

Change Our Heart's - Part 1

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's sovereignty, holiness, and righteous judgment in relation to remedial judgments, which are concurrent with sin and offer time and opportunity for repentance.

Duration: 1:17:02

Scripture: John 15:1

Topics: "Gods Judgment", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor shares a story about a guest preacher who was asked to give a short sermon but ended up speaking for a long time. The pastor explains that sometimes we fail to deal with our sins in a timely manner, and this is a reflection of our society's lack of understanding of judicial timeliness. He emphasizes the importance of addressing our sins immediately, as God's judgment is not delayed. The pastor then discusses seven aspects of God's character that make remedial judgment significant, highlighting God's mercy and the potential for our nation to receive another chance.

Transcript

Maggie joins me in expressing our deep gratitude, excuse me. Don was letting us know this morning, he was 84, and I remember the first time we heard him, he was explaining a problem with his voice and justifying it somewhat by his age. Now, at the time I first heard him, I realized I was running nine years behind him.

I haven't caught up yet. So, if I've got any trouble with my voice, I'll explain it away by age and you'll understand, won't you? I did want to say how grateful Maggie and I are for the privilege of being back again. As has been acknowledged to you, I was and I still am a Congregationalist.

Many people have had to forgive me for that and I appreciate your kindness in allowing me to continue to speak here from time to time. Cedars has always meant, I think, a whole lot more to Maggie and myself than we have to you. But we are truly grateful and honored at the privilege.

Now, as Henry mentioned, I stated to the group of leaders yesterday, the subject that we are focusing upon is of narrow scope. Now, by that I did not mean that it is relatively inconsequential, for it is a terribly long ways from that. I wonder how many of you have ever taken the time to go all the way through your Bible to discover the heart of God on the subject of his righteous judgment.

I was led at one time to get the fresh Bible, one without marks, and to read all the way through from Genesis to the Revelation and to mark with the letter J in the margin every time the Lord registered his discontent, his heart grief, or his joy over his own people. And by the time I got through, I could scarcely believe that the subject of God's righteous judgment was such a truly prominent theme. And hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of passages dealing with the judgments of God.

But the agreement was made among those who are leading this weekend to focus upon not just the subject of God's judgments, but his remedial judgment. And I understand that not everybody knows what we are talking about. We had lunch at our own church last Sunday.

I have not been in our own home church but once in the last calendar year. Every other Sunday I've either been preaching out of the state or preaching in a nearby city where the First Baptist Church lost its pastor and I've been filling the pulpit. They too, you see, have had to forgive me for being a non-Baptist.

But last Sunday I was asked to preach in our home church and had the great joy of preaching on John, chapter 15, verses 1 to 8, on fruit. That we prove that we are his disciple by bearing much fruit. But even more importantly than that, verse 8, we also bring glory to our Father through the fruit that we bear.

Anyway, at the luncheon that followed the service, three young men deliberately sat across the table because they wanted to ask me what I meant by remedial judgment. And it was crystal clear that they had not the slightest notion of what these matters of righteous judgments really consist of. So, with the supposition that at least a few here yet have to understand the subject, let me just lay out in a few simple sentences the situation as it presents itself to us.

Now, normally when the word judgment is used by professed Christians in America, what is in their mind is future, what we describe as eschatological judgment, the judgment of our works, or what is referred to sometimes as the great white throne judgment, where God calls before him everyone who has ever lived and everyone gives an account of themselves before God and is held responsible for their entire lifetime. And certainly, the subject of divine judgment does include eschatological or judgments at the end. But we're not speaking about future judgments this weekend.

We're talking about those judgments that are concurrent with sin. And it's terribly urgent that we understand that even when we fail to judge ourselves and when our churches fail to judge us as they are ordered by our divine commander, he himself will and does do what he has commanded us to do personally concerning ourselves and what he has commanded our churches to do. If we fail to judge ourselves and our churches fail to judge us, God does judge us.

