

# The Righteous Are Scarcely Saved

- Who Are the Righteous?
- What Does “Scarcely Saved” Mean?
- How the Righteous Continue Faithfully
- Where Shall the Ungodly and the Sinner Appear?

Our lesson (this morning), centers on the sobering statement of [1Pet.4:18](#), which reads:

- “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

This passage forces us to think seriously. It tells us that salvation is not casual, automatic, or careless. At the same time, it does not teach hopelessness. Instead, it teaches the **Seriousness of discipleship**, the **Necessity of obedient faith**, and the **Danger of turning away from God**.

Sometimes people may think,

- “If I am basically good, that is enough.”

Others may think,

- “Since salvation is by grace, effort does not matter.”

But the Word of God teaches neither of those ideas.

The Bible teaches that all have sinned, that righteousness comes through faith in God, and that such faith must live, obey, endure, and continue.

In this lesson, we will consider four major questions:

- Who are the righteous?
- What does it mean that they are scarcely saved?
- How do the righteous continue faithfully?
- And if the righteous are scarcely saved, what becomes of those who refuse God?

This subject is weighty, but it is also helpful.

It teaches us to be humble, watchful, serious, and thankful.

Before we can understand how the righteous are scarcely saved, we must first understand,

## I. Who Are the Righteous?

Let’s begin by clearing away one misunderstanding:

Righteousness does not mean sinless perfection in ourselves.

### A. None Are Righteous by Their Own Sinless Perfection

Paul gathers the testimony of Scripture

to show that no human being can stand before God claiming personal perfection.

- He said, “As it is written, There is **none righteous**, no, not one:  
There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.  
They are all **gone out of the way**, they are together become unprofitable;  
there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” ([Rom.3:10-12](#))

Explanation:

- “None righteous” means — no person is naturally, absolutely just before God, on his own merit.
- “Gone out of the way” means — mankind has departed from God’s path.

Paul then states the same truth plainly.

- “For **all have sinned**, and **come short** of the glory of God;” ([Rom.3:23](#))

Explanation:

- “All have sinned” means — every accountable person has transgressed God’s will.
- “Come short” means — to lack, to fall behind God’s holy standard.

The Old Testament had already declared this reality.

- The Bible says, “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all **gone aside**, they are all together become **filthy**: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” ([Psa.14:2-3](#))

Explanation:

- “**Gone aside**” means — to turn away from the Lord’s path.
- “**Filthy**” shows — the moral corruption sin brings.

If a clear white garment has even one stain, it is no longer spotless.

In the same way, one sin proves that man cannot claim sinless perfection before God.

This humbles us and prepares us to seek righteousness, where it can truly be found.

But if no one is righteous in the absolute sense, how can the Bible speak of righteous men and women?

## **B. The Bible Still Speaks of Righteous People**

Though all have sinned, Scripture still uses the word “righteous” to describe people who live by faith and walk in God’s ways.

- The Bible says, “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias... and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.” ([Lk.1:5-6](#))

Explanation:

- “**Righteous before God**” means — approved by God, in their manner of life.
- “**Blameless**” does not mean sinless perfection, but that they lived faithfully and uprightly.

Noah also stands as an example of righteousness, in a corrupt age.

- Scripture says, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” ([Gen.6:8-9](#))

Explanation:

- “**Found grace**” shows — God’s favor.
- “**Just**” means — righteous.
- “**Walked with God**” means — Noah lived in fellowship and obedience to God.

The Hebrew writer explains Noah’s righteousness more fully.

- He said, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house... and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” ([Heb.11:7](#))

Explanation:

- “**By faith**” shows — the source of his response.
- “**Moved with fear**” means — reverent obedience.
- “**Righteousness which is by faith**” means — righteousness connected, with trusting and obeying God.

A righteous person is not one who never sinned, but one who **Trusts** God, **Walks** in His ways, and **Seeks** His approval.

Noah lived among the wicked, yet he walked with God.

That helps us see that righteousness is possible, even in a sinful world.

So then, righteousness is not self-made.  
It comes by God's grace and is received through obedient faith.

### C. God Justifies the One Who Lives by Faith

Paul explains that the gospel reveals, how God makes sinners right with Him.

- He said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth... For therein is **the righteousness of God**, revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.**" ([Rom.1:16-17](#))

Explanation:

- "The righteousness of God" here — points to God's way of making men right with Him.
- "The just shall live by faith" means — the righteous person, lives by trusting submission to God.

God is just, while also justifying those, who trust IN Jesus.

