

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to 2 Peter 2:4, as we continue our study through this last letter that Peter wrote to the churches that had been really running for three years or so, now, as the persecution under Nero had expanded horrendously. In fact, millions of folks would be put to death for their faith, beginning in 64 A.D. and going 250 years into the future. And Peter had been arrested. He was on death row. He knew that he would be executed soon. And so he writes this final letter - three years after the first one - words of a dying man that majors on the majors. He's not really beating around the bush. He doesn't really have much time. But he selects the things that he felt the church needed to know more than anything else, having ministered to these folks whom he loved for thirty-five years or so.

The outline of the book is fairly easy. In chapter 1, Peter talks about the true things of God. In chapter 2, about the false teachers that try to undermine those things. And then in chapter 3, the end, the coming of the Lord, the return of Jesus to rule and to reign.

In chapter 1, Peter talked about the necessity that all of us face of having a personal relationship with Jesus. We need to know Him well. And if we do, then we can survive the onslaught - whatever it may be. But it's not just salvation. Peter went on to say that we should nourish our commitment to the Lord by adding to our faith the diligence and commitment on our part that means we put into practice what we learn. As you learn, you do. As God teaches you, you follow it. And especially now, when there is so much pressure upon the church. He finished chapter 1 by telling us that he had seen the ministry of Jesus, he had heard His words, he was an eyewitness. He was secured in his faith because of it. But he said to the people who hadn't seen or heard the Lord, "Look, you have an even more sure word of prophecy than my testimony. God's Word, prophetically preached and delivered to you, supports all that Jesus came to say and to do. So, even more than my testimony, His Word is something you can absolutely depend on."

Well, having ended chapter 1, then he turns to those who are trying to undermine that word of God, these false teachers who have come to substitute for it, to deny it, to set it aside. We talked last week, as we looked at the first three verses,

there were false prophets in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, there are the false teachers. And Peter will spend this entire chapter warning us and them to be on guard against them because their wicked ways can take you out, and they can certainly have eternal consequences. So we began, last Sunday, looking at what God would have us to know about these peddlers of the counterfeit; the fakes who gain, driven by self-corruption, and they want to introduce things that are not of God. We talked to you last week - we gave you six things: these false teachers, we are told, are always around; they distort the truth by "secretly" or underhandedly bringing in heresies that deny Jesus; they broaden the way to heaven; they cover their true motives; and twice we're told that they are headed for judgment (at the end of verse 1 and again at the end of verse 3). But, in the meantime, before judgment, be careful. The church should be on guard. We shouldn't get sucked up into these guys and into their lies; these folks that would like to "exploit" us (verse 3). Emporium is the word; make a market of us, if you will, with "deceptive words." And we told you last week that word "deceptive" is plastic. It means that they can kind of form and twist whatever they say to whatever crowd they're speaking to, to get the most effective return.

Well this morning we want to look from verse 4 down to verse 9, as Peter says, "Look, there is a time coming when God will deal with these false teachers. You might think they're getting away with it. It does seem like they're getting away, and they're living high on the hog, and nothing's being done about them, but the Lord will have the last word. It is only while we wait upon Him to act that we will have to be careful. They'll get their day in court." And oftentimes, the question for true believers is, when they listen to these false teachers, "How long, oh Lord? When will you judge them, God?"

And one thing that you should learn about God, if you haven't by now, is that God is very patient, that He doesn't immediately judge wrongdoing, that He waits. In fact, Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Or, in other words, God waits long enough to where when your time of judgment comes, you'll really have no excuse. God waits inordinately long. He loves. He wants to save. He desires all men to be saved. He is patient in His waiting. The danger for us is interpreting God's patience as a lack of concern, or somehow that God is weak, or, even worse, that God approves. "Well, look. He hasn't done anything about it. It must be all right with Him. Or maybe He can't." Certainly the challenge of the false prophets in the Old Testament. But that would

leave you with a false sense of security, and Peter doesn't want the saints misreading God's patience. He literally says to them, "Look, these false teachers seem to be getting away with it, but they're not. God will deal with them as God has always dealt with those who have defied Him. But not in your timetable, in His." Peter saw very little hope in the deceivers. He'll mention in verse 15, "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray." They know it, they're not following it.