Now, these righteous judgments concurrent with sin fall into two general categories, the one of which we are speaking this weekend, the remedial judgments of God, and also the final judgments of God. Now, by using the word final, I haven't suddenly leapt over to the future or to eschatological judgments, but I'm making a contrast between those judgments which are remedial and those which are final. Now, the young men said, no, we know the word remedial in terms of school.

A child falls behind in their reading skill, and so they're put into a remedial reading class, a catch-up class. Well, that's what we're talking about. The people of God fall behind in their walk with God.

They violate him. They trespass his clear commands. As Henry has so carefully pointed out to us this morning, the wages sin, that is death.

Death lays hold of a person in this way or that way. They have lost something of incredible consequence in terms of the life of God in them. And so God brings upon them a remedial judgment, a judgment that will help them to catch up, to return to the Lord, to get where they should have been and should have stayed but did not.

I trust that that is crystal clear. But just in case someone is a bit on the slow side, let me run it through again. The judgments that are future and are very real, you will be judged according to your will.

There will be a great white throne judgment, a judgment in which there is a permanent separation of the sheep and the goats. But those judgments are not our theme this weekend. Our focus is upon the remedial judgments of God.

But someone thoughtfully is saying, you have described what you mean by remedial but you haven't distinguished what you're referring to by the use of the term final. All you've said is I'm not leaping over now to eschatological. I'm still with these righteous judgments concurrent with sin.

Yeah, final. You see, a remedial judgment is a gracious judgment, a judgment demonstrating God's incredible generosity, God's loving kindness, God's desire that all of us come to repentance. In remedial judgments, there are both time and opportunity extended for repentance to occur.

But as some of you have learned, a remedial judgment left unheeded will in God's time become a final judgment. A final judgment is a judgment in which there is neither time nor opportunity for repentance. But again, it's not the same as an eschatological judgment.

If I were to ask you what is the most amazing of these final judgments stated in the New Testament, most of you would immediately say Ananias and Sapphira. For when the lie was told, Peter did not say, over there is the prayer room. You see the door over there? Go to make your way to the prayer room and see if you can't discover some grounds for grief.

No, no. The sin was committed. It was confirmed.

And immediately, death. No time, no opportunity for repentance. So while we are not going to focus this weekend on final judgments, we would be most foolish not to retain in our minds and our hearts an awareness that we dare not neglect the remedial judgment that God places us under.

Because to do so is to greatly imperil our future. Now that must be said individually, but it must also be said corporately. For the judgments of God are not merely upon individuals, but upon churches, upon denominations, upon entities of every conceivable sort.

And it is crystal clear that neither Henry nor I have come this weekend to say, be careful, God may place you under judgment. By His grace, we don't speak so foolishly. The judgments of God are not iffy.

There is absolutely no uncertainty whatsoever in terms of the judgments of God. If we sin and we do not deal with that sin in repentance and turning to Christ, we are immediately under the judgment of God. Not a week from now, not three days later.

The very day we sin and do not deal with that sin as God requires, He places us under His judgment. And we must not. We must not for His glory and for the good of the multitude to watch us like hawks.

We must not fail to deal with our sin as it occurs. Now it's my happy privilege to launch my part of this weekend by speaking to you this morning about seven great aspects of the character of God that make this subject of remedial judgment so very, very consequential. So, I probably will not say anything but what in some fashion you have heard before.

I don't have any desire to be novel, but only to draw together the vital issues concerning the very character of God that ought to lead us to great promptness in dealing with our sin. Let me begin with His sovereignty. There are seven that I will mention.

I do not mean to imply that there are only seven of God's qualities that affect these remedial judgments, but just seven of which I hope to speak this morning. So as I said, number one, God's sovereignty. You understand, don't you? That nothing can hinder, delay, or prevent God from doing exactly what He pleases.

Now that needs to sink in deeply. One of the messages that the church ought to be conveying constantly to the world is you're not going to win. You've already lost.

