

**The Last Days**  
SERMON  
By  
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**April 23, 2012**

**TEXT:** 2 Peter 3:1-13

**PROP:** Knowing that Christ is certain to return let us with holiness and godliness wait for and hasten the coming of the day of the Lord.

**2 Peter 3 (ESV)**

**The Day of the Lord Will Come**

<sup>3</sup> This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, <sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” <sup>5</sup> For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, <sup>6</sup> and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! <sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

**Final Words**

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. <sup>15</sup> And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. <sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Consideration of the last days has often been the focus of writers in history and no more so than in our present society. Whenever enemies are seen to be encroaching on the citadels of society we think in terms of catastrophe and destruction. Many associate the last days with events that immediately precede the second coming of Christ. They call to mind passages of Scripture that speak of great apocalyptic events such as "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*" (Matthew 24:29, ESV) But the tribulation Jesus speaks of, is the "abomination of desolation" prophesied by Daniel that refers to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem shortly after the time of Christ.

Or perhaps we might recall the prophecy of Joel, "*And in **the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (Acts 2:17-21, ESV) Peter cites this prophecy in connection with the apostles who were speaking in other tongues on the day of Pentecost.

He tells us that blood and fire and vapor of smoke; the sun turning into darkness and the moon to blood, will occur before the **day of the Lord** comes, but these events also took place in the days of Peter. The Lord tells us through the prophet Malachi, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter*

*destruction.*" (Malachi 4:5-6, ESV) However, Jesus informs us that John the Baptist is this "Elijah the prophet." (Matthew 11:14)

In addition, Paul informs us, "*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*" (Hebrews 1:1-2, ESV) Therefore we understand that we are now living in the last days and Jesus first coming was indeed the great and awesome day of the Lord. In fact, the Bible never clearly associates the phrase "last days" with the second coming of Christ and in several texts associates the phrase, "the day of the Lord", with his first coming. Thus Calvin correctly comments on our text in 2 Peter 3, "For by *the last days* is commonly meant the kingdom of Christ, or the days of his kingdom, according to what Paul says, "Upon whom the ends of the world are come." ( 1 Corinthians 10:11 .)

We presently live in the last days, the character of which is the same as the days of Peter. Are there not those in our day who scoff at the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through the apostles just as they did in Peter's day? Are there not those in both ages who say, "-- *Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.*"? (2 Peter 3:4, ESV) When for a long time the small part of the world in which we live does not appear to change it is our sinful nature to say that God is not there or that he is not interested in what we are doing. We are apt to take up the aphorism, "when the cat is away the mice will play." Since God has not sent great calamity or judgment upon us, we often feel that we are free to do as we choose. Instead of thankful gratitude for the mercy of God and his manifold blessings we take our freedom as an opportunity to sin. We too easily develop a false sense of security. We know that God raises up nations and empires and tears them down but we live in a superpower nation where we enjoy freedoms that most other nations never come close to so we tend to lower our guard and lose our zeal for righteousness.

The fall of nations and empires, devastating wars and famines have often been brought about by God to restrain and control the arrogance and perversity of sinful men but God has always been slow to anger. Our God is long-suffering and his steadfast mercy is greater far than we can ever understand it. But we are prone to take advantage of God's love and we grow sinful and profane. The license and gross wickedness of many in our nation reflect the same attitude as those of Peter's day who scoffed at the goodness of God and followed their own sinful desires. "Where is the promise of his coming"? They said it then and are saying it now.

However, when we take an honest look at history we will readily see that things have not continued as they were from the beginning. Peter reminds us of the flood in the

days of Noah. It was just like Jesus said, "*For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away...*" (Matthew 24:38-39, ESV) It was business as usual with no care "... *that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" (Genesis 6:5, ESV) Things did not continue as they were. God intervened and they all perished except Noah and his family. The world does not go on like a clock, needing no hand to move its wheels or guide its action.

Even the laws of Physics are not beyond the control of God. Modern uniformitarians fail to take into account the judgments of God. His great sovereign miracles have often intervened in the natural laws that he created and established in the universe and it will happen again when and where God is pleased to bring it to pass. Peter tells us that God will intervene again and instead of water, fire will be God's instrument of destruction. Then the entire universe will be destroyed. The Messiah has come, the plan of redemption has been accomplished, the elect will have been gathered from the four corners of the earth and the final judgment will take place. There will be no Noah to carry on the line of Christ. There will be no remnant in Babylon or Assyria to carry forward God's great plan for all will have been accomplished. **No one will remain to be saved.** All of God's creation will be destroyed. God's wrath is long in coming, but in the end it will burn like an oven.

The Bible is very clear about the final judgment of God on the universe but the maze of events leading up to it, are not nearly as distinct. Many attempts have been made to present a consistent eschatology but all have fallen short. **All eschatological exposition must deal with prophetic and apocalyptic language.** We must interpret analogy and metaphor. Therefore it is not possible to determine from Scripture an exact sequence of events that lead to the second coming of Christ. God clearly reveals all that we need to know in order to glorify him and enjoy him. All that we are to believe about God and the duty he requires of us are abundantly clear. All "those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:7) **But God has not been pleased to tell us when he will destroy the universe.** Neither can we know when our Lord will return the second time. (Harold Camping and a host of others notwithstanding including predictions concerning the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam and the Mayan Calendar) Because we think he is slow to return we may be led to drop our guard and not pursue holiness and godliness as we should. We may not pray for the hastening of the day of God as we should. We may not work as we should to establish and promote his kingdom on earth.

