

Ned and Fred got together one Saturday afternoon to walk into town to watch the latest John Wayne movie at the theater. As they made their way into town, Ned told Fred that he was willing to bet five dollars that John Wayne would be killed in the movie. Fred said that he would take that bet, so they traveled on down the road.

Sure enough, the Duke was killed near the end of the movie and Fred handed Ned five dollars. On the way home Ned told Fred that he felt guilty for taking the money because he had seen the movie the week before. Fred just smiled and said, "Naw, you just keep that money. I watched it last week too, but I didn't think them fellers could kill John Wayne twice!"

Just like Ned and Fred, you and I have been given "insider" information about the end of the world as we know it. We already know what's going to happen – we've seen the end of the movie so to speak, and knowing how it all plays out should matter to us. Knowing the future should have an impact in our lives today, and that's what we are going to talk about this morning.

We are finishing up this second letter from Peter. If you recall, when we last looked at this letter, Peter spoke about the promised return of Christ and the judgment He will bring with Him; however, the false teachers scoffed at that idea – denying it would ever happen. In essence, they said,

"You Christians have talked about the Second Coming of Christ for a long time, and He still hasn't come back yet. Since creation, things have always been the way they are right now and they will stay that way. So, get over it. Jesus is not coming back." The false teachers mocked the truth about Christ's return and His judgment, and they distorted God's grace into a license to sin so they could follow after their own lusts. That was their real motivation – they wanted to do what they wanted to do.

Well, Peter proved they were absolutely wrong in their claim, for since creation, things had changed and the flood was his proof. Back in Noah's day, when the people least expected it, God judged the wicked world with water – the same water He had previously blessed them with, and Peter says God will judge the world again – but this time with fire. It's going to happen according to God's timing – a timing that often appears slow to us – but thank God for that. Peter tells us that God is slow in His judgment, but with a purpose – to give time for those who will – to come to Him and be saved. God waits for people to open their eyes, to see their need, and to turn to Jesus for salvation. God is patient for He does not want any to perish; however, Jesus is coming again.

So, let's pick up where we left off, and if you have your Bible, turn to **2 Peter 3** beginning with **verse 10**. Peter says,

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Okay, there is a lot in this verse that we need to flush out. This verse begins with the phrase "**the day of the Lord**" which needs a little bit of explaining. This is the first time, in either of his letters, that Peter has used this well-known Old Testament phrase, and at first glance, it seems to be a fairly simple phrase in which Peter describes the final judgment of the earth by fire; however, I think there is more to it than that. First of all, the term "**day**" is not a 24-hour period as we might call a day, but rather it is used figuratively – like, "*Back in grandpa's day, people didn't have iPhones.*" In addition, there are several passages in the Bible about **the day of the Lord** and sometimes they reference judgment against God's people, sometimes against foreign nations like the Babylonians, and there are other references surrounding end-time events such as the return of Christ. For example, in **2 Thessalonians 2:1-2** the Apostle Paul tells us,

¹Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ²that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

So, generally speaking, **the day of the Lord** refers to a period of time where God intervenes in human history *typically* in some form of judgment and/or deliverance for the people of God, and in this case, after putting it all together, it seems that **the day of the Lord** describes a culmination of end time events including the judgment associated with the Tribulation period, the Second Coming of Christ, God's final judgment by fire as mentioned here, and even the blessings of salvation which will follow final judgment.

So, for our purpose, I believe **the day of the Lord** is not one single future event but a culmination of future events, and actually we find a few of them mentioned in **Chapter 3**.

If you go back to **verse 4**, Peter mentions the promise of His coming – referring to the Second Coming of Christ – His physical return to the earth. That's one event. Then go to **verse 7** where Peter speaks about judgment of the earth by fire. He's

referring to something that happens at the final judgment which is a separate end-time event that occurs 1000 years after the Second Coming of Christ. If you recall from our study in **Revelation**, when Jesus returns, He will set up His promised earthly kingdom – it's called the Millennial Kingdom which lasts for 1000 years, and shortly afterwards, then comes the final judgment. Now, if we jump ahead to **verse 13**, Peter makes mention of new heavens and a new earth. At the very end of it all – the crescendo if you will, God creates new heavens and a new earth and that's where we will finally be as followers of Christ.

