

Scarcely Saved – I Peter 4:17-18

I. Introduction:

- A. You and your friend have just entered the newest Italian restaurant in town.
1. It looks like you have just stepped back into 19th century Italy.
 2. The menus are well-designed with fancy lettering and a few illustrations, but no pictures of the food.
 3. You are not an expert in the cuisine, so the names are not overly familiar to you.
 4. After a few minutes, you make your choice of “*Penne au Gratin*” at \$25.00 a plate.
 - a. The waiter brings a big bowl of salad smothered in Italian dressing, and another dish is full of hot bread.
 - b. The bowl of Alfredo sauce makes the bread even tastier.
 5. After you are nearly full of the appetizers, out comes your Penne au Gratin.
 6. You take one look at the plate and realize that you’ve been duped.
 7. It is nothing more than Mac and Cheese with short straight noodles, and it’s not even close to gourmet.
 8. You are furious with that restaurant and with yourself for your ignorance, vowing never to return.
- B. Your decision makes sense in this case because this is one of many restaurants in town.
1. But how many times have you experienced the same thing at church?
 2. You come to the house of God to hear an exposition from the Word of the Lord, only to find that the text has been taken out of context?
 3. The title of the message suggested that the subject would be something from the Bible, but it was nothing but feel good human psychology.
 4. It makes you wonder how often has the messages here been completely off point, but you didn’t realize it.
 5. You came to taste of the “*bread of life,*” but you were fed Macaroni and Cheese straight from the box.
- C. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard these two verses twisted into messages which were not Peter’s.
1. He is not telling us to examine ourselves before we observe the Lord’s Supper or before serving Him.
 2. This is not a declaration that unless we improve ourselves the Lord is going to destroy our church.
 3. This is not a reference to self-examination at all, but rather to the on-going judgment of God.

II. What is the Holy Spirit telling us in this scripture?

- A. Admittedly, this is not a crisp and clear statement.
1. “*For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.*”
 2. Like most preachers, I believe that the “*house of God*” refers to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. But the reference to “*judgment*” is a little more difficult to pin down – until the context is considered.
 4. Two verses earlier Peter referred to suffering as murderers, thieves, evil doers and busybodies.
 5. Many of these young Christians had come from a variety of backgrounds with heathen moral standards.
 6. For example, some of them had been habitual liars, some compulsive thieves and others constant gossips.
 7. Pointing to their current fiery trials, the apostle says that corrective judgment for sin begins – must begin – at the house of God – among the saints of the Lord.
 8. If you suffer for your faith, that is one thing, “*but let none of you suffer as*” a sinner, **verse 15**.
- B. Then he makes a different kind of application.
1. If God’s children receive loving, corrective punishment for their sins, what shall happen to those people who hate God, and who are already under His eternal wrath?
 2. “*If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*”
- C. There are people who interpret “*if the righteous scarcely be saved,*” as teaching some doubt about the saint’s eternal outcome. They may not make it to Heaven, if they don’t straighten up and fly right.
1. But the teaching of the New Testament is that every child of God is eternally preserved by Christ Himself.
 - a. Salvation is not left to chance or to the strength and righteousness of the sinner.
 - b. Jesus said, “*I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish*” – period.
 - c. As Peter told us in **chapter 1**, Christians are “*kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation...*”

2. The apostle is not talking about eternal salvation, but rather about making it safely through the earthly chastisement of our Heavenly Father which may come in the form of persecution from a wicked society.
 3. The word “*scarcely*” refers to **difficulty** and **hardship**.
 4. It doesn’t suggest any doubt; it isn’t “*barely*” saved, as in “*Wow, I didn’t think you’d make it.*”
 5. The Christian life is difficult, full of testing, trials and even persecution. It is not for sissies.
 6. Those who have been declared righteous by God – those who are justified – will often find living victorious Christian lives extremely difficult.
- D. On the other hand the disobedient and ungodly may not suffer a single rebuke or spanking in this world.
1. The world, generally speaking, loves sin & has little interest in judging sinners, except in the worst cases.
 2. But when the lives of the wicked come to an end, & they appear before the divine Judge, things will change
 3. Standing before Jehovah’s alabaster throne, the books will be opened, including the Lamb’s Book of Life.
 - a. The wicked shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.
 - b. “*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Rev. 20:12-15).
- E. This is what I believe the Holy Spirit is telling us in these verses.
1. But now, I’d like to open a fresh box of Macaroni and Cheese and feed an entirely different, and yet wholesome, home cooked meal.
 2. The words “*scarcely be saved*” open the door to another kind of message – a message of the gospel.
 3. That was not Peter’s intention, but, without apology, that is what I am going to do with his words this morning.

