

Sermon Brief
Andre Riendeau
October 9, 2022

Text: 2 Peter 2:4-9

Title: “The God of Wrath and Rescue”

Subject: God’s past judgments are grounds for His present and future judgments.

Complement: In the midst of judgment, God rescues His own.

Textual Idea: God’s past judgments are grounds for His present and future judgments; yet in the midst of judgment, God rescues His own.

Sermon Idea: We can trust God to judge rightly.

Interrogative: Am I right with God?

Key Points:

1. In the past, God judged the ungodly and rescued the righteous. (vv.4-9)
2. In the present (and future), God will judge the ungodly and rescue the righteous. (v.9)

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that God’s judgment is sure and serious. They need to get right with God through faith in Christ. He can also be trusted to strengthen the godly when they go through trials.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) receive Christ if they haven’t, (2) avoid throwing away historic Christian beliefs, (3) pray for those who don’t know Jesus.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need for experiencing God’s salvation in His judgment.

“The God of Wrath and Rescue”

2 Peter 2:4-9

October 9, 2022

I'd like to start with a provocative question this morning: Is Christianity a bad thing? Was Jesus sadistic? Some think so. Almost 100 years ago, in a lecture entitled, “Why I Am Not a Christian,” British philosopher (LCD) **Bertrand Russell said this, “There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”** He goes on to discuss how Jesus drove demons into pigs and slaughtered them unjustly and how he unjustly cursed a fig tree even when it wasn't the season for figs, all true mind you. He then concludes with this comment, (LCD) **“I cannot myself feel that either in matter of wisdom or in matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects.”** Russell believed religion to be superstition, so he had no hesitation to judge Jesus. He was a pacifist who thought that much war and oppression in human history was caused by religion, notably Christianity. He's not wrong. Much oppression in human history HAS been caused by Christians – the Crusades, preachers advocating slavery, men dominating women in the name of “submission,” etc... Churches do cause pain and hurt. I've hurt people even when trying to do good. Maybe Russell is right. Oppression, judgment, hurt. Lots of people are leaving the church over thoughts like these. Maybe this Christianity thing is bad after all.

I have a feeling that the false teachers Peter was dealing with in 2 Peter had similar ideas. How can a God of grace ever pour out wrath? Maybe there isn't a final judgment anyways. We have questions like this in our time too. Hell?! Seriously?! What kind of sadistic God would eternally punish people? Isn't God love? What's this wrath stuff? Isn't that just the product of moralistic, super religious interpretation? Is traditional, historic Christianity a bad thing? Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 2.

Last week, we looked at the first three verses of chapter 2. Peter had gone on the offensive against the false teachers. At the very end of verse 3, he says this, *“Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”* He states that their judgment, condemnation and destruction, have been hanging over them. What does that mean? 2 Peter 2:4, *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.”*

Believe it or not, in the Greek, this is all one, huge sentence! It is an A fortiori argument: if “x” is true, then how much more is “y” true. In verses 4-8, is the “X” part, God has judged sin and rescued the godly in the past; then, verse 9, how much MORE true is the “Y” part, that God will ultimately judge the false teachers and rescue His suffering people in the present and future. That’s his main point: **(LCD) God’s the God of wrath and rescue**; love and mercy (I’m stealing my sermon title from Chuck Swindoll), the Bible reveals God to be the God of wrath and rescue. But how is that possible? Let’s see.

Peter cites three notorious episodes from the past: **(LCD) sinful angels, Noah’s flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah**. He isn’t interested in going into much detail about these events: he has one goal – to show that in each case, God judged sin and, in the last two, rescued the godly. He starts with a weird story, the sinful angels: *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment.”* What story is this alluding to? My opinion is with the vast majority who think that it is related one of the weirdest incidents in the Bible, Genesis 6, **(LCD) “When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.”** Who are the “sons of God?” There is debate about that but most think that a very popular book among Jews and Christians of the time sheds the best light on this. It was a book called First Enoch and in there we read this, **(LCD) “In those days, when the children of man had multiplied, it happened that there were born unto them handsome and beautiful daughters. And the angels, the children of heaven, saw them and desired them...”**

According to this ancient Jewish tradition, the “sons of God” were angels. And later in 1 Enoch, God imprisoned these angels who violated His orders. Most think that their sin was the crossing of species, that humans are to mate only with humans, not angels or animals or other species. That’s not his point. His point is that they are judged by being sent to hell. Hell isn’t a good translation because the word here referred to a temporary holding place for judgment, just as Peter says it is, not the ultimate place of eternal punishment that hell is. The word here **(LCD) “tartaroo,” is a verb that comes from the word “Tartarus, thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, and so regarded in Israelite apocalyptic as well.”** In other words, it was the death row of the underworld. No getting out of there until the time for eternal punishment came.

