your will, didn't he make it easy for you to believe in Christ?

Didn't he make it easy for you to trust in the Lord? Of course he did. But that was only a beginning. That was only a beginning. God made it easy for you in the beginning.

But as you go on in the Christian life, are you finding it easy? Are you finding it simple to live out your life as a Christian?

Are you aware of forces that are working against you in this world as a Christian? Of course if you're a Christian, you've got to realize that you're living in an alien environment, you're living in a world in which you have enemies within and enemies without.

Of course, as a Christian, you have difficulty. And I'm just going to name one or two of the difficulties that surround the Christian on his way to heaven.

[17 : 25] The righteous is saved with difficulty. and the first thing that I want to mention is this, the devil won't make the way of the Christian an easy way.

I believe there are some here and they were never ever aware of the personality and the power of Satan until they trusted in Christ.

You were never aware of his personality and you were never aware of his power until you came to put your trust in the Lord Jesus. But oh, the minute you trusted in Christ, you started to experience the power of the devil against you as a believer.

You started to experience his power working against you. you. You know that he would do anything to make you fall short of reaching heaven.

You know that he would do anything to spoil your Christian life. Of course he would. There's nothing that the devil hates more than a believer exercising faith in the Lord Jesus.

[18 : 39] Nothing the devil likes to upset more than that. the believer who exercises faith in Jesus Christ.

The devil is always wanting to break something. What does he want to break? He wants to break the golden cord that unites the believer and his Lord.

He wants to come in and make a break in the cord of faith that exists between the believer and his Lord. That's what the devil is trying to do then.

And then the world is trying its utmost to tear you away from Christ if you are a believer. The world is doing its utmost.

You know around this time of the year it's very strange the psychology that the world uses you know that there's a whole campaign of advertising going on at the moment building up to Christmas time in the shops and on your television screens somehow or other insidiously the world is trying its best to make you buy its way and the world is very adept at setting out its shop window.

[20 : 12] The world makes itself so attractive it's got it doesn't need suchy and suchy to teach it the ways in which it must advertise itself.

The world is a massive advertising agency that wants by the most subtle methods to reach right into your heart.

And the world wants you as a believer to be torn away from the things of Christ and to live by its own standards and live by its own manner.

That's what the world wants. That's what makes living as a Christian so difficult. The world is against you. But oh there's something else.

Inside the believer's heart the believer finds that there is a force that is against him as a believer. Inside the believer's own life there is the enigma of evil working still in his heart.

[21 : 30] You know this my friend the enigma of evil will be working in your heart as long as the Lord leaves you in this world. Doesn't matter how long you're left here that evil principle will be at work in your life trying its utmost to spoil your Christian testimony and your Christian living.

It's there. It lurks there and there are times with its own subtlety when your evil heart will deceive you into thinking that it's gone and that it's dead but it's not dead.

It's there and it's doing its utmost to separate between you and your living Lord. Oh yes my friend there are two statements here.

Judgment must begin at the house of God and the righteous will be saved with difficulty and it behoves you and I to learn them well because they're true of every Christian.

But then I want to turn to the unconverted now tonight and I want to have a very solemn word with you. God's people are suffering.

[22 : 54] God's people are tempted. They are tried. The world, the flesh and the devil is working in their life. But what about you?

And that's the way Peter looked at this whole enigma of evil. If the time has come when judgment must begin at the house of God, what will the end be of those who obey not the gospel of God?

What about you my friend? Let me remind you of a story, I don't know, I may have told it before, about two boys who were gathered together around the deathbed of their godly father.

A man who was noted for his Christian living, a man who was noted for his devotion to Christ. And these two lads were at his deathbed after he had just passed away.

And they had seen the difficulty with which their father had gone to face death. And there there were two young men, unbelievers, two young men who didn't have anything to trust in, two young men who had no one to go to in their area of need.

[24 : 32] And they said one to another, look they said, if father as a believer had all that difficulty before he died, what will it be like for us when we die?

And that's the way Peter is thinking here. if it's going to be so difficult for the Christian, if it's true that judgment begins at the house of God, what will be the end of those who obey not the gospel of God?

