

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Trust in the LORD and Do Good

1 Peter 4:17-19

4:17 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?

4:18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

The First Letter of Peter was written to encourage Christians who were in trials. Chapter 4, verses 12 and 13 taught that the believers should rejoice the sufferings for Christ because the sufferings were the sufferings with Christ. Verses 14 through 16 taught that the believers should glorify God since suffering as a Christian was blessing from God. Then what do the today's verses, 17 through 19, teach about the meaning of sufferings and the believers' responses to the sufferings.

1. Judgment and Salvation

Today's portion begins with the word, "judgment." It says that the sufferings of the believers are "judgment" of God. However the word, "judgment" in this context does not mean "punishment." It means that God's work to re-create the disordered world and transform it to the place where God's will be done as it is in heaven. God will purge sins and evils which harm people and the world. The God's work becomes

“judgment” for those who afflict the believers, but it becomes “salvation” for afflicted believers. 2 Thessalonians 1:6 says, “since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,” The Bible teaches that “judgment” is a part of “salvation.” There is no “salvation” without “judgment,” and no “judgment” without “salvation.”

Let’s think about it. “Salvation” means that people are delivered from the afflictions. If so, it is needed that those who afflict people should be judged. The salvation of the afflicted people needs the judgment of those who afflict. We have many samurai stories that a local magistrate and a merchant conspire each other seeking power and money, and afflict people. But a hero, like Mito Komon or Ooka Echizen, appears and the evil ones are punished and the people are saved. In reality, not all evil people are punished like novels or TV dramas. Then we feel relieved when we see the happy end in the story. The afflicted people can get the salvation only after those who afflict them have been judged. I hope you understand the statement, “There is no salvation without judgment.”

Then, what does this statement mean? “There is no judgment without salvation.” We are sinful and have no right to appeal God according his justice even though we become perished by God’s judgment. But, God loved men, and prepare the salvation before the judgment. God sent Jesus to the world not as the Judge, but as the Savior. God has desire that everyone will be saved. So, he gave us the gospel, the message of the salvation. God postponed the last judgment again and again because of his love to human and mercy on the world. (2 Peter 3:9) He has been showing the way of the salvation until now.

The statement, “There is no judgment without salvation,” means that God never judges us without offering the salvation from the judgment. If a man would be judged and perished, he himself chose to be judged and perished because of not choosing the offered salvation. The man chose not God’s salvation, but the judgment.

There is a story about a man who built his house near a river that would rise during a rainstorm. He had been warned that if the river rose, his home should flood. He replied, “I am alright.” One day the rain came, the river rose, and his home was flooded. A rowboat came by and offered to carry him to dry land. He replied, “I am alright.” later he climbed on the roof of his house. A motorboat passed by and its boatman offered him help. He replied, “I am alright.” As the waters rose higher, he climbed atop the chimney. The pilot of a helicopter circling overhead called down to him and offered to lift him off the roof. He replied, “I am still alright.” He drowned after having rejected helps.

God is reaching us with his saving hands in many ways, like a rowboat, a motorboat, and a helicopter came to the man. Since we cannot save ourselves, we have to cling to the salvation which God has prepared for us. The man who built his house in flooding area neglected the warning and rejected helps, and finally lost his life. We should not follow such a bad example by neglecting God’s warnings, rejecting the invitation of God’s love, and throwing off his hands of salvation. God extends his arms and tries to reach us. Let’s extend our arms and hands to God.

2. Judgment and Christian

Verse 17 reads, “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.” What does it mean? “The household of God” is “Church” and its members, “Christians.” Does this phrase mean that even the believers in Jesus Christ can be condemned at the final judgment? If so, it is in contradiction with John 3:18 which says, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned.” “Judgment” in this verse is not the final judgment but the work of God, which he re-creates the believers according to his will and restores the world. It is natural that God begins to restore his house and his people when he restores the whole world. Like the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple, God gets rid of earthly things from the churches and makes the Christians like Christ. By doing so, the churches are purified, and the Christians are prepared. The churches are cleansed, and the faith of Christians is strengthened. Consequently, the gospel will be proclaimed more powerfully, and it will become the salvation of the world.

God uses trials to purify the churches and prepare the believers. It is the same in Peter’s era and now. If the ancient churches needed trials such as persecution, we need more for these days. The faith of ancient churches has been passed over until today, and believers and followers of Jesus Christ have never ceased. However, in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, there is a prophecy, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the

appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” In the 21st century, many churches have become what Jesus Christ has not wanted. However, God has not abandoned the church. He has mercy on us. This is our era, because it is that, God tries to purify the church and prepares the Christians. When the church tries to go back the original spirit, it always faces the difficulties. When Christians try to follow Jesus Christ, they face unexpected challenges. However, by overcoming the trials and challenges, the church and we can become the one that God wants.

The trials are necessary for the churches to be purified, and for the believers to be prepared. However, we shall not think that God likes to give us trials excessively. We shall remember that God also feels pain and struggle when he gives his believers trials. God gives us the trials only when he thinks that this is the only option to save us. Let’s understand the deep love of God in the words such as “judgment” and “trial”. When we understand it, we can believe that our pain and struggle of trials will become our joy and glory.

3. Judgment and Trust

Then, what should believers do during the trial? There the Bible teaches two things; one is “to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator” and the other is “to do good”.

“To entrust” means to leave ourselves to the hands of God in trust. Even if we understand that entrusting God leads to “salvation”, when we feel that the trial from God is as if “judgment” to ourselves, we often become desperate and complain, “I give up. There must be something worse happening to me. I cannot stand it anymore.” We

also try to run away from suffering, struggle and use up all our energy, then become exhausted and depressed.

When we go through a trial, what we have to do is to not turn our back to God who gives us the trial, but rather we entrust him and let God handle the situation. You can find many believers in the Bible or history, who actually overcame the trial, and you can imitate them. But the excellent role model is the Lord Jesus himself. 1Peter 2:22-23 says, “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” As Lord Jesus entrusted God the Father, we would like “to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator”.

And even if it is a time of trial, let’s not stop “doing good.” When we are discriminated or singled out from the society, we often despise it or turn our back against the society. If someone has been working so hard for others but no one appreciates what the person has done, or even worse, beat him/her up, that induces anger and grudge and leads to anti-social activities. It could kill him/her out of strong despair. It often happens among youth as well as the middle-aged people.

However, even if they are casted aside from the society, relatives, family or a certain group and end up suffering, believers still continue to love neighbors, fulfill the responsibility wherever they are, and try to do good, which God has given to them. Psalm 37:3 says, “Trust in the LORD, and do good.” This is what God wants Christians to do in any era or in any situation. This is something we can never forget in a time of pain, trial and suffering. If we follow this one by one in our daily life, a suffering of believers will lead to joy and a trial will turn

into glory. Then, this testifies for the Savior to people, leading to salvation of the world.

(Prayer)

Dear God, the Father, please give us faith to correctly receive the suffering that you give us according to your plan. Then, please make us entrust you and keep doing good. We pray through the name of Lord Jesus, who completely entrusted you during the suffering.