But the Bible states with absolute clarity and certainty that Jesus will return and that we are to be waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

It is not our place to second guess the mighty plan of God our creator. Instead of spending our energies on the things that are not clearly propounded in Scripture, we need to give our full attention to those that are. God is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, says Peter, but he is simply patient, not wishing that any should perish. And the context demands that we understand that God does not wish that any of his elect should perish, for Peter writes to the elect exiles of the dispersion (1 Peter 1:1) God will tarry until all who have been chosen to be in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world, have been born into this world and brought to Christ by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. And God has not been pleased to tell us when that gracious work will be completed. But come it will and like a thief in the night. As Paul puts it, "*For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4, ESV) The elect of God know that Christ will come again and it is therefore no surprise to us. Peter tells us, "*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*" (2 Peter 3:10, ESV) Is this not a clear statement of fact? Peter does not use analogy or metaphor in this text, but straightforward fact. Everything in the universe including the earth as we know it and all that is in it will be burned up and dissolved and all the works done on it will be exposed.

We also learn therefore that the destruction of the universe will be done in connection with the final judgment. The present earth will not be destroyed as the inevitable result of physical decay or falling into the sun (Theories of global warming notwithstanding). It will be destroyed so that its wickedness will be brought to light. Scientists claim the earth and its inhabitants were formed over billions of years and claim it will take another billion or more years for it to fall into the sun. Long before that, the earth will be un-inhabitable; never-the-less mankind is looking at more tens of thousands of years of human history, so they say. If the universe is to be destroyed in connection with the end of human history why is it so hard to believe that the universe was created in connection with the inception of human history? The same God who will destroy the universe created it to begin with. Furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that human life has been on the earth some 10,000 years and can we not expect it to remain a similar amount of time into the future? "*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness...*" (2 Peter 3:9, ESV) But it remains that we do not know the mind

of the Lord. Recent world events may lead us to believe that the return of Christ is imminent, that he may come in the next moment or day or year. But we do not know the mind of the Lord. The earth will remain until the elect are called and he is pleased to bring an end to the earth as we know it.

However, God leaves us with a wonderful promise. Peter continues, "*But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*" (2 Peter 3:13, ESV) What are we to understand by the phrase, "New heavens and a new earth"? The earth as we know it will be destroyed along with its moon and the sun about which they revolve. True, the wicked on the present earth will be judged and their wickedness removed, rendering the earth a righteous place. But consistent with the universal destruction described by Peter we read from John's vision of the eternal kingdom of Christ, "*And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*" (Revelation 21:22-27, ESV)

Calvin reminds us that Peter's reference to the "day of God" is tantamount to referring to the eternal kingdom of Christ. This eternal kingdom is, as it were, a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Our mortal bodies will be changed into immortal bodies which will never perish. Therefore I have difficulty thinking of the new heavens and the new earth as being simply our physical earth devoid of its wickedness. Our present physical earth is subject to the second law of thermodynamics which is to say that it has a starting point and is decaying toward an endpoint; it is running down. The new heavens and earth will exist in a dimension of reality of which we know only what God has been pleased to reveal. The present earth was created as a habitation for God's people, for the purpose facilitating the redemptive plan of God in Christ who became flesh and blood and died for our salvation. The new heavens and earth will be the eternal habitation for God's people in the presence of God with Christ their risen Savior.

Now the apostle applies all of this to our hearts by saying, "*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,*" (2 Peter 3:11, ESV) What connection would there be between the destruction of the universe and our personal holiness and godliness? Would not the same connection have existed between the holiness of Noah and the destruction of his

world? Knowing that all living flesh would be destroyed in the flood against which he was preparing the ark, would it not seem ridiculous to continue to be engrossed in the pursuit of wickedness? Knowing with certainty that all our empires, our wealth, and the pursuit of superficial happiness will be destroyed, would not that also be ridiculous to pursue at the expense of our soul? How can that be rational and sane for a man, "*For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord.*" (Psalm 10:3, ESV) As Jesus said, "*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?*" (Matthew 16:26, ESV) Unless we believe on Jesus and are saved in him we will be destroyed with the earth on which we live, for the day of the Lord is surely coming and judgment awaits the ungodly. I do not necessarily speak against the pursuit of wealth and happiness but if it is done at the expense of the soul it is all for naught. And if it does not comport with holiness and godliness it is wrong at the outset and displeasing to God. We must not build our lives upon the quicksand of unrighteousness.

Knowing that the universe will be destroyed and earth cleansed of wickedness should we, who profess to love the Lord, practice immorality or dishonesty? Rather we ought to be the sort of person that wholeheartedly pursues a life of holiness and godliness. We must show thankful gratitude for the mercy of God and his manifold blessings and we must not take our freedom as an opportunity to sin. Because God is patient toward sinners we must not foster in ourselves a false sense of security. We must not lower our guard or diminish our zeal for righteousness. God forbid that we should take advantage of his love and grow sinful and profane. Knowing that Christ is certain to return let us with holiness and godliness wait for and hasten the coming of the day of the Lord. May God bless us and enable us all in this holy endeavor.