- "Whom God hath set forth, to be a **propitiation** through faith in His blood... that He might be just, and the **justifier** of him, which believeth in Jesus." ([Rom.3:25-26](#))

Explanation:

- "Propitiation" means — the sacrifice that satisfies justice.
- "Justifier" means — the One who declares the believer righteous.

Faith is counted for righteousness, not as empty belief, but as trusting reliance on God.

- The Bible says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is **counted for righteousness**. <sup>7</sup>...Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man, to whom the Lord **will not impute sin.**" ([Rom.4:5-8](#))

Explanation:

- "Counted for righteousness" means — regarded or reckoned by God, as right.
- "Will not impute sin" means — God forgives, rather than charging guilt.

This faith is not dead; it produces obedience.

- "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have **obeyed from the heart** that form of doctrine, which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the **servants of righteousness.**" ([Rom.6:17-18](#))

Explanation:

- "Obeyed from the heart" means — sincere, willing submission.
- "Servants of righteousness" means — devoted to what is right before God.

The righteous are those whom God forgives and guides, because they trust and obey Him.

A branch lives, only when connected to the tree;  
so the soul lives rightly, only when connected to God by faith.

The righteous are not people who earned perfection.  
They are people who, though once sinners, now live by faith,  
walk with God, and are counted righteous, through His revealed will.

This gives us both, humility and hope.

Now that we understand who the righteous are, we are ready to consider Peter's sobering statement, that the righteous are scarcely saved.

## II. What Does "Scarcely Saved" Mean?

This statement is not meant to make the faithful despair, but to make them serious.

### A. "Scarcely" Means With Difficulty

Peter's words are direct and solemn.

- He said, "For the time is come, that judgment must begin at the **house of God**: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that **obey not the gospel** of God? And if the righteous **scarcely** be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" ([1Pet.4:17-18](#))

Explanation:

- "Scarcely" means — with difficulty, not easily or carelessly.
- "House of God" refers to — God's people.
- "Obey not the gospel" shows — that the gospel requires obedience.

Jesus taught the same truth, using the image of a narrow gate.

- He said, "Enter ye in at the **strait** gate... because strait is the gate, and **narrow is the way**, which leadeth unto life, and few there be, that find it." ([Matt.7:13-14](#))

Explanation:

- "Strait" means — constricted or narrow.
- "Narrow is the way" means — the path to life, is disciplined and defined by God.

The Lord also emphasized earnestness, in entering that way.

- Scripture says that one said, "...unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them, **Strive** to enter in, at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." ([Lk.13:23-24](#))

Explanation:

- "Strive" means — to struggle, labor, and exert oneself.
- This is not teaching salvation by human merit, but the seriousness of wholehearted effort.

If a man is crossing a swift river by stepping stones, he cannot be careless with his footing ([1Cor.10:12](#)). The righteous are scarcely saved, because the path requires alertness, faithfulness, and careful obedience.

Why is salvation described this way? Because there are real obstacles, real temptations, and real trials.

### B. The Way Is Difficult, Because Faith Must Be Tested

Peter wrote in a context of suffering and fiery trial.

- He said, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the **fiery trial** which is to **try you**, as though some strange thing, happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings..." ([1Pet.4:12-13](#))

Explanation:

- "Fiery trial" refers to — intense testing.
- "Try you" means — to prove or test.

Faith is refined through trial.

- "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through **manifold temptations**: That the **trial of your faith**, being much more precious, than of gold that perisheth..." ([1Pet.1:6-7](#))

Explanation:

- "Manifold temptations" means — many kinds of trials.
- "Trial of your faith" means — the proving of genuine faith.

The Lord does not promise ease, but victory through endurance.

- He said, “...be thou **faithful unto death**, and I will give thee, a crown of life.” ([Rev.2:10](#))

Explanation:

- “**Faithful unto death**” means — steadfast, all the way to life’s end, even under persecution.

Gold is purified by fire, not by comfort. In the same way, faith is proven in hardship, pressure, and decision. The righteous are scarcely saved, because the journey includes testing.

The difficulty, is not because God is unwilling to save, but because,

### **C. Salvation Is Not by Mere Claim, but by Living Faith (Not empty profession)**

James warns that a faith with no obedience, is dead.

- “**Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.**” ([Jas.2:17](#))

Explanation:

- “**Dead**” means — lifeless, inactive, not saving.

Abraham’s faith was shown, in action.

- James said, “**Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?... Ye see then how that by works, a man is justified, and Not by faith only.**” ([Jas.2:21-24](#))

Explanation:

- “**Faith wrought with his works**” means — faith worked together with obedience.
- “**Made perfect**” means — brought to completion.

Christ Himself is the author of salvation, to those who obey Him.

