

"WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE OUGHT YOU TO BE?"

2 Peter 3:10-14

Objective: To help Christians identify and make a proper response to the coming of the Lord.

Introduction:

There is uncertainty about the time of the Lord's coming, but there is no uncertainty about the fact. From the observation of man it appears that the coming has been delayed. These seeming delays are best explained by the nature of God Himself. If we could see things from God's perspective, we would see that there has not been any delay. Everything about the coming is right on schedule.

We will never be certain about when the Lord is coming. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief." The thief always comes without warning. He makes a science out of coming when he is least expected. This indicates that the coming of the Lord will be in such a manner that those who are caught unprepared will have no opportunity to repent. Whatever preparation we are going to make for His coming must be made now before He comes.

The impact of His coming will be catastrophic for the universe. "The heavens will disappear with a roar." It will sound like the roar of a mighty flame as the heavens that have surrounded our earth pass away. "The elements will be destroyed by fire." Most see these elements as being the sun, moon, and the stars. They are the basics of our universe, and they will be consumed. The New International Version reflects another reading of the Greek text when it translates the next clause, "and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." This word would emphasize the judgmental aspects of His coming. All of the things that occupy so much of man's time will be exposed for what they really are. The temporality of the earth and its things will be made clear. The spiritual things of life will be exposed as the really eternal things.

Peter follows the same course that our Lord followed in discussing last things. He moves quickly from a presentation of the event to the moral implications it has for the living of life. He presents this with a question, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?" It is a question of the quality of life that should mark a person who knows that this earth and its things are temporary, who knows that all of the affairs of man will undergo a baptism of fire. Peter does not leave us to speculate about the answer to this question. He gives some good pointers to us about the lifestyle we should adopt as we move toward the certain day of the Lord.

I. YOU WOULD BE LIVING A HOLY LIFE

"You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." This indicates what our commitment to and attitude toward God ought to be. "Holy conduct" or "holy conversations" should mark us. This indicates that we ought to view ourselves as having been separated unto the Lord God. In this connection there is an illustration that comes to my mind. This kind of thing has happened thousands of times through the ages. A young man falls in love with a young woman. He asks her for her hand in marriage, but before they have time to consummate the marriage, he is forced to leave home to fight a war in a foreign country. He leaves with a promise that he will return to take her as his wife. As a pledge of his return, he places on her hand a beautiful diamond ring. She voluntarily separates herself from all other young men for the one that she loves. While he is gone, she may receive invitations, but she turns them all down for she is taken. She is set apart. This is our situation. We have been set apart for the Lord through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a pledge of his return to receive us unto Himself He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit. We, too, may receive other invitations to follow other Lords, but we do not go with them for we are set apart. We are already promised to another. We should so live that in no way will this separation unto the Lord be violated. This is true "holy living."

"Godly" touches on the attitude in which we do this. This means that there is an inner recognition of God as God. We have the right attitude of inner reverence and trust toward Him. He occupies the first place in our hearts.

Later in the passage, Peter develops the same theme in another way. He says, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." This is a matter that demands diligent effort on our part. We must give ourselves to this with all earnestness. "Without spot and blameless" means to the Lord. It should be our desire to be a joy to our Lord when He comes. "In peace" probably means peace of conscience here. We are to live in such a way that we will not have to draw back from in fear or anxiety when He comes. We will have nothing to hide. Can you imagine the fear our young woman in our illustration might know if she had been seeing other men while her fiance is away. She would have a very mixed response to the news that he was coming home. But if she has kept herself wholly for him while he is away, she can look forward to his coming without any fear. She will know that there will be nothing offensive in her. This -should be our goal.

How would it be if the Lord were to return today? Have you been keeping your heart for Him alone? Would He find any cause for blame in your response to Him?

Have you been following the tragic story of the people who live in that Love Canal community near Niagara Falls, New York? These people made the mistake of buying houses that had been built over a place where many chemicals had been disposed. They found their homes to be filled with life altering influences. This is really a parable of the whole human situation. The earth on which we must make our homes has become a polluted house. It is filled with injustice and unrighteousness. Ever since those people in New York discovered their plight, they have been clamoring for the Government, or somebody to move them to a new home. Our God has made us a precious promise of a new world. "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness."

This promise of a new home, a new dwelling place for the people of God, was first heard in the Old Testament prophets. Evidently the promise had even been given earlier, for the writer of Hebrews tells us that Abraham was looking for such a place. Jesus gave special emphasis to this promise in His teaching ministry. This means that the new home is as certain as the promises of God. Since God cannot lie, it must be pretty certain.

The word "new" ordinarily indicates that it is superior to the old. The old is being replaced with something that is better. The thing about it that is really better is that it is the "home of righteousness." There is not a house in this town which is really a home for complete righteousness. Surely righteousness has not found a home in our town. We may pray for it and work for it, but there is still none righteous, no not one. This means that in this new home everything will be fair and just according to God's eternal standard of justice.

In light of what the day of the Lord will mean, we ought to make His coming the earnest expectation of our hearts. The word translated "wait" is a very active word. It means to really look for, to expect.

Let's come back to our illustration concerning the girl left by the soldier. What would be her attitude toward His return? Is not the Lord Jesus the Bridegroom of the church? Are not we His bride? How much anticipation can we stir up about His coming? Are we anxious to move with Him to a new home filled with righteousness, or have we become settled into this house with all of its deadly poison and life destroying influences? In light of the fact that He is coming, we should be looking.

III. YOU SHOULD BE LABORING TO SPEED HIS RETURN.

The King James Version of the Bible missed the force of this verb in our text. It translated it, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." The NIV caught the force of it with the translation, "and speed its coming." Peter clearly indicates that the day is not really set on some calendar in such a way that we have no influence over when the Lord will come. The clear implication is that there are some things we can do to hasten the return of our Lord. I believe that there are other scriptures that would support such an interpretation of this passage.

The force of this passage is that our holy living can have an impact upon the speed with which the Lord makes His return. The more intense the devotion of His people is to Him, the more intense their love becomes, the harder it will be for the Lord to stay away. Can you imagine what the letters of the girl left behind must do to that young soldier on a far away shore. He reads of her longings for him, of her looking forward to his return. He reads of the expressions of her love and devotion for him--of how he wants to go and take her as his wife. Our dedicated Christian lives can invite the heavenly Bridegroom to return and take His bride with him.

Our prayers also have this impact. Did not Jesus teach us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." Whatever else may be included in that petition, it is at least a prayer for the return of the absent King. Every time we utter those sacred words, we are petitioning for His return. Would He teach us to so pray if the prayer did not have some kind of impact upon the Father? I wonder what might happen in heaven today if all of the saints of God set upon the Lord with an earnest petition for the coming of the Kingdom? Do you think that He might answer even today?

Jesus gave one other indication. In the Oliver discourse he said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) The missionary and evangelistic activity of the Church has a part to play. There is a certain work that must be done before He comes. If we are in earnest about wanting the Lord to return, we need to do more than study the book of Revelation. We need to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature by every means that is possible. Is it time to involve ourselves with all that we possess in the task of taking the Gospel to the whole world. The completed task will bring the King back soon.

Conclusion:

Our text for this morning is a question. It is a personal question. What kind of people ought you to be? Peter has answered the question for us. Now you must measure yourself by his inspired answer. Are you living a holy life? Are you looking for a new home? Are you laboring to speed His return? If you answer these questions in the affirmative, then you are getting ready. Jesus our Lord admonished us to "be ready." Make sure that you are!