What will be your end, unconverted soul? What will be your end who hasn't closed with Christ in salvation?

What will be your end who has lived Christless and godless? What will be your end? That's the question. That's the question.

And then there is another one. Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? Where will they appear?

[25 : 56] Now I'm going to try tonight with the help of God to answer these questions. I'm going to attempt by God's grace to answer these two very solemn questions.

What will be the end of those that obey not the gospel of God? and where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?

And they're very very solemn questions. And they're questions that ought to make everyone in this gathering think for themselves.

Because it must be the case that there are those of us here who have not obeyed the gospel of God.

It must be the case that there are those who are sinners and who are ungodly men and women in this gathering. If that be the case then the questions apply to you.

[27 : 06] So the first question that I want to deal with and to try and answer is this. What will the end be of those who obey not the gospel?

What will the end be of those who obey not the gospel? You know what I'm going to tell you? There is a sense in which they will have no end.

There's a sense in which they have no end. Oh, you say, I thought when a person died that was the end a soul which is co-extensive with God.

A soul that is never, ever, ever going to die. A soul that will live forever. That's what we all of us have.

We have all got something that will never die. What's that? We have a soul. We have a soul that will never die.

[28 : 19] That's the difference between us and the brute beasts of the field. That's the difference between you and a sheep or a dove or any other beast that goes around the village here.

That's the difference between you and the other created animals. There's something about man. Do you remember what Shakespeare said about man?

He said this, what a piece of work is man. Shakespeare, that man, that playwright admitting openly that there is something glorious, majestic, different about man.

Part of what makes man so different is this that man will have no end. My hand, there is a sense in which you will never, ever, ever come to an end.

And yet, the Bible talks about the terminate to which those who are born of the gospel of God are heard.

[29 : 53] Do you remember the way Paul writes that very moving letter which he wrote to the believers in Philippi? And he's been thinking of some who are in the church in Philippi who are not really true believers.

And he's saying about them that there are some and he regrets to have to say it who walk, who follow, who do not follow after our example.

There are some, he says, who don't follow us. And he speaks about them and he can't hold back his tears when he thinks about them.

I wonder if there are any in this congregation tonight and there are people in this world and as you think about them you can't hold back his tears from them.

Because they've been so disobedient to the gospel of God you can't but think about them. Your heart can't that go out to them.

[31 : 09] After all the opportunities they've had to repent they're still disobedient they're still unrepentant they're still without God and without Christ.

And the Bible speaks about these people and Paul says this of them whose end is destruction whose God is rebellion and in whose glory is their shame for an end whose end is destruction.

My friend if tonight the angel of death were to come and call for you and it's quite possible it's quite possible.

If God were to come for you tonight would that be your end whose end is destruction?

Well let me talk about that end for a moment. Does that mean that you would be blotted off the face of God's memory forever to be destroyed?

[32 : 35] Well I'm afraid that there are some people who deceive themselves into thinking that that's the kind of destruction that God will bring on the disobedient.

I'm afraid there are some and I don't know but they might even be in this gathering tonight who think that some way or another if they're lost they'll be annihilated.

If they're lost it'll only be in a moment and it'll be over and done with forever. My friend don't deceive yourself into thinking that that's the way to be with you because I tell you this that the end of those that are born of the gospel of God isn't just something that will go on for a moment of time it's something that will be there throughout the endless ages of eternity my friend what will the end be of those that believe not the gospel it will be everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord everlasting what does that mean it means that it's going to go on and on and on and on forever there will be no end to it there will be nothing but destruction forever and ever and ever do you remember the way the epistle of

Jude speaks about him do you remember the way he speaks about it he speaks about it with perhaps the most graphic words in the bible to describe a lost eternity and it was just this the blackness of darkness forever the blackness of darkness forever what will be the end of those that obey not the gospel of God listen to it the blackness of darkness forever listen to the way Jesus spoke about it what will be the end of those that obey not the gospel of God Christ the Lord tells us this is what he says at their end will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth in outer darkness outer darkness where there will be nothing but weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth oh sinner are you going to go on in your disobedience

