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## “The Final Judgement”

**2 Peter 3:1-18**

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**(2 Peter 3:1-18)**

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. <sup>2</sup> I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

<sup>3</sup> Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” <sup>5</sup> But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup> By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup> By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

<sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

<sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

<sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. <sup>15</sup> Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. <sup>16</sup> He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. <sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

The Judgment is a subject that is talked about quite frequently in the Bible. Yet, for all its frequency, we don’t talk about it that much, we don’t think about it enough. It takes all but two chapters of the Bible, before we get to judgment. The judgment, the warning of terrible consequences, was given by God to Adam and Eve. God said to them in Genesis 2:16-17,

<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.

Then we see God declaring judgment upon the man, woman and serpent in chapter 3, after they had eaten the forbidden fruit.

However, it's true, the theme of judgment is found throughout the storyline of the Bible. God judges the Egyptians who held his people captive. God judges his own people by allowing them to be conquered by foreign nations and makes them captives. Judgment was the bulk of the message of the prophets, not only against Israel, but against all the nations who had rejected God.

The idea of judgment is not just an idea that's found in the Old Testament and then lost in the New Testament. The New Testament continues along the same lines. One of the first characters to appear in the New Testament was the prophet John the Baptist. He was a preacher of judgment and he predicted that the Messiah will come as the judge. Listen to Matthew 3.

**(Matthew 3:10)** The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

**(Matthew 3:11)** "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Do you hear the language and imagery of judgment? Jesus also pronounced judgment during his life and ministry. In keeping in line with the prophets, some of his judgments began with that awful word, "Woe!" which is equivalent to "Curse be on you." That's a word of judgment. More importantly, the very life and death of Jesus Christ, was carried out for judgment. Many people miss this point. Many people look at the life of Jesus as an example of how to live a purposeful life, a moral life, an altruistic and kind life. But that's not the primary purpose of his life. Jesus came to die. Jesus lived in order to die. He lived to be judged. Death is judgment. God told Adam and Eve; you shall surely die. The Apostle Paul tells us that the wages of sin is death. The culmination of the life of Jesus is his death on the cross. He came to be judged by God, on our behalf. So, as you read your Bibles, don't overlook the frequency of this theme.

This is our subject for today as we wrap up 2 Peter. We will be looking at the Final Judgment. Perhaps we can organize this chapter under three headings. The certainty of the judgment. The delay of the judgment. The response to the judgment.

Let's look at **the certainty of the judgment**. Apparently, there were people back in the day that denied the judgment of God, not as an idea, but as an event. By judgment we mean the final judgment. If you look to verse 4, Peter writes,

**(2 Peter 3:3)** Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Here's what these people were thinking. They were saying, "You Christians and your leaders talk a lot about this judgment, this second coming, this return of Christ, but why hasn't it happened? If the judgment is going to happen, shouldn't it have occurred already? So, they were mocking Christians for believing in such things.

You know, it's not too different from people today. Some people don't believe that there will be a final judgment. For some people it's more of an intellectual argument. They don't believe in the existence of God. Thus, they don't believe in a universal standard of morality that applies to all moral beings. They believe that when you die, you die and there is nothing beyond it. You merely cease to exist.

The challenge for people who entertain this view of the world is that it goes against the way the world actually is. All human life is moral. Human beings make moral judgments countless times every day. We make them about our co-workers, about political candidates, about governments and nations, even in the grocery check out line. To believe in morals or morality means you believe in judgment. To say that something is right implies that the opposite is wrong. To say that doing the right should be rewarded implies that doing the wrong should be punished. And people do that all the time. All human existence is lived in a realm of morals, of good and bad, of reward and punishment. It's what allows human society to exist and flourish. It is actually impossible to live without this. That's what makes life significant and purposeful, at least it's one of the things. Where does this morality come from? If we think it's just arbitrary, then we have no right to say that someone else is wrong and evil or right and good. In other words, as someone has said, can we be moral without God? The answer is no. Morality must presume an ultimate standard of morality. One can't be more moral or less moral without an ultimate standard. And for Christians, that standard is God. I think that's the dilemma for atheists. They don't have a strong argument for morality, and thus for judgment.