But here's his point, and we'll jump down to verse 9. Here're his points that he wants to make in these verses that we'll look at. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations" - that's point one; and point two - "and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." So no matter how secure someone might look or act, judgment is sure to come - either for good or for evil. "The transgressors will be destroyed; the future of the wicked cut off. The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD" (Psalm 37:38-39). We were going to read it this morning, but you can read it later. Those looking to Him will be delivered.

So, here's Peter's plan as he approaches this second part of the chapter. He wants to convince you that God gets the last word with the rebellious, and then he wants to show you that the righteous are always delivered in the midst of the rebellion. So he'll give us three examples: the fallen angels, the ancient world, Sodom and Gomorrah. Those are three examples of God not just standing idly by. And then, in the end, two guys who were delivered - Noah and Lot. God delivered them from His judgment to come.

So let's begin in verse 4. Remember, he ended by saying (verse 3), "their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Verse 4, "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment." If God did not spare them. Here's his first example - fallen angels. If you read through the Bible, you come away saying, "Gosh, I wish I knew more about angels." We know about their creation. We know about their fall. We know they were created before man. We know that the world in which we live came afterwards. Job talked about it in chapter 38, as the Lord was challenging him, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? And all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (speaking of the angels). The angels were there when God created the heavens and the earth. Man was not. We know that a fall took place, a time of judgment in heaven. In

fact, both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 talk about Lucifer's fall; that he was a chief angel, he led worship, he seemed to have great access to God. And yet there came a time that the angels needed to choose "who would we follow," and it seems to have been the one place where every angel made a choice; that no more angels are being created. But all of the angels were called to account. "Who will you follow, and what will you believe?" And along with Satan falling from heaven, a third of the angels joined him (according to Revelation 12:4). And, in his rebellion, God cast them out of heaven to the earth. That we know. It was the subject of Milton's "Paradise Lost." We know that there are plenty of angels who remain faithful - two thirds of them, and there must have been millions of them from what we read; that some sit around the throne of God in worship, that they are fighting spiritual battles against demonic forces in the heavenlies. We read about that in many places - Daniel 10, for example. We know that you have a guardian angel, and some of you, the way you live, a couple of them I suspect. And they're worn out. We need them. The fallen angels also appear around men. They have some access. Satan tempted Eve in the Garden. Job tells us that he's walking around seeking whom he could devour (Job 1:7 and 2:2). Peter quoted that in his first book in chapter 5:8. We know from the Scriptures that the enemy and his hordes of fallen angels war against God's people - that that's your enemy. Paul said in Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." We also know that some of the fallen angels are being held (before the rest of them) in a place called the "**abussos**," the bottomless pit. And, according to Revelation 9, during the Great Tribulation, this "**abussos**" will be opened, and, for a time, these evil spirits will come forth to do great harm. Jesus, when He was dealing with the man possessed, there in the Gadera graveyard (there in Luke 8), when He went to cast demons out of this man, it says that the fallen angels begged Jesus (the demons), "Don't send us to the abyss. Don't lock us away before our time." At Jesus' second coming, we know Satan and all of his demons will be locked into the "**abussos**" for a thousand years. Revelation 20 tells us that. And then, at the end of those thousand years, they'll be released for a little while so that those who've only lived under the authority of Jesus might have a chance to decide that they would rather not follow Him, and actually some will make that choice. And then they will all be gathered and thrown into Gehenna, the place of burning, the final eternal fire that God never intended for man.

Well, here in Peter, in our verse 4, we're given a new term where some of these fallen angels are kept. And the Greek for "hell" here is "*tartarus*." It's the only place that it's used in the Bible, and most commentators believe it literally refers to the lowest place of the abyss; in a funny way, the bottom of the bottomless pit, so to speak. It's about as low as you can go. And when we were going through 1 Peter 3, we talked about who these angels were. But to recap (and you can go through verses 18-22 there, where we did on a Sunday), these particular angels are referred to in Jude 6 as having left their first estate, left "their proper domain"... .. they are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." Peter wrote the same thing, there in 1 Peter 3:19-20 as well. But they are these sons of men from *Genesis 6* (four verses). They preceded the flood, they were angels who left their proper place of angels and cohabitated (took a form of flesh and cohabitated) with man and produced this large race - the Nephilim, the giants, if you will. And these sons of God, if you will, left their proper place, and they would eventually lead to the flood and to the destruction of all mankind - with the exception of eight souls. God brought judgment. They are particularly destructive fallen angels. God isn't allowing them to run around. These are chained and held, and Peter points out (and he'd written about it before) that these angels now sit awaiting certain judgment, yet they haven't fully found it yet. They're just being held until that final judgment day. These wicked angels will be judged. These lying false teachers will as well. So his point is - God has intervened in the affairs of man, has brought judgment, and yet has reserved them for judgment yet to come: final judgment.

