

FIRE!
2 Peter 3:10-13
Trinity Presbyterian Church
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First Peter was written to first century Christians suffering from persecution from the pagan culture in which they lived. Although we live in different times and different places, Christians are still persecuted today. Our brothers and sisters in India, Pakistan, Iran, China, North Korea and many other places face deadly persecution every day. God breathed His words of encouragement and exhortation to stand firm through the Apostle Peter. These words are still relevant for us today as we face the unbelieving and hostile-to-Christians culture in which we live.

A few years later, God moved Peter to write a second letter to His people encouraging them to beware of false teachers within the church. False teachers are maybe more dangerous than outright persecution because they are more subtle than chains and swords. The danger of false teachers is very much with us these days. People professing to be miracle workers or with a direct line to God or with new revelations or ways of interpreting scripture can enter our homes, thoughts and hearts through the internet or television and corrupt our understanding of God's precious Word. We must beware always comparing what we see and read and hear with the gold standard of God's timeless and timely truth in the Bible!

After warning people of dangers outside the church and within the church, Peter now turns to the greatest danger of all – the fire of God's judgment. By vigilance, you may be able to escape the dangers of extreme persecution and false teachers, but without faith in Jesus Christ, God's just judgment is inescapable.

This morning, we take up our journey through the 2nd letter of Peter at chapter 3 verses 10 through 13. Second Peter 3, 10-13. In honor of the Just Judge who will judge the whole world on that "great day of the Lord," all rise as I read 2 Peter 3:10-13.

We've all seen news clips of wildfires raging through brush and forest consuming everything in its path. Homes, schools, hospitals, vehicles – lives – all consumed in the insatiable flames. One of the earliest lessons we teach toddlers is "HOT!" so they will learn not to touch something that will burn them.

There seems to be an instinctive fascination – and fear – of fire. When I was a lad growing up in Kansas one of my household chores was to take the rubbish to the burn pit and burn it up. I used to take cereal boxes and other containers and make a village then set it on fire. It was extra fun when one of my sisters got careless and threw away a hair spray can. Ka-BOOM! I have lots of fire stories from my youth, but it's probably not wise to share those with tender ears. God preserved me, for some reason!

But getting burned isn't fun. I was seriously burned on one hand in Ethiopia with a chemistry experiment gone awry. I had to have skin grafts. I don't play with fire anymore – much!

But when God warns of judgement by fire – BEWARE! God isn't fooling around. He is fair and just in His judgement. He has warned us since the beginning that sin leads to death. And not just the death of annihilation, but the death of living in eternal torment in fire that never goes out. Don't believe it? Listen to these verses:

Isaiah 66:24 – *And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched.*

Daniel 12:2 – *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Matthew 13:41-42 – *The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace.*

Mark 9:48 – *Where their worm does not die and the fires is not quenched.*

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 – *In flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.*

Revelation 20:15 – *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

God's judgement is sure – and just. Nobody spends an eternity in hell who doesn't deserve it. We are ALL sinners bound for death and hell – unless and until we respond to God's gospel call and trust Jesus to save us from the just judgement of our sin.

Hell is awful. But so is rejecting God's gracious provision for salvation – trusting Jesus' life, work on the cross in paying for our sins with his death, his resurrection that assures us of our own resurrection and is God the Father's seal of approval on the effectiveness of Jesus' death, Jesus' interceding for us even now at God's right hand, and the indwelling Holy Spirit who leads us to Jesus and keeps us united to him.

One day, Jesus is coming back to establish his perfect kingdom in the new heaven and new earth. That day is certain. We don't know when it is. God the Father does, though. And what He has planned from before the beginning of time, will certainly come to pass in his own time and his own way. And today, we get a small glimpse of that amazing and awesome event.

Because Jesus' return is sure and upon his return He will judge the whole world, believers must live lives separated-to-God for we don't know when he is coming.

When we read the words of verse 10 and following, we see the English word "will" – this and this and this WILL happen. It's predictive. In the Greek, it expresses **achieved** arrival – one who was expected is now present and active. There is a purpose and urgency.

Who is the one who is expected? None other than Jesus, the Christ, the once and coming Savior. While we don't see this explicitly in this passage, we see it in many other places. Among those references are these 2:

- John 5:28-29 - ... an hour is coming when all who are in the books will hear his (Jesus) voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.
- Revelation 1:7 – Behold, he (Jesus) is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

Why will people be wailing? Because they will have realized too late the truth of Jesus coming as Judge. No more waiting. No bargaining. No plea deal. He comes as the final and just judge – and they weren't ready.