Others believe in God and may also believe in a final judgment, but functionally live as there will not be a final judgment. And this is the case for some Christians. Many of us, who call ourselves Christians, we believe in orthodox Christian teaching, which of course includes believing in the judgment, but when we examine the way we live our lives, we live like functional atheists. We live as we please, spend money on ourselves, live for pleasure, excuse sin in our lives, and so on. We are functionally living as if the judgment will never occur. We're living like the people described in verse 5. Peter writes,

<sup>5</sup> But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup> By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup> By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Isn't that interesting what he says about them? They deliberately forget, they intentionally forget, that God is judge, that God has judged, and that God will judge. He's referring to the flood during the time of Noah, when he judged and punished and destroyed every person on the earth, except those who made it onto the ark. Do you believe that story? Do you believe that God is the judge? Do you believe that God will judge you? They why do you act as if He isn't and that He won't?

How do you know if this is you? Well think of it like this. If you knew that Jesus was coming back in exactly one year, how would you live? Would you live in revelry, would you live in self-indulgence, would you hoard all your possessions? You see, we are told to live, as if Jesus could come back tomorrow, as if the judgment were tomorrow. That's how we know if we're living as functional atheists, and in some way, we all are.

What Peter tells us here is this. The greatest, most comprehensive judgment occurred upon mankind thousands of years ago, through a terrible flood, through water. And as certain as that flood was, there will be another and even greater judgment. The next one will not occur through water, but with fire. We should not think for a moment that the judgment will not occur. Wishing it away doesn't mean it won't happen either. God's final judgment upon the wicked will be more terrible than what he did during the flood.

So, why hasn't it happened yet? **What's the delay?** Peter gives us a couple reasons. The first reason is that God's time is not our time. We may look at world events, the collapse of world powers, natural disasters like volcano eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, and famine and think that the judgment is coming soon. Or we may look at how evil is getting so out of hand, that judgment must be coming soon. But Peter says, God's time is not our time. He quotes Psalm 90:4 which is a prayer of Moses. It's a psalm about the infinitude of God and the finitude of man. It's about the immortality of God and the mortality of man. It's about the sin of man and the judgment of God. Let me read it for you.

**Psalm 90:1** Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
2 Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
3 You turn people back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."  
4 A thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.  
5 Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—  
they are like the new grass of the morning:  
6 In the morning it springs up new,  
but by evening it is dry and withered.  
7 We are consumed by your anger  
and terrified by your indignation.  
8 You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.  
9 All our days pass away under your wrath;  
we finish our years with a moan.  
10 Our days may come to seventy years,  
or eighty, if our strength endures;  
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.  
11 If only we knew the power of your anger!  
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.  
12 Teach us to number our days,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

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- 13 Relent, LORD! How long will it be?  
Have compassion on your servants.
- 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
- 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,  
for as many years as we have seen trouble.
- 16 May your deeds be shown to your servants,  
your splendor to their children.
- 17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;  
establish the work of our hands for us—  
yes, establish the work of our hands.

So, Peter quotes this psalm to remind us that God is still sovereign, he's still reigning on his throne over the universe, he still sees what's going on in the world of human beings. As Francis Shaeffer said, "He is there, and he is not silent." Because the judgment hasn't happened yet, doesn't mean it will not happen. It will and only God knows when that will be. His time is not our time.

There's a second reason for the delay of his final judgment. It's so that more people will come to him. Look with me to verse 9. It might be one of the most hope-inspiring passages in the Bible.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

What is God's desire? It's that no one perishes, but rather that everyone comes to repentance. But we know that the reality is that many do perish, and by perish, we mean, they receive God's judgment and go to hell. Why is that? It's because they have chosen to reject his offer of salvation. They have chosen to refuse the gift of forgiveness that's given through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. It's because they have chosen sin over forgiveness. They have chosen self over God. But God's desire is that they go to heaven and repent of their sins. God, your creator, desires for you to repent of your sins, the very sins that will bring you to hell. God desires that you not perish and instead for you to be with him forever in heaven. Why would you reject his desire? Why would you continue to embrace your rebellion and your sin and suffer eternal punishment?

