



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 3:10-18

“The Day of the Lord and the Day of God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for the exhortations that the Apostle Peter has been giving us in this second epistle of his. We thank Thee for the warnings and for the admonitions and we thank Thee also for the encouragement that has come from the apostle as he has directed us toward the foundational truths and also toward the kind of Christian life that should be exhibited by those who profess the name of our Lord Jesus as Savior. We pray Lord that the lessons that we have read and have studied may become a part of our lives and that as a result of them, through the Scriptures we may be constantly being sanctified and made like unto him who has loved us and given himself for us. We again ask for divine enablement tonight as we study the word together. We pray that our hearts may be responsive and open illumined by the Spirit. And we also ask that Thou wilt increase our motivation to serve and please Thee. We commit each one present to Thee, we pray for all of the aspects of our lives that they may contribute to Thy glory through Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are concluding our series of studies in 2 Peter by taking up the last nine verses of the 3rd chapter, the subject being “The Day of the Lord and the Day of God.” Let me read beginning with the 10th verse through the 18th verse for our Scripture reading,

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are in it shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”

That statement in verse 12 if I may, if you will wait just a moment while I take a look again at the original text in order to confirm that, but that statement in verse 12 in which Peter says looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God in which is as I remember looking for and hastening the day of God on account of which rather than in which. “On account of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” Now what Peter means by that is simply that the day of the Lord or the day of God is the reason for the heavens melting with fervent heat, then continues in verse 13,

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

Peter’s most vigorous work draws to a close in these verses that we have just read. This tract for our age which 2 Peter surely is, is a forthright and powerful attack upon apostates and apostasy and according to Peter, as is usual, this apostasy is both doctrinal and moral. He doesn’t say a great deal about the denial of the person of our Lord Jesus, but he does suggest that in the earlier parts in the second chapter and we are certainly living in days in which there is in the professing church, a denial of the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus.

One writer whose books I used to like to read very much because they were always original was G. H. Lang. Mr. Lang was a very godly man who traveled among the brethren in Britain and wrote some very interesting works. He had some odd doctrinal views, and because of these odd doctrinal views, many people didn’t like to read his books, but I liked to read them because he was an original student of the Scriptures and his writings were always fresh, and even when you didn’t agree with Mr. Lang you at least knew that he was attempting to study the Scriptures. And he was a very accomplished man, an intellectual man, a man with a good mind, and I must confess, in spite of some of his aberrations from the truth, I gained a great deal from the study of his books. Occasionally, I still read some of them.

He has a commentary on the Book of Revelation, a commentary on the Book of Daniel, a book on the nature of the church, and a number of other things. One thing that I particularly liked about Mr. Lang is that he had a reputation in Britain for being an extremely godly man. Now anyone who knows anything about the history of the Brethren churches knows that those churches have been characterized by a number of divisions. Almost as many as the Baptists have had or the Presbyterians, in fact, probably many of you don’t know, but there are scores of different kinds of Baptists and Presbyterian churches, but the Brethren also followed along in true scriptural tradition and had a lot of divisions too. And one interesting thing about Mr. Lang was this that he would go into assemblies or churches in which the men disagreed with some of his doctrines and with other men they probably would say to them, “Now we don’t want you to say anything in our meetings.”

But Mr. Lang had such a testimony for godliness that they would allow him to speak even though they disagreed with him which I thought was a great testimony to the godly character of his life.