There is a sovereign God who always gets His way without any exception. All around us are multitudes of people who think they can rebel against the sovereign God and somehow in it all survive. But it cannot happen.

God always wins. There are literally millions of Americans who would be wise to lay hold of the little parable that Jesus taught concerning two kings going to war. And the one king looks across at his enemy and sees the magnitude of the army that he's up against and he sends up a white flag of surrender.

It's not only millions in the world who fail to understand that God has already won, but multitudes in the church who continue in their rebellion against the God who sees them as they are losers. Now there's something very stupid about arranging your life in a guaranteed loss pattern. But the church has not been faithful in presenting this aspect of the character of God.

He is sovereign. Let me give you some scriptures. Numbers chapter 23.

I'm reading verse 19. God is not the man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent. Has he said and will he not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not make it good? Why indeed when God says this is the way it is, that's it.

The whole issue is settled. There's no controversy. There's no room for argument.

Anyone who says otherwise declares himself to be what he truly is, a fool in his own heart. God is the victor. Now there may be some area in your life where you hold out against the sovereign God.

Are you going to lose? You already have lost. You are making a fool of yourself. You would be wise to run up your white flag.

And in the event that this has escaped your notice before, when one person sends up the white flag of surrender, who declares the terms of the treaty? The loser or the victor of incredible consequence to the subject of the remedial judgments of God is God's sovereignty. Listen to these words from Isaiah chapter 14 verses 24 to 27. The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely just as I have intended, so has it happened.

And just as I have planned it, so it will stand. Excuse me, I'm going to have to get a little something to drink. I've seen Don do this, so apparently it's all right.

Let me start again, Isaiah 14. The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely just as I have intended, so it has happened. Just as I have planned it, so it will stand.

To break Assyria in my land, and I will trample him on my mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulder. This is the plan devised against the whole earth.

And this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for his stretched out hand, who can turn it back? We've got to get a hold of that. God wills it.

God brings it to pass. All the nations of the world, gathering together and marching against God, will not raise one single hair of fright on God's head. God wills it.

He brings it to pass. Perhaps these words, some of Isaiah 46, verses 8 to 11, are familiar to some of you. Remember this and be assured.

Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things, long past. For I am God, and there is no other.

I am God, and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, my purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my purpose from a far country. Truly, I have spoken.

Truly, I will bring it to pass. I have planned it. Surely, I will do it.

In Ephesians chapter 1, verse 11, we read, who works all things after the counsel of his own will. I repeat, there is something extraordinarily foolish about thinking you can resist God, his will, and his way, and get away with it. And before we go to my second observation concerning the character of God as it affects the matter of remedial judgments, let us be certain that not one of us is in any way resistant to the will of our God.

Well, you say, I don't know that we really need to worry about that. Oh, God hates divorce. And how many divorced people are there here? One could go through the catalog of sins and discover that everyone in the room is somehow involved in some form of rebellion against God, past, present, or is calculating it for some time in the future.

The remedial judgments of God are very much determined by God's sovereignty. Let us be sure we have that crystal clear in our hearts and are responding appropriately to that incredibly important truth. Number two, the holiness of God is indeed an aspect of his nature, of his character, that profoundly impacts his judgment.

God is absolutely righteous. And he hates both sin and unrepentant sinner. Now, all my life, I've gotten in trouble for that statement.

But I haven't backed down, and I'm not going to. Some of you have heard me report that a long time ago, I was preaching in one of those large California churches, and it had one of those circular balconies that

covered about three quarters of the church. But it was at a beautiful slope, so standing in the pulpit, one could look into the eye of everybody there in that vast congregation.

And I remember so well in the evening service that as I began to preach, there were these hundreds of children visible and watching and listening intently. And as the sermon progressed, perhaps a wee bit longer than some of the folk were used to, I saw some of the children kind of tip over and lean on their parents. And then after a bit, why, some of the children were picked up and placed lying out under the benches or in the aisles.

