

The Promising Life in a World that is Perishing

Part 5:

Living in the present with the hope of the Parousia

Preached June 3rd 2007

The Text: 2 Peter 3:1-14

The Day of the Lord

1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. **2** I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. **4** They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." **5** But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. **6** By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. **7** By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives **12** as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. **13** But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Introduction:

When Alberta celebrated our centennial in 2005, one of the highlights of that year was the visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip in May. I know that our daughter Elspeth, who at the time was eight, was very excited. Her school was asked to help to form the greeting line, welcoming our Sovereign to the Saddledom.

The visits of Kings and Queens have, from time immemorial, been events that citizens look forward to and plan with great care.

In the ancient world, when Greek was the language of commerce and politics, such events were called parousia. This is a Greek word that means: "to be present" and finds a technical use to describe the visits of rulers or high officials. On the occasion of such visits there were speeches made, delicacies eaten, street improvements, and wreaths or gifts of money given. These were paid for by voluntary contributions or, if necessary, unpopular levies. Under the Roman Empire the ceremonies became even more magnificent and visits were marked by new buildings and the institution of holy days.¹

In the passage we heard read for today Peter describes one such event. But this is no ordinary royal visit. Peter has in mind the Parousia which will be the most important of all human history. The return to earth, or shall I say, visit of Jesus Christ. This will happen at the time of the Second Coming.

Everywhere in Scripture this event is heralded, proclaimed and made known to us. This morning as we study 2nd Peter chapter 3, we are going to hear what Peter has to say about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The title for this morning's sermon is: "*Living in the Present with the hope of the Parousia*" This title helps us to pin point the theme of this passage. So let's see what Peter has to tell us about living in the present with the hope of the Parousia.

At verse 10 Peter tells us that we need to be prepared for the Parousia. This is important for us to do, because there are many others who are not prepared. Rather, they are people of protest, who

¹ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament; page 791

claim that Jesus will never come again. But such a protest is based on an attitude that precludes God intervening in the world. Peter points to the story of the flood as a precaution, to warn us not to dismiss the clear direction in which history is moving. This is a history that will culminate in the Parousia of Jesus Christ.

Because of the surety of the Parousia, God has a purpose for the present and a promise for the future.

Now if you have been listening closely to the words I have used in the last couple of minutes to describe what Peter is saying here, you will have heard that the key words all begin with the letter "P".

I have built my outline this way to help you better understand the message of this passage. So let me show it to you now in point form:

Peter calls us to be:

Living in the

Present

with the hope of the

Parousia.

To do this means that we need to be

Prepared.

Knowing

There are many who

Protest

the teaching about the Second Coming and therefore

Preclude

any evidence there is in Scripture that would support this wonderful doctrine.

But those who are followers of Jesus Christ take these

Precautions

seriously and know that God has a

Purpose

in the present and a

Promise

for the future that will be fulfilled.

.....

Prepared

Protest

Preclude

Precautions

Purpose

Promise

It is my hope that as I unpack these six words for you now, you will clearly know the message Peter has for us here and its significance for our lives today.

1. We are to be Prepared:

Three years ago I returned from a walk on a beautiful September day, unlocked my front door and entered into the foyer of my home. As I looked up the stairs I was startled. My living room was turned up side down and the two people who had ransacked my home were standing in my kitchen! I was startled because this was the last thing I was expecting to discover upon opening my front door.

One of the things this experience has done for me is to help me better appreciate what Jesus and the Apostles say when describing the

Second Coming. Jesus and Paul say that this event will come like a thief in the night.²

At verse 10 Peter says the same thing: "But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief". Therefore we are to be prepared. The way we prepare ourselves is by understanding that this day **will** come and it will be a day of great turmoil before it is a day of glory.³

The "Day of the Lord," was a popular phrase of the Old Testament prophets, which indicated the time of God's decisive and final intervention in history to judge his enemies and to save his own people. The rest of the verse suggests that the idea of judgment is dominant here.

Peter portrays the coming of Christ with cosmic imagery: "The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

The "heavens" denote that part of creation that is unseen— the spiritual realm. Peter suggests that the day of the Lord will bring destruction to these heavens themselves.

In the second clause the elements he has in mind are those basic to the universe: fire, water; air and earth. Peter is telling us that these elements will actually be destroyed by fire.