In verse 5, he then refers to the ancient world. He says He "did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly." Now, both of them are found back there, if you will, in *Genesis*. But in *Genesis 6:3* (notice that Peter says He "did not spare the ancient world"), God waited 120 years from the time that Noah began to build until the time of the flood. And He waited while the world was, according to *Genesis*, filled with the "wickedness of man, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (*Genesis 6:5*); that the earth was corrupt before God, filled with violence. That's the description that you find in, *Genesis 6*, of the world in the days of Noah. So corrupt, so violent, so turned against God that God determined to wipe it out, to cleanse it from its filth, if you will. But He waited a long time. He waited. He gave everyone plenty of notice. Noah was called "a preacher," notice, "of righteousness" here in our verse. He preached day in and day out, as his boat began to be formed, for 120 years; miles

from an ocean, in Mesopotamia, old Noah was building with his sons - warning people of something that had never happened. It had never rained. There was always that mist, right? In fact, the average lifespan before the flood was 912 years. By the time you get to David, it's 70-80. After the flood, it's 120, and then it kind of reduced itself to 70-80, which is about where we're at today. But Jesus made it clear that, until the day Noah entered into the ark 120 years later, life went on as if all was well; even in the 119th year and the 300th day, sixty days away, eight-nine weeks away from absolute world judgment, people were still marrying and giving in marriage, they drank, and they talked, and life was just fine - until the day Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and it says "destroyed them all" (Genesis 7:21-23). There was no anticipation of God's judgment. Just seemed like all was well. And yet God waited and waited and waited. I don't doubt that they brought the experts out to discredit Noah. Can you just imagine? Proving it could not rain, labeling Noah as some kind of lunatic. Right? Peter wrote in his first epistle that there was a time of "Divine longsuffering in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20). God gave man every chance to repent, and Noah faithfully discharged his duty. He built daily. He was the butt of most jokes, I would suspect. Hebrews, though, chapter 11:7 says when God "warned Noah of the things not seen as yet, he moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." So Noah was faithful. But Peter's point, in using the example, is much like the angels that are locked up since Genesis 6 and have no place to go and still await final judgment. So the world in Noah's day waited long and hard, had years to repent and turn to the Lord but didn't. They didn't, and by the time all was said and done, it was only Noah and seven members of his family that make it through. God is patient. You should know that God is patient. You may look around our country today and how things have changed in the last thirty years and say this, "Lord, where are You?! How long will You wait? How many more people need to die? How many more babies need to be aborted? How much more trouble do we need to face?" And the answer is - God is patient. Isn't it good that God waited for you? What if He'd have returned twenty years ago? How would you have fared? Or ten years ago? For some of you, two weeks ago? But He's patient. He may allow wickedness to go on for years, all the while crying to the people to repent. Yet in the end, judgment comes without fail. God will not be mocked. And it's interesting that throughout the gospels, Jesus makes this parallel between the days of Noah and our day: just oblivious to God, to His judgment, to His demands, to His Word - people just living as if He doesn't exist. And then, without warning, the flood came in those days. The Lord will come for the church, and judgment will fall in these

days. Can you imagine the noise outside the ark when God closed them in? The Lord shut the doors, and the rain began to fall, and people began to knock on the door while they could still stand on the ground. "We've always believed you. We're just kiddin', man!" But it's too late. Try telling somebody today that Jesus is coming. See how you're received. See what the natural tendency of man is. "The Lord's coming back you know." They'll step a few....."He's a little nutty, we're gonna move back here." "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:26). We have much greater evidence that we're in the last days than Noah did. Noah just had God's word on it. That was it. Moved with godly fear. Warned of things not seen as yet. We're told that Israel has to be in the land before we see the coming of the Lord. And they are! It's probably the single greatest living testimony to the prophetic word of God. Israel is back in the land. We still see these false teachers lining their pockets and merchandising the people and leading the religious astray and seeking to stumble godly people and turning away a world from looking for Jesus. Well, they're headed for judgment as certain as the angels that are sitting there in chains today and those living in the days of Noah. It's coming. It's coming. As God declared, so it shall be. And Peter wanted them to know that. Now, look. Peter's about to be killed by a wicked culture driven by false teaching. He's about to be murdered for his faith, as well as tens of thousands of believers. And he says, "Don't get too upset. The Lord's judgment is coming. He's going to make it all right. He has the last word."