And it was just simply a beautiful sight. And at the end of the service, a large group attacked the pastor and said, Pastor, why did you tell Mr. Roberts he had to preach a short sermon? And he said, I didn't. Well, they didn't believe him.

So they brought the pastor to me and said, Mr. Roberts, did the pastor tell you to preach a short sermon? No, he said, take all the time that God wants you to. Well, then why were you so brief? Well, I said, I saw all the little ones laid out under the benches and on the steps. And I just thought maybe you were concerned to get them home.

No, why don't you give us another sermon tonight? It was a beautiful atmosphere, a tremendous hunger expressed on the part of the people. But to my astonishment, later the next week, I got the letter from a very important figure on the West Coast. And the essence of the letter was you're an extremely dangerous person because you have such a subtle way somehow of worming your way into the minds and the hearts of the people.

But you say the most reckless and dangerous thing. He said, you adamantly insisted that God hates both sin and the unrepentant sinner. And that is a dreadfully wicked thing for you to have said.

And he really gave me a good assailing on that. But I wrote back to him a very kind letter in which I said to him, I believe that I have a distinct advantage over you in this matter. For I have weighed every passage of scripture dealing with the subject of the love of God.

And I find overwhelming evidence that God hates unrepentant sinners. After a while, he wrote back a most courteous and kindly letter saying, You were right. You did have an advantage over me.

And I apologize for my attack. But not long thereafter, my son called. He was then himself living in California.

And he said something like this, Dad, I've heard you say some amazing things. Things that I was sure you would never be able to recover from. But somehow you always seem to have some biblical proof.

But this time, you'll never manage. I heard on a tape that Mom sent me your statement, God hates both sin and the unrepentant sinner. And you'll never recover from that statement.

And so I said to him, Bob, answer the question. What is sent to hell? Sin or sinner? It was a long pause. All right, he said, you got me.

I'm not ready to admit you're altogether right. But that's certainly a powerful argument. But then not long after that, I was with him in a group.

And I heard him convincing someone that God hates both sin and the unrepentant sinner. Now I want to ask you, is this an area where you're in trouble with God? Are you still among that vast crowd of so-called Christians who tells unrepentant sinners that God loves them just the way they are? Oh, that sounds so delightful. That's such an encouraging and a lovely thing to say to a sinner.

But it's a lie. Well, you said we heard your argument to your son, but it didn't persuade us. Well, maybe the word of God will persuade you.

How about Psalm chapter 5, starting at verse 4? For thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness. No evil dwells with thee. The boastful shall not stand before thine eyes.

Thou dost hate all who do iniquity. Have you faced that? Thou dost hate all who do iniquity. Thou dost destroy those who speak falsehood.

The Lord abhors bloodshed and deceit. Or these words from Psalm 11, starting at verse 4. The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven.

His eyes behold. His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked.

And the one who loves violence his soul hates. Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire, and brimstone. And burning wind will be the portion of their cup.

For the Lord is righteous. He loves righteousness. The upright will behold his face.

I'll tell you very plainly why the subject of divine judgment concurrent with sin is such a neglected subject. Because the bulk of the church has swallowed a lie straight from the pit that God loves the sinner just the way he is. You can believe that until the day you die.

But you were wrong the first time you believed it and you're still wrong. God is holy. He has zero tolerance for sin.

The church has been teaching he has huge tolerance of sin. Almost everyone in the whole evangelical movement in America believes in a God who doesn't care whether they live righteously or whether they live ungodly. That if they ever had a moment of faith they're forever secure no matter what.

But in actual truth, because God hates both sin and the sinner he brings us under remedial judgments. So we will learn to hate sin as he hates it. So we will learn to flee from it as he requires us to do so.

What a tragedy. If someone here were to continue to insist to the unrepentant that God loves them, it's only their sin he hates. But have you ever thought of the consequence of that type of teaching? Here's a sinner.

