

Mercy Over Judgment

2 Peter 3:1-9

Intro

At the end of James 2:13 we find these words...

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

And I believe this truth is fundamental to understanding *the character and nature of God...*

I would argue that it is abundantly clear in the scriptures that God would ***prefer to show mercy to fallen human beings than to judge them...***

Here are a scriptures that demonstrate this truth...

Ezekiel 33:11 (NKJV)

Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Micah 7:18 (NKJV)

**Who is a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity
And passing over the transgression
of the remnant of His heritage?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in mercy.**

John 3:17 (NKJV)

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

John 5:24 (NKJV)

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

This truth — the truth that God desires *mercy over judgment* — that He desires to *forgive rather than to condemn* — is the lens through which I read all of the scriptures...

- The Apostle John tells us that **God is love** — and *because* He is love, God *seeks and saves the lost* — He invites into fellowship those who are far from Him...

With this as our introduction, would you please follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying this morning...

2 Peter 3:1-9 (NKJV)

**1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),
2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,
3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,
4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."**

5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,

6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

I've divided this passage into four sections...

- 1) Be Mindful**
- 2) Words of Scoffers**
- 3) Past & Future Judgment**
- 4) Reason for Delay**

Let's move into our first section...

1) Be Mindful (vs 1-2)

1 Beloved,

By using the word **Beloved**, Peter reminds us that he is writing to believers — who are *loved by God* — and we are also reminded that these believers are *loved by Peter*...

And every Christian should take these two vital truths to heart on a daily basis...

1) As a believer, you are loved by God — God truly loves you, wants the best for you, and is directing your life for your eternal good...

2) As a believer, you are loved by fellow Christians — no matter how low you might feel at times, there are many fellow Christians who love you and truly want the best for you...

And if you are listening to this and you are not yet a believer then *please know that God loves you and that it His desire is to bring you into a loving relationship with Himself...*

- He has already demonstrated His love for you by *sending His Son to die on the cross in your place...*

But as with any love relationship, you must **respond** to that love — you must **choose to respond to His invitation** by *placing your faith in Him and in His love...*

Let's continue on in vs 1...

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),

Here Peter reminds believers that this was his second letter and that both letters were written as ***reminders***...

- [ex. Pastor Chuck Smith — “sheep need to be reminded because sheep forget”...]

I stir up — *to wake someone up...*

pure minds — *sincere, without hidden motives...*

*I believe that what Peter is communicating connects to what Paul wrote in **Romans 13:11-14** — please turn there...*

Romans 13:11-14 (NKJV)

11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

- [expand — living life on mission / battleground not playground...]

Please turn back to 2 Peter 3 as we move into vs...

2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

Now, what Peter is writing here is very interesting...

be mindful — *recollect, remember; bring to mind and think about...*

that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets,

In other words, Peter wants believers to remember and think about what the OT prophets wrote...[expand]

Then Peter continues in vs 2 with these words...

and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

Peter instructs believers to remember the ***commandments*** of the **apostles** as well...

- And this seems pretty straightforward — Peter wants the believers to ***remember*** and ***apply*** both the teachings of the ***OT prophets*** and of the ***NT apostles***...

With that said, please do not miss the fact that ***Peter is putting the NT apostles on the same level as the OT prophets***...[expand]

Let's move now to our second section...

2) Words of Scoffers (vs 3-4)

As we move into this section, let's read vs 2 again along with vs 3-4...

2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Peter begins vs 3 with the words...

knowing this first — *knowing this most importantly...*

that scoffers will come in the last days,

scoffers — *mockers; cynical unbelievers...*

in the last days — *the period of time that began with the incarnation of the Lord Jesus...*

The author of Hebrews makes this clear in...

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NKJV)

1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,

2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

*Now, this is an important point — because mockers and scoffers will highlight the fact that **the last days** are taking an awful long time by human standards...*

2000 years of last days? — How can this be? — (we will get to that complaint in a bit)...

But for now it is important to focus on the fact that these scoffers that Peter writes about will be...

walking according to their own lusts,

Peter is letting believers know that **scoffers do not submit to God's authority** — they do not recognize His rightful rule in their lives...

- Instead, scoffers walk **according to their own lusts** — scoffers are directed by their own strong desires — whatever those desires might be...

Moving on to vs 4 we read...

4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

*First of all, let's look at the question "**Where is the promise of His coming?**"...*

With this question, scoffers are asking why God hasn't come to earth in judgment?...

- They are mockingly asking, *"if things are so bad and God is so good then why doesn't he punish unbelievers?"...*

And then the scoffers follow up with the following statement:

"For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

- The scoffers are essentially saying, *"everything has been the same as it ever was — nothing will ever change and no judgment will ever come."*...[expand]

Now, before we move into our next section and examine how Peter responds to the argument of scoffers, we must admit that ***even believers can fall into the scoffer mindset...***

- As believers we can become angry and discouraged because God hasn't brought judgment upon this fallen world...

It seems that things keep getting worse and we begin to wonder about the promise of His coming in judgment...

It can seem like nothing is ever going to change and that the wicked will go unpunished forever...

- With that said, I believe that **Psalm 73** will help us work through these tough times when we are not seeing things accurately...

So, if you would, please turn to...

Psalm 73 (NKJV) A Psalm of Asaph

**1 Truly God is good to Israel,
To such as are pure in heart.**

Asaph acknowledges that God is good to His people — to those who follow Him...