This is the point he continues to drive home with the next example, verse 5, *“if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.”* Of course, Peter is referring to the famous **(LCD) flood** that God poured upon the world in the days of Noah. God instructed Noah to make a humungous boat in the middle of nowhere. It took 120 years. During that time, you can bet that the people mocked Noah, “What are you doing? You’re wasting your time! Worldwide judgment is coming? A flood? It’s been 100 years and nothing! You’re wasting your time!” Similar to what the false teachers in 2 Peter are saying. And similar to what people say now.

Just two weeks ago, CNN had this article posted, **(LCD) “For some Christians, ‘rapture anxiety’ can take a lifetime to heal.”** It talks about how people who believe in a “anytime rapture” are caught up in anxiety, depression and paranoia because of believing that judgment could come at any moment. It quotes an expert in religious trauma who says this, *“Now imagine,” he continues, “You are taught that at any minute, you could be left here on Earth. What does that do to the teenager who just had premarital sex, or even simply took the Lord’s name in vain?”* Did you notice that? “SIMPLY took the Lord’s name in vain.” If you downgrade judgment, you upgrade abominations to “simply sin.” Anyways, the answer they suggest in the article? Deconstruct your faith. Tear down everything. Start from scratch and remember that God is love, you should never feel guilt or shame. Now, let me be clear, I agree that guilt and shame are not how Christians are to live; and many expressions of Christianity HAVE produced paranoia and shame. That’s why Bertrand Russell rejected Christianity. That’s why so many are leaving the church even now. But we don’t have to throw everything out! What we need is a right understanding of God’s wrath and love.

Third example, verse 6, *“if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.”* Next, he jumps a few chapters in Genesis and brings up the notorious story of **(LCD) Sodom and Gomorrah**. Again, he’s not interested in what they did, the bottomline is that the men of these towns sinned terribly. The end result, what Peter cares about, was the total annihilation of the cities. Again, this example, along with the others serves his main point: that God is going to judge the ungodly, those who disobey Him.

But there is more to it than that. Notice that I skipped verse 5. Peter mentions how God *“protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.”* Out of all the people on earth, only 8 survived the flood. What a contrast to verse 2 last week that said “many follow” the false teachers. Unfortunately, most rebel against God’s authority. We want to be our own masters. It’s nothing new. Been that way among us humans since Adam and Eve. Only a few...but don’t be discouraged: those few, those 8, were rescued by God in the end! They were saved! Why? Because they deserved it? No. Because they were better than the others? No. Because they believed God’s Word. God said, “Build an ark. I’m going to judge the world with water.” And, as crazy as it sounded, they believed it and acted on their faith. Faith is the key.

In verse 7, we see another example of God rescuing His people in the midst of judgment, *“and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard).”* Again, like Noah, Lot is called a righteous man. But if you know your Bibles, as many of you do, that might strike you as odd! For instance, in Genesis, we see Lot **(LCD) making a worldly choice to live in Sodom, a depraved city; he’s portrayed as weak and morally depraved in how he treats his daughters, he’s invested in this evil city so much that he had to be dragged out of it, and then he falls into a drunken stupor, unconsciously impregnates his daughters and they give birth to the Moabites and Ammonites, the enemies of God’s people!** That’s a righteous man?

There was much debate about this in Rabbinic Judaism – most saw him as a notorious sinner. However, Genesis says that Abraham prayed that God would rescue the righteous from the city – and God rescued Lot. This tells us that God saw him as righteous even though he didn't have it all together. That's a relief to me because I don't have it all together either. But even in his compromised state, Lot, according to Peter, was distressed and tormented, strong words, by the evil that he saw and heard around him. There is evidence of a God-consciousness there. Our first point this morning, **(LCD) In the past, God judged the ungodly and rescued the righteous.** That is the "X" part Peter is establishing in his argument. Having established that, he's saying, if this was true in the past, how much more true will it be in the present and the future.