Jesus is coming to complete the salvation of the elect, those who have trusted and obeyed him. Jesus is coming to judge those who have rejected him. Jesus is coming to make all things new.

Jesus has wisely not shown us exactly the day or the hour of his coming. Can you imagine what our sinful tendency would be? Well, since he's not coming today, I'll just live like I want to. I'll confess on my death bed and sneak into heaven that way. That's not what God has designed. He knows us. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

So let's see what these 4 verses, 2 Peter 3:10-13, have to tell us about Jesus' coming again and what we are to know and do about it. We will see that his coming is sure and sudden. His coming will result in sure and solid transformation of his people. And his coming will bring about sure and sovereign renewal of all creation.

Sure and sudden return (v10)

The day of the Lord. Much debated, much predicted, much anticipated! We all would like to know much more about this terminal event. It is an event that the whole world will see. It is an event of tremendous power and importance. Let's take a closer look....

- His coming will be **like a thief in the night** – Jesus himself uses this idea in Matthew 24 when he says, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.” He is more explicit in Revelation 16 where he says, “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake....” The Apostle Paul uses the expression, too, in 1 Thessalonians 5 where he writes, “For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

We are to be ready for Jesus' return for it is sure and will be sudden. We prepare ourselves for all sorts of emergencies – a little extra food in the house, batteries, a little cash on hand.... Why would we not prepare ourselves for the most stupendous event in the history of the world? How do we get ready? Read, study, memorize and obey the Word. Be in frequent fellowship, prayer and worship with other believers. Participate in the sacraments.

- With Jesus' coming, there will be **radical purification** – The rest of verse 10 tells us some alarming things – the heavens will pass away, the stars and planets burned up and dissolved, and everything on the earth exposed. Some read this that the original creation will be annihilated.

But that doesn't square with things on the earth being exposed. Nor does it sound like Romans 8 where creation is said to wait in eager longing for being set free from the bondage of corruption.

However we are to look at this – complete destruction and re-creation or a radical purification of the original creation, we can rest assured that the outcome will be more wonderful than we can even imagine! No trace of sin or any of the effects of sin. Everything in pristine beauty and perfection.

There are some important elements in the Greek word translated as “dissolve.” Yes, it can mean the total dissolution of something. Like the legal dissolution of a marriage. It can mean untying something, loosing something – like untying the colt that was brought to Jesus for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem or loosing Lazarus from the grave cloths. But in our relationship with Jesus, it is a picture of being released from the bondage of sin and death.

- And why all this violent destruction? Because Jesus bore the fire of God's wrath on the cross. Not flames, but the power of Almighty God bearing down on His own Son as He took on Himself the sin of all His people. That same power is now unleashed on all creation to make way for the new heaven and earth – completely new and sinless.

So is all this just interesting theological stuff? Maybe not all that interesting when I have bills to pay and kids to raise and work deadlines breathing down my neck. But those things are all temporary. They will cease. Jesus coming again will spark off a whole new world. Eternity will open up wide, not just as a vague idea, a dreamed-of place to be, but a superbly beautiful, excruciatingly exciting, completely and totally fulfilling reality that is OURS all by trusting Jesus!

THIS is what we look forward to, the culmination of all our dreams. This is the fullness, the manifestation of all our faith, our prayers, our worship – to be in the presence of our King, our Savior, never again to be tempted or bothered in any way by sin. Home – at last!

All with Jesus' sure and sudden return.

Sure and solid transformation (vv11-12)

AS we move to verses 11 and 12, we see a sure and solid transformation. What is being transformed? We are!

- Fifty years ago Francis Schaeffer wrote the book “How should we then live?” The title echoes Peter’s inspired words in verse 11 – *“since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?”*

We have just described in the previous point the fiery destruction of creation. Are we to hear those words with a ho-hum, doesn’t apply to me attitude? Or with an attitude of reverent awe considering the trajectory of our lives?

If there were to be a tremendous roar tomorrow and all those astounding things were to happen for sure tomorrow, what would you need to change in your life before standing in front of Judge Jesus? Would you rush to clear out the search history on your phone? Quickly write that check to the IRS for those back taxes you were hoping would go away? Would you quickly call that person you offended and try to make amends?

My friend, now is the acceptable time. Today is the day of salvation. Don’t put it off! We are to be new creatures in Christ. Behold the old has passed away, the new has come.