He loves his sin. He has no intention whatsoever of repenting of it. He is told by some clergyman or some Bible teacher that God loves him just the way he is and it's only his sin that God despises.

And what have you done? You have encouraged him to live out his life of sin. You have taught him that it might be nicer and more pleasant to God if he turned from his sin, if he repented, but it isn't mandatory because God loves him just the way he is. Now I'm not much concerned about some of you being angry over this matter.

At this point in my life I fail to see why any threat from anybody could have any real consequence as far as I'm concerned. But my concern is not in any sense personal. We claim that we worship and serve a holy God and yet we create an atmosphere of great tolerance for sin among people who persuade themselves that they're followers of Jesus Christ.

But my real purpose, as I hope I've made it clear, in bringing this up is the second aspect of God's character that affects righteous judgment. If God were not righteous in this sense of hating both the sin and the unrepentant sinner, he would perhaps let us get away with things. But he doesn't.

But let me move on. Let me mention as a third quality God's jealousy. When was the last time you gave any serious attention to biblical statements concerning God as a jealous God? God is such a jealous God that he will not allow any who are identified with him to rob him of his glory.

We exhort one another not to rob God of his glory and it's right that we should. And Ron and Patricia have some songs that I particularly am fond of and always so appreciative when they use them concerning robbing God of his glory. And while we ought certainly to stir ourselves up and to guard against robbing God of his glory, I declare to you today God is a jealous God and he will not tolerate anyone robbing him of his glory.

Now let's look at this matter briefly but at least fairly from a biblical perspective. Exodus 20, verses 3 and following. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children on the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me but showing loving kindness to thousands to those who love me and keep my commandment.

Do you remember Henry's closing words this morning? 28 times? I saw Maggie get her pen out and start calculating. What was your figure? 2,401? You take 28 and multiply it out the way that passage, 7 rather, and multiply it out the way that passage requires us to. You're running up to 2,000.

What did I just say? 2,401. As soon as she showed me that on her pad, I immediately thought of something I had read during the course of the week. He would visit iniquity onto the thousandth generation.

Then I began to wonder, I wonder how many generations there have been since Adam. I don't know. I doubt that any of you do.

But I don't think there have been a thousand yet. And we still are feeling the impact, the effects of Adam's sin, are we not? Have you not this very week felt something of the curse of Adam in your own life and especially in the life of those that you love and are burdened concerning? The Lord our God is a jealous God. Notice these words also from Exodus.

This time, chapter 34, verse 14. You shall not worship any other God. For the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

Now, I don't know that I ever heard anybody declare for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. Or hear these words from Deuteronomy, chapter 32, verse 21. They have made me jealous with

what is not God.

They have provoked me to anger with their idols, so I will make them jealous with those who are not a people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. Have you thought about those words? Let me read them again.

Deuteronomy 32, verse 21. They have made me jealous with what is not God. They have provoked me to anger with their idols.

To whom are those words first addressed? Well, obviously, to Israel. Israel provoked God to anger by their idolatry. So, as a judgment against Israel, what does God do? Why, these words are so perfectly plain.

I will make them jealous with those who are not a people. Who's that? Why, that's us, the Gentiles. Those who were nobody at that time have been raised up by the Almighty God to make His own ancient, much-loved people jealous because they provoked Him to jealousy.

Now, how asinine can you get when you think God would do that to ancient Israel and then let us provoke Him to jealousy and get away with it? So, the subject of the righteous judgment of God hangs to a very significant degree upon the absolute fact that God is a jealous God. Joshua said to the people, this is in the 24th chapter of his book, the 19th verse, you will not be able to serve the Lord for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God.

He will not forgive your trespasses, your sins. Now, I've lifted that out of its context. But in the context, He's demonstrating to Israel how hard it's going to be for them to follow the Lord.

