

Hope PCA Sermon: April 28, 2024

“Entrust Your Soul to Your Faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:17–19)

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This morning we continue in 1 Peter chapter 4 coming kind of to the end of a long section here that started back in the middle of chapter 3 where Peter really focuses, as he does quite strongly (actually it goes even into chapter 2), where Peter focuses quite strongly on the theme of suffering and what it means to suffer as a Christian. That's part of our experience, part of our life as believers. And so we'll get to the last little part here: verses 17 to 19 of chapter 4. If you would, if you're able, please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word here this morning. 1 Peter 4 verses 17-19. This is God's very living Word.

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? ¹⁸ And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly
and the sinner?”

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

Thus far, the reading of God's holy, infallible, and inerrant word. May he plant it deep within our hearts. May it bear fruit in our lives. Please be seated. Once again, let me briefly pray for us.

Lord God, our desire this morning is that you would fulfill the promise you yourself have made about your Word, that when it goes out, it does not return to you empty or in vain, but instead accomplishes everything for which you've sent it out. It's successful in everything. May that be true here this morning as we come before your Word. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, times have changed, as they do, but for many decades, including mine when I was a teenager, it was a big deal for kids, boys especially, to get their driver's license and get that first car. We all hoped for it. We all dreamed about that day coming. Some would get summer jobs or a part-time job even during school, saving up money to be able to buy that dream car once I get my license. Not many could do that necessarily, but certainly many dreamed. I think that has been replaced perhaps by other things in our time today, but it was a big deal for quite a long time. Even our student newspaper in high school had a regular column featuring one of the students' cars. And how cool was it that your car got featured in the student newspaper and your picture with it printed in the paper?

As big a deal as that was, that's not what I was pursuing in high school. I had a different priority. I was saving up for something else, a particularly unique kind of musical instrument.

I wanted the best. I wanted a professional model and the same one played by one of my favorite musicians. Most people haven't even heard of it. It's called a flugelhorn. Someone once described it as a pregnant trumpet. In about 1980, a professional model flugelhorn was going to cost me about \$700. 1980 dollars. What was I going to do? How am I going to pay for this? I had a paper route, but monthly paper route earnings, that would take a long time to save up for. I had an idea. I had my old, beginning student model, clunky, no-name trumpet. I'll sell it. I vaguely remember that I put ads in the newspaper. Again, another thing we don't do anymore. Who looks at the want ads? In any case, even if I did that, it didn't work. There used to be a place, I don't think it's there anymore, down on South Lake Union, a store that sold musical instruments, new and used. And I learned about something called consignment. I took my trumpet down there, and I thought: well, they can sell it. If anybody can sell this thing, they can sell it. I'll make a little bit of money, pay them their fee. I'm on my way to getting something better. Waited a few weeks, didn't happen.

But the experience was quite profound for me. I remember not a little bit of terror as I walked in there and handed over my possession to strangers to sell on my behalf. What's going to happen? It took a fair amount of trust. Who are these people? Will they do what they said they'd do? Can I trust them to do what they said they would do? Will I get the money they promised me when and if this thing actually sells? Again, it didn't sell, it turned out to be moot. But it was this little experience for me as a teenager of kind of taking a leap of faith, turning over something that was valuable to me to someone completely different. In the end, I was able to get the flugelhorn with my parents' help and pay them back over time. But that's another story. It's one thing to trust a consignment store over on South Lake Union with an old clunky, no-name, basic trumpet. Still, there was worry, and the worry was genuine.

And why I bring this up is if that was true for me and for that experience with that trumpet, How much more true is it for us to hand over our very soul, our whole being, to God Himself? To whom can I do that? To whom should I do it? Can I entrust everything about me to this God who I've never even seen? Peter says do that: *"Entrust your souls to a faithful Creator."* Entrust your souls to God. And he says to do this even in the face of pending judgment. To do this even in the midst of suffering for doing good in his name. You know you're facing judgment. You know you're dealing with suffering. Nevertheless, entrust your soul to this faithful creator.

I want to look at those two ideas and their implications this morning. Trusting God while facing his judgment and trusting God while suffering persecution for bearing his name. Let's talk about this idea of pending judgment first.

