



## Their Destruction Is Not Asleep

*Series: A Divine Antidote to Heresy*

2 Peter 2:3b-10a

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**Introduction:** This morning, our subject is a difficult one, to say the least. The judgment of God is a fearful thing. Peter, in the text that we are looking at this morning, means to show us the certainty and the inescapable nature of the wrath and judgment of God. This is a subject that no-one likes to speak of and yet it must be spoken of clearly and frankly. Faithful prophets and teachers in the Scriptures did not hesitate to speak of God's judgment to come on the unrepentant and the Christ-rejecters of their age, of our age and the age to come. To be sure, to 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, to those outside and even inside the church, to speak of the judgment of God sounds so unenlightened, so old-school, and so heavy-handed. Fallen man despises the idea of God's judgment because we do not like the idea of a God who is zealous for His own glory first. We want a god and create a god who is zealous for our glory first. Charles Spurgeon rightly says of humanity's false conceptions of God: **And we now declare that the God of Holy Scripture is a God of inflexible justice, He is not the God Whom some of you adore. You adore a god who winks at great sins; you believe in a god who calls your crimes peccadillos and little faults. Some of you worship a god who does not punish sin but who is so weakly merciful, and mercilessly weak, that he passes by transgressions and iniquity and never enacts a punishment. You believe in a god who, if man sins, does not demand punishment for his offense. You think that a few good works of your own will pacify him, that he is so weak a ruler that a few good words uttered before him in prayer will win sufficient merit to reverse the sentence, if indeed you think he ever passes a sentence at all. Your god is no God; he is as much a false god of the Greeks or of ancient Nineveh. The God of Scripture is one who is inflexibly severe in justice and will by no means clear the guilty. "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked" (Nahum 1:3, KJV). The God of Scripture is a Ruler who, when His subjects rebel, marks their crime and never forgives them until He has punished it, either upon them or upon their Substitute.**

The reality and the power of God's coming judgment is displayed throughout the whole of Scripture. The psalmist writes: **(Psa 21:8-13)** Isaiah tells us: **(Isa 13:6-11)**

The wrath of God against the ungodly, against the false professor of Christ, against the hypocrite, against the religious, against moral and seemingly good unbeliever, of all those not found in Christ through repentance and faith –God's judgment is coming and it is inescapable.

But especially what Peter wants us to see is that God's judgment is coming specifically against the false teacher, against the false prophet, against those that would falsely speak for God and those who would follow them. In the words of chapter 3 that we looked at last week, **"Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." (2Pe 2:3)**

So, Peter will tell us that the judgment of God against the false teachers is coming and when it comes, God's justice will be administered with thorough exactness, with absolute strictness and without mercy. No bargains or deals will be struck. No extenuating circumstances will be taken into account. Every false teacher will be judged fully and finally and the root and reason for the severity God's judgment is this. God is a God of truth and because He is a God of truth, He is set against all liars, but particularly those who would misrepresent Him and misrepresent His Word and misrepresent His gospel with their lies. To teach lies as if they were the truth of God, however is to have the almighty God set against you. What God said of the false prophets in Jeremiah's day stands today: **(Jer 23:30-32)** Ezekiel describes God's anger with the false prophets saying: **(Eze 13:2-9)** Peter means for us to see that:

**1) God is a God who judges the rebellious and unrepentant with certainty and severity. (v. 4-9)** Peter in essence is saying this: If God has brought these various judgments against the rebellious throughout history, yet in the midst of these judgments preserved his people, then we can be certain that God knows how to rescue and preserve His people and judge thoroughly the unrighteous, especially those who feed their flesh and despise Christ's Lordship. Peter uses three illustrations to describe God's faithfulness to judge the rebellions and he speaks first on the cosmic scale speaking of His judgment of the angels.

**Angels: God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...**What is Peter talking about? Peter is speaking of an event beyond our human experience. He is giving us a glimpse of the rebellion of the glorious beings known as angels who served God face-to-face, beholding the fullness of his glory and the greatness of his power and who still rebelled against His throne and God's response.