Well, Mr. Lang in one of his books comments upon the fact that he attended a public session of the Baptist Union in order to hear a very notable man address the Baptist Union in Britain. And this man always spoke of the Lord Jesus as our divinest lord, and then he went on to say that it was no unintentional slip for he read from his manuscript and also threw on the superlative “est” a rhetorical emphasis such as so able a speaker knew how to do. Not a single protest was raised though obviously the term was a flat contradiction of Paul’s words that “though there are in heathendom lords many, yet to us Christians, there is one Lord, Jesus Christ.” It’s very easy for us to deny the Christian faith, and it’s very easy for the simple minded saints to let it pass by without any check at all. Jesus Christ is not our divinest lord; he is the one Lord as the Apostle Paul has put it. Now I know that people are sometimes critical of people who are critical about doctrinal error, and they say we must not be narrow but we must be charitable. But as Mr. Spurgeon well said, “the truth is God’s property, not ours, and he who is charitable with another’s property is a thief.” And so I don’t want to be a thief, and I don’t want you to be a thief and I don’t want you to be charitable with God’s property which is the truth.

So Peter here is stressing with a great deal of stress the fact that there is doctrinal apostasy and there is moral apostasy and we must beware of apostasy. Now in this section after describing the judgments that await the earth dwellers, the apostle urges his readers to live in hope and holiness. Three times he uses the word look. Notice the 12th verse, “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.” Verse 13, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,” and then again in verse 14, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things.” Three times the Greek word *prosdokao* is used here, and this word has an intensive force and expresses the idea of looking earnestly for the accomplishment of the program of God.

Well let’s look tonight then at three things. First, the coming of the day of the Lord or the coming day of the Lord in verse 10, the consequent duties that Peter lays upon genuine believers in

verse 11 through 16, and finally, a brief word concerning the conclusion of the letter in verses 17 and 18. Now remember, this question arose because Peter is attempting that which the scoffers are going to be saying in the last days. He warns his readers that there shall come in the last days scoffers, who walk after their own lusts, and they will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” And they will give reasons for their denial of the second coming, they will say, “Since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Well Peter has answered that, he has settled the question of the delay; he has said that the reason that there is a delay and must be a delay is not because God has forgotten his promises, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years is one day. If it should stretch out into two thousand years before the Second Advent comes, why it will be just as if he made that promise day before yesterday. And so the passage of a long time should not in any way cause us to feel that the promises of God have been forgotten.

And then remember, he explained in the 9th verse why there must be a delay, the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but he’s longsuffering with reference to you. The original text has this in the second person rather than the first person. With reference to you, and that you refers to the beloved of verse 8, “But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing.” So he is speaking of believers. So he says, “He’s longsuffering toward you, not willing that any (that is any of you, you believers) should perish but all (all of you, you believers) should have room for repentance.”

Now I posed a question last week. Is it true that God is unwilling that any should perish? Now if we mean by that, is it true that God is unwilling that any man should perish, then of course, that is not true, he is willing that men perish. The obvious answer to that and the obvious proof of it is the fact that in the Bible we are told over and over again that there is coming a final judgment and the unbelievers are going to be cast into the lake of fire there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and individuals are even said to have already been reserved for that final judgment before the great white throne. So it is obviously true that God is willing that some should perish. But now in the

light of the context of this passage in which the all refers to believers, then it is true as Peter has put it here that “God is not willing any (that is any of his elect believers) should perish.” And so every one of the elect individuals, chosen by God before the foundation of the world, every single one of them shall be brought into the presence of the Lord ultimately. He is not willing that any, any of his chosen ones should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And the reason for the delay then is that his program down through the centuries might be fulfilled so that all whose names are written in the Book of Life of the lamb from the foundation of the world may be gathered into the family of God.

That’s why he is delaying at the present time. That’s what he’s doing at the present time through the preaching of the Scriptures. And that of course is one of the reasons for the existence of Believers Chapel. We exist not only as a church in which the saints are to be encouraged and built up through the Scriptures and through the fellowship that we have together, edified in the truth, brought to maturity, but we also exist in order to be an evangelistic agency, individually as well as a church, that the whole church of Jesus Christ might be gathered ultimately to him. So then, that question is settled.