In verse 6 he says, "and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly" lives; "and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)." Peter has a third example to consider. Genesis 18 and 19 just kind of take you back into the history of Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities that Peter said God set forth as specific examples to those who would choose to live ungodly lives. And his description of those cities is they might have at one time been thriving there on the Dead Sea, but they are now ashes, and they are condemned to destruction, and they are an example to others who would like to live this way. Genesis 13:13 says this, "The men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD." Jude writes, "As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (verse 7). Ezekiel writes, "This was the iniquity of your

sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49). Peter described the lifestyle of Sodom, in verse 7, simply as "filthy conduct" and, in verse 8, "lawless deeds." There wasn't any law of Moses yet, so the reference is here to the natural law. Unnatural homosexual relationships. In Sodom, the angels of God were accosted at Lot's door by men seeking to take them out for sexual pleasure (there in Genesis 19). Abraham, a godly man, had interceded for Lot (Genesis 18). When the Lord was on His way to destroy Lot, he said, "Lord, what if there are fifty righteous in the city?" And he knew that his little nephew, Lot, lived in town. And the Lord said, "For fifty, I won't destroy the city." And he said, "Lord, how about for forty? Should not the judge of all of the earth do right?" "No. For forty, I'll let the city stand." And Abraham was kind of careful to be questioning God, but he finally, with very great care, said, "How about ten?" And the Lord said, "For ten, I'll let the city stand." There weren't even ten in this major metropolis that God had declared, less than ten, and the judgment of God fell, and the people of Sodom died in their sin. Yet for years, the city had stood. For generations, even as life had gone on in the days of Noah, for a long period of time. Or the fallen angels who had left their habitation and their first estate got away with it for quite some time, but eventually God brought His judgment to bear. So Peter's point is - God will judge. To us, it looks like it's forever. We'll read in the next chapter a thousand years to the Lord is like a day (2 Peter 3:8). So it's not really forever to Him. But his point is - the judgment is certain, though in each case all seemed well until judgment fell. But notice that Peter adds, in verse 7, "He delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) - then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." Jesus is coming. We're not looking for judgment. We're looking for Jesus, aren't we? But the world, not looking for Him, is going to find Him - without being ready to meet Him.

So he gives us, here in verse 5 and then in verses 7-9, two examples of men who lived in the midst of cultures who found judgment and were delivered: Noah, verse 5, "saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness." Noah was a tremendous man of faith. He listened to what God had to say. He was protected from the judgment to come, and he had to stand up against a world who thought he was nuts. And day in and week in and year long, Noah served the Lord, and God delivered him. He was faithful. Just like you and I are going to be delivered from

this world. Isn't that going to be good? But judgment is coming. But we will be saved. That's why I said we're not looking for judgment. We're looking for Jesus. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "We wait for His Son from heaven,.....even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). So that's our hope, and that was Peter's word to the church.

