

Lakeville Christian Fellowship

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

II Peter 3:11,12

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Morning Worship at Williams Camp
Lakeville, Massachusetts
www.lcfbaptist.org

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Reading: II Peter Chapter Three

“What manner of persons ought you to be...”

vs.11,12. “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” Peter is a spokesman for what he believes is a belief system in which its doctrine, including its eschatology, or the study of the last things, is well known. He speaks to the children of God here as we have seen throughout the epistle, and

reminds them to be preparing themselves in holy conduct, godliness which is piety, and purity of mind and heart, so that we might become the righteous inheritors of a new and sinless creation. Fire is often given in Scripture as the great purifier of things, yet we must not believe that he speaks here merely metaphorically, for he is clearly alluding to the end of all things, saying that they will be dissolved by fire and melted with fervent heat.

Peter is concerned, largely due to pervasive false teaching regarding the last things, that some, perhaps many, could be led astray into an unwarranted trusting of the flesh, and a sinful comfort level with the material world and its temporal benefits. The *scoffers* he alludes to here are those who believe that the end of all things according to the Scriptures is a myth, a fantasy, and something that ought not to be looked for, feared, or even prepared for. They say: *“Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”* He speaks of such as *wilfully forgetting* due to their sinful impatience with a God who acts on His own schedule. He speaks of God’s timing as being a thing that cannot be reconciled in the minds of finite beings. And so he says that: *“The Day of the Lord will come”*, not when we expect it, but *“as a thief in the night”*.

Just as there are false teachers who say the end will not come according to the promise of God, so there are those who teach the end is near and predictable. Peter speaks of a course of action by the faithful that in no way should spur them on to the type of wild speculation we see in our day concerning the end of all things, but rather to a life of rigorous preparation and jubilant expectation, for the end could come now, or a thousand years from now. For with the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. We become like foolish men when we attempt by numerology to take this metaphor of time as literal and own a hope of being wise enough to discern a date for His return and the end of all things.

There are so many schemes in our day by those who believe that they

have unlocked the mystery of the Second Coming of Christ as to timing. In all of Christian history there has not been such foolish guesswork as to the unraveling of prophecies that foolish men without an ounce of poetry in their souls dupe themselves into reading apocalyptic literature as straight forward didactic teaching. Men being sucked out of airplane cockpits and the unbelieving passengers doomed to crash, babies raptured from their mothers' wombs, people of all walks of life disappearing from the earth is the hope of the vast majority of today's evangelicals, and the whole scheme is founded upon a catastrophic misreading of the Bible and its allusion to Noah and the flood.

Jesus speaks in the Olivet Discourse of the end being like the days of Noah. He speaks of the flood taking them all away and then gives us this famous passage where we read: *"and [they] did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. (Matt.24.39,40)."* Those who teach of an intermittent rapture, a hauling away of the saints into heaven before, even long before, the actual end, cite this passage as a proof text, even though the allusion to Noah destroys that conclusion. In Noah's flood the ones that were taken away are the ones who are doomed and destroyed. The ones that are left, as Peter refers to the *eight* in his epistle, are the ones who are saved. Even Dr. J. Vernon McGee, a noted dispensationalist, teaches that the rapture is not taught in this passage. Clearly we tend to read into a passage of Scripture the very thing we hope to find there.

And then we come to this apostle who speaks like Christ spoke of such things. First, the end will not be predicted by men. Those who do predict will be wrong. Jesus said of such things: *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ! Or 'There! Do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you before hand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!*

Do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms! Do not believe it. (Matt.24.23-26)."

Peter speaks of a day coming without warning and unexpected, as does the Lord. Both speak of the present age and the age to come, not a twisted course of events happening with labyrinthine complexity, but a whirlwind of events happening suddenly and simultaneously - not to mention unmistakably. Jesus said: *"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashed to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of man be.....then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt.24.27-30)."* We may also add this teaching of Jesus: *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only (Matt.24.36)."*

Again, Peter refers to his epistle not as new teaching, but rather simply a reminder of beliefs that are well established among the community of believers. He writes in the first verse of chapter three: *"Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior...."*

Though he humbly describes his writing, not as teaching of new information, but of a reminder of old information, he is not remiss to class himself among the most esteemed prophets and other apostles. He is a man speaking with authority, and though he comports himself with humility, he speaks plainly and authoritatively regarding the Lord God's intentions to deal with the ungodly.