In this short passage, Peter is summarizing or pointing us back to what has come before. Remember from 12 to 16, he's exhorted us "not to be surprised by the fiery trial that's about to come upon us, as if something strange were happening." Again, that fiery trial language echoes language in Malachi of God refining his people. He will purify the sons of Levi. And we saw that suffering is a means how God refines us as his people. Peter says, don't be surprised when that comes. Rejoice instead, because this is a sign of being one of God's people. So be sure, he says, do not suffer for being "a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, a meddler." But if you do suffer, if you do suffer as a Christian, "glorify God in that name." Rejoice that you bear that

name. Glorify God that he has given you that name. And then he continues in verse 17: for, because of this, for this reason, judgment is coming. Why do we do this? Because judgment, he says, is coming. In fact, he says, judgment is going to “begin with the household of God.”

What in the world does Peter mean by that? Oh, he’s drawing on some Old Testament ideas. Let me share a few. There’s a prophecy in Jeremiah of the coming judgment that God is going to bring upon Judah. Chapter 25 verse 29. Here’s how it reads: “For behold, [says God to the people], I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name. And shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished. For I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the Lord of hosts.” He’s saying: punishment is coming. And my people, it begins with you in the very city that bears my name. The prophet Amos in chapter 3 verse 2 speaks against all Israel: “You only have I known [says God] of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” In Zechariah 13 verse 9 there’s again a picture of God refining his people like silver or like gold. And then again that passage from Malachi chapter 3 verses 1 to 5 where we see God refining his people like gold or silver. But there’s a purpose to it. With the result that they will bring offerings of righteousness to the Lord and those offerings will be pleasing to the Lord. So it’s a kind of judgment, a kind of refining that results in things pleasing to the Lord.

A couple things to note about these kinds of judgments. God’s people are being judged for their sins and being disciplined for them. This idea of refining. Why do we refine ore? I have a little box of silver ore that I got in Idaho when I was 10 years old. It’s not worth much because it’s just the ore. It’s pretty. You have to refine it, you have to extract the pure silver out of it to get to the best, to get to the real source of the gold or silver. There’s an old saying attributed to the philosopher Seneca: “Fire tests gold, affliction tests strong men.” Affliction makes us stronger. We’re purified. We’re made better. God is refining, purifying his people through affliction that he brings upon them. And while that affliction is unpleasant, and while that affliction in some ways is quite deserved, its purpose is not primarily to punish, but to discipline. And there’s a difference between the two, right? Punish is just retributive. Discipline is for the purpose of bringing about a better result. Sometimes we deserve God’s fatherly discipline as we stray into sin or fail to live as we ought to. Also, sometimes suffering comes even while we do good, as Peter writes about here, because others hate us for our faith. God still uses that to refine us, to purify us.

The second thing to note about these judgments in the Old Testament is that God can and does use our opponents and their persecution of us to accomplish his purposes in us. They might think they’re harming us. They might think they’re doing wicked things to us. Remember, what’s God’s providence? His most wise, holy, powerful, preserving and protecting of His creatures and their actions. Everything that happens to us, God has ordained for us and for our benefit. It can be, and in fact it often is, very painful and difficult to experience this kind of suffering at the hands of others. Fiery trial. Yeah, it’s fiery. It’s unpleasant. Israel lamented by the banks of the great river in Babylon. They wept tears of sorrow. But God uses these things to refine and purify his people. So Peter’s idea of judgment here includes this idea of being tested, being refined by the fiery trials of life.

But there's another aspect of this judgment as well that we can't ignore as much as we might like to. And it's kind of there in the second half of verse 17 and verse 18. Because here Peter compares the judgment of God on his people with his judgment of those who do not obey the gospel of God. If God sends trials and suffering as a way to discipline and purify his people — and those trials can indeed be called fiery, severe, painful — what will non-believers experience in comparison? Their judgment will be much worse. And he says they have rejected the gospel of God. They have not obeyed the gospel. We've seen that kind of language before in 1 Peter back in chapter 1 verse 22. Obedience to the gospel or obedience to truth. Those who believe, we are those who have purified our souls, says Peter back in chapter 1 verse 22, by obedience to the truth. And he makes that comment in the context of describing the great salvation that is ours in and through Jesus Christ. So this idea of obedience to the truth or obedience to the gospel is a New Testament way of speaking about coming to Christ Jesus in repentance and faith.