- The Bible says, “**Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience, by the things which He suffered; And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation, unto all them that obey Him;**” ([Heb.5:8-9](#))

Explanation:

- “**Author**” means — source or cause.
- “**Obey Him**” shows that — salvation belongs to those, who submit to Christ.

It is not enough to say, “I believe,” if the life will not follow the Lord (“devils believe and tremble” – [Jas.2:19](#)). To be scarcely saved, means salvation is not easy, broad, careless, or automatic.

The righteous must pass through, a narrow way, enduring trial, resisting temptation, and maintaining living faith, IN Christ Jesus.

If that is true, then we must consider,

## **III. How the Righteous Continue Faithfully**

The same God who warns us, also teaches us, how to remain faithful.

### **A. The Righteous Must Seek God’s Righteousness FIRST**

Jesus teaches us, where our priorities must be.

- He said, “**But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**” ([Matt.6:33](#))

Explanation:

- “**Seek ye first**” means — make it your highest priority.
- “**His righteousness**” means — the things God says are right.

The righteous hunger, for what is right before God.

- “Blessed are they which do **hunger and thirst** after righteousness: for they shall be **filled**.” ([Matt.5:6](#))

Explanation:

- “**Hunger and thirst**” describes — strong desire.
- “**Filled**” means — satisfied by God’s provision.

The righteous do not drift into faithfulness — they meditate on God’s will.

- “Blessed is the man that walketh Not, in the counsel of the ungodly...  
But his **delight**, is in the law of the Lord; and in His law, doth he **meditate** day and night...” ([Psa.1:1-3](#))

Explanation:

- “**Delight**” means — joyful desire.
- “**Meditate**” means — thoughtful, continual reflection on God’s word.

What a man feeds, grows — If the heart feeds on the world, worldliness grows.

If the heart feeds on God’s truth, righteousness grows — The righteous continue, by keeping God FIRST.

But seeking righteousness, also means putting sin away and presenting ourselves to God.

## **B. The Righteous, Must Yield Themselves to God**

Paul calls Christians, to stop offering themselves to sin.

- He said, “Let not sin therefore **reign** in your mortal body... neither **yield** ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God...” ([Rom.6:12-13](#))

Explanation:

- “**Reign**” means — rule like a king.
- “**Yield**” means — offer or surrender.

The Christian life involves, putting off the old man and putting on the new.

- Scripture reveals, “That ye **put off** concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; <sup>23</sup> and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; <sup>24</sup> and that ye put on the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.” ([Eph.4:22-24](#))

Explanation:

- “**Conversation**” means — manner of life.
- “**Put off**” and “**put on**” show — deliberate change.

The fruit of the Spirit, marks a life led by God.

- The Bible says, “But the **fruit** of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, <sup>23</sup> meekness, **temperance**...  
<sup>24</sup> And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.” ([Gal.5:22-24](#))

Explanation:

- “**Fruit**” means — the visible result, of a Spirit-guided life.
- “**Temperance**” means — self-control.

A field left unattended, fills with weeds.

A life left spiritually unattended, fills with sin.

The righteous continue, by daily yielding themselves to God and refusing sin’s rule.

Yet the righteous must do more than begin well — they must endure to the end.

## C. The Righteous Must Endure in Faith

Peter tells suffering Christians, what they must do.

- He said, “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, **commit** the keeping, of their souls to him in **well doing**, as unto a faithful Creator.” ([1Pet.4:19](#))

Explanation:

- “**Commit**” means — entrust completely.
- “**Well doing**” means — continuing to do right.

The just do not draw back.

- The Bible says, “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man **draw back**, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto **perdition**; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” ([Heb.10:38-39](#))

Explanation:

- “**Draw back**” means — shrink away or retreat from faithfulness.
- “**Perdition**” means — ruin or destruction.

Jesus gives the principle simply.

- He said, “he that shall **endure unto the end**, the same shall be saved.” ([Matt.24:13](#))

Explanation:

- “**Endure**” means — remain steadfast.
- “**Unto the end**” means — continuing faithfully, to the finish.

Paul’s own life, shows that the race must be finished.

- He said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have **kept the faith**: Henceforth there is laid up for me, a **crown of righteousness...**” ([2Tim.4:7-8](#))

Explanation:

- “**Kept the faith**” means — guarded and maintained, faithfulness to God.
- “**Crown of righteousness**” points to — the reward, promised by the Lord.

The righteous continue faithfully, by **Seeking God** first, **Yielding themselves to righteousness**, and **Enduring to the end**. Salvation is promised, Not to the careless beginner, but to the faithful finisher.

