

Scarcely Saved

SERMON

By

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TEXT: 1 Peter 4:12-19

PROP: Since the way to salvation is filled with fiery trials and difficult to the elect we must not indulge ourselves with sin but be careful to avoid the same pitfalls that ensnare the wicked. We must entrust our souls to our faithful Creator while doing good.

1 Peter 4:12-19

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **17** For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** And

" If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Peter now comes to the end of his treatment of Christian suffering. People become Christians because God in his sovereign mercy causes them to be born again to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3 ESV). By nature no one wants to believe in the true and living God and they call the preaching of the gospel, foolishness. Who would ever want to turn away from sin unto Christ? Who would ever want to do this knowing that fiery trials and sufferings awaited them? The mega churches of our day sell Christianity to their hearers making the matter of being a Christian as attractive as possible. Becoming a Christian and joining the church will give you access to youth programs, senior programs, athletic programs, counseling services, great music and entertainment, and lots of good friends. Who would not want the benefits of belonging to such a church? And it is so easy to belong. It is as simple as ABC. Accept Christ, Believe the Gospel, Confess your sins and you are in and to help you make your decision a great choir sings the stirring hymn, Just As I Am without

One Plea." The recruiting sergeant offers clothing, food, lodging and travel to interesting places abroad but little is said of forced marches, deprivation, and the terrors of war.

Now there is nothing wrong with good social programs, beautiful music wholesome entertainment and lots of good friends. We certainly should show compassion to those who are suffering. We should support good government and good education and good medical services. But this is not the mandate of the church. The mission of the church is to make disciples of the nations. It to maintain, teach and preach the word of God. It is to properly administer the sacraments and to worship the true and living God in accord with his word. Obedience to the law of God brings about positive movement in all of these areas. It is just as the Psalmist writes,

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD ,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

Why is it that there is so much pain and misery in this world? Why so much suffering? It is the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners and the seat of scoffers that accounts for much of the suffering in our world today. The nation in general is morally bankrupt and the social programs they promote only lead to more wickedness and suffering. We cannot expect the wicked to love the law of God nor can we expect them to inculcate God's law into society. Merely insisting that the Ten Commandments be displayed in public places does nothing to change the hearts of those that see them. But what shall we expect from those who call themselves Christians? Should we not expect them to delight in God's law? Should they not meditate in the law of God day and night? Our prosperity and the prosperity of the nation is strongly related to delight in the law of God. However, as we have already noted in Peter's treatment of human suffering, despising the law of God is not the only cause of human pain and misery. God's people often suffer at the hands of the ungodly. Jesus himself was crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Thus does Peter tell us,

1 Peter 4:12-13

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

God's people are often insulted for the name of Christ and they often suffer because they have done what is right. There is no shame in suffering as a Christian. Indeed, we are greatly blessed because as Peter says, "-- *the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*" (1 Peter 4:14, ESV) That is to say, the Spirit of glory who is the Spirit of God rests upon those who are the Lord's people. What can be better for us than that? Calvin tells us, "that it is no hindrance to the happiness of the godly, that they sustain reproach for the name of Christ, because they nevertheless retain a complete glory in the sight of God, while the Spirit, who has glory ever connected with him, dwells in them. So, what seems to the flesh a paradox, the Spirit of God makes consistent by a sure perception in their minds."

Peter continues with an amazing statement of God's sovereignty. He does not want us to be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon us to test us as though something strange were happening to us. But consider the force of what he now says in verse 17.

1 Peter 4:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Are we not surprised to know that the household of God is being judged? Judgment begins with us, Peter says, and his point is, if God judges his own people how much worse will be his judgment upon those who are not his people. He supports this concept from,

Proverbs 11:31 (ESV)

³¹ If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!

The Hebrew word translated *repaid* refers to compensation and in this context it means judgment for sin. In some sense, the household of God, or the righteous, is judged on earth for the sins that they commit. But the wicked are judged on earth much more. Christ suffered once, the righteous for the unrighteous. He suffered unjustly, but when we suffer, it is just, because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. When we suffer for the sake of Christ is there no sin in us? Not one of us can say when we suffer for Christ sake, "I am completely innocent, I am without sin." Jesus could say this but we cannot. Even the best of us cannot say it. Though Noah was said by God to be blameless in his generation and that he walked with God, he made a sacrifice for his sin when he left the ark.