So, in **Chapter 3**, we see these references to several end-time events related to **the day of the Lord**, and its only partial because Peter doesn't include the Rapture of the church or the seven years of Tribulation. It is my personal belief that the Rapture is the next event on God's time table – it could happen at any time, and it's a precursor to God's judgment upon the earth. Listen to what the Paul had to say in **1 Thessalonians 4**, beginning with **verse 15**,

¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul was speaking about the Rapture of the church – that's what **caught up** means, where Christ meets us in the air, but Paul continues with his train of thought in **Chapter 5** and he says beginning with **verse 1**,

¹ Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

So, after Paul speaks about the Rapture of the church, he follows by referring to **the day of the Lord** – the beginning of judgment experienced by those who are left behind during the Tribulation period, which oddly enough begins with false peace. To the unbelieving inhabitants remaining on the earth, the Tribulation period begins with **peace and safety**, but later like a **thief in the night**, as God's judgment progresses, destruction will suddenly and unexpectedly overtake them.

Okay, before we get too distracted, let's get back to **2 Peter 3:10** where Peter speaks about the final judgment, and he says, **the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.**

That word “**destroyed**” carries the idea of something being *broken down into its basic elements*, and it seems to describe a condition where the molecular bonds that hold everything together will be loosed, so that the whole universe will be separated to its smallest possible components. In other words, the earth will be disintegrated – dissolved with intense heat. Everything will be wiped clear to make way for something entirely new.

That's a lot to take in isn't it, but however, you may view the end-times or the sequence of events that will occur – and there are many different views out there – the bottom line is this, and please don't miss this, **the day of the Lord** is coming. Judgment is coming. People can mock the truth and they scoff at it just like they did in Noah's day, but mark it down, Jesus will physically return just as He said He would. There will be a final judgment where the books are opened and the lost will be judged for every thought, and every motive, and every action of every moment in their entire life – and lastly, the new heavens and the new earth will be very real, but unfortunately, so is the lake of fire for those who reject Christ.

So, since we have been given this “insider” information about the future, **how should that impact our lives today?** Let's look at **verses 11-13.**

¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people 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 destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

In light of the fact that this world and everything connected to it will be dissolved – Peter asks, **“What sort of people are we to be?”** pointing out that our character should be a reflection of what we believe, and what we believe should be expressed in a holy and godly character, or as Peter says in **holy conduct and godliness. Holy conduct** speaks to the way we live our lives in this world. Our conduct, our behavior is to be different from those who live according to the ways of this world and are attached to this world – a world we know will not last. Our character is to be different from the unbelievers around us.

Now, **godliness** literally means to worship well and it describes a person whose heart is devoted to pleasing God, **so what sort of people are we to be?** We are to be the kind of people whose behavior and attitudes are characterized as being one who follows Christ – who is Christ-like – where others see Jesus in our lives.

Peter continues and he tells us that we should be **looking** with expectation and **hastening the coming of the day of God**, meaning our looking and our waiting is not passive in nature – instead, we are to be actively cooperating with God and contributing to His kingdom, because how we live down here today speaks volumes as to whether or not we are really looking for our Lord, looking at His promises, and looking to our future.

And speaking of looking, Peter also tells us we are to be looking **for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells**. The Apostle John describes what he saw in **Revelation 21:1-4**. He said,

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

That’s literally heaven on earth – a new earth, where God will personally dwell with His people. I believe it will be the Garden all over again, but this time without the fall, and as followers of Christ, this will be our final home for all eternity.

Randy Alcorn, in his book called “Heaven” says the following: “Imagine someone takes you to a party. You see a few friends there, enjoy a couple of good conversations, a little laughter, and some decent appetizers. The party’s all right, but you keep hoping it will get better. Give it another hour, and maybe it will. Suddenly your friend says, ‘I need to take you home.’”

What Now? *You’re disappointed – nobody wants to leave a party early – but you leave, and your friend drops you off at your house. As you approach the door, you’re feeling all alone and sorry for yourself. As you open the door and reach for*

the light switch, you sense someone's there. Your heart is in your throat. You flip on the light.

Surprise!! Your house is full of smiling people, familiar faces. It's a party – for you. You smell your favorites – barbecued ribs and pecan pie right out of the oven. The tables are full. It's a feast. You recognize the guests, people you have not seen for a long time. Then, one by one, the people you most enjoyed at the other party show up at your house, grinning. This turns out to be the real party. You realize that if you'd stayed longer at the other party, as you wanted, you wouldn't be at the real party – you'd be away from it.

Christians faced with a terminal illness or imminent death; often feel they're leaving the party before it is over. They have to go home early. They're disappointed, thinking of all they'll miss when they leave. But the truth is, the real party is underway at home – precisely where they're going. They're not the one's missing the party; those of us left behind are.”

This world as we know it will be dissolved by fire, but God is going to create new heavens and a new earth – where those who are considered righteous in Christ, only because of the completed work of Christ, will dwell there with God.