This now brings us to Peter’s searching question: if the righteous are scarcely saved,

## IV. Where Shall the Ungodly and the Sinner Appear?

Peter’s question is not merely rhetorical; it presses judgment upon the conscience.

### A. The Ungodly, Have No Hope Outside God

The contrast in [1Pet.4:18](#), is between the righteous and those who reject God.

- “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the **ungodly** and the **sinner** appear?” ([1Pet.4:18](#))

Explanation:

- “**Ungodly**” means — irreverent, lacking devotion to God.
- “**Sinner**” emphasizes — one living in sin, without repentance.

Those who do not obey the gospel, face eternal punishment.

- The Bible says, “...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them, that know not God, and that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished, with **everlasting destruction**, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power;” ([2Thess.1:7-9](#))

Explanation:

- “**Obey not the gospel**” shows — the gospel has commands.
- “**Everlasting destruction**” means — eternal ruin, not temporary loss.

The final end of the wicked, is plainly declared.

- “But the fearful, and **unbelieving**, and the abominable... shall have their part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the **second death**.” ([Rev.21:8](#))

Explanation:

- “**Second death**” means — eternal separation and punishment.
- “**Unbelieving**” shows — unbelief itself is condemning.

If a refuge is difficult to enter, what hope is there, for the one who refuses to enter at all? Peter’s point is powerful: if the faithful barely make it through the narrow way, those who reject God, have no path to safety.

That truth should not merely frighten us; it should move us to reverence, repentance, and urgency.

## **B. This Makes the Gospel Urgent**

Because judgment is real, persuasion is necessary.

- “For we must all appear before the **judgment seat of Christ**... Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we **persuade** men...” ([2Cor.5:10-11](#))

Explanation:

- “**Judgment seat of Christ**” is the — place of final accountability.
- “**Persuade**” means — urge, plead, and appeal.

God’s command, now goes to all people everywhere.

- The Bible says, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now **commandeth** all men every where to **repent**: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness...” ([Acts 17:30-31](#))

Explanation:

- “**Commandeth**” shows — this is a divine requirement.
- “**Repent**” means — a change of mind, that results in a change of life.

Today is the time to respond.

- “...behold, **now** is the **accepted time**; behold, now is the day of salvation.” ([2Cor.6:2](#))

Explanation:

- “**Now**” emphasizes — urgency.
- “**Accepted time**” means — the favorable season, to respond to God.

The Lord does not desire our destruction, but our repentance.

- “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” ([2Pet.3:9](#))

Explanation:

- “Perish” means — be lost.
- “Repentance” is the — turning of the heart and life toward God.

When a watchman sees danger, love moves him to warn — The gospel warns, because God is merciful.

The ungodly have no safe standing in judgment.

Therefore the gospel must be heard, believed, obeyed, and followed **without delay**.

Peter’s question, presses every heart: If the righteous are scarcely saved, where will the disobedient stand?

Having walked through these truths, let’s gather them together and press them upon our hearts with,

## V. Some Final Thoughts

We have seen that:

- No one is righteous, by personal perfection,
- Yet God calls faithful people righteous, because they live by obedient faith,
- The righteous are scarcely saved, because the way is narrow, demanding, and tested,
- and the ungodly face certain judgment, if they remain outside of Christ.

This lesson should leave us humble, serious, and thankful.

- **Humble** — because we are not saved by our own perfection.
- **Serious** — because salvation is not casual.
- **Thankful** — because God has revealed the way of life through Christ.

**Some Lessons learned:**

- Righteousness is found in God, not in self.
- Faith that saves is faith that obeys.
- The Christian life requires vigilance, endurance, and wholehearted devotion.
- The danger of being lost is real.

**The invitation of the gospel is urgent and must not be delayed.**

**A fitting final reflection is this:**

- If the road to life is narrow, then we must walk **Carefully**.
- If the judgment is certain, then we must prepare **Seriously**.
- If God has spoken, then we must listen **Faithfully**.
- And if Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him, then our greatest duty is, to **obey Him now**.

It is the Lord, Who invites, and we await to assist. Won’t you come...

- Desiring to **Hear** the gospel ([Rom.10:17](#)),
- **Believing** in Christ ([Heb.11:6](#); [Jn.8:24](#)),
- **Repenting** of sins ([Lk.13:3](#); [Acts 17:30](#)),
- **Confessing** your belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God ([Acts 8:37](#); [Rom.10:9–10](#)),
- and **be baptized** for the forgiveness of sins ([Acts 22:16](#); [Mk.16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [1Pet.3:21](#); [Gal.3:26-27](#)).

...While we stand and while we sing.

Source: Adapted from sermon outline by Joe R. Price  
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