A person is blameless in the eyes of God because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him but he still commits sin. Is God therefore unjust when he judges his own household? Not at all because we all deserve the wrath and curse of God forever for the sins we have done and continue to do in the flesh. The whole church of God continues to experience the miseries common to all mankind and in particular we as God's children are punished for our sins by God as a loving father. "*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*" (Hebrews 12:6, ESV) Again Calvin tells us, "For except we desire to be blotted out from the number of the faithful, we must submit our backs to the scourges of God. Now, it is a sweet consolation, that God does not execute his judgments on us as on others, but that he makes us the representatives of his own Son, when we do not suffer except for his cause and for his name."

Let us take careful notice of verse 18 which reads, "*And "If the righteous is **scarcely saved**, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"*" (1 Peter 4:18, ESV)

1 Peter 4:18 (NA27)

18 kai ei ho dikaios **molis sozetai** , ho asebes kai hamartolos $\Sigma\text{R}\text{X}\text{?}\text{S}\text{K}\text{O}\text{H}\text{?}\text{t}\text{ai}$;

We will notice that this text differs from the text quoted from the Proverbs where we read "If the righteous is **repaid on earth**, how much more the wicked and the sinner!"

Proverbs 11:31 (BHS/WTS 3.5 Morph)

31 hen tsadiyq ba'arets **yeshulam** 'ap kiy-rasha' wechowte'.

Proverbs 11:31 (LXX)

31 ei ho men dikaios **molis sozetai**, ho asebes kai hamartolos $\Sigma\text{R}\text{X}\text{S}\text{K}\text{O}\text{H}\text{?}\text{t}\text{ai}$;

The text Peter quotes is the Greek Septuagint while the Proverbs translate the Hebrew text that is the authority from which we are to obtain the meaning of all New Testament quotes of the Old Testament. Accordingly we have seen that the Hebrew word translated *repaid* refers to compensation and in this context it means judgment for sin.

Some have suggested that to be scarcely saved means that we will be hardly and with difficulty saved, when we come before God in judgment as if to say that the death of Christ did not atone for all our sin. The sin that remains upon our death must therefore be cleansed by an undetermined stay in purgatory while the living light candles and pay for indulgences in our behalf. However we must notice that Peter speaks of the here and now not the judgment to come. Others note correctly that the phrase *scarcely saved* means "saved with difficulty," but it does not suggest that God is too weak to save us. Calvin notes that the term *scarcely* or *with difficulty* does not speak of God's strictness or rigor, but shows how many and what arduous difficulties must be surmounted by the Christian before

he reaches the goal. *Sinner* here means a *wicked* man -- and the righteous are not those who are altogether perfect in righteousness, but who strive to live righteously.

Peter comes to the same conclusion in his next epistle where speaking of God we read,

2 Peter 2:6-10

6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; **7** and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked **8** (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); **9** then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, **10** and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

We will remember that Sodom and Gomorrah were inhabited by homosexuals and God was determined to punish them with extinction for their great wickedness. Lot needed to act quickly to spare his life but we read,

Genesis 19:15-17

15 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." **16** But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. **17** And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away."

Lot prospered in his dealings with the men of Sodom and was loath to give it all up. To save him the angels of God had to drag him forcibly from the city thus he escaped with his life but all his worldly possessions perished with Sodom. So it is with us.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

12 -- if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— **13** each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **14** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Spurgeon calls our attention to an Aesop fable that says, "A pigeon oppressed by excessive thirst saw a goblet of water painted on a signboard. Not realizing that it was only a picture, she flew toward it with a loud whirr and unwittingly dashed against the signboard, and jarred herself terribly. Having broken her wings by the blow, she fell to the ground and was killed by one of the bystanders."

The mockeries of the world are many, and those who are deluded by them not only miss the joys they looked for, but in their eager pursuit of vanity bring ruin on their souls. We call the dove silly to be deceived by a picture, however cleverly painted, but what epithet shall we apply to those who are duped by the transparently false allurements of the world!

So then we are brought by Peter to the conclusion that since the way to salvation is filled with fiery trials and difficulty to the elect we must not indulge ourselves with sin but be careful to avoid the same pitfalls that ensnare the wicked. As Peter tells us

1 Peter 4:19

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

If judgment begins with the house of God, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? Their judgment will be far worse for they have taken the broad road to destruction. And if the righteous be scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? The salvation of the righteous involves them in a life of war with sin and fiery trials to test them. But for the ungodly, the pain and miseries of this life are merely a foretaste of hell forever. The suffering of God's people is controlled by his sovereign will and its holy goal is our perfection in heaven forever. May all of us be found faithful to our gracious God through all of our trials and tribulations and may we receive with great joy the crown of life forever.