The third clause points out that on the Day of the Lord there will be a disclosure that will happen. This disclosure will bring into the light what has been done in secret. This is something Jesus clearly speaks of as well when he says in Luke's Gospel:

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.⁴

² **Matthew 24:43** "But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into"; **1 Thess.5:2**: "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

³ It is important to remember that when the Scripture speaks of "day" in this context this is not a 24 hour period. Rather "Day" refers to an allotted period of time, which in duration is not easily defined.

⁴ Luke 12: 3-4

We are to be prepared by understanding that the Day of the Lord will be one where the whole universe will be judged and cleansed in order to be made ready for the Coming of the great king Jesus.

2. We also need to know that there will be many who protest:

Peter clearly states this when in verse 3 and 4 he warns us:

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Here we are being told about those who believe in an idea that has been called the philosophy of uniformitarianism. It is an ideology that has gripped both the world for millennia. The basis of denying a supernatural reappearance of Jesus is that nothing of that nature has occurred in the past and therefore it cannot in the future. Not only is this so, but as they are quoted to have said: "Everything goes on as it has from the beginning of creation."

3. But their protest is one that precludes the witness of Scripture.

In other words, such people are closed to seeing what the Scripture says. Peter says as much in verses 5 and 6.

5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

Here is Peter describing the events that are recorded in the first eight chapters of Genesis. He begins by reference to the creation of the heavens and the earth. See how in this passage Peter has in view the whole scope of history, from creation in verse 5 to judgment in verse 10. But he also points out that we are not to preclude the judgment that took place on the world when the Flood happened.

As Genesis six so poignantly describes:

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the

earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.⁵

The Flood/judgment that came about at the time of Noah resulted from the wickedness of man. Imagine this. Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And so God decides that enough is enough. I will be done with them. But then there is Noah, who found favour in the sight of the Lord because the Lord saw that he was righteous before Him in this generation.⁶

It is interesting how down to our own day there are those who preclude these story of judgment because they dismiss it as impossible. No flood of this proportion could ever happen. And having dismissed the Flood, they dismiss the judgment.

4. But for those who take this story to heart, we see it as a precaution of what is to come.

For just as in the judgment of Genesis 7, when God acted decisively, so too in the judgment that will happen on the Day of the Lord, God will also act in a most decisive way. So at verse seven we read:

By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

This is a sobering verse. Everywhere scripture predicts a coming day of judgment when the ungodly will be made to submit forever to the horror they have chosen of existence without God. Notice that Peter says that the same word that created the heavens and the earth and judged the people of Noah's day is still operative today. This is because the Word is a person, Jesus Christ.

Three weeks ago I quoted two verses from Acts 10, where the Apostle Peter is at the home of Cornelius. Having described the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, he goes on to say:

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁷

⁵ Genesis 6: 5-8

⁶ Genesis 7:2

⁷ Acts 10:42

Now beloved, we can have no greater authority than the words of Jesus himself. And it is none other than Jesus who said to Peter and the others that He alone is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. After the millennial reign and the period of horror that will follow when Satan will be released from his prison and all hell will break loose, the Great Court Scene will then be set up. Jesus will be on the Bench and the court will be declared "In Session". Jesus the judge will pass his perfect judgment on all, both those who are alive at his coming and all of those who have already died. The nature of this judgment is envisioned for us in Revelation 20.⁸

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The Scripture is so very clear on this. At the end there will be a separation and the words that Peter writes for us in our passage for this morning are taken by John and described pictorially. Everywhere there is the precaution that judgment will truly happen. Jesus, whose judgment is perfect, will declare some destined for eternal life and others for eternal damnation.

5.And yet,God has a most wonderful purpose for every person born into this world.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

⁸ I don't have time this morning to discuss what is meant in the verses immediately preceding the ones quoted. For more information on this go to: <http://raystedman.org/revelation/4210.html>.

What a wonderful God we worship. Although some see his apparent delay as evidence that the Parousia will never happen, Peter says two things.

One, God inhabits eternity and secondly He is merciful.

Peter reminds his readers that there is something they must keep in mind when thinking of the Parousia of Jesus Christ. The nature of God is different from the nature of men and women. Since God is eternal and humans finite, they look at time in different ways. The thousand years is a quote from Psalm 90:4 where man is pictured as "numbering his days" while God is "from everlasting to everlasting." In eternity there is no time, i.e. past or future, but only the present. Thus "time" and "delay" are virtually meaningless to God, and we must learn to adjust to that. This should help us greatly in facing the centuries that have passed since New Testament times.