And then Lot, verses 7-9. Verse 8, "that righteous man." I must tell you it is hard to understand Lot in the Bible. In fact, if Peter had not written these three verses, and you would have said to me, "What do you think happened to Lot?" I would have said, "Yeah, I don't think he made it. I don't think he made it." And yet Peter tells us otherwise; which is interesting because if you read through Lot's life story, he wasted every privilege he was given. Uncle Abraham blessed him, led him, directed him, and yet Lot pitched his tent towards Sodom (in Genesis 13). In Genesis 14, he moved into Sodom. When a war broke out, and he was taken captive, Uncle Abraham brought his own army - brave rescue - and, with great fear, came and took Lot back and brought him home and saw the Lord's deliverance. And Lot went, "Thank you very much" and moved right back into Sodom. And yet Peter tells us he was "a righteous man who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked" around him, which "tormented his righteous soul day to day when he heard and saw their lawless deeds." God kept Lot alive as he chose to live on the edge of hell. I mean, he literally is a guy that seemed to live right on the edge. Right? When the Lord's judgment came, Lot had to be dragged out of town, by the hand, by the angels. "While he lingered....." that's what you'll read (Genesis 19:16), and the angels said, "High noon, man. We've got to go!" They had to drag him out of town. Lot could have chosen to live anywhere else. Living in Sodom cost him his wife, two of his daughters and their husbands; and even the two daughters he got out alive, let's just say they were no pleasure. They were polluted by the place that they had grown up. Now, look, Peter's not pointing out Lot as an example of some godly man separated in his life; but rather that God is able to deliver His own from judgment. And even one like Lot with no apparent lasting fruit, living on the edge, and I can't tell you why he chose to live there, but I can tell you God declares him righteous. And though he is vexed by his surroundings, he stayed there. I thought about so often you'll hear from Christians their complaints about the world and how filthy it is and movies, and, "Oh, you can't watch," and yet they're absolutely participating in it. But they're complaining about it all the time. Sounds a little bit like Lot.

Tertullian, the historian, 1st century, wrote that he got saved because he watched Christians willing to die for their faith. Today it is hard, sometimes, to tell who

the real believer is. Everyone claims Christ. I guess the question, then, is - does He claim you? He claimed Lot. God chose Lot. So Lot maintained a conscious resistance to the evil around him while maintaining a proximity to it, which ruined his family, minimized his ministry, and left us wondering about his status - except for the fact that God declared him righteous. I would rather be a far-away witness like Abraham than a living-in-the-city kind of guy that's totally ineffective - like Lot. But even fringe dwellers were delivered by God, for he belonged to Him. He came out before the judgment of God. But fall God's judgment did, and save - God saved. And that's Peter's word to the church. That's what God wants you and me to know.

So we live today in a time when the judgment of God is preparing to fall again. Jesus used, like I said, the days of Noah and the days of Lot. In fact He mentions, in Luke 17, "As it was in the days of Noah" and then later on, "As it was in the days of Lot who went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so it will be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." Same concept, same argument, same presentation. Peter, to a church that was being murdered for its faith by a powerful world leader; we, today, living in a place where you have a hard time sometimes defining who the believers are. And yet one day, the Lord will come. What did we read of the days of Noah? Evil continually, days of wickedness, violence. Lot's day - immorality, perversion, laziness, great tolerance for the wicked, very little concern for the poor, compromising in every way. And then it says, "So shall the days be when the Lord returns." Peter's point in all of this is - but God will judge. In both of the examples, people lived without fear. They lived like - this is going to be the way it is, there's nothing coming. Today people still mock you. It seems to have very little influence for the Lord. They just don't seem to listen. And a lot of Christians are living way too close to the world, like Lot, and they've got no influence whatsoever.

But notice, in verse 6, Peter says this, "Let them be an example to you. Let this be an example to you." The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is illustrated in the book of Genesis and Deuteronomy and Amos and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel; talked about by Jesus and Peter and Jude. It's the standard for - God doesn't let things go on forever. He will judge the wicked, deliver the righteous. If God didn't spare the angels or those in the days of Noah or in the days of Sodom at the time of Lot, He won't spare this generation either.

When I was growing up, and I think it's kind of disappeared now, my father used to say to me (when I was going to school), "Don't mess up. It'll go on your permanent record." You remember hearing that, some of you? Permanent record! I went, "Oh, my God, I don't want a permanent record!" I don't hear that much anymore, but you shouldn't hear that from the Lord. "It'll go on your permanent record." Unless Jesus comes to clean your record. He's longsuffering. But one day the wheat will be separated from the tares, and the harvest time will come, and Noah and Lot should assure the church that we'll be delivered before the Great Tribulation. In fact, that's exactly what the Lord said to the church in Philadelphia. "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). You'll be delivered. You'll be taken. That's our hope.

So, what does Peter say? Stay on the path, saints. If judgment is soon, the rapture comes earlier, doesn't it? May we not think all is well because God hasn't moved yet. Just hang in there. He'll move in His time. You just be careful, and walk with Him.

Next week, we're moving along.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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