Christians, as we pray for our unsaved friends and family members, hold up this verse to God. Allow this verse to help you to persevere in prayer, as you share the Gospel with them. How could the Lord God refuse our cries and our pleas to him, when we hold up to him, his own words. So, pray like this: "Lord, did you not say in your word, that you do not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance?" Those are your words, Lord, so I cry out to you, don't allow so and so to perish. Grant them the gift of repentance."

There's another verse I pray and this one is especially for our unsaved children. I think every Christian parent should use this verse as they pray for the salvation of their children.

<sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. **(1 Corinthians 7:14)**

Here's how I pray this verse. "Lord, does it not say in your word that the children of a believing parent are considered clean and holy, set apart for you? Lord, I claim this truth for my children. I know that salvation is not passed on through me, but I do know that your favor is upon my family, including my children. Don't allow any of my children to abandon you and reject your Son. Lord, in mercy, bring each of my children to you through repentance and faith."

Why does God delay his certain judgment? He's giving sinners time to hear the Gospel, to consider their ways, to repent, and receive his forgiveness through Jesus. Maybe that's you? God is giving you time. Take advantage of it.

### Finally, **what should our response be to the certainty of God's Final Judgment.**

The Apostle Peter begins this section saying,

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? If the judgment is going to occur, if it's just a matter of time, how then should we live? What kind of people ought we to be? Thankfully, he answers the question for us. He tells a few things.

First, live godly lives. In verse 11 he says, "You ought to live holy and godly lives." In verse 14 he says, "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." If it is true that the judgment is going to happen, and we too will be judged, then we should live in fear of that judgment. To live in light of the judgment is to live lives that honor God and obey God. Jesus said that we will be judged based on what we did and did not do, such as feeding the hungry and thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the prisoner. Paul's message was this. In Acts 26:20 he said, "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds."

Jesus also said,

**(Matthew 12:36)** But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.

And Paul also said,

**(Roman 2:15)** They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) <sup>16</sup> This will take place on the day when God **judges** people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

If these words are true and they are, then friends, every thought we think should be done in light of the judgment. Every motive of our heart should be done in light of the judgment. Every word that comes from our mouths should be spoken in light of the judgment. Every deed we do should be done in light of the judgment.

What else? We should look forward to the day of judgment and speed it's coming (v12). Verse 13 says we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Why should we look forward to the day of judgment? Oh my goodness, there are so many reasons. 1) Jesus will return. He will reunite with his bride,

the holy Church. 2) All evil will be accounted for, once and for all. Every evil deed will be taken care of, will be judged and fairly punished. Whatever people thought they got away with while on earth, will be justly recompensed. 3) We will sin no more. 4) God will usher in a new heavens and a new earth and we will reign with him. 5) All the cosmos will bow down and worship at the foot of Jesus, to the glory of God the Father. These are some, but not all of the wonderful things that will happen when the judgment takes place. So yes, we should look forward to that day and speed its coming.

Third, share the Gospel. Sharing the Gospel speeds his coming. Jesus said that his Gospel will be preached to all nations and then the end will come. So, it's remarkable to think that our activity here on earth, can speed up the return of Jesus Christ. In verse 15 Peter says,

<sup>15</sup> Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

God's delay in his judgment means salvation for more people. That means we must be engaged in his work of evangelism and mission. Our neighbors and the nations must be reached.

One last thing, and this is how the Apostle Peter concludes his letter:

<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

What should we doing as we await the judgment? Grow! Grow in grace. What does it mean to grow in grace? To grow in grace is to grow in the experience of grace. It means to live a life under grace, infused with grace, constantly receiving God's grace and sharing God's grace. That's what it means to grow in grace, but that growing in grace is inseparable from growing in the knowledge of our saviour Jesus. He is the source of grace, He's the model of grace, He's the means of grace. To know Jesus more, to experience Jesus more, is to experience more of His grace in our lives.

Let me conclude. Friends, the judgment is certain. It will occur. On which side of the judgment will you fall? At the same time the judgment is delayed so that more people can repent and trust in Jesus. If you are not a Christian, God is keeping you alive and the judgment has not yet happened, for you, for you! To give you the chance to turn to him and for the rest of us, let us live holy, godly lives. Let us live to share the Gospel. Let us grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, until he comes again.

Let's pray.