As followers of Christ, we should in a sense, have one eye looking to our future, and the other eye looking to the here and now, looking for opportunities to love and serve one another. I like how Joseph Stowell explains it. He said, “*When we begin to believe the reality of the other side, we start behaving differently on this side.*” That's so true – what one is *looking* for should have a direct relationship to what one is *living* for, and in a nutshell, that's what Peter tells us next. Look at **verses 14-16**.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

So, in light of the coming day of the Lord, in light of the anticipation of the new heavens and a new earth, in light of our future, Peter gives us a command to be **diligent** today. That word “diligent” means to be zealous or to take great pains at

accomplishing something, and in this case, Peter says we are to be diligent to be found by God in **peace – spotless and blameless**.

Followers of Christ should look to the coming day of the Lord with all seriousness, but also with **peace** – without any fear or panic about the future judgment to come, and with this **peace**, we should be determined to live our lives today in righteousness. In Christ, and only because of Christ – we are considered **spotless and blameless** – that's who we are in Christ, and because we are **spotless and blameless** in Christ, we need to be **diligent** to act like it.

If you knew Jesus was coming next week, would you be at peace with it, and would you live your life differently? I think that is what Peter is getting at. Knowing what we know about the future, how should that impact our lives today?

Now once again, Peter returns to the reason that the Lord has not yet returned – God is patient so people will come to repentance and salvation, something Paul also wrote about – for they were united in this teaching, even though Peter said that some of Paul's teaching was **hard to understand**. Some Bible truths are difficult to understand, apparently even for Peter, and that's okay – it's even encouraging to some degree, but in the wrong hands, hard passages that are unclear can be easily twisted and distorted, and that can have a disastrous effect.

An art enthusiast displayed on the walls of his office a collection of etchings, including one of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Every morning he noticed it was crooked, so he straightened it. Finally, one evening he asked the cleaning lady if she was responsible for moving the picture each night. "Why, yes," she said, "I have to hang it crooked to make the tower straight!"

In a similar way, the false teachers in Peter's day and some people even today have the habit of twisting Scripture to make their imperfect lives look better or to justify their own moral standards. The false teachers, with Scripture in hand, twist and distort a passage until it says what they want it to say.

Distorting the Word of God to fit our own ideas and to support our own agendas is very dangerous. Peter warned his readers about the kind of people who do this, who approach God's Word with self-serving motives, who disrespect its authority, and who distort its message. They will incur God's judgment.

For you and me, I want to say this: *we must align ourselves with God's Word, never God's Word with ourselves*. Okay, let's look at the last two verses.

¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸ 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.

These are the final words of Peter where he looks back over all that has been said, and he forewarns fellow believers to beware of the false teachers and their heresy, for if they buy into it, they will become unstable, stumbling backwards in their doctrine, in their conviction, in their confidence, and in their spiritual growth.

Because we have been forewarned that false teachers carry Bibles, we must be on our **guard**. In essence, Peter says: *“Don’t fall for them. You know that they are among you; now it is your responsibility to watch and to guard yourselves against their lies. You have been forewarned and forearmed so there is no reason to be tripped up and swept off your feet by them. You have been firmly grounded in the Word of God – so stay there.”*

Now, on a positive note, Peter concludes his letter with words **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.**

Grace is not merely the way God draws us to Himself for salvation, but it’s also how we live, and it’s how we continue to grow – and we all have room for growth. By grace, Peter encourages us to keep on growing for the Christian life is a continual, growing life – a life that was never intended to be stagnant, and that growth finds its focus in an increasing knowledge and understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A young lady busied herself getting ready for a blind date. This was not just dinner and a movie; her date had planned dinner at an exclusive downtown restaurant with live music and dancing. Wanting to make a good first impression she had taken the day off work. She cleaned her apartment; she went out that afternoon to have her hair done and get a manicure. When she got home, she did her makeup, put on her best dress and was ready for her date’s arrival. His expected arrival came and went, but she continued to wait patiently.

Finally, after waiting over an hour, she decided she had been stood up, so she took off her dress, let down her hair put on her pajamas, gathered all her favorite junk food and sat down to watch TV with her dog. Sometime later there was a knock at

the door; it was her date. He looked at her surprised and said, “What I gave you an extra two hours and you’re still not ready to go!”

Jesus is coming again for His church – in His own time because He is patient. We already know this beforehand. We have the “insider” information, and like this young lady, we don’t want to get caught off guard when He comes.

I hope He finds you and me doing what we are supposed to be doing – looking to the *future*, diligently living a holy and godly life *today*, and all the while, growing in grace that comes from knowing Jesus more.

Source Material:

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