

Judgment Day

2 Peter 3:10-13

Where is God? Have you ever wondered that when you confront the wickedness and unrighteousness of people in this world? Where is God, when injustice seems to prevail, when unrighteousness seems to flourish? Where is God, when the righteous seem to be oppressed and the wicked seem to prosper? Where is God, even in the midst of the trials of this age? We have those questions, don't we?

Remember from last week the question that Peter is answering, the accusation of the scoffers who scoff at the truth and promises of God's word.

v.4 "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Where is your God, they ask? Where is this judgment that he has promised, they ask? Everything just goes on the way it always has. And since they don't see any evidence of God's judgment for themselves, they believe themselves to be free to do whatever they want, without any accountability, "walking according to their own lusts." "Where is the promise of God's coming?", they ask mockingly.

Peter answers. And the main idea is simple.

I. THERE WILL BE A FUTURE DAY OF UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT.

v.10 "But the day of the Lord will come."

Where is this coming? Nothing is changing, they say. And nothing has ever changed. Those people are very much around

today. Such a belief is an essential aspect of evolution, where the belief in any outside influence upon the existing world is denied. Such a belief is inherent in the concept of fate and the acceptance of fatalism. No outside, supernatural intervention.

But Peter rebukes such a notion.

2 Peter 3:5 "For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

So, Peter says. There was once a universal judgment, which we call the flood. And there will be another one. And just as sure as history records the first judgment, the second and final judgment will come.

"The day of the Lord will come." And it will come like a thief. That is, unexpectedly. Suddenly. Without warning. When a thief strikes under cover of darkness, he provides no warning. Neither shall our Lord Jesus.

Paul uses this same language.

1Ths. 5:1 "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."

Calvin writes that "this is added so that the faithful may always be on the watch and not promise themselves tomorrow."

But we do, don't we? We do promise ourselves tomorrow. We often live for tomorrow, or put off to tomorrow what we don't want today. We live expecting tomorrow to arrive, but in this sense, we shouldn't. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief."

Calvin adds something very provocative here, saying that "almost all of us labor under two very different evils, too much impatience and too much laziness." The point is that many people today are impatient, studying the issues of Jesus' second coming with reckless foolishness, making all sorts of rash predictions and silly projections. A lot of empty words. Just listen to the drivel so common with television evangelists speaking of the end times if you don't know what I mean.

But many people today are also careless, pushing off the expected coming of Jesus into the distant future and living our lives without proper preparation. Chances are, your life won't end suddenly and unexpectedly, as in a plane crash or national calamity. But your life will end, and with absolute certainty, this present age will end with the destruction of the world. According to Peter, the day of the Lord,

A. Will be a day of catastrophic destruction.

v.10a But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise."

It will be a day of catastrophic destruction. Verse 11 refers to such destruction, the destruction of everything. That destruction is described in,

v.10b "...the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

The "great noise" refers to the hissing or crackling sound of a

fire, the roaring of a flame. In the words of Revelation 6:14, quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah,

Rev. 6:12 "I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. 13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place."

"The sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up." The heavens disappear with a roar. And "the elements will be destroyed by fire." Melted in the heat. Those elements are most likely the sun, moon and stars, the light-bearing elements of creation, though the word could possibly refer to the physical elements of this present world. And again, the reference to fire. Destruction by fire, literally dissolved, disintegrated.

The language of catastrophic destruction is repeated in, v.12b

Again, the destruction of the heavens by fire. The elements melting in the heat.

The Old Testament prophets frequently mentioned fire in connection with the final judgment, spoken in the prefiguring language of the judgment upon the nations,

Isa. 34:1 "Come near, you nations, to hear; And heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, The world and all things that come forth from it. 2 For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations, And His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter. 3 Also their slain shall be thrown out; Their stench shall rise from

their corpses, And the mountains shall be melted with their blood.
4 All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree.”

Then,

Isa. 66:15 “For behold, the LORD will come with fire And with His chariots, like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. 16 For by fire and by His sword The LORD will judge all flesh; And the slain of the LORD shall be many.”

And, Zeph. 1:18 “Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the LORD’S wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in the land.”

Zeph. 3:8 “Therefore wait for Me,” says the LORD, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All my fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy.”

And also,

Mal. 4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.”