This is not like New Year’s resolutions so quickly forgotten. This is of eternal significance. This transformation from the old to the new; from the death-bound to the eternally alive; from at odds with God to adopted by God happens in an instant with confessing that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness and turning to Jesus as your only hope and savior. Trusting Jesus alone.

And suddenly, you are that new creature! Admittedly with much work to do through the empowering of God’s Holy Spirit, but declared just, freed from the guilt and shame of ALL your sin – for all eternity.

- We all know what it means to wait. For the needed check to arrive in the mail, for your turn at the doctor’s office, for the crops to come in.... But now in verse 12 Peter is talking about urgent, intentional waiting. A different kind of waiting than we are used to. And not only waiting, but hastening the day of God.

A lot of our waiting is passive. Foot-tapping, impatient, foul-tempered. That is not the kind of waiting we are to do here. This waiting is bathed in prayer for Jesus’ soon return, obedience, witnessing, teaching, making disciples, worshiping, living each and every day in a way that honors God knowing that without a doubt, Jesus IS coming back. Jesus WILL make all things new. We WILL be transformed with glorious new bodies and sinless, God-praising souls. So eager for that day that we can hardly wait! Listen to this promise from Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21: *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”*

So just how are we to hasten that day? God is the one who is sovereign over all his plans and purposes. God knows the day and hour. God tells us in Acts 3:19-21 how to hasten the day of Jesus’ return: *“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”*

How can we hasten the day? By submitting to God's transforming work in every area of your life – finances, relationships, thoughts.... By repenting and being forgiven that God may send the Christ. When the whole number of elected to salvation is complete, THEN Jesus will come again!

Sure and sovereign renewal (v13)

In verse 13, Peter underscores the certainty and God's sovereignty over all this fiery destruction – and wonderful renewal.

- Our hope is no vague wishful thinking. We may have even wished fervently for straight A's in school or 300 bushel corn, but that was just wishful thinking subject to our imagination and desires.

Hoping in God's unchanging promises is **objective** hope – hope anchored in the object of God's unchanging and faithful nature. All the way back in the prophecies of Isaiah 65:17 we read His faithful promise – *For behold I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.*

- What we so eagerly await is a NEW heaven and a NEW earth, NEW bodies, and NEW holy relationship with God. All this newness is wrapped up in the word **redeemed**. By grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been redeemed, bought by Jesus' precious blood. We were created in embodied perfection, why would our glorified state be any less? We were created to live in a perfect physical world. Why would our new environment be any less?

Romans 8:18-25 tells of the redeemed and recreated universe. Isaiah 65:17 to 25 gives us some glimpses of the new heaven and earth as does Isaiah 66:22-24. Take some time this afternoon to read Revelation chapters 21 and 22 to see Jesus' revelation to John of what the new heaven and earth will be like. All of these passages and many more throughout the Bible create in us an eager longing for the "day of the Lord" when everything sad will come untrue (to quote Samwise Gamgee in *The Return of the Ring*).

- And all of this because King Jesus reigns supreme and sovereign over all things. The new heaven and earth is not just about beautifully renewed and recreated physical universe, but about our perfect union with Jesus and all believers. Righteous, redeemed, recreated relationship with Jesus. Perfect worship. Perfect fellowship. Perfect communion and communication. A place where there is no night, no darkness, for God Himself is the light that permeates everything.

And so we wait, with sanctified objective hope. Living every day as unto Jesus – for His honor and glory. That is our joy and our task each day no matter our occupation. Are you a student? Study to show yourself approved. You study to honor Jesus and to prepare yourself for the work He has prepared for you. Are you a multitasking homemaker? You raise those kids, clean the house, plan and prepare meals with a joy that honors Jesus even in the midst of tiredness. Are you a farmer, a teacher, a business person, a driver, retired or looking for work? Make each day count as you look forward eagerly to that new heaven and earth that is a certainty because King Jesus rules sovereignly over it all.

Conclusion:

Because Jesus' return is sure and upon his return He will judge the whole world, believers must live lives separated-to-God for we don't know when he is coming.

Jesus' return is sure and sudden. With Jesus' return there will be sure and solid transformation of our hearts, desires, and relationships. And with His return, there will be His sure and sovereign renewal of all creation.

As you await that wonderful day, how should you live? Every moment, every thought, desire, motive and action as unto Jesus – to honor Him and bless your neighbor as you express your deep longing for that day proclaiming in word and deed the truth and certainty of Jesus' return.

Are you ready, my friend? On the edge of your seat with eager anticipation for Jesus' sure return?