Secondly Peter says that God is not at all slow in Coming, but he longs for all to come to repentance so that none will perish.

I want to quote again Acts 10:42. But this time I will go on to read verse 43:

*42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.
43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

Do you see that Peter is saying the same thing in Acts 10 as he writes here in his letter? The sermon from Acts 10 is taken from the early days of Peter's apostolic ministry. The words from the 2 Letter are written at the very end of his ministry, right before his death. And the message is consistent. Jesus Christ will judge. Be sure of this. But be equally sure that He is so merciful and compassionate that he desires more than anything else that everyone will come to believe in Jesus and so receive forgiveness. We have a wonderful assurance as Christians beloved. God has a purpose for this present day. He has included us to be those who testify to the his future judgment and present patient mercy.

And so I want to ask you today. Have you truly come to that place in your life when you have said yes I believe that in Jesus Christ I receive the forgiveness of sins? Maybe you have confirmed this already, but

you have been in denial about his role as the judge. It is clear that to believe in Jesus is to acknowledge him as both Saviour and Judge.⁹

6. For when we can do this not only do we have an assurance of God's purpose in the present we also look forward to his promise in the Future.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

As we come to the end of this text, you can now understand why I entitled this morning's sermon: *Living in the present with the hope of the Parousia*. Because we can have absolute assurance that Jesus will come again in judgment, we can also be assured that he will usher in the New Heavens and Earth where righteous will be at home.¹⁰

Because of God's future promise, Peter asks us what kind of people ought we to be in the present? With striking incisiveness Peter returns to his exhortation to godly living, his theme in chapter 1. This is set against the fearful background of the Day of the Lord. Personal character is all that will be left after the destruction of the heavens and the earth. His appeal is to the desire in each of us to live worthwhile, meaningful lives. Holy behavior toward others and genuine worship toward God are the two qualities that will survive and be honored beyond the conflicts of time.

The day of God referred to here is the culmination of the Parousia. It is what believers wait for and even, by godly living, hasten in its coming; and it is the reason why the present heavens and earth must be destroyed. It is described as the new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is, therefore, the eternal state, pictured in vivid imagery in the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22. In the present age, righteousness is under constant attack; in the millennium righteousness will be the dominant lifestyle, though evil is present; in

⁹ I will say more about this at the time of the Offertory. Provision will be made for you to re-commit your life to Jesus or affirm your faith in Him for the first time.

¹⁰ Notice how Revelation 20 – 22 follows the same sequence Peter uses here. Please read Revelation 20 - 21 to better appreciate what the Apostle is writing here.

the new heavens and earth, righteousness will dwell, i.e. be at home, in its natural environment, without having to struggle with sin or weakness.

Therefore we are to be diligent, making every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Jesus. He is urging a practical result of our forward-looking hope.

Jesus is coming again, it could occur at any moment, what will you be like when He returns? That is Peter's question. Jesus himself had raised the question: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8). He left the question hanging in the air, waiting for each hearer to answer in his or her own heart. Peter suggests a diligent response that seeks to avoid the shame of the false teachers ("spots" and "blemishes"), has dealt biblically and honestly with any personal failure and therefore has found peace that passes understanding. Peace is the heritage of Christians and its presence indicates one whose expectation of the return of Christ has given a sense of balance and proportion despite whatever chaos the world may present.

Conclusion:

Yes, Disciples of Jesus Christ are to be people who live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. We do this by knowing that while there are many today who protest the Parousia, we are those who live with a quiet confidence that understands God's purpose for the present and his promise for the future.

Thanks be to God, the His word gives us such clear teaching about the Parousia. Because we know the king will be coming again, we are preparing ourselves now for the Event which as Peter, Paul and Jesus all say, will come like a thief.

The End

Let us Pray:

Jesus we thank you for what the Bible says, and especially 2nd Peter about your **Parousia**. We affirm today that because of what we now know we can be **prepared** for your coming. May we not be dissuaded by those who **protest** your coming because they have they **preclude** the clear teaching of Scripture. Help us to hear its **precautions** and so live in the present knowing that it is your **purpose** that everyone who believes in you receives forgiveness of sins through your name. Knowing this purpose may your Holy Spirit plant within us an unwavering assurance that you will also be true to your **promise** to both judge this present order of things and then usher in the New Heavens and Earth, where righteousness will be at home. In your name we pray, Amen.