Can you imagine a more vivid description of final and total judgment than that of fire. The day of the Lord, the day of Jesus’ second coming, will be a day of catastrophic destruction. It will not be a nuclear holocaust initiated by warring nations. It will not come in the form of a great plague like AIDS. Nor will the end of

the world come slowly by the what is often labelled global warming. Instead, it will be something on a universal scale on par with the flood, even far greater. For God will not simply put to death every living creature as he did in the days of Noah, but God will actually bring a melting destruction to the elements of this world.

But more than that,

B. It will be a day of total reckoning.

Go back to,

v.10 “...both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

There is a lot of discussion about the meaning of the verb translated “burned up.” Some translations read, “laid bare,” which is a good translation. The main idea of “being found” is even more accurate. Everything will be found out on that day. Everything will be exposed. To divine judgment. The earth and all man’s works will appear before God’s judgment seat, laid bare to give a total and complete reckoning before God.

We could get the same idea from,

Rom. 14:10 “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

And,

1Cor. 3:12 “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Most clearly, we read in,

2Cor. 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Heb.9:27 “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

So what? That’s always a good question for a preacher to ask during the course of a sermon. So what’s the point? How does it apply to my life? How does it affect me?

The answer is obvious, and immediate.

II. THE CERTAINTY OF THE FUTURE DAY OF JUDGMENT SHOULD TRANSFORM THE WAY YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE TODAY.

v.11a

There is a direct, logical connection that you must not miss. Since there will be a day of judgment, “what kind of people ought you to be?” Since you will to give an account of your works to God before his throne, what kind of people ought you to be?

There will be a day of reckoning. Everything will be laid bare. So what kind of people ought you to be? The answer:

A. Your lifestyle should be characterized by holiness and godliness.

Peter refers to a lifestyle, a manner of living, a whole approach to life. Your life practice, the general character of your whole life’s conduct should be characterized by holiness. And holiness means to be set apart, set apart from the world by the way that you live. And specifically, that means obedience. Obedience to the law, the law of God.

Holiness is obedience. And because there will be a day of judgment, you must live an obedient life.

Now, I need to be careful. I am not saying that you must live a holy life in order to somehow achieve salvation on that day of judgment. I am not saying that you will stand before God on that day and give an account of your holiness in an effort to convince him to let you into heaven. That’s heresy. It’s works salvation, and contradicts the gospel of grace.

Your salvation was secured by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, finally and completely. It is a gift that you receive by grace through faith. Apart from works. But to you who are saved, to you who received the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, then to you I say this--your lifestyle should be characterized by the obedience of holiness as you prepare for that day of judgment that will be for you the day of your glorification, the day when your salvation is completed.

Salvation by grace does not mean that you are free to live in disobedience. Rather,

Titus 2:11 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The grace of God that brings salvation teaches you to live a life of holiness. And godliness. Godliness is perhaps the one word which best summarizes all the aspects of the Christian life. Ours is to be a life of godliness, purity, reverence, and devotion to God.

Because Jesus is coming back. And there should be some urgency in that.

B. Your lifestyle should reflect a certain urgency as you await the Lord's return.

v.11b-12

You should look forward to that great day. In anticipation. In expectation. In preparation. And you should "hasten its coming."

That's an astounding phrase, because obviously none of us can alter the sovereign will and decree of God. We can't literally speed it up, not from God's perspective. By from our own human perspective, which is and will always be ignorant of God's timing for this great day, from our perspective, we are to hasten it's coming.

How do we do that? Well, think about it. Why is God waiting? Why hasn't that great day come yet? Because God is still bringing people unto repentance. He is still saving people from their sins. So we hasten that day by going into every nation of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

From our perspective, we bring about the end of this age by taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We read in,

Acts 3:19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 "and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

And so Jesus says in,

Matt. 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

We should have such an urgency as we go about our daily lives, and quite honestly, that is often missing among us! We get so wrapped up in the daily affairs of life, that we lose the proper focus. Such an urgency is defined by the Greek word Maranatha, translated in our Bibles as, "O Lord, Come." The word is found in,

1Cor. 16:22 "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!"

That same idea is spelled out at the end of the book of Revelation.

