

Judgment

1 Peter 4:17-19

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, December 3, 2017

This morning we're in a series called "The Suffering Church", where we're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering. We started this back in April and we've been in it for about eight months now, and we should be closing it out soon, I actually wanted to finish it before now, but when I preach I'm like a kid in a candy store, I want to take everything home with me. I want to skip over some stuff and then I go, "Ooh, that looks interesting." And then before long, we got a whole sermon on a couple verses, so I haven't wrapped it up yet, but hopefully we'll do so at the beginning of the New Year and hear it in just a couple of weeks, and then we'll jump into a new series that I'll tell you about later.

To say that theologically, that sounds funny maybe, the kid in the candy store comment. But to say this theologically, here at Grace Fellowship church, we believe in what is called the plenary inspiration of Scripture. That means we believe every word is inspired by God, plenary means "every." Every word is inspired, every word in Scripture comes from His hand, every word says what He wants it to say, which means that when you go through the Bible it's good to go slow. There's a theological reason for that. And you want to catch all God has to say to you. Another way to say this is, I don't know if you know this or not, but the phrase "thus says the Lord" appears 400 times in the Bible. It appears 400 times, because when the Scripture speaks, God speaks, and when you open your Bible you meet God there. And you want to take your time and make it a long meeting with God. I hear people say today that they want to hear God speak to them. Well, there's a simple way to do that. Open your Bible, amen? That's where God speaks to you, or they say they want to meet God, well, this is where you can meet Him. You meet Him in the book, in the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon told the story of the time they were building the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the church where he preached, and they were testing the acoustics to see if they were okay, and he got up in the pulpit in and he said with a loud voice, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." And a few minutes later a construction worker came in who had been working on the roof and he looked like he had seen a ghost. And he said, "Pastor Spurgeon, I think God spoke to me just now," and Spurgeon said, "Well, what did he say?" And the man said, "Well, God said, behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." And Spurgeon said, "God did speak to you because the Bible says that." That is the Word of God, because when Scripture speaks, God speaks. When you open your Bible you meet God there, and that's how we want to approach it here at Grace Fellowship Church. This is the Word of God, it is inspired, every word matters. And we want to have that approach in everything we do in ministry and as we go through books of the Bible. And that leads us to the book of 1 Peter.

1 Peter is the Word of God to you this morning. It is where you meet God in your suffering. That's the theme of the book. If you've been with us for the past couple of months, you'll remember that the idea of the book is about suffering. And just to show you what I'm talking about, if you would read 1 Peter 4:12-19, the last part of this is our passage for today, in verse 12, Peter writes,

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 “And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner”? 19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Now, just to give you some background for this passage, I've told you before that the first verse of the letter says who it was written to. 1 Peter 1:1 tells us the audience. It says it was written “To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.” Those were all provinces in the territory of Asia Minor. (It's kind of neat to be in a country that actually has provinces. I don't know have to tell you what a province is, you guys know that. I was just thinking if I was in the United States I'd have to tell them what a province was, they don't have those there.) But this was a stretch of land between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. It's in modern day Turkey, which is very quiet now, but back then it was a very populated place. A lot of ancient cities were in Asia Minor, Ephesus was there, Paul's hometown of Tarsus was there. If you remember the Seven Churches in Revelation, they're all in Asia Minor. The famous city of Troy was there, the island of Crete was just off it, same thing with Cyprus, it was a very big place. According to some estimates, it was 300,000 square miles in diameter, that's the size of British Columbia, which means that these churches and these Christians were really spread out.

Without modern travel and without automobiles and the internet and then telephones, this was some severe isolation. And the way this is worded in verse 1 makes it sound like Peter was writing to them in a circle. What I mean is that if you look on a map, Pontus is next to the Black Sea. Galatia is just below it to the east, then you go south to Cappadocia, west to Asia, back up to Bithynia, which is also on the Sea, meaning that Peter wrote this letter in a circle.

It's actually the route of the messenger, 1 Peter 5:12 tells us the messenger's name was Sylvanus. The idea is that Peter wrote this letter, handed it off to Sylvanus, Sylvanus caught a ship, entered at Pontus and then made a route to all these areas, taking months to do this, possibly years. And the point of the letter is that he did this to encourage them. If you've ever been suffering, you know that nothing helps like a personal visit, nothing helps like a face-to-face conversation.