Another example would be Romans chapter 2 verse 8. Paul writes that those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, for them there will be wrath and fury. It's in a part of Romans 2 that talks about God's certain judgment of sin, and this sin is the result of a hard, Paul says, impenitent heart that stores up wrath when God's judgment, his righteous judgment, is revealed. What's an impenitent heart? It's an unbelieving heart. It's a heart that does not come in repentance and faith to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. So again, obedience to the truth, obedience to the gospel is simply hearing and heeding the call of God to come in repentance and faith to Christ Jesus. So the contrast, again, that Peter is making here is between those who believe in Christ Jesus as Savior and those who don't. And judgment is coming. It's a theme we saw a few months ago back in Habakkuk and Malachi. Judgment is coming. God's wrath is coming.

And in verse 18, he quotes from a proverb, Proverbs 11:31, to help make his point. I'm going to read how Proverbs 11:31 is in the Old Testament: "If the righteous is repaid on earth [it says], how much more the wicked and the sinner!" Note that the translation is a little bit different than Peter's quote, because Peter is using, pretty obviously, he's using the Greek translation of the Old Testament that he's quoting from. But even that Greek, a word that in Hebrew is translated "repaid" in Proverbs, translated "scarcely" here in the English Standard Version, can also be translated as "difficult" or "with difficulty". And that's probably in the context of suffering and persecution, the fiery trials that are the result of the work of God, his refining work. "Difficulty" makes more sense. Because Peter's not saying that we just barely squeak through to salvation. I made it. You know, it's like that first Indiana Jones movie at the very beginning. The wall is coming down and he jumps across and slides through it just in time. It's not "scarcely" like that. Salvation, Peter is saying, salvation comes with trials. It comes with difficulty, with hard times, as we indeed do suffer for being Christians, for the sake of Christ. But salvation does come. In fact, salvation is assured, and it's not by our own works or striving. Again, why the word "scarcely" just doesn't make sense for me. It comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We stand at the final judgment dressed in the righteous robes of Christ, His perfect obedience to God. We stand before God not guilty. "Scarcely" doesn't work with that picture. "Difficulty", yes. So salvation does come with trials and with difficulty, suffering for the sake of Christ.

And what Peter's saying, if that's true for believers, what's it going to be like, he says, for the ungodly and sinners, *"for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* So it's vital here, it's necessary to pause, to reflect, to assess: Who are you? Which one are you? Is your name "Christian"? Or is your name "ungodly" or "sinner"? Have you obeyed God's gospel call to repent and believe and accepted the free gift that he offers in Christ Jesus, his beloved son? Do you see that only begotten One whose death takes away the penalty of God's wrath for sin? Do you see him whose perfect obedience is offered in exchange for your absolute disobedience? If you have, praise God, for you will stand secure. You will stand secure at the day of judgment that is coming. Because you stand secure now. And nothing can snatch you out of Jesus's hands. Nothing can snatch you out of the Father's hands. But if that is not you, my friend, God's wrath remains upon you. You and you personally. And it's coming. If it's hard for Christians, what's it going to be like at the judgment of God? What to do about it? Repent, believe, and do it while there's still time. Now is the day of salvation. So judgment, entrust your souls to a faithful creator, even though judgment is coming. maybe because judgment is coming if you have not yet believed.

Then verse 19, it takes us to the final of the seven themes that I introduced last week from Daryl Charles's commentary on 1 Peter. It points us to what should be a believer's attitude, a believer's disposition about life until Christ comes again, or until death takes us into his presence. He says to us in these themes of suffering (the seventh one), you *"who suffer according to God's will, entrust [your soul] to a faithful creator while doing good."* Don't stop obeying God. Don't stop doing good. Rather, entrust yourself to him. Commit your soul to his care. Again, like my poor, sorry teenage self, but on a much, much grander and more glorious scale, and in a much more vitally important way, put your whole being, as it were, on consignment with God. Turn yourself over to him. Part of the idea of entrusting something, putting something we value in trust. We expect it to be taken care of. We expect that we'll get it back at some point in the future. We put money in the bank. What are we doing? We're entrusting it to the bank's care, and that we'll get it back when we want it back.