I don't think I think I'm hearing somebody in this gathering whispering no no I'm not going to go on like that the day is going to come for me when I'll turn the day is going to come for me when I'll repent but not quite yet leave me for a little while there's time enough to think about these things time enough to get right with God I'll go on for a little while longer in my disobedience you know my friend that's the way ungodly sinners go on and on that's the way the disobedient go on they're only saying leave me a little while longer a little while longer to fold my arms a little while longer to repent a little while longer to get right with God a little while longer to think about these solemn matters a little while longer oh my friend have you ever considered how easily a little while longer can turn to be a little while too long too long tonight

[36 : 50] I believe with all my heart that there are thousands and millions of souls in hell many of them were saying in a little while in a little while I'll get right with God give me a little while longer they were saying I'm too young they were saying give me a little while to enjoy myself but lost lost forever in the endless ages of a lost eternity in the blackness of darkness forever what an end the end of those that obey not the gospel of God and what about the other question second question here if the righteous are saved with difficulty if the righteous are saved with difficulty what where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear where will the ungodly man and the sinner appear well

I want to answer that in three ways it's a very solemn question and if tonight you are a sinner or an ungodly man no sometimes I get very frustrated with the way people preach some texts of scripture you know this text is so solemn and I've been asked by people as if all that mattered in this text was this what's the difference between an ungodly man and a sinner well I'll tell you this much as far as the place in which they appear is concerned there's no difference whatever they are the ungodly man and the sinner they're both going to a lost eternity and they're both going to the judgment seat of Christ and they're both going to the great eternity just as you and I are and therefore my dear friend what difference is it which of these classes you are in a man who is a sinner and a man who is an ungodly man and

I believe tonight that there are some in here and the the name sinner could be applied to you and there are others and the name ungodly man could be applied to them you know there are people in this world there are people in this world and they have somehow or another succeeded if you can call it success in blotting God completely out of their lives just as though he didn't exist that's what they think have you ever seen them have you ever seen these ungodly people these atheists these agnostics that are so self assured and so confident in their own views have you ever seen them I've seen them operating and I'll tell you this I've seen them getting rattled by the gospel again and again and again they get rattled by the gospel why is that why is it that these people who are so blasé and saying that they don't believe in all of this that these things that we preach are just legends and that they're of no value how is it that they get so rattled by the gospel

I'll tell you why because despite all of their self assuredness they have a conscience in their being there is a conscience that tells them that there is a God and in their being there is that sense of God of which Calvin spoke so lucidly in his writings where he said there's a sense in which every man is from time to time taken to stand in his conscience before the judgment of God you hear my friend tonight you might be very blasé about this gospel you might be an unbeliever you might be amongst the sinners and the ungodly but let me ask you a question are you ever brought face to face with the reality of what's living in your own conscience tonight

I believe you are from time to time and if there is a recording going on in your conscience that can bring you back to stand face to face with God what is there in the mind of God concerning you isn't it a strange thing that you can live as a sinner and you can forget your sins and you can live as though they didn't exist and you seem to be able to overcome them and you seem to be able to go your own way and forget that you've done them and all of a sudden you're pulled up short all of a sudden you're pulled up short and you remember that sin in your life and you remember that you did this thing that caused this hurt to someone else or this hurt to your own soul my friend if your conscience can record these things against you what

[43 : 05] I wonder has God got to record against you what has God got to record against you if there are things tonight that are registering in your own conscience what about the God who made you how are you going to answer that how are you going to stand in the presence of God because that's where you will stand because I want to say first and foremostly tonight that the sinner and the ungodly will appear at the judgment seat of Christ do you know what the Bible says the Bible says this we must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ we must all appear why why are we going there to the judgment seat of Christ well I'll tell you why in order that we might receive for what we have done in our body whether it be good or bad that's why that's why you're going to appear at the judgment seat of

Christ to answer what you have done with a few short years that God gives you on the face of this earth you're going to appear there my friend and so am I and that makes it very very solemn as for you preachers of the gospel are going to appear at the judgment seat and so are the hearers the converted are going to appear at the judgment seat and so are the unconverted why are the converted going to appear at the judgment seat well your shorter catechism you've known it since you were a child in the sabbath school since you were a child at your mother's knee you know it what does it say about the Lord's people at the judgment seat of Christ says this at the resurrection believers being raised up in glory shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment it doesn't stop there it goes on to say they shall be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of

