

Sermon#990: 2 Peter 3:3-14 (Historic Epistle)

11-18-12 (Second-to-Last Sunday in the Church Year), Bethany-Princeton

THE END OF THE WORLD

Prayer: Praise be to You, Lord, that we do not have to worry about how to answer the scoffers and all who don't believe in Your coming judgment. You are the answer. Your longsuffering is the answer. It also teaches us not to be dismayed by what others say or do, but show them Your patient love in everything we say and do. We thank You that in the end it won't be wickedness, torture, persecution and lies that prevail, but You and Your kingdom. Help us to faithfully and cheerfully do what has to be done for others in this evil world, and always be glad and in good spirits because every day for us is a day closer to Your great day. Amen!

(Includes words from a prayer by Bo Giertz, To Live With Christ, p. 741)

The Text, 2 Peter 3:3-14. ³ Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." 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. ⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰ 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, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² 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? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. Lord, this is Your Word ... Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

We are always saying, "It's not the end of the world." Well, here in 2 Peter 3 it is the end of the world. This reading is one of the reasons that people objected to the

phrase, “world without end” and now we say “forevermore” instead. Because here the Apostle Peter (by divine inspiration) says the world will come to an end.

These verses in 2 Peter describe the created world, the heavens and earth – “heavens” not meaning God’s heaven, but the skies, stars, planets, etc. – all of it, including anywhere you can travel on earth and all you see, being burned or dissolved by intense heat. It says this not once but *four* times: **“The heavens and the earth, which are now, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment.”** And: **“The heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.”** Again: **“All these things will be dissolved.”** And finally: **“The heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.”**

Kind of makes you not want to be there, doesn’t it? It’s horrible and terrifying. You just wonder why God tells us this. It’s not merely to satisfy curiosity. If that were the case it would tell us more. Even what it says here is something we can’t picture or conceive of. So why tell us?

He does not tell you about the end of the world to scare you. He does not even tell you about the end of the world so that you can scare others into repenting.

It does sound as if that is the reason for this passage: the **“scoffers that will come in the last days.”** We certainly hear from them a lot these days, and in our lives, which is just another sign that we are living in the last days: people you know or from whom you hear in the news, who not only resist the Lord and don’t believe His Word, but they are not content to leave it at that; they scoff at, jeer at, and speak scornfully of, Christians like us and say all these Christian beliefs are just made-up fables. They demonstrate no fear of God and actually go even farther, are irreverent as they can be. It makes you gnash your teeth. It makes you angry. It makes you want to lash out at them. And indeed, it seems like this whole section is just what you ordered, Peter’s divinely inspired, very emphatically stated words **“the day of the Lord will come,”** isn’t this arming you with something you can throw back at

them? It certainly is tempting to want to scare others into changing their tune by this frightening display of God's power, kind of a "just you wait, you'll see."

But, as we see in the middle of this reading, that shows just how little our thoughts are like God's thoughts, for none of this is about making anyone afraid.

Quite the opposite. For surely you noticed that right in the middle of this reading, there was a verse you know by heart: "**The Lord ... is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" It is a verse that teaches clearly that God does not predestine anyone to hell or choose anyone to be condemned. God says what He means both negatively – "**that not any should perish**" – and positively – "**that all should come to repentance,**" that is, to be converted, saved, and preserved in the true faith unto life everlasting – saying it both ways says it is absolutely true and certain, and it says that this is His "**will,**" what God wants.

You know this verse by heart. But now we see where it comes: right in the middle of all this end of the world stuff. Coming where it does, this verse is a relief. This verse is placed here so that you use this information the right way. It shows that God is not trying to scare you, or anyone else, with these details about the created world being burned up or melted by intense heat.

So that you *don't* hear these words *fearfully*, the dear Holy Spirit – who has nothing but compassion for people who listen to fears – directed the apostle Peter to write these *heartening* words that God's heart and will is bound up with your salvation, your believing His Word and finding all your confidence in your Savior. So these words that you know by heart, "**The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,**" are here to make you unafraid.