And chapter 4 tells us what Sylvanus read to them. He said several things before he gets here, but in chapter 4:12, he reminds them that God is doing this for your testing. He said, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing." That word means “a study” or “an investigation of something”. Sylvanus was reading this letter to them and explaining God is investigating you. He is testing your heart to see what's in there, that's why the suffering is happening.

Just before that, he mentions their “fiery ordeal”, or their “burning” in Greek. We don't know what that burning was, but it must have been bad because he compares it to the sufferings of Christ in verse 13, the worst sufferings imaginable. He talks about their being reviled and insulted for the name of Christ in verse 14.

And then he says something interesting, he says, “if anyone suffers as a Christian”. Now the interesting thing about that is the word “Christian” had just been invented at this time in history. We kind of ran out of time last week, didn't get a chance to get into this, but it was a brand new word and only occurs, actually, three times in the Bible. If you look up the word “Christian”, you'll see it three times, twice in the book of Acts, once right here. And almost every time you see it it's an insult. Remember King Agrippa, when Paul was standing before the king, the king says, "Paul, you're not gonna try to make me a Christian, are you?" That wasn't a compliment, that was an insult. And you see it here in the same way. To give some history for that, one of the earliest paintings we have of a cross was found on the wall of a house in Rome. And on the painting, you see a picture of a man being crucified with the head of a donkey. And beneath him is another man worshipping him with outstretched arms and the words, *Alexamenos sebetai theon* which means "Alexamenos worships his God." Because that's how the ancients looked at Christianity, they thought it was stupid. They thought it was dumb to worship a crucified man. The cross was a symbol of torture. And the idea of basing a religion on that was about as dumb as worshipping a farm animal. And so they slandered people with this name. When these people in these provinces got saved and started worshipping Christ and calling Him Lord, their neighbours called them Christians to insult them. The word “Christian” comes from the word Christ, it means “Christ worshipper or Christ follower”. It's actually a spin off of the word *Caesarianos* or “Caesar worshipper”. And the idea at this time was that just as we worship Caesar, so you worship Christ. Just as we look to Caesar as king, which is a normal thing to do, a respectable thing to do, you look to Christ, which is just dumb. And in light of all this, Peter and Sylvanus, Peter through Sylvanus, reminds him, "God is testing you." That's the point here. And he says, "You'll be blessed if you pass the test." Quentin just read, "Blessed are you when people persecute you," you see that in verse 14. "And you'll experience God's glory."

And then he mentions judgment in verse 17, which starts our passage for today, it's the next theme in here. Verse 17 starts out, "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God." I don't know if you ever thought about this before, but judgment and suffering go together, because every time we suffer, we question God's judgment, don't we? You might know what I'm taking about. When you're insulted and slandered, like these people are, what do you say, you say, "That's not fair." You say, "I don't deserve this." And that is a statement of judgment. You say, "Why, God, why are you doing this?" One author says it this way, he says, "Why does God allow the innocent to suffer while the wicked pop champagne bottles and sing loud songs?" That's the idea here. Even the unbelieving world asks this. I was reading the Chilliwack Progress this past week, our local newspaper, about a convicted criminal who had gone through six lawyers trying to get an appeal, and the people were asking, "Why? He doesn't deserve this," they said. "That's not fair." They were passing judgment. In the same edition, there was the article about the policeman who was killed in Abbotsford and people were saying the same thing, "Why? Why did he have to die, why did this have to happen to him?" You see, we say those kinds of things when we suffer. We question God's judgment when we're in pain.

And it might help you to know people have always done this, this is nothing new in human history. I was reading the other day that every major, important author in history, from Homer to Dante to Shakespeare, they've all wrestled with the question of God's fairness in light of evil. You see it in the Bible when Job asked, "Why do the wicked live while the righteous die?" The interesting thing about that is that Job might be the oldest book in the Bible. Some say, it might be the oldest book in history, and here Job is wrestling with the question, "why?" Jeremiah asked the same thing, "Why is the way of the wicked prospered?" Asaph prayed, "I was envious of the wicked." David said, "How long will the wicked rejoice?" That's all a question of judgment, it's all a question of right and wrong. It might be helpful before we get into this passage just to back the truck up for a minute and talk about this issue of justice.