Rev. 22:20 "He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

That should be your philosophy of life. "Come, Lord Jesus." That should be your deepest desire when you pray the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

The point is that a focus on the future day of universal judgment should transform your life. It should determine how you live. And we need the exhortation unto such a transformation, for we are so often completely engrossed in the things of this world, that we fail to see the things that are most important. In Jesus' words,

Mat.6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Seek first his kingdom. Seek first his righteousness. God will take care of everything else. So don't worry about tomorrow.

That sounds simple, doesn't it? Simplistic. I don't mean it to be, for Jesus meant those words to be the most profound words that you will ever hear. Knowing that the day of judgment is coming, you should seek to speed its coming. And you should live a certain way as you wait.

What is it that causes people to get so dreadfully entangled in the sinful affairs of this world? Hopelessness. Meaninglessness. Life has no purpose. No direction. There are no goals, no worthy ambitions. Just lots of ruts to get stuck in, day after day. So why strive after godliness and holiness? You may well have experiences of those thoughts.

Let me stir you up to escape such a pessimistic and fatalistic view of life. Dear ones, the certainty of the future day of universal judgment should lift you out of those ruts, by enabling you to look into the future and prepare yourself for that day. And to prepare yourself for what will follow, for,

III. THE FUTURE DAY OF UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT WILL USHER IN THE FINAL AGE OF ETERNAL GLORY.

There is hope. Great hope. Something to look forward to. Something to work for. Something to live for. Something to die for.

v.13

The promise of a new heaven and a new earth. It's a promise quoted in the OT prophecy of Isaiah, and made explicit in the revelation of John,

Rev. 21:1 "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the

first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Let me plainly and clearly identify the great glory of those verses. God is removing the curse, the curse placed upon Adam and Eve, and all their descendants, after the first fall in Genesis 3. The height of that curse is the curse of death. It is the associated curse of pain and sorrow, pain to the woman expressed in her distinct role of bearing children. Pain to the man in his distinct role of labor in the garden in order to provide a living. Because of that curse, all the normal experiences of our life and work will be burdensome, painful, difficult. And all creation suffers with us, as Paul writes in Romans 8, all creation, therefore longs with us a new heaven and new earth.

Rom. 8:19 "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as

sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

We are all groaning under the strain of living in a fallen world, a world which operates under God’s curse. A world subject to the inescapable reality of death. But God shall remove that curse. That’s what it means for God to make everything new. The curse is removed! No more tears. No more death. And the redemption of our bodies! And that is the context for Paul’s words I just read,

Rom. 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

There is a reason for such a statement, that,

A. In the final age, everything will be made new.

That expectation of the new heavens and the new earth is the only proper context for responding to the difficulties of this life with hopeful optimism. All things will be made new. That’s why Paul can say that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Notice something very important here. The newness is not a new creation, a creation out of nothing. Rather, it is a renewing of what God has already created. The world in which we live will not be annihilated, in the sense that it will cease to exist. Instead, it will be melted, reshaped, and renewed in glory. It is not the newness of something which has just come into existence, but rather the newness of something that has just been perfectly renovated. Something perfectly restored. Restored to its original perfection.

And so the new heavens and new earth shall be a return to the perfect glory of the Garden of Eden, only better. No longer will we be on probation. No longer will we be subject to the testing of Satan’s temptation. We shall be secure in our glory,

and secure in our position of enjoying God for ever and ever.

Everything will be new and perfect. And,

B. In the final age, everything will be made righteous.

And so we read in,

Isa. 60:21 “Also your people shall all be righteous; They shall inherit the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified.”

And,

Isa. 65:25 “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” Says the LORD.”

People of God, there is a future day of judgment, a day of salvation for those who trust in Jesus Christ. Knowing that, we can believe that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” And so I’ll end with Paul’s great encouragement, found in 2 Corinthians 4:16. In the context of the promise of our eternal glory, let these words be a great encouragement to you,

2Cor. 4:16 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Do not lose heart! That’s the encouragement of this text. Don’t lose heart. It’s easy to do. We look and what we see

appears prove what the scoffers have said. “Where is God in all this?” Indeed, under God’s curse of death, we shall all ultimately die. But there is a judgment. It will come. God’s promise is true. And no matter what we suffer in this life, no matter how severe the anguish of this age might be, we have hope, for we “look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”