And then they come back and they say, every commandment that He issues, we will obey. We enter into covenant with God. Well, they meant it at the moment, but they quickly forgot.

Or listen to these words from Zephaniah, chapter 1, verse 18. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath. And all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy.

He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth. So I've spoken of His sovereignty. I've spoken of His holiness.

I've spoken of His jealousy. Let me mention a fourth. His eternal love.

Now, God is not fickle in His love. It is only when His people willfully and persistently violate Him that He turns them over to their own iniquity. God is never in a hurry to bring His people under judgment.

He loves His own. He loved Israel. His patience with Israel is remarkable.

Every time I pour over the pages of the Old Covenant, I'm again impressed and amazed with the eternal love of God demonstrated toward a stiff-necked and rebellious people. But that doesn't ever move me as much as the examination of my own heart and life. And I consider the grace of God extended to me despite the hardness of my heart and the stiffness of my neck.

Surely, an incredibly important part of the righteous judgment of God is His eternal love. He does not have to extend Himself to us the way He does. At any moment, He would be righteous in plunging the whole band of us into hell.

We long ago earned it. But instead, His love. But because we do not respond to His love as we ought, He then introduces these remedial judgments.

When we speak of remedial judgments, we must never lose sight of the fact that they are truly expressions of God's eternal love. It's not as if God is saying, I can't stand you. I can hardly wait until I have fully destroyed you.

On the contrary. I have loved you with an everlasting love. And with loving kindness, I'm drawing you.

That message through Isaiah, or Jeremiah rather, the prophet, is the message that these judgments of God continually extend to us. Jeremiah 31-3. If you haven't got a hold of those words yet, lay hold of them this morning.

Will you not realize that these righteous judgments of God are expressions of His loving kindness? With loving kindness, He says, I draw you. Now some of us lose patience with one another. And we're glad to cut somebody off after they've tried us for the umpteenth time.

Now I'm not implying that God never turns a person completely over to their iniquity. But I surely hope you understand, He's not in a rush to do so. I listen to some who talk about our nation as if it will be a great delight for them if God opens the bowels of the earth and dumps us all in.

I listen to others who are in prayer meetings pleading with Christ to hurry up and come back and rescue them from this rotten mess. And whenever I hear that, I say, what about your lost children? What about your lost grandchildren? How can you be anxious for their destruction? Well thank God, no matter how weak and silly the church is, Christ remains as He's always been. A God of eternal love.

Now not soupy, not sickly, not silly. Coffee love. So when you sin, you can count on it that God will bring upon you some judgment calculated to turn your heart back to Him.

Give thanks, we're told by Jeremiah in chapter 33, verse 11. Give thanks to the Lord of hosts for the Lord is good. His loving kindness is everlasting.

Let me move to another aspect of the character of God that greatly impacts this matter of righteous judgment. His kindness and His long-suffering. I've pointed this out already, but it bears repeating in this fashion.

God is not in a hurry to bring a person or a people under condemnation. But He exercises extraordinary long-suffering in providing them more than ample opportunity to repent and return to Him. You remember the experience of Moses after that wicked season of the golden calf when Moses spoke to God and requested, show me thy glory.

And God summoned him back to the mountain. And we read in Exodus 34, starting at verse 6, the Lord passed by in front of him and He proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and truth, who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and the fourth generation. The kindness and the long-suffering of God are a significant part of these righteous judgments.

We read in Psalm 86, 15, But thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness. And Paul crystallized this matter in Romans 2, 4, Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and His forbearance and His patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? Did you see what's happening in our day? Is that we have become abusive of the kindness of God. We have become presumptuous.

We act as if the kindness of God proves that we're all innocent, that we've never done anything wrong, that God has no broken heart because of us. Whereas in actual fact, His kindness is intended to lead us to repentance, not to arrogance, not to presumption. And let us pause and ask our own heart, Has the kindness of God, His compassion, as manifested in His remedial judgments, led me quickly to repentance? And if not, why not set your heart in this very hour to respond to God appropriately? Now we read in 2 Peter 3, 9, The Lord is not slow about His promises, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.