Or think about something even more precious. How hard is it for many of us as parents, especially with the first one, they're five years old, to send them off to school. Right? The tears, the questions, the fears that might arise. My little one's gone for hours. We entrust them to someone else's care and we trust that we'll get them back at the end of the school day. Think about how hard and emotional that often is for parents to do. Of course, as a side note, let me say, in today's world especially, be very, very careful to whom you are entrusting your children. Things are not quite as trustworthy as they used to be, even up through college, as we can see in the news.

But what do most of us value? Most of us. What do most of us value even more than our children? Number one, right? Me. That's why Jesus' remembrance of the second commandment is so apt. It hits so close to home. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. He knows we love ourselves. Most of us, again, most of us have no trouble loving ourselves. Peter is saying we need to let go of that and give it to a faithful creator, our faithful creator, so that he can take care of it. It's interesting that Peter refers to God here as Creator, I think. It points us to the wonders of God's creation, the absolute majesty and beauty, the glory, the variety of God's creation. I think Peter wants us to have this in mind and that if God can do such amazing

things in the world that he's created, the world that's not even created in his own image, how much more can we trust him to take care of those made in his image, being remade into his image in Christ, those of us on whom he has placed the very image of his own beloved Son? If he can do that in creation, can he not protect me? Can he not take care of me? I would think so.

There's some things to conclude here. How do we entrust ourselves then to a faithful Creator, our faithful God? Well again, it begins, it must begin, with repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Begins with receiving and resting upon the gift that God gives of Jesus' work to save sinners like you and like me. That's a beginning, but it's also a lifelong process. It doesn't end. There's fruit that comes with it. How do we entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator? Take advantage of the means of grace that God has given to the church: the preaching, the teaching of the Word, sacraments, prayer, worship, fellowship with other believers.

A way to entrust ourselves to God is to entrust ourselves to Christ's body, the church. And I know that can be a messy place. I've seen it. I've experienced it. It can be hard. It can be crushing. But God is here with us, and he ministers to us. I would say he loves us. One of the most tangible ways that God loves us is through each other, the body of Christ. We can entrust ourselves to his under-shepherds, elders and deacons, those called to care for our needs, both body and soul. We can entrust ourselves to service of one another's needs according to our gifts, using them to serve God and to glorify God and to serve the body. But also by receiving that service from others when we're the ones in need. That's the hard one, confronted again and again in ministry. Someone's in need: "Oh, no, no, no, I don't need any help." You know what? You're depriving someone who's gifted to help you of their opportunity to serve you. God has given that resource to the church, and he's given that resource to you. That's a little bit prideful for us to reject that gift of God to us through the body. Be willing to receive service from others when I'm in need. That can be hard.

We can entrust ourselves to the worship of God as he desires to be worshipped, not according to what entertains us or pleases us or makes us feel good or tickles our ears. That's entrusting ourselves to God. "Oh, this is the way you want to be worshipped? But I don't like it." Too bad. That's kind of harsh, but it's there in the essence of it. We can entrust ourselves to God by following his commands. These things are all acts of faith, of trust, of committing ourselves to God's care. Obeying His commands in the face of the consequences that might be out there is an act of faith.

Again, that I will trust God to take care of me, to watch over me, to protect me, to preserve me, whatever the consequences of obeying His word might be in my life. We can entrust ourselves to his purifying work in our lives, the fiery trials, the various situations and circumstances that mold us and shape us into the people that he's called us to be. We can entrust ourselves to a God who cares for us. Peter didn't say that in chapter 5 verse 7: "cast all your cares upon him, because he cares for you." So much so that he gave his only son to save us. And that son serves as an example. We saw this back in chapter 2 verse 23. Jesus himself entrusted himself to God. If he did, so should we. And then in all of these things (the theme of Peter here), in all these things, rejoicing and glorifying God, whatever the

circumstances, that you and I have the amazing privilege of bearing the name Christian. Christian. Rejoice and glorify God in that day.

Let me pray for us.

Well, Lord, we would be fools if we did not freely admit how unpleasant suffering and trials are. We don't like them. We frequently pray for them to go away. That's understandable. But oh Lord, even in the midst of trial and difficulty, would you be gracious to show us your purposes at work in us that we might give you praise and honor and glory? And where we can't figure these things out, that we would nevertheless have, by your gracious gift, the faith to endure, the faith to continue, the faith to entrust ourselves to you and to your care. Lord, we pray this in the name, the wonderful, matchless, beautiful name of Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

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