Having settled then the question, Peter now advances to a description of the Day of the Lord which comes at the Second Advent. Now his words with which he opens the 10th verse, “The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night” are built upon the words of our Lord. So I want you to turn with me if you will to Luke chapter 12 verse 39 and verse 40, Luke chapter 12 verse 39 and verse 40. Now if I had a whole lot of time, I would liked to have turned also to Matthew chapter 24 verse 43 and verse 44, so if you have a pencil and you’re taking a few notes, you might put down that passage also, but we’ll just read Luke chapter 12 verse 39 and verse 40. This is a parable, or parables warnings pertinent to Christ’s second coming is the heading over this paragraph in my edition of the King James Version. And in verse 39 Luke chapter 12 now the Lord Jesus says,

“And this know that if the owner of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have permitted his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

You can see that this figure of a thief and the suddenness of the coming of the Lord, the two being linked together is a figure that is traceable to the Lord Jesus himself. Will you now turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 2? For here in one of the Pauline epistles we have the same apostolic teaching, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 2, Paul writes in the first verse of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” So you can see, the teaching of the Lord Jesus is teaching that is picked up by both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter. And Peter writes, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are in it shall be burned up.”

Now we have a little bit of a problem of interpretation here and Bible teachers have differed over the meaning of verse 10 and specifically over the time at which or to which this verse refers. Is this a reference to, for example, the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus before the coming of the kingdom of God upon the earth, or is this a reference to the time after the kingdom and before the great white throne judgment? In other words, some Bible teachers say that this statement in verse 10 refers to the time before the kingdom at the beginning of the day of the Lord. Some however, think it refers to a time after the kingdom at the conclusion of the day of the Lord. Now you know what the Scofield Bible says because it has a note on page thirteen forty-one. Its note one for chapter 3 verse 10 and it reads like this, “The expression in which refers to the close of the day of the Lord at the end of the millennium when the destruction of the heavens and the earth ends the day of the Lord.” And you’ll notice the passages that are cited as support for it are Revelation chapter 20 verse

11, a text that has to do with the great white throne judgment and then chapter 21 and verse 1 in which John sees a new heavens and a new earth.

There are Bible teachers who differ with that interpretation however, some of them say that this is a reference to the time of the Second Advent, which as we know from our studies in eschatology precedes the coming of the kingdom of God upon the earth. Generally teaching, most students of the prophetic word have come to the conclusion that the term, the day of the Lord is a term that refers to a very lengthy period of time. Some think the day of the Lord begins with the tribulation period, the seven year period that precedes the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. And it not only goes through the time of the tribulation period but also through the millennial age. So the day of the Lord is a lengthy period of time that covers over one thousand years. Now there are some differences of opinion in some minor details, some think the day of the Lord begins at the mid point of the tribulation period when the great judgments really begin to be poured out in earnest upon the earth. But that's a minor matter.

Those who believe that the reference here is to the time before the kingdom and that the day of the Lord that is referred to here in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, those that believe that this describes the event of the Advent which takes place before the kingdom point to these reasons in support of their interpretation. They say this text says that there will be the melting of the elements with fervent heat, a great stress upon fire and if you'll look at the texts of Scripture that have to do with the Second Advent, you will find that they are often descriptive of the Advent in terms of great fire. For example let's just take one text; I'll cite some others for you in a moment. But let's take one text and turn back to Acts chapter 2 verse 19 through verse 21. This is a passage which comes from Joel in the Old Testament and it's cited by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Acts chapter 2 verse 19 through verse 21, and this is a reference to the Second Advent time and notice the words that Peter cites from Joel, verse 19 of Acts chapter 2,

“And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Now associated with the coming of the day of the Lord then in this passage is fire. Other passages that refer to fire are, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 7 through verse 10, I think I'll turn to that one and read it if you want to you can, but I may finish it by the time you find 2 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 7 through verse 10, now I wouldn't suggest that you couldn't find it, you all know it's on page twelve ninety-four and Paul writes here,

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

So those who feel then that this text in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 10 refers to that Advent to the earth which will be a time of judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth, they point to the fact that it is characterized by signs in heaven and furthermore by great outpourings of fiery judgment. And that they say is very similar to what we have here. And furthermore, since this text mentions in the context in verse 13, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,” they point us back to Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 17 in which the first promise of the new heavens and the new earth is given and they claim that that is given in the context of the millennial age, not the eternal state. So you can see, there is some support in Scripture for this interpretation.