Now I don't want you to miss the forest for the trees here, okay. There have been those throughout history who have tried to determine exactly what event Peter is describing here. Some have tried to tie this to the fall of the angels during the rebellion of Lucifer, of Satan, when he sought to make himself equal to God. Others have tried to say this is a commentary on Gen. 6:1-4 where the sons of God took to themselves daughters of men – we talked about that on Wednesday night a while back. The fact is that there is no way of knowing what it is that these angels did. They sinned. What did they do greater than the sins of the other fallen angels – the demons that are still free to roam the earth? God has not told us. They sinned and as a result of their sin, God Almighty has cast them into hell – actually into torment. Here Peter

borrowed a word from Greek mythology...the word Tartaros. The Greeks viewed Tartaros as the lowest place for wicked -- rebellious gods and people were sent there to receive the worst punishment. It was the lowest place a being could go. And the Jews eventually came to use that term to describe the place where the fallen angels were sent. It was the deepest pit, the most terrible place of torture and eternal suffering and God has cast these particular angels that sinned to this place to await the final judgment when they will be cast into "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Mat 25:41 ESV) The point here is not what these angels did, but rather, God's response. What we are supposed to understand from Peter's illustration is this:

**1. No-one is exempt from the judgment of God** – God did not even spare the angels when they sinned. Neither their former rank, nor their former glory, nor their former holiness, saved them from being thrust down to hell; and if God punished them so severely, then false teachers could not hope to escape. No one will escape the judgment of God for sin. Even the angels of heaven, who served in the presence of God, were judged when they sinned and they were judged with an awful, awesome and terrifying judgment, how could the false teachers, therefore, ever hope to escape. That is the first thing. The second thing is this:

**2. Judgment, though delayed, is nevertheless real** – These angels are being kept until the day of final judgment, but they will not escape, and neither will the false teachers. They may seem to be successful, may seem to be getting away with their lies, but built into the way that God rules the universe is the principle that punishment does not always immediately follow rebellion, but punishment is inescapable. The whole idea of God as some soft, understanding, sentimental God who is indifferent or tolerant and understanding of sin is totally foreign to scripture. Every sin must be judged. His very character, as a holy and righteous God, demands it. The sin of angels and God's response shows this clearly. Peter doesn't stop there. He talks about God's judgment on a cosmic scale with the angels and then he tells us about God judgment on the

**The Ancient World: (God) did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.** Wednesday night folks, you will be familiar with this illustration. In reading the account of the flood in the book of Genesis we see that God's evaluation of mankind in the days of Noah was this: **The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen 6:5)** This is a remarkably comprehensive statement. Sin had run its course in man. At the very root of man's existence, God saw only evil all the time. The depravity, the wickedness, the unrestrained sin of man was unrepressed by anything. Open, daring, rebellious sin was the norm.

In that setting, for 120 years as he built the ark, Noah was proclaiming the need for righteousness before a holy God and the whole world was disobedient while God in his patience waited. They ignored the preaching of Noah, they ignored Noah's warning; they ignored God's patience, His mercy, and His kindness. They refused to believe the message that Noah preached and because of their sin and wickedness, God brought a flood upon the earth. What are we to see from this?

**1. God's judgment on the wicked who refuse God's message is inevitable and just** – As the sovereign and holy God, God has the right to destroy sinful mankind, to bring upon man the judgment that he deserves, to utterly destroy man. God is a just God and he cannot let sin go unpunished or He stops being just. If God did not deal with this rampant and pervasive and unbridled and uninhibited sin, then it would mean that He is not a moral and holy God, but he is. The people of Noah's day refused to hear the herald of God's righteousness and repent and so were judged by God. If God judged the world of sinners who rejected God's message through His herald of righteousness, how much more will He judge these false prophets, who suppress the truth, the message of the gospel in unrighteousness, and so hide from men the only way of life.

**2. God's preservation of the faithful is certain** – We see that in God's preservation of Noah, don't we? As a herald of righteousness in the midst of wickedness, he was not like those false prophets who cried "Peace, peace" where there is no peace, nor was he like those Jeremiah describes in Jer. 23:17. Because he was faithful to preach the message of God, Noah had few converts but numbers is not the measure of faithfulness. God will preserve His faithful, but the false teachers, notwithstanding their multitude of followers and long success in propagating their lies, have no reason to imagine that they will escape the wrath of God. From the flood, Peter then turns to the judgment of

**Sodom and Gomorrah: By turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes (God) condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and He rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)**

The book of Genesis tells us that **the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD. (Gen 13:13 ESV)** They were guilty of unbridled lust evidenced by their homosexuality, they shamelessness, the sensuality and excess. Ezekiel says of Sodom -- **(Eze 16:49 ESV)** They were ungodly -- irreverent, wicked, in opposition to God. The idea is to be without any respect or worship of the true God at all, living as if God does not exist, doing what is right in our own eyes, fulfilling the desires of our sin nature. Because of their great sin, God sent angels two angles to judge and destroy the inhabitants. Genesis 19 tells us the story. **(Gen 19:1-17 ESV)** What we must see from this example is this:

**1. God's judgment will be complete and will consume the sinner** – Peter selects this particular illustration to press a main point. The wrath of God will consume the sinner. Notice that Peter puts the sins of these false teachers on the same level as the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. The same disgust God has toward Sodom is what He has toward false teachers. Should the false teachers who have rebelled against God and His glory think that their fate will be any different? Sodom and Gomorrah are an example of what will happen to the ungodly. Their judgment and Lot's deliverance combine to show that:

**2. Living a life that honors God and that is faithful to the gospel in a world under judgment will be difficult** – Look at the way that Lot is described here, as a righteous man who was **tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard**. It comes as a surprise that Lot would be called righteous. On the surface he seems to be cowardly, foolish, weak, and perpetually attracted to the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but Peter says he was **greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked**. By God's mercy, Lot was a believer and as a believer, Lot was troubled daily by the lawless deeds he saw and heard. Lot was not swallowed up by the tide of immorality that swept through the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but neither was he numb to the sin around him – it troubled him and tortured his soul. Living a life amidst the sinfulness of this society and the wickedness of false teachers will vex our souls.

So in using these judgments as an illustration, in describing all of these judgments of God upon sin and rebellion against God, Peter means for us to come to the conclusion that:

**2) God is the God who knows both how to preserve His own and judge His adversaries (v. 9)**

**God knows how to deliver His own from the test – The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials...** If He knew how to save Noah and seven others before He flooded the world, and He knew how to save Lot and his two daughters before He destroyed the city, then He knows how to save those who belong to Him and they have absolutely nothing to fear.

Those who faithfully trust in the goodness and the justice of God, who hold to the truth and the reality of the gospel, should take heart and be of good courage, though surrounded by unfaithful teachers who strive to infiltrate the church and a sinful society that seeks to overcome God's people must stand firm, for the Lord knows how to rescue his people, for in the words of Paul to Timothy, **But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."** (2Ti 2:19 ESV)

And let me just show you something cool -- **The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials...literally, from the test.** The word translated as trials is not plural in the Greek but singular and is best translated as the word "test." The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from the test. What is the test? Deut. 13 that we looked at last week give us a clue. Do you remember what it said? **(Deu 13:3-4 ESV)** The Lord knows how to deliver those who are His from the test of the false teachers and

**God knows how to judge false teachers -- to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.** If God knows how to judge in the cosmic sense in judging the angels, if God knows how to judge the ancient world of sinners, if God knows how to judge the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He knows how to utterly judge the false teachers who seek to destroy His church and reject His gospel, those whom Peter describes as **those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority** – those who crave self-glory, self-exaltation, self-promotion, self-indulgence and who hold in contempt the Lordship of Christ. Last I want you to see that

**3) God rescues the godly and judges the unrighteous in light of their response to the gospel of the cross.** As compelling as the three examples that Peter used are, they are not the supreme example of God's willingness and power to judge sin. The ultimate example is the cross. It was there that His wrath against all ungodliness was poured out in all its fury. It was there that the righteous anger of God was unleashed. All of it exhausted upon His own Son who voluntarily stood in the place of guilty sinners. God judged sin on the cross of Christ. But God also ordained the cross, the sacrifice of Christ, as the only way to redeem sinful men and women. Not only does He know how to judge; God knows how to redeem. Jesus Christ, moved by a love for His Father and for His church that was determined to do everything necessary to save us, endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgment for which we were otherwise inescapably destined, and so won for us forgiveness, adoption and glory. Sin is a cursed thing. God, because of His holiness must curse it and judge it; He must punish men for committing it; but the Lord's Christ, the only begotten Son of the Eternal God of Heaven, became a man and suffered in His body the curse which was due the sons of Adam, so that by a substitute for guilty man, God could punish sin, our sin, in Him so that He pour forth in bountiful mercy upon those who believe in the only Substitute, the only Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is in responding to this gospel in repentance from sin and in faith in Christ that God rescues those made godly by the work of Christ on the cross. And it is in rejecting and despising the gospel, and in the case of the false teachers obscuring and changing the gospel that God will judge the unrighteous.

How ironic that the only way of deliverance for the false teachers from the wrath that is to come against the sinfulness of man is by the very work of Christ on the cross, the very message that false teachers seek to obscure and refuse to preach.

May we hold fast to the word of the cross, hold fast to the gospel and hold fast to Christ.

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