Verse 9, *"if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment."* And there's his main thesis and our second point, **(LCD) In the present (and future), God will judge the ungodly and rescue the righteous.** Why am I saying in the present and the future? There's debate about this verse in two places: what "trials" refers to, and how to translate the word for "hold." The word for "trials" is **(LCD) periasmos** and it's used 21 times in the New Testament as you see here. Now I know you can't read these verses, but if you did, you'd see that they all relate either to temptations to sin or persecution for following Jesus. Only once does it refer to the final judgment. Why does that matter? Well, if "periasmos" means final judgment, then what Peter is referring to our eternal salvation. That God knows how to save us eternally. But if it refers to present difficulties, which Peter's readers were struggling with, then Peter is saying that the Lord knows how to get us through temptations and present persecution, and in the meantime is holding the unrighteous for future judgment.

The second debate is over the word "hold." It's in the present tense, which would seem to indicate that it is also not talking about future judgment but that, like Tartarus I talked about earlier, God has the wicked in a holding tank waiting for the final judgment. The issue is that this is a participle and present participles can have a future meaning. In other words, this could be referring to future judgment and not just present judgment.

So which is it? The bottomline is that both are true in Scripture. God is the God of wrath and rescue both in the present and the future. As for wrath, Romans 1 says this, **(LCD) "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness."** Notice this is in the present tense. God is to a lesser extent already pouring out His just wrath. But eventually, God will pour out the full measure of His wrath at the final judgment, 2 Thessalonians 1, **(LCD) "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."**

Our God is a God of wrath. Why? Because He's holy. Perfectly holy and just. He can't just excuse sin. Imagine a judge who let everyone off out of love: the thief, the murderer, the mass murderer. We, imperfect, sinful people ourselves, would be crying out for

justice! How much more will the perfect, holy God demand justice when His ways and word are broken. But that's not the whole story. God is also the God of rescue for those who trust in Him. He strengthens us in the present against temptation and trials and He saves us eternally in the future through our faith in Christ.

And why Christ and not Buddha or Socrates as Bertrand Russell suggested? Because of the Cross. For it is at the Cross, and only at the Cross, where we see **(LCD) perfect love and perfect wrath**. If you want to see the wrath of God, look at the Cross where the sins of all humanity past, present and future were heaped upon Christ. You need to understand that on the Cross, all the full weight of God's justice and wrath was poured out on Jesus. It was the greatest suffering ever experienced. With the violent death of Jesus, we see God executing perfect justice, His wrath upholding His holiness.

But why, why Jesus? Because, the Bible says, **(LCD) "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** If you want to see the love of God, look at the Cross. Knowing that we could never withstand God's wrath, the Father sent His perfect Son to die in our place as Paul says, **(LCD) "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** Like Noah and Lot, we need to be righteous to be rescued. And the only way we can be righteous is through trusting in what Jesus did at the Cross. He became sin so that we could become right with God. This is the glorious gospel where **(LCD) perfect love and perfect wrath meet**. Have you believed in Jesus? Have you acknowledged your need for a Savior?

There's an old story of a judge who listened to the case against a young man. The judge found him guilty and ordered him to pay a huge fine or go to jail for a long time. The young man couldn't pay the fine. So the judge got up, left his seat, took off his robe, and walked over to the bailiff. He then took out his checkbook, and, as the young man's father, paid the exorbitant fine. He then put his robe back on, sat back down on his seat of authority, and said, "I see that your fine has been paid. You may go free." Perfect justice executed by one who loved perfectly and sacrificially. Love and justice in balance.

I started this sermon by asking, Is Christianity a bad thing? Was Jesus sadistic for teaching about hell and judgment? Just look again at **(LCD) the Cross**. There's your answer. Our God is a God of wrath and rescue. Wrath without rescue is cruel; Rescue without wrath is unjust – the God of the Bible is neither. He is the God of wrath AND rescue. Believe in Him. I like how Tim Keller has summarized this truth, **(LCD) "Yes, believing in a just God can lead to oppression, but not believing in a just God can lead to even greater oppression as we're left to fend for ourselves in an unaccountable world...Every religion says there is a judgment, and you have to pass it. Christianity turns that on its head. Yes, there's a judgment and a judge. But the judge came to earth and paid the penalty...The gospel takes away relativism, but it takes away judgmentalism too. It's the only way it's safe to believe in truth. The gospel makes it safe to believe in the judgment and justice of God."** Amen.