The others however, represented by the tradition represented by this note in the Scofield Bible, others who believe that the reference here is to the end of the day of the Lord at the conclusion of the millennial age, they point out that that is the time at which the Bible seems to say, in the New Testament particularly without question, that the new heavens and the new earth shall come. And since Peter seems to imply here that the conclusion of the day of the Lord is the new heavens and the new earth they are rather inclined to believe then that the description of the judgment in verse 10 is not of the beginning of the millennial age, in the early stages of the day of the Lord, but rather is a reference to the end of the millennial age at the conclusion of the day of the Lord when there is a final purgation or a final cleansing of this universe in which we live and the millennial age itself in order that there may be a true preparation for the new heavens and the new earth on which all the saints of God shall dwell throughout all the ages of eternity. Now we don't have to solve that problem, it's possible for us to wrestle with it and puzzle over it and so I'll just leave it with you and I expect now each one of you to have the answer for this by next Wednesday when we come together so you can tell me which one of these views is right.

The important thing in this context is obviously the moral incentive that this great event should give to all the saints, because the thing that Peter stresses is that since we do look for these things, we ought to be certain types of Christians. So he uses these prophetic events in order to urge us to a form of moral dedication to the principles of our great God in Heaven. This incidentally is one of the evidences of the fact that prophecy and prophetic teaching is not simply given us to excite our curiosity, but prophetic teaching is designed to lead to holiness and purity of life. We should never for example criticize people who stress the prophetic word and say they're always interested in the future, whereas we ought to be interested in the present. Or criticize those who have curiosity about future things because the study of prophecy is a purifying agent in the Lord's hands. Remember that in 1 John chapter 3, the Apostle John speaking about the second coming of the Lord Jesus says, “He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.” So I would hope that in your Bible study, there would always be a great stress on the prophetic word. And do not let

anyone ever bring you to the place where you think the prophetic word is only a subject for human curiosity and should not be made a part of your daily study of Scripture. It’s amazing how much of the Bible is prophecy. And its great aim and goal is that we should become holy in the light of the hope that we have. And when you get as old as I am, you will also rejoice in the prophetic word because it reminds you that the coming of our Lord is just that much nearer and the consummation of these great promises is just that much nearer for us. That I want to tell you is a very comforting thing and particularly when you get old.

Now then, let’s look at some of the details of this, because this is a most interesting section and I want you to notice how relevant it is to the things that we know about the makeup of our own physical universe today. It’s almost as if Peter knew something about atomic theory when he wrote this. I’m sure, well I think I am, I think I’m sure that Peter didn’t know anything about atomic theory, but he was guided in such a way that his words fit that which we do know about our universe. Now I don’t imagine they fit in perfectly, because I’ve discovered from my experience, that the scientists are constantly wrong, and the proof that they’re constantly wrong is that they’re constantly changing. And the science of 1976 is not even the science of 1966 and so on. So we shouldn’t expect the Bible to agree perfectly with science, but it is interesting that here and there they do agree. Now he says in verse 10 that, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise.” Now if you had your Greek text before you and you could read Greek what this means simply is with a rushing sound, as of the roaring of flames.

