

THE HOPE OF A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH II PETER 2:13

INTRODUCTION:

When you take the long look into the future, what do you see? Bertran the **** in a Free Man's Worship reports his own dim view of the future. "All the labor of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon day brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system – the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitable be burned beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the souls habitation henceforth be safely built."

Another spokesman for this point of view, Will Durant, the well-known historian wrote, "Life has become, in that total perspective which is philosophy, a fitful pollution of human insects on the earth, a planetary eczema that may soon be cured, nothing is certain in it but defeat and death." Contrast that point of view with what we read in this letter from Simon Peter. "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." Peter is in agreement with these two pessimistic spokesmen when he looks into the immediate future, but he is able to see beyond the destruction of the world system as we know it a new heaven and a new earth. The child of God is never without hope of an eternal home. It is this hope that we are considering together this morning.

I. THE BASIS FOR OUR HOPE IS THE PROMISE OF GOD.

Peter makes is clear that this hope to which we hold is based upon God's unshakable promise. He probably had in mind a word of promise that God gave through the prophet Isaiah. "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to

be a light and its people a joy.” (Isaiah 65:17-18) That same prophet stated this hope in yet another promise in these words, “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me, declares the Lord, so will your name and your descendants endure.” (Isaiah 66:22) But his promise is not only found in the Old Testament, John the Beloved announces this same hope in the closing words of the New Testament. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a Bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. And they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4)

It is important that we recognize that this hope on which we base everything stands on the sure foundation of a promise from God Himself.

1. The fulfillment of the hope depends on the faithfulness of God.

You recognize that a promise is no better than the faithfulness of the one who made it. The God who said, “I will create a new heaven and a new earth” is the God that cannot lie. He is the God that has confirmed His word to generation after generation across the centuries of time. We are on the sure word of the God of truth and faithfulness.

2. The fulfillment of the hope depends on the power of God.

The other great issue is – can God do what He has promised? Can He create a new heaven and a new earth? We need to be reminded that the One who spoke these words is no other than the Creator of the first heaven and the first earth. By the power of His own word He called into being all that we know as the universe out of nothing. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Indeed, He is the God who raised our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the dead. He is the God with whom all things are possible.

You and I base our hope upon the promise of the God who cannot lie and is indeed able to do whatever it pleases Him to do. So when we speak of a new heaven and a new earth, we are basing our word of hope on the word of promise from the Sovereign God.

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE HOPE IS A NEW EARTH.

The word transliterated “new” is a Greek word that indicates it will be new in quality, different from the old heavens and the old earth. We have already studied Peter’s description of the end of the old heavens and the old earth. They are made to pass away under the judgement of God. Many scholars believe that this new heaven and new earth will actually be a renovated old heaven and earth. They see the fiery judgement that Peter describes in this great chapter as being the fire that purges out the sin and evil that man has used to defile the earth. However, the words of our text would seem to indicate to me that we are actually looking at a totally new creation by the Sovereign God. Indeed in the Word a promise to which Peter alludes in the text we hear God

say, “I will create.” Indeed the same Creator who made the first heaven and the first earth will provide for His redeemed people a new heaven and a new earth.

1. It will be free from the things that destroyed this earth.

As you read the recorded history of the earth as we presently know it, it is the story of a creation gone awry. Almost immediately after God had completed the creation of the heavens and the earth, His supreme creation, man and woman, chose to rebel against Him. They sided with God’s adversary in his opposition to the rule of God. From that tragic decision in the Garden of Eden where sin was born the story is one of pain, disease, and death. It is one of Satan roaming to and fro across the face of the earth seeking whom he may devour. The new heaven and the new earth will be free from all of that pollution.

Satan himself will have been imprisoned in the pit for eternity. And the promise that God gave to John the apostle assures us that there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” This is the substance of our hope – a new order that is free from the rebellion against God that was introduced into the first creation by the tempter.

2. It will be designed for God’s new people.

The first heaven and the first earth were made for the habitation of human kind. Everything about the earth was designed for man. The man that God created was given dominion over the

creation. Tragically he lost that position of dominion and plunged the new creation into the travail that apostle Paul describes in Romans 8.

The new creation will be designed for the habitation of God's new people. God's new people are those who during their lifetime on this earth came to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It will be made up of those who were by the power of God made a new creation. They will compose a new kind of humanity.

Furthermore these for whom the new heaven and the new earth are designed are members of the human family that have passed through death and resurrection. Either they have experienced the glorious resurrection in which their earthly bodies have been transfigured into a body suited for the new earth, or they will be persons who were gloriously changed at the moment of the coming of Jesus Christ because they were still alive when he came. All of the inhabitants of this new heaven and new earth will be persons with a body like unto the glorious resurrection body of Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the reason that their new bodies will not be subject to disease, pain, or death.