For the Lord knows us. He knows you. As a sinner, according to your sins you can only be condemned, you must therefore stand in fear of God's judgment, afraid of what might happen, afraid of the unknown, feeling very small and vulnerable. Hearing about such big things, the biggest of "world events," you might be tempted to think that little you, and the little details of your life, are not very signific-

ant in this big picture or in the grand scheme of things, God's plans of which you really know so little. You do not know all the "why's" of the Lord's ways. When things happen in these last days, some of the signs that Day of the Lord is near, which include catastrophes in nature, storms, destructive earthquakes, hurricanes and tornados, wars which have escalated even this past week, instability in world governments and the global economy, this causes some people to scoff at God's ways.

You do not have to be able to provide all the answers, nor do you need to be put on the defensive. For what you do know is what God tells you here: **"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."** Here, and at the conclusion of this reading, you have all that you need to know to keep from fearing.

First, you have His will that **"not any"** should perish eternally. I return to this phrase in particular because it takes into account every single person, even little you. His concern is for the **"any,"** nobody is left out, all the ups and downs in your faith, every trial or temptation you face, every sin that troubles you and makes you less certain of your being forgiven and saved, every prayer you say, it is all important to Him. He does not want **"any,"** that includes you, to perish eternally.

Second, you have His wonderful word **"longsuffering,"** which is patience, but it is the kind that "suffers long," that waits even when it's hard or you have to wait a long time. Hasn't He waited for you? Sometimes you take too long to come to Him with your sins or with your troubles. Sometimes you take too long to humble yourself, soften your heart, and forgive. Sometimes you take too long to find your way to Him in His Word. Sometimes you have all the time to give to the world, even in your worries, but too little time for Him. Here He says His patience isn't in danger of running out. He is **"longsuffering."** Against the backdrop of the great day of the Lord, He is showing that there is not a moment that little you are not important to Him, He is not waiting just for the well-known people, but every little one, even you.

Third, after the end of the world is fully described, this reading ends with the words **“in peace, without spot, and blameless.”** He is applying this to you. But who is “without spot and blameless?” In 1 Peter he wrote: *“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1Pe 1:18-19).* Peter ends this reading with these words about you, **“without spot, and blameless,”** to place before you Jesus, the Lamb of God, but more personally: your Lamb. In the Passover, each family had a lamb, their lamb. So He is your Lamb, your own Lamb who shed His blood to redeem you, you are that important and significant to Him. In light of the end of the world that is what makes it possible for you to be not fearing, but **“in peace,”** having a clear conscience and untroubled outlook, because He bore your sin away.

There is one final part of this that emphasizes that these truths about the end of the world are not revealed to make you afraid and that you have significance. Peter writes: **“Therefore what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God ...?”**

Not only should these details not make us afraid, but the confidence that we have through Christ is something that we are to show. Our conduct as we live with others is to be **“holy and godly,”** it begins with confessing your faith boldly and confidently, being unashamed or unafraid to express what you believe from God's Word, because the end of the world will only confirm the truth of it. It continues by confessing your faith boldly in how you live, being unafraid or unashamed to resist sinful ways, the ways of the world and what is popular among unbelievers, because as a Christian every little thing you do is seen in the light of the great Day of the Lord. I think especially of youth, kids and teenagers, who are pressured to go along with what is supposedly popular, and if you don't you're made to feel as if you're the only one and won't have any friends. I also think of how Christians today are given the impression that they are so out of step with everyone else. But these words inspired by the dear Holy Spirit – who feels only compassion for people who listen

to fears – give you the knowledge that there is only one Friend whose opinion matters, only one leading the way, and if you are in step with Him, walking in His steps, that's all that matters, and the Day is coming when you will find yourself part of the **“new heavens and new earth, in which [only] righteousness dwells.”**

So everything you think, say, and do, all of the righteousness that you engage in now, matters. It is not little or insignificant. You are following the King of kings. Because you see Him clearly, and He takes away your fears about what is coming, you can march confidently after Him, in all you believe, think, say and do, and others who follow you will find their way to Him. Amen!