God to all eternity what a contrast what a contrast between them and those who will go as the ungodly and the sinner to appear before the judgment seat of Christ the believer openly acknowledged and acquitted openly what's going to be you unconverted man if you go to the judgment seat as an unconverted soul what's going to be true of you there if the believer is openly acknowledged and acquitted you will be openly arraigned and condemned in the day of judgment openly arraigned and condemned oh my friend how awful is your sentence going to be if you die without Christ how awful is the reading of that sentence going to appear before you on the day of judgment repent and amongst what it will contain will be this the countless opportunities that you had to repent the countless offers that

God made you oh friend if it were only for the fact that you have in your home a Bible that you could open and study to find out what is the mind of God if it were but that how much how much are you guilty of going to eternity when you have wasted so many opportunities how much openly arraigned and openly condemned oh friend what an awful thought condemned condemned condemned how do I know that the believer will not be condemned in the day of judgment I will tell you why because there was another who was condemned in his place oh what a wonder it will be for the believer when he goes to the judgment seat of Christ he will go there closed in the righteousness of his

Jesus but you will go to the judgment seat of Christ my unconverted friend and you will go naked and open before the God he made naked and open you will appear in the judgment but then the ungodly and the sinner will appear in eternity how do I know how do I know well I know because as I said earlier we have been made coextensive with God we have a soul that is eternal a soul that is everlasting it's never going to die I know that and I think somehow or other you know it you know how I think you know it have you ever had the experience of looking on a dead corpse have you ever had that experience in this world looking on someone in death and you know as you look on that dead corpse that the real person the spirit has fled it's gone it is no more where has it gone it's gone to eternity do you know my friend that's the way it'll be with you and it'll be with me when we come to die we too will go to eternity my friend what does that mean well it means one of two things it means either that we go to heaven or that we go to hell one or other my

[50 : 05] Bible doesn't give me any warrant to believe that there's such a place of purgatory in between the key my Bible doesn't give me any warrant to believe that there's a second chance going to be given to anyone we'll either go to heaven or we'll go to hell and the Bible speaks so eloquently of the bliss of heaven and the Bible speaks so eloquently of the woe of hell my dear friend where will you appear when you die will you appear in heaven with Christ which is far better or will you appear in hell where you will never ever escape I wonder why the apostle Paul asks this question how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation how shall we escape oh my dear friend tonight in the quietness of your own soul and in the quietness of your own heart will you not consider these two questions what will the end be of those that obey not the gospel where will the ungodly and the sinner appear tonight let me ask what is the response of the

Christian to this whole scenario the response of the Christian is surely this let us commit our souls in well doing and to God as a faithful creator do you realize that tonight is the night when you should commit your soul to your faithful creator to your God do you realize that now is the time when you should come and you should commit yourself body and soul for time and eternity to your God do you know what the people of God say they have this to say by dint of long experience he is faithful who promised and I can tell you my friend that the savior is faithful to all his promises and if you tonight come to commit yourself to him he won't let you down he won't fail you he will never leave nor forsake those who trust in him let us pray most most holy and ever blessed

God the questions of thy word and the statements of thy truth are so so solemn and oh lord who knows to whom thou wilt come next who knows whose door thou wilt knock God as a thief at midnight who knows gracious God who will lift their head from off their pillow on some morning very soon and yet we know that those who obey not the gospel of God will have as their end destruction everlasting destruction and we also know that the ungodly and the sinner will appear in death in judgment in eternity and even in hell lord wilt thou not in thy mercy lay home to the hearts of our people and especially the young people of our congregation the solemn nature of the message of the gospel for who knows how long we will have the opportunity gracious

God bless this week into which we have entered with all its privileges bless thy servants who we expect to come among us to preach the gospel to us we ask that their preaching might not be in the excellent words of man's wisdom but with the demonstration of the spirit and of power and all we ask is in Jesus name Amen Amen