But I think that the words that gripped me most as I was thinking my way through this matter were the words in 1 Peter 3, verses 18 to 20, where we read about Christ going and making proclamation to the spirits in prison who were once disobedient, but then this line is what has caught my heart. When the patience of God was kept waiting in the days of Noah during the construction of the ark. Did you ever think about those words? God had decided what to do with the wicked men on earth.

He called upon Noah to build an ark. Was that ark built overnight? No, you know as well as I do, what a protracted season of time it took to ready that ark, and during all that time, the patience of God was stretched. And during all the days of your life, when you have been trying and testing God by your evil thoughts and ways, the patience of God has been stretched even as it was prior to the flood.

The whole of the matter of divine judgment is affected by the kindness and the long-suffering of God. Number six, we must also use the term mercy. All of God's righteous judgments are tempered with mercy or compassion, as the same word is often translated.

So even when we ourselves are under divine condemnation, we never receive at the hand of God what we really deserve. Suppose you were sent to hell tomorrow. Would the sum of your life be you got what you deserved? No.

No, you didn't get what you deserved. You deserved hell long ago. But God, in His mercy, has all this time extended His grace and His favor to you.

And surely you can readily see that in sending remedial judgment rather than final judgment, God is demonstrating His mercy. Now take our own nation. Does our nation deserve another chance? Could any of us plead with God and say, our record was so remarkably good in the early years, surely you must extend your mercy now and give us another real demonstration of your mercy.

No, no, we have no grounds along those lines of appeal. And yet we have hope. We have hope that the God who has invested so much of His grace and His mercy in our land may yet extend His mercy beyond what we can foresee and give us an opportunity to prove that like Him, we hate sin.

And really, the great test of the usefulness of this weekend will not be the flowery words that you speak to those whose words have blessed you or even the report you give in your home church on the next Lord's Day. The report will be the speed and the permanency with which we demonstrate that the Word of God

has changed our lives. When we came, we really didn't know how many would be here.

But when we arrived yesterday, it was mentioned that approximately 450 had registered. And I was thinking to myself, how many were there in the upper room? How many were there in that first great Moravian outpouring of despair? How many were there that banded together with Whitefield and the Westleys in those days? Oh, my friend, 450 people in one place, all responding to the Word of God permanently. The prospects are incredible! But my final word has to do with judicial timeliness.

Now, that's not an expression you will find in Scripture, but it's a summary of Scripture. We live in a land where really nothing is known about judicial timeliness. You're well aware that someone can be observed by 14 eyewitnesses committing a murder, and 17 years later, they're still fooling around in court trying to decide whether he's guilty or innocent.

We've become so used to delayed injustice that we can scarcely comprehend judicial timeliness. We need lay hold of that. God is never tardy in His administration of justice.

There are many powerful passages in Scripture that demonstrate this, but the one that comes quickly to most minds is one that our dear brother Henry has already made reference to in the life of David. As he pointed out to us in the earlier hour, when Nathan arrived on the scene and took his bony finger and poked it in David's face, already at least nine months, more probably a year or more, had passed. Now, does that passage suggest that God was a year late in getting to David? No, not if you know your Scriptures.

You know that in Psalm 32. You know that in Psalm 38, David makes it crystal clear the very day he sinned and did not repent, God brought him under judgment. He speaks about his bones being broken, about his lips being parched, about his spirit being withered.

God is always on time with his judgment. The minute you sin and do not judge yourself and put that sin away, God brings you under his judgment. But we somehow foul things up because we're still here, and we say, well, I guess God hasn't judged me yet because I'm still here.

That's because we don't understand the distinction between the final judgments of God and the remedial judgments of God. But most of us have come to understand that of all the countless numbers of judgments recorded in Holy Scripture, the most prominent of the remedial judgments is the withdrawal of God's manifest presence. And most of us are members of and in regular attendance at churches that God has come nowhere near for months and years.