**2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
My steps had nearly slipped.**

[expand — God's perspective vs Asaph's perspective...]

**3 For I was envious of the boastful,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.**

**4 For there are no pangs in their death,
But their strength is firm.**

**5 They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like other men.**

**6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace;
Violence covers them like a garment.**

**7 Their eyes bulge with abundance;
They have more than heart could wish.**

The wicked seem to have everything going for them...

**8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression;
They speak loftily.**

**9 They set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue walks through the earth.**

**10 Therefore his people return here,
And waters of a full cup are drained by them.**

**11 And they say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"**

[expand — scoffers do not believe that they will be judged...]

**12 Behold, these are the ungodly,
Who are always at ease;
They increase in riches.**

**13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,
And washed my hands in innocence.**

**14 For all day long I have been plagued,
And chastened every morning.**

Asaph was thinking that following God thing wasn't worth it — it was a bad investment...[expand]

**15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have been untrue to
the generation of Your children.**

If Asaph had expressed these feelings *as if they were the truth* on the subject, he would have *misrepresented the truth*...

Because Asaph's *limited perspective was not the full reality* —
Asaph *did not have the complete story*...

**16 When I thought how to understand this,
It was too painful for me—**

Asaph could not make sense of the situation...

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God;

It was not until Asaph *humbled himself* and went to the sanctuary of God that things became clear...

Then I understood their end.

- As Asaph came into the presence of God, Asaph understood that the unrepentant wicked enjoy brief prosperity in this life — but their judgment is coming...

**18 Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.**

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

**20 As a dream when one awakes,
So, Lord, when You awake,
You shall despise their image.**

Asaph realized that the unrepentant are on their way to judgment — and when judgment comes it will be swift...

**21 Thus my heart was grieved,
And I was vexed in my mind.**

**22 I was so foolish and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You.**

Asaph realizes that he was wrong to doubt God...

**23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You hold me by my right hand.**

**24 You will guide me with Your counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory.**

**25 Whom have I in heaven but You?
And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.**

**26 My flesh and my heart fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**

**27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;
You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.**

**28 But it is good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord GOD,
That I may declare all Your works.**

Now, please notice that *everything changed when Asaph got his eyes **off of the scoffers and onto God...***

- So, if you and I find ourselves are falling into the Asaph trap...

If we are *discouraged* and *despondent* because of *the wicked* then we must do what Asaph did and get our eyes off of the *wicked* and *get our eyes onto God...*

We must humble ourselves and come into God's presence...

Unfortunately, this is the very reason that unrepentant scoffers can never see things clearly...

Because they refuse to humble themselves and go to God so that He might give them a proper perspective...

*With that said, would you please turn back to **2 Peter 3** as we move into our third section...*

3) Past & Future Judgment (5-7)

5 For this they [scoffers] willfully forget: [forget on purpose] that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,

6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

Peter is once again referring to the global flood that took place in the days of Noah...

- [expand — the Flood was the greatest possible object lesson regarding the seriousness of God's judgment...]

7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

In the past God judged the world through flood — but in the future He will judge the world through fire...

- [expand — lake of fire — final judgment // burning up or refining of present universe for the coming of the New Heaven and New Earth (discuss more next week)...]

Please look once more the last part of vs 7...

until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Few things in scripture are clearer than the truth that **God will judge the unrepentant...**

- But then the questions inevitably come up — **“why is taking so long for that judgment to come?”...**

“Why doesn’t God just get on with it already?”...

Peter answers that troubling question as we move into our fourth and final section...

4) Reason for Delay (vs 8-9)

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Here Peter is making it clear that the Lord does not perceive time the way that we do...

We are limited, time-bound creatures and our perception of time is linear...

We *have* experienced the past, we *are* experiencing the present and we *expect* to experience a future...

For us, time is tied to sequential segment — 60 sec in a min — 60 min in an hour — 24 hours in a day and so on and so forth...

- But God is both ***transcendent*** — *outside and above time* — and He is ***immanent*** — *present right here, right now, at this time*...

God has *known and perceived every moment* — *always* — even before He created anything...[expand]

- With these mind-boggling realities in mind, I believe the big takeaway from verse 8 is that *God's timing is not our timing*...

And when we seek to critique God for His timing we are playing the fool — we have no idea what we are talking about...

And this leads us into our final verse...

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Let's look at the first section of this verse...

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness,

In other words, God is not one who *promises something and then does not deliver on that promise*...

On the contrary, God has made a promise *to judge all the unrepentant and He will deliver on that promise...*

- His *seeming delay* in fulfilling this promise is not because He is ***unfaithful*** — instead it is because He is ***gracious***...

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

longsuffering — *to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others; to be mild and slow in avenging; slow to anger, slow to punish...*

not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

This is God's desire — *that no one would perish* — that no one would be lost — but that all would come to repentance...

- It is God's desire that all would respond to His invitation and be saved through the finished work of the Lord Jesus...

With this in mind, would you please turn with me to one final passage...

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (NKJV)

1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,

2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

7 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Conclusion

Now, as we wind down our time together, I want to address the following question:

“If God wants all to be saved — if mercy triumphs over judgment — then why isn’t everyone saved?”...

- *[answer this question as the Lord leads...]*