What will be involved in this type of life on a new earth in the midst of the new heavens is still somewhat of a mystery. The Bible does not satisfy all of our curiosity at this point. It is enough for the child of God to understand that it will be the place where God dwells with His people – He is their God and they are His people. It will be not only inhabited by God's new people it will be the very temple of God Himself.

3. It will have a New Jerusalem for its center.

Peter has no reference to the New Jerusalem, but we find in connection with the new heavens and the new earth in John's apocalypse. There John sees the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven dressed up like a bride who has been prepared for her wedding day. He then proceeds to give us the inspired description of this New Jerusalem. We are not to understand that the New Jerusalem is all of heaven but rather it is the capital city of the new heavens and the new earth. God will make this New Jerusalem what old Jerusalem was never quite able to become. You will remember the lament of Jesus over the old Jerusalem as He foresaw the destructive judgement that was to fall upon it in 70 AD. But the purpose of God for Jerusalem cannot be defeated by the failure of the people of Israel and the devastation brought by Titus the Roman general. Before God is finished in His plan He will make a New Jerusalem for the new earth. This New Jerusalem will be more glorious than human language can ever describe or the human mind can ever conceive.

So the substance of our hope is a new heaven and a new earth with a New Jerusalem. We're like Abraham seeking a city whose Builder and Maker is God. It is a city which will never be found on this planet on which you and I live. It will require a new earth for this new city that God is to provide for his people.

III. RECIPIENTS OF THIS HOPE ARE THE RIGHTEOUS.

Peter adds this descriptive word concerning the new heaven and the new earth, "the home of righteousness." The old version says "wherein dwelleth righteousness." This is such a

descriptive word concerning the new heaven and the new earth. It's the word that sets the new apart from the old. The old has been characterized by sin and rebellion against God, unrighteousness! But the new will be the home of righteousness.

1. The recipients will be clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Every citizen in this New Jerusalem on this new earth will be wearing the righteousness of Christ. It is a righteousness which they received as a gift of His grace. It is a righteousness which they received by faith. It is a perfect righteousness, even the righteousness of God Himself. There will not be one person on the new earth and the New Jerusalem who does not wear these beautiful, spotlessly white garments of righteousness.

This reminds us of that parable told of the wedding feast where a man came dressed in his own garments. When the master of the feast came in and saw this man dressed in his own garments, he confronted him. When he asked the man why he was not clothed in the beautiful wedding garments that had been provided for the guests, the man was speechless. He was utterly without excuse. The master of the feast commanded the servants to bind him and cast him out into the darkness. The lesson our Lord intended to give is that there will be no one, no one, no one on the new earth or in the New Jerusalem who is not dressed in the graciously provided garment of righteousness. It will be the home of righteousness because everyone there will be dressed in the righteousness of Christ.

2. The recipients will love righteousness.

Not only will they be wearing righteousness, they will be in love with righteousness. The writer of Hebrews described the character of the Lord of heaven as being one who "hated iniquity and

loved righteousness.” Those who find themselves as the inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth will be like their Lord. They will hate what He hates and they will love what He loves perfectly. They will hate iniquity because of what it did to their Lord as well to themselves and they will love righteousness like their Lord.

This raises an interesting perspective on the new heavens and the new earth. How would you like to live in a community where everyone there was like the Lord Jesus? Every citizen lives by the rules and principles which Jesus lived by? Every citizen there related to God and to his fellow man like Jesus related to God the Father and his fellow man? That is precisely what heaven will be! There will be no need for a police department, or courts of law, or jails or prisons! Everyone there will love righteousness.

3. The recipients will practice righteousness.

Every citizen of this new heaven and New Jerusalem will joyfully be a practitioner of righteousness. The righteousness of Christ which they wear will be reflective of the righteousness which they practice. They will freely and joyfully do righteousness for eternity.

Actually after they came to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior while they were still on the earth, God began to prepare them for heaven by teaching them to love and to do righteousness. This is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The reason the Holy Spirit makes you so uncomfortable with sin is He is trying to get it out of your life in preparation for heaven. The reason the Holy Spirit allows you to find such joy in doing good and righteousness here on the earth is that He is getting you ready for heaven. We never quite get free from sin and never

quite learn to practice righteousness perfectly here on the earth but we will in the new heavens and the new earth.

All of this points us to a very practical truth for this morning. If you have not received God's gift of righteousness by placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have no part in the new heaven and the new earth. When the old earth and its universe are destroyed in the fiery judgement, and you find yourself standing before God, God will have no choice but to banish you into the lake of fire which burns forever and forever. Only those who are dressed in the righteousness of Christ will fit in in the new heavens and the new earth. I want to give you an opportunity this morning to receive as a gift this righteousness that fits you for the new heavens and the new earth which are the home of righteousness.