I remember reading in one of the encyclopedias some years ago a description of one of the first atomic tests. And in the description which is found in the World Book, a statement is made that when the bomb exploded there was a blast of air like a hurricane that blew down men ten miles away. And in one of the tests in New Mexico, a steel tower was vaporized. Now this statement, “With a rushing sound” is very descriptive of some of the things that transpire in our scientific experimentation. Further notice, he says, “and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” The elements, that’s a very interesting word. It’s a word that was often used of the ABCs; it’s used of

things in a row. In fact, a root also was used of the step that a person takes. And in Galatians chapter 5, Paul uses a related word for walking by the Spirit in which he means taking each step by the Spirit. That’s the way we walk by the Spirit take each step, one step at a time by the Holy Spirit. But this word was also used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs. So it refers to the primary elements of anything. Now in this context, when he mentions that the elements shall melt with fervent heat, he refers to the primary elements of the physical structure of reality. And he says that they will melt with fervent heat. In other words, there is going to be a breakdown as a result of the judgment of the material universe into its fundamental elements.

Now he doesn’t stop with that, he says, “and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The Greek word there is extremely interesting, because it is “loosed,” shall be loosed. So that the stress of “shall be loosed” is shall be divided into, these fundamental elements. That’s very appropriate for atomic fission and its release of energy. In fact that word *luō* means something like release shall be loosed.

But he doesn’t stop with that even. He says “and the works that are in it shall be burned up.” The manuscripts of 2 Peter at this point are in a little confusion. Some scribe early in the copying of the manuscript that Peter wrote made an error, this often happens. Have you ever copied anything and made an error? Three people have. The rest of you are perfect scribes. [Laughter] The same kinds of errors that you make in copying were made by the ancient scribes in copying the original texts of the Greek manuscript. One of the things you do is to write a word twice every now and then. You’ll copy it and you’ll copy it twice. You’ll say, “their their house.” That’s exactly what the scribes do. Sometimes because one word ends like another word nearby, you’ll copy that word, look down, finish copying, look up and instead of catching the place where you stopped, you’ll catch the word perhaps even the same word in the next line. You’ll skip a whole line.

Now if you’ve ever done much copying, you’ve done that. You’ve written words twice, you’ve omitted words, you’ve omitted lines, many things you have done in your copying. I know because all copyists do it. I still do it. Well now in our Greek manuscripts, copies of the original,

copies of the copies, copies of the copies, it was natural to scratch and make mistakes. Now because we know certain types of errors, those that are intentional and those that are unintentional, and because we know a great deal about the age of manuscripts and about the transmission of some of them, by the application of the principles of textual criticism, to the mass of manuscripts that we have of the New Testament, we are able to arrive at a text that is practically speaking the text that the writers of Scripture really wrote. Now I have an edited text here, bound together with a text of the Hebrew Old Testament. This is not exactly what Peter and Paul and James and the rest of the New Testament writers wrote, but it is practically what they wrote. And at the bottom of the page in the textual apparatus, I know the variant readings, the major variant readings; they're listed with the manuscripts that support them, so that essentially, we have the original text of the New Testament. At certain places, due to the conjunction of certain words in the context, occasionally a word will be used two or three times in a context, occasionally a scribe thinking ahead, thinking about this word that he knows is in the context, seeing another word, seeing a similarity, writes the second word instead of the one that is before him. Just as you and I often do.

Well that's what's happened in this text right here, so that in some of the manuscripts it reads instead of, “Shall be burned up,” “Shall be found,” shall be disclosed. In fact there are three or four different readings at this point. Now the edited text that I have has, “And the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the works that are in it shall be uncovered,” shall be disclosed. Now the meaning of that would be that the disclosure of earth and all its works shall be made obvious to all the survivors of mankind. Now the works that are to be disclosed are perhaps the fine buildings, the deeds of men and all of the other things. So it's a picture of destruction and how everything by virtue of the judgment of God is going to come to public light. And we're going to see actually what has been done by man.

Now there are some very good manuscripts however, that read like our translation reads here, “Shall be burned up.” And some textual critics think that that is probably the correct reading here because the word found or disclosed occurs later on in the context, and a scribe may have been

thinking about that and inserted it above. So let's just leave it, “Shall be burned up.” Now the point of that is in harmony with that which we have throughout the context here, God is going to purge this particular creation that we have about us, burned up.

And the striking thing