If you're taking notes, you can write some of this in here. It might help you think about judgment from a Biblical perspective, 'cause Peter talks about it some, but he doesn't dive into all of this. If you're wrestling with this question of, "Why does God allow good things to happen to bad people?", let me give you a couple things to think about. One is this, God is into ultimate justice, not immediate justice. He's into ultimate justice, not immediate justice, which means that God will ultimately punish sin, ultimately punish evil, but not immediately on our timetable. He doesn't see time the way we do, so He doesn't judge things as quickly as maybe we would want. 2 Peter 3:8-9 says, "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is like 1,000 years and 1,000 years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." In other words, sometimes God delays His justice to give men time to repent. You guys understand, we've said this before, but if God gave us immediate justice, do you understand that every lost person right now would go to hell and spend eternity there forever? If God gave immediate justice, all those who are in Christ would be pardoned because their sins are paid in the blood of Christ. All those who are not in Christ would go to hell right now. You see, God delays justice because He's merciful. We'll talk about that in a minute. He's not dragging His feet.

This leads to another thing the Bible says about justice and that is that God is into universal justice, not selective justice. God is into universal justice, not selective justice. And what I mean by that is so many times when we say, "That's not fair," we mean, "That's not fair to me," right? When we say, "Where is the justice," we mean, "Where is the justice to me?" We see someone get pulled over for speeding and we say, "That's right. You shouldn't be speeding." And then we get pulled over for speeding and we say, "Now, wait just a minute here, officer. I had good intentions. I was on my way to church," right? "I'm a pastor. I would never break the law." Or we watch someone get arrested for littering and we say, "That's right. Keep British Columbia clean." And then if we get arrested for littering, we say, "But there's no trash can anywhere around here." And see, God doesn't operate that way. His rules are the same for everybody. His justice is universal. What goes through this one goes through that one. What goes for you goes for me. It's the same everywhere. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, "The Rock, His work is perfect and all His ways are just." Job 34:12 says, "Surely God will not act wickedly and the Almighty will not pervert justice." God does not pervert justice ever.

And that leads to another good point here. And the Bible also says that God is not into justice only. He's into mercy, grace and love too, and we've already alluded to that Psalm. I told you if

God was just, and only just, this world wouldn't last ten seconds. You would lie and then, boom, you're outta here, you're done. But God is a merciful God. He is not just a judge, He's a loving Father. And there's a lot of other ways we could look at this as well. God punishes people in ways that we don't know about. That's another way to look at this. And we can mention some other things, but you can assure God will bring justice. He will do right in all the earth. The Bible is explicitly clear about that.

A US Supreme Court Justice, Horace Gray, once informed a man who was acquitted of a crime. He said, "I know you're guilty and you know you're guilty. And what makes it worse is that God knows your guilty," but the judge said, "And I want you to remember, one day you will stand before the better and wiser judge and then you will be dealt with according to a justice that is greater than anything you can imagine," and all this leads to our passage for this morning. In 1 Peter 4, Peter tells us about a justice that is greater. He tells us about a better and wiser judge. For those of you who are suffering this morning and wrestling with the question, "Why?" Peter says, "Well, let's talk about that." Let's talk about the judge. For those of you who are wondering, "Why is this happening to me? What's going on? That's not fair." Well, we can't answer all of those questions. But we can answer a few of them here, and let's do that. In 1 Peter 4:17-19, the Apostle gives us three stages to the justice of God. He kind of lays it out for you, almost consecutively, almost chronologically in some ways. So if you're taking notes this morning, here's some stages to the justice of God in history.

The first one is this: God's justice begins with the church. His justice begins with the church. For those people who say they want justice, especially those Christians, you got to be kind of be careful what you're asking for. Because Peter says here, "You will get justice." Even as a Christian. Judgment will come to the church. As he's writing to people who are being attacked, people who are suffering in the church, in the household of God, Peter gives them the reminder that this is where it all begins. If you look in verse 17, this is exactly what he says. He says, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God." The word "for" there points to back to all he said so far in chapter 4. He said, "You're undergoing a fiery ordeal, you're sharing in Christ's sufferings, you're being tested and reviled and slandered and called things, like 'Christian,'" which again was an insult back then. He says, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. This is why this is happening to you." Peter says, "This is why you're experiencing this. If you want to know why, this is it, it's a result of God's judgment."