III. The righteous have been saved with great difficulty – they have SCARCELY been saved.

- A. There is not a person on earth who is not a sinner in the sight of the holy God.
1. It is impossible for any human being to become sufficiently good or righteous to go to Heaven.
 2. The Bible makes these declarations over and over again.
 - a. “*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” “*There is none righteous, no not one.*”
 - b. “*They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one*” – **Romans 3**.
 3. Furthermore, “*by the deeds of the law (or by the works of those sinners) there shall no flesh be justified (made righteous) in (God’s) sight...*”
 4. There is no ointment or pill we can take to cure our sin disease, because our problem is deeper than deeds of the flesh. Our sinful actions are just the symptoms of our real problem. We are sinners by nature.
 5. No psychiatrist or therapist who can reform, transform or conform sinners into righteous souls.
 6. Furthermore, if we were able to live a perfect and sinless life from this day until the day we die, we cannot undo the sins of the past or the nature of our hearts.
- B. In addition to our inability to cleanse ourselves, there is no other person or earthly organization which can wash away our sins.
1. There are no priests in this world who are not as sinful as we are, and therefore they are unable to help us.
 2. There are no churches, Christian denominations or non-Christian religions which can cleanse our hearts.
 3. Baptism may imperfectly wash the body, but it can’t cleanse the heart.
 4. Eating the flesh of the Son of God in some physical way cannot satisfy our eternal need.
 5. We need direct divine help, because nothing human, or earthly, can meet our spiritual needs.
- C. The point is: we have sinned against God, and therefore we need **God’s** forgiveness.
1. Let’s say that I was angry with you, and to hurt you I lied about you to a third person.
 2. But then I repented of what I had said.
 3. It might be appropriate for me to go to that other person and try to undo the harm I created, asking him to forgive me.
 4. But far more important would be your forgiveness, because my sin was primarily against you.

- D. A Biblical example was King David who stole a man's wife, slept with her and arranged for her husband to be killed.
1. When the fruit of his sin, a baby boy was born, that child became ill and died.
 2. It was at that point that God sent his prophet, Nathan, to show David the depth of his sin.
 3. And shortly thereafter, with a broken, repentant heart, David began to plead with God for mercy.
 - a. *"Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*
 - b. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight..."*
 4. Wait a minute, David, you sinned against Bathsheba and against Uriah.
 5. Actually, while David committed crimes against Uriah's family, his sin was really against God.
 6. He was theologically correct in saying *"against thee (God), thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight..."*
 7. Since, ultimately, all our sins are against God, only God can forgive those sins.
 8. That is why David begged **the Lord** to *"have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" – (Psalm 51).*
- E. While only God can forgive sin, there is a huge obstacle in Him doing that. Jehovah is infinitely holy.
1. He is not simply righteous in what He **does**. For example, He cannot lie; He cannot sin.
 2. Even more importantly: God is holy at His very core. It is one of His attributes.
 3. Just as you and I are sinners by nature – at our heart's core. God is infinitely holy – righteous.
 4. It is a part of His being; something which He cannot deny, ignore or transgress.
 5. And it is something which He cannot dismiss for the sake of forgiving someone.
 6. So how then can anyone be forgiven?
- F. Paul deals with that divine dilemma in **Romans 3**.
1. Please turn to **Romans 3** and look at **verse 23**.
 2. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."*
 3. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, there are people like King David and the former idolater, Abraham, whom God has forgiven.
 4. In Paul's words, they have been *"justified freely by (God's) grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" – Romans 3:24.*
 - a. To be *"justified"* is to be *"declared righteous,"* as Paul explains, using David and Abraham as examples.
 - b. Sinners can be declared righteous, but only through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
 5. *"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."*
 - a. God has sent His own righteous Son to establish a way to satisfy, or to *"propitiate,"* the demand of death against the sinner.
 - b. God has just determined to use Christ's righteousness and sacrifice to meet the sins of people like David or you and me.
 6. And in this God can maintain His holy righteousness while still forgiving the sinner.
 7. *"To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."*
- G. Again, here is the eternal problem: how can the just and holy God, declare a sinner righteous, while still maintaining His own perfect holiness?
1. The answer is in the death of His only begotten Son – someone as holy as God the Father Himself.
 2. When the blood of God's chosen sacrifice, Christ Jesus, is imputed to the sinner – exchanged for his sins – God maintains His holiness and yet can still forgive that sinner.
 3. Only through Christ can sinners like you and me be delivered from the penalty for our sins.
 4. Herein Peter's words are true when applied to salvation – the righteous are saved with great difficulty.