And indeed, some of them, God will never visit again. Their situation is as hopeless as was that of the temple in Jerusalem when our Lord overlooking the temple said, your house is left unto you desolate. But for our own private lives, thank God that there is still time and opportunity of repentance.

Now, the seven terms that I've used this morning all bear heavily on the subject of righteous judgment. But as I finish, let us nail down for good the realization that no time can be lost. The righteous judgments of God are always on time.

And if there's some sin in your life, you are under God's judgment if you have not judged yourself and put that sin away. And there is always the frightening truth that a remedial judgment left unheeded will in God's time become a final judgment. Remember, our God is a consuming fire.

And what a tragic thing that those who have sat under the ministry of the Word and have felt the pull of the Spirit of God in their heart to tell, to heed the Word of the Lord and should discover, as the author of Hebrews made it clear, we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken. Thus, let us show gratitude that we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence. For our God is a consuming fire.

He is the sovereign God. He has won. Let us get our flags up high and live in total surrender to the victorious King Jesus.

One of the wonderful things about Cedars is that we're not going anywhere else. And we don't have to worry about a time schedule. Would you bow your heads for a moment of prayer? We really would be amiss to just rush off to lunch after hearing such a message and not recognize that it's God's kindnesses and His patient endurance of us that ought to cause us to hurry back to Him in repentance.

We are going to be moving to lunch hour in just a few moments, but I want to just mention that sometimes fasting, the reason you fast is because you don't have time to eat when you're doing business with God. And it may be that there's some of you that need to go get along with the Lord during this lunch hour rather than eat. And I would encourage you to do that if that's what the Lord is dealing with you about.

And others, I would ask you, as you talk over the lunch hour, let's not get far off the subject but share with one another what God's saying and what He's doing that we might help each other return to the Lord. Heavenly Father, You are sovereign. You alone are God.

You are right and righteous in all that You do. What You purpose, You bring to pass. Help us, Lord, today to surrender to Your sovereignty.

Lord, You are holy. Like Isaiah, when he really caught a glimpse of Your holiness in the temple, he saw his sin and cried out because of his sin, Lord, we are a people of uncleanness and we dwell among a people of uncleanness and we have no grounds to stand on. Pull back the veil, Lord, and allow us to see Your holiness in a way that this weekend will forever change our lives.

Lord, You are love eternally. And we saw Your love on the cross that demonstrates Your holiness that required sin's penalty to be paid for and Your love that paid the price in our stead. Thank You for Your love.

Lord, You are kind and compassionate. You're merciful. Lord, we're grateful for the way You have endured and been merciful to us.

Lord, the very fact that we are alive is a clear demonstration of Your mercy. We don't want to be presumptuous upon Your continued mercy, and so, Lord, I pray that You would make clear to us all that needs to change. Lord, may we begin to experience the reality of Romans 6, that when we were buried with Christ in baptism, we died to sin.

We've been delivered from sin, that sin no longer is our master. We're no longer slaves of sin because we've been set free from sin. And, Lord, I pray that You'd allow us to begin to live out the reality of that life in Christ that is free from sin for Your glory and Your honor.

Refine us, Lord, and purify us and cleanse us. Continue Your work in us. Lord, I pray that as we share with one another over the coming hour what You are saying and doing, Lord, would You begin to help us help each other.

Lord, the Scripture says, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another and be healed. Lord, I pray that throughout this weekend, we'll have ample opportunity to turn to a brother or a sister in Christ, to bear witness to what You're doing in our lives, and to know Your cleansing and Your forgiveness. May there be great healing come in our midst in the coming days.

Lord, we thank You for the food that's been prepared for us. Lord, far more than the physical food, we're grateful for the spiritual man that You've been feeding us this day. And we pray that You will continue Your work.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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