To give you insight into this verse, the word "act" could be translated "from" here, so you could translate this passage, "It is time for judgment to begin from the household of God." The idea is the church is the starting point for God's judgment. It's the point of departure. The fire starts here and it spreads elsewhere. It begins to burn here and then it envelops other things. If you remember your Bible history, Jesus cleansed the temple first. Matter of fact, that's one of the first things He did in His ministry. He was baptized, tempted by the devil, called His disciples and then He goes into the temple and cleans it out. Why? Because judgment starts at the household of God. And Jesus was gonna pass a lot of judgments in the next three years of His ministry, they all started at the temple. Same goes for Israel. If you remember all the judgments that were passed on Israel, Romans 2:9 even says, "There will tribulation and distress for every man who does evil, for the Jew first and then for the Gentile." And you want to ask the question, "Why the Jew first, what did he do?" Well, the judgment begins at the household of God. And if the house

is clean, everything is clean. If the house is in order, everything is in order, so God starts with His house.

You could say it another way, so goes the church, so goes the culture, so goes the priest, so goes the people. So God starts with the priest. He starts with the church. If you ever wonder why it's so hard to be a Christian, this is why, because God starts with us. He judges us first, not in an eternal sense that is paid for in the blood of Christ. There is no judgment for the believer. Once you die, you don't go to purgatory, you go to heaven, if you're in Christ. Jesus says, "It is finished," and that word "it" was referring to judgment. Judgment is finished in an eternal sense. But in an earthly sense, in the here and now, in some sense Peter says, "He is passing judgment." The church bears God's name, so it bears His accountability, that's the idea here. It bears His glory, so it needs to act like it.

Other passages of Scripture refer to this in different ways. Hebrews 12 says the church needs to be disciplined. If you remember, Hebrews 12:6 says, "For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines and He scourges every son whom He receives." Those of you that have children, you know that it takes a lot of work to discipline your child, teach them right from wrong. And you do it, because you love him, same thing here. God disciplines His church, because He loves it. 1 Corinthians 5 says that the church needs to be cleansed. 1 Corinthians 5:1-7 says, "For it is actually reported that there is immorality among you," this is the Church at Corinth and he says, "Your boasting is not good, clean out the old leaven, so that you may be a new lump just as you are in Christ." Same idea here, a father gives his son a bath, because he loves him. You will fight tooth and nail to get that kid in the bathtub sometimes, but you do it, because you care about him. You don't want him going around filthy all the time. God does the same thing for the church. He wants us pure and holy. He wants us clean and righteous. He wants us to grow and, like we talked about last time, a lot of our growth comes through suffering. John Calvin says, "God stores up wrath for the wicked, but correction for the church." This judgment is not a punishing judgment, it's a correcting judgment. Another author says, "God strikes us, as well as strokes us for our good." Stephen Charnock said that we learn more about God from the rod than from the pillow. In fact, the reformers had a saying for this. They said, *Semper reformanda ecclesia*, which means, "always reforming the church." We could say, "always judging" or "always cleansing" the church. It's an ongoing process, it's never over. As long as the church is on this earth, God will be judging it in this sense.

As matter of fact, if you look back over history, there was never a time when the church was not being cleansed. There was never a time in history when there was not a Christian somewhere suffering for the name of Christ. If you wanted to pick an easy religion, you've failed. This is not one of them. If you remember in the Book of Acts, things were going great, the church had thousands of members, it was growing by leaps and bounds, it was about to start some satellite campuses and an Internet ministry. (I'm just kidding.) Everyone had everything in common and then what happens? Stephen dies, right? Not only does he die, he's murdered; one of the first deacons of the church, by the way. If you ever want to be a deacon, just think of the kind of job you're getting into, 'cause this was one of the first guys. He's murdered, why? Because God was judging His church. Then a few chapters later, you read that James is killed, one of the first elders, one of the first Apostles. In fact, you go on and read in church history all the Apostles were martyred but one of them.