IV. But if the righteous are scarcely saved, what about the ungodly and the unbelieving sinner?

- A. The answer is: there is absolutely no hope for them.
1. There can be no other way of deliverance except through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.
 2. Again, I point out that there hasn't been a person born since Adam who was not an ungodly sinner.
 3. There is no hope for any of us outside of the grace which is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Peter uses several words to describe these hopeless sinners. First, they are "ungodly."
1. This English word is most often used to suggest how awful some evil deed is.
 2. We see that the **Book of Jude**: *"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."*
 3. But here Peter isn't describing the nature of our sinful acts.
 4. He says that a certain kind of people are ungodly by nature.
 5. Here the word is an adjective not an adverb, describing not what we do, but who we are.
 6. And in this case this simply means that they are without God or any of the blessings or character of God.
- C. And that explains why those people are called "sinners."
1. To be a sinner is to miss the mark or to fall short of God's standard of righteousness.
 2. We are like one armed, blind men shooting at God's target. It is impossible to hit the Lord's bull's eye.
 3. *"We are all gone out of the way, we are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one."*
- D. Peter says something else in **verse 17**: they have **not obeyed** the gospel of God.
1. How can someone disobey the good news of Christ's death, burial and resurrection?
 2. By not believing God's message and not putting their faith in it.
 3. To hear the evangelist exhorting, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,"* and not to believe on Christ is to be disobedient to the gospel.
 4. And even when there is no evangelist, simply to live and die without faith in Christ is disobedience to the gospel.
- E. And where shall the ungodly and the sinner then appear?
1. What shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?
 2. Please turn to **Revelation 20:11** – *"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.*
 - a. *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*
 - b. *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*
 - c. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*
 - d. *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*
 3. **Matthew 25:41** says, *"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."*
- F. I will close with what Paul told us about Abraham and David in **Romans 4**.
1. *"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God."*
 - a. There was nothing Abraham, the idol worshiper, could do that could create a situation through which God could declare him righteous.
 - b. There were no works which could undo his sinful past, and it was impossible for him to live sinlessly in the future.

2. *“For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”*
 - a. God applied His grace and righteousness to Abraham, and that sinner believed Him; he trusted Him.
 - b. He believed God’s promise, even though at the time the Saviour had not yet died.
 - c. Nevertheless, it was through the blood of Christ that Abraham was saved – by faith in God’s promise.
3. *“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”*
 - a. *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*
 - b. *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”*

- G. It was **SO difficult** for God to forgive David and Abraham that it took the death and blood of God’s own Son to make it happen.
1. There is no other way to be saved from our sins but through the blood of the Saviour.
 2. You and I may appreciate what Jesus did on the cross, and we may shed a few tears as we think about His passion and death.
 3. But we will never fully understand what it cost God the Father.
 4. Righteous Abraham and righteous David, along with every other saved sinner has scarcely been saved.
 5. We have been saved through extreme difficulty.
- H. And now in the light of that, I appeal to you who are outside of Christ to come to God through faith, the same way that David and Abraham did.
1. Repent of your sins before God, and acknowledge that you are undeserving of the least of His mercies.
 2. But then put your trust in the greatest of all God’s mercies: the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.