He has spent the last chapter dealing with the subject of impending condemnation upon false teachers, those who would lead the beloved astray. And though we often picture this apostle at this late stage of his life as a loving elder and shepherd and father figure to his people, who comes with the gospel of peace and the hope of eternal life, he

does not hold back any descriptive terms regarding those he believes will receive the merciless and fiery condemnation of an all powerful and holy God who is offended when He is misrepresented. We examined a partial list of traits and intentions of so called *false teachers* and *false apostles* and his personal opinions of them and their impending fates. We read from last week's notes: "*bringing in destructive heresies....denying the Lord....deserving of swift destructiondogs turning to their own vomit....sows to their wallowing...wells without water...hearts trained in covetousness....spots on their love feasts....presumptuous and self willed...brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed...accursed children....speaking great swelling words of emptiness...alluring others with the pleasures of the flesh...slaves of corruption...clouds carried by tempests...for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*"

He speaks thus of those who for a variety of reasons chose to reject apostolic teaching and resort to their own devices and worldly wisdom which masquerades as biblical truth. And now, in this chapter speaks of *scoffers* sometimes translated *mockers* who laugh at and mock at the notion that God will one day put an end to things and to them with it. The word for scoffer is the same word used to speak of those who mocked Christ in His ministry, at His trial, and while on the cross.

Peter speaks of the recipients of his letters as those who, in contrast to the scoffers and false apostles, are those who are of pure minds, meaning sincere toward Christ, submissive to apostolic teaching, but not above the need to be stirred and reminded unceasingly, as there is unceasing contention against the truth by the prevailing enemies of Christ that persist in all ages.

Calvin gives an appropriate summary of the chapter, saying the following: "*It now appears what is the use of admonitions, and how necessary they are; for the sloth of the flesh smothers the truth once received, and renders it inefficient, except the goads of warnings come to its aid. It is not then enough, that men should be taught to know what they ought to be, but there is need of godly teachers, to do this*

second part, deeply to impress the truth on the memory of their hearers. And as men are, by nature, for the most part, fond of novelty, and thus inclined to be fastidious, it is useful for us to bear in mind what Peter says, so that we may not only willingly suffer ourselves to be admonished by others, but that every one may also exercise himself in calling to mind continually the truth, so that our minds may become resplendent with the pure and clear knowledge of it."

It is amazing to me how even the most eminent mature and well taught among the saints can be easily swayed and led away from the fundamental truths of the faith and from the proven love of other saints. Scoffers carry with them great power and destructive reasoning that those of us who are taught to be meek and tolerant may sometimes fail and begin to foster debilitating doubts under the strain of controversy and the ignominy of being in the minority.

It is a simple matter, for example, even the most steadfast saint, who may be undergoing extreme trial in this life, who may be sick unto death or have a spouse who is dying, or may be in financial ruin and personal disgrace, who may simply be falsely accused of wrongdoing or bad intentions, to receive as true the ridicule of a scoffer who laughs at your calamity and that you naively believe you are loved by a God who could deliver you from such things. Think of the power of the scoffer over the godly in such cases. Where is your defense when you feel and appear forsaken? How do you profess your faith at such a time?

The apostle spoke of this in his first letter where he warned his beloved, saying: "*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is gloried. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's*

matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter (I Pet.12-15).”

So, with all these things considered, what manner of person ought you to be? You ought to be a person who knows that suffering is not some strange personal dilemma that has come upon you. It is the legacy of God’s people in this world. Thankfully, it is not our only legacy. There is also joy, and success, inner peace, and a mind at rest in the great questions of this life. There is union with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There is the excitement of hearing the word and knowing that it is for you. There is the privilege of partaking of the same truth that Moses preached, the same peace and joy the David wrote about, the same power that Elijah wielded - remembering that one day he called the fire from heaven that killed 450 prophets of Baal , and the next day ran in fear from the sorceress Jezebel. We have the same promises that Abraham received that He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. We have the closeness with Christ that John himself did have. We may partake of His body and of His blood. We may weep to see Him crucified. And rejoice to see Him risen. So why would ever think that we will not partake in the fellowship of His suffering? Indeed the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.

Why would we ever let mere circumstances fool us into thinking that we are not of more value to our Father than many sparrows? *“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?....But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt.6.25,33,34).”*

The beloved apostle leaves us with this benediction:

vs.17,18. “You therefore, beloved, since you know this

beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

manner of persons