Then as you go on in history, you come to the Ten Persecutions of the Early Church. Over a period of about 200 years, after the Apostles died, the church was persecuted by Roman emperor after Roman emperor after Roman emperor. Starting with Nero and ending with Diocletian, Christians were burned at the stake, crucified, slaughtered in the Colosseum, drowned, beheaded and put in vats of burning oil. Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote about this. And this guy's not a believer, but he said, "In their deaths Christians were made a mockery. They were covered in the skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified and set on fire and as a result," he says, "People, unbelievers, began to feel sorry for them. For they realized that they were being massacred not for the public good but to satisfy the emperors' pleasure." And then as you go on in history, Constantine takes over and the Middle Ages begin and now the church begins to persecute the church. Now Christians, at least people who called themselves Christians, killed Christians. Now you see the Spanish Inquisition begin. And now, you see people being put to death for reading their Bibles. They would actually, well, because of the cost of it, they would chain Bibles to the pulpit. That would be kind of interesting, right? You walk into the church and Bible's actually chained to the pulpit. That was because they didn't want anybody stealing it and selling it. But there was kind of a metaphorical thing going on there as well. They didn't want anybody reading it. Your Bible has blood on it. In order for it to be translated into English, people died. In order for it to be translated into Spanish, people died. In order for it to be translated into any language other than Latin at that time, people died. Then the Reformation began and eventually things cooled off for a while. Then you see the Great Awakenings pop up. And now, you have men like George Whitfield and John Wesley preaching in open fields and on street corners because they couldn't go into churches. Churches banned them from attending. And they would sit on the fields and preach and oftentimes hecklers would throw rocks at them and dead cats and manure. This is the time you see probably the greatest, one of the greatest theologians ever, Jonathan Edwards, fired from his church for the same reason. And then you go on and you see the rise of liberalism and the church fought over that. And before that you see the rise of evolution and the church fought over that. And today you see men like Al Mohler getting death threats. Several years ago, I remember hearing Al Mohler talk about the time they were turning the Southern Seminary around and he would walk across the campus and get spat on and people would picket and protest outside his office. But the point is that, it's always been that way in history because God is judging His church. It's always been like this because He's disciplining us and cleansing us off. When you clean your house, you get rid of the stuff that doesn't belong, right? That's the whole idea. You throw away the stuff that shouldn't be there. When God cleanses His church He does the same thing. Through persecution He makes people ask the question, "Do I really belong here? Is this really worth it?"

To look at this another way, to shift gears for a moment, this passage in verse 17 says, "God has ordained a time for this to happen." If you notice, it says, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God." In other words, God is sovereign over this. This is not an accident. This is not a mistake. This is in His plan. Some passages call this the "birth pains." Like a woman in pain giving birth, so the church goes through pain and judgment in this sense. Some passages say "the hour is upon us." Some call it "the tribulation," not "the great tribulation," but "a tribulation," a time of turmoil. But the point is, this is exactly how God wants it to be, which means you don't have to worry when it happens. You don't have to be afraid. You can trust God through this, when it happens to you. A drug store in Galveston, Texas put a sign on their door that said, "We've been trusted a million times and never failed." You could put the same sign on

God. Throughout all this persecution, throughout all this violence and this pain in history, God has been sovereign over it all. When you go to heaven and you sit at the Lamb's supper and you talk to these martyrs that have been killed for their faith, not a one of them will say God let them down. Not a one of them will say it wasn't worth it. They'll all say, He can be trusted. And you could say the same thing in eternity.

That leads to the next stage in the justice of God. And we'll go through these next two a little quicker, but we spent a lot of time on that first one, it was very important. But it begins in the church. It starts with believers. If you're wondering about justice and judgment and all those questions, well, it starts here. And then Peter says, here's the second stage: it spreads to the world. The judgment begins in the church, but it doesn't stop there, it spreads to the world. You could go back to the image of cleaning, when you do spring cleaning, you start with your house first, right? Because you live there. All your stuff is there. And then you go out into the yard and the garage and the shed out back and then your husbands and kids run for cover. I'm getting in trouble here while I'm talking. But you start with the house because it's closest to you. God does that with His church and then He goes out into the yard. Then He goes out in the world.

If you read in verse 17, all of it says this. It says, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel?" That phrase "those who do not obey the gospel" is a reference to lost people, people outside the church. Peter's point is very simple here, if God is this tough on the church, what's He gonna do to those who are outside of it? If He judges and cleanses and disciplines us, what's He gonna do to them? It's a rhetorical question, he leaves it unanswered for effect, but he follows up with another one in verse 18, there's another question. He says, "And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?"

That phrase "with difficulty" is translated "scarcely" in some of your translations, the word is *molis* in Greek, it means "barely" or "with great trouble." The same word was used of Paul's shipwreck in Acts to say he barely survived it, he survived it with great trouble. And Peter says, "If the righteous are saved with that kind of trouble, what's gonna happen to the godless man and the sinner?" If God puts believers through that, what's He gonna put them through?

And Peter doesn't spell this out here for the... Because he didn't think it was necessary to, but the implication is that they will go to hell, right? It's stated very clearly in other parts of the Bible. Like I said earlier, God is into ultimate justice, He's into universal justice. Romans 10:13, it's a very encouraging passage, it's a universal passage, it says, "For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." That's universal, it includes everybody. "Whoever" means whatever country you're from, whatever race you are, whatever gender you are, whatever your background, whoever. But the flip side to that, is that whoever doesn't call isn't safe. Whoever rejects Christ will spend eternity paying for their sins. John 3:36 says, "For whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." The phrase "abides on him" is very interesting 'cause the idea is like it sticks on him, like Velcro. You've got the wrath of God on you in this life, but God is being patient, God is being kind, until the day you die and then the kindness and the patience end and the wrath abides with you into eternity.

That's why the Scriptures talk about abiding in Christ, because you want Christ with you on that day to go with you to the judgment seat of God. John says, if you reject Christ, you don't have that with you, you face God all alone.

You say it like this, "This is the answer to the problem of evil, to the people who ask why, why is this happening to me? Where is the justice?" Here is the justice, the justice comes in hell. To those who say, "Why does God allow the innocent to suffer, while the wicked pop champagne bottles?" Well, the answer to that question is, the wicked won't pop champagne bottles forever. The day is coming when all that's gonna end for them. I've heard people say, they can't wait to go to hell so they can scoop coal with their friends. I have to tell you, you're not gonna have any friends in hell. Hell is not a friendly place. It's a place of punishment. Other people will say, "Well, I can't wait to go there, so I can have a party." You're not gonna party there. Nobody's gonna, the devil's not gonna party in hell. If you read the book of Revelation, the devil's gonna be punished right along with everyone else, because God takes evil very, very seriously.

I think this whole mindset of, why this or why that, when we suffer, why is this happening, it's because we don't think God will deal with evil, because we don't believe in the doctrine of hell any more. God will deal with evil. God will deal with every injustice that's ever been faced in the human race, but He'll deal with it there. Legend has it that when Voltaire, the famous atheist, was dying of disease, a priest came to visit him and he asked Voltaire, he said, "Do you renounce Satan?" And Voltaire said, "Now, now, my good friend. Now is no time for making enemies." But the irony is, Voltaire already had an enemy, but it wasn't in Satan, it was in God. He misunderstood his enemies. In his commentary on Romans, another way to look at this, Donald Grey Barnhouse said,

When you're crossing the border between the US and Canada, you hear people say, talk about how to cheat customs. Just tell them, you've been in the US for more than 48 hours or just declare a few items but not all of them, nobody will ever know. One day, you're gonna pass a customs barrier that will never be cheated. You'll pass through the customs of God and nothing will get there but the truth. You will stand exposed and speechless before Him there will be no deception. He will receive nothing that has not been done entirely for His glory.

And that's what Peter is telling us here. One day you will stand before the customs barrier of God, one day you will stand before the judge and there will be no deception. Nothing will get in that is not been done for His glory, perfectly. Which means that if you are without Christ and without salvation, then you will have to answer for every evil that you have committed and give an account for it all.

And while that's a frightening thought for the lost, in this passage Peter is actually using it as a comforting thought to the saved. And the comfort is that evil will be dealt with, and God will hold men accountable for what they do. One author said it this way, he said, "All roads lead to the judgment seat of God." Another author said, "God will be the judge, even if all we can be is a witness." I can't even remember what I had for breakfast yesterday. The interesting thing about God is, God remembers everything, and He forgets nothing. Which means that every event that happens on this planet is recorded in His mind and will be dealt with in eternity.

And this leads to a final stage of all this. Where does justice begin? It begins with the church. Where does it spread? It spreads to the world. God sees it all. All roads lead to His judgment seat. But that leads us to a third stage and that is this: where does it stop? It stops with God. It ends with God. And there will be a day when all of this evil will end, and it will end with Him. Peter calls Him the "faithful creator." If you read all of our passage this morning, all the way through verse 19, he says,

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 "And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?" 19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Peter calls God a faithful Creator here. And to my knowledge that's the only time the word "creator" is used in the New Testament, but it's used here for effect. The idea is that, as a Creator, God controls everything. And as a faithful one, He can be trusted. As a Creator, He rules over everything, this is all His property. And as faithful, He will rule it with integrity. Which means you don't have to be afraid of anything, if you are in Him. Peter says you can entrust your souls to Him. That's a banking term in Greek. It means that God is your safety deposit box. And God will take care of your soul. He says that the judgment stops with Him. If you're suffering in this life and this life is painful for you and you trust in Him, you can know a day will come when it will end. If you don't understand why the evil is happening and why people are shooting policemen and why they're shooting churches and why people are slandering you for worshiping Christ, Peter says, you may not know all the answers, but you do know God will take care of you. You do know He's got you in His arms.

A friend of mine recently wrote a song called Stained Glass Windows, where he said that when you look at stained glass window, up close ... I guess we have one back here, kind of ... If you look at a stained-glass window up close, it's ugly. You guys know what I'm talking about? Got all different colours and pieces, none of it matches. It looks very broken up close. But when you back away from it, it looks beautiful. You see the whole thing. And my friend, in the song, said our lives are like that as Christians. Up close our lives sometimes look ugly. Sometimes everything looks mismatched and broken. There's pain and persecution and slander, there's sin popping out of us, sin coming all around us. There's injustice everywhere. But when you back up and look at it from God's perspective, everything is beautiful. When you take a step back and see it from His point of view in heaven, all the pieces will fit. You'll see that God was a faithful Creator.

D. L. Moody said if anyone ever said anything bad about his wife, he wouldn't listen to it because he knew she was faithful. And he said if anybody ever said anything evil about God he would say the same thing. We should say that as well. Friends, you shouldn't listen when people say God is not just and God is not fair. Now, you can listen to them to counsel them, that's fine. But you shouldn't listen to them to believe it, because you know He's faithful. He was faithful in the Apostles' day. He will be faithful in our day. He was faithful in the early church and the Middle Ages, He'll be faithful in our church. He was faithful in the Reformation, faithful in the Great Awakenings. He's been faithful through every controversy the church has ever made it

through. And He'll be faithful now. Will you trust Him today? Will you call upon His name? He is worthy of it. Will you listen to His voice, obey His word and entrust your soul to a faithful Creator? God has been good to us, my friends.

I think one of the most interesting things if you look in church history and you see all the heresies that have swept through and all the fights is the fact that we still have the Word of God with us. We started out with that, let's end with that. You can still read His Word here because He has been faithful. Let's pray and thank Him for that this morning.

Father, we do thank you, Lord, for Your kindness to us and for all the ways You have blessed us. We're, the church as a whole here in Canada, the church in any country in the world, it's a church that has sailed on stormy waters. And there's never been a time when everything has been at peace. There's never been a time when the church was popular, not in the secular sense of the word. And that's when You give us your reasons here for that. But we know, Lord, You will preserve your church, because You are a good, good God.

Father, we've talked about a lot of things related to judgment this morning, I do want to say a special prayer for if there's any unbelievers who are here with us, Lord. As they hear about hell and they hear about judgment and they hear about Your righteousness, Lord, will You break them of their sin? Will You remind them that a day is coming when it will all be made known to You? You know it already, but a day is coming when You will hold them accountable. Will You please pardon them through Christ this morning? Draw their hearts to Christ. Help them see that salvation is found in You.

Lord, for those in our church who are suffering a lot today, I pray You would be gracious to them. I pray they would be encouraged as they think through this whole issue of justice and judgment and fairness, and they would see that You are a very, very fair God and You're a loving God. Lord, thank you for all You've done for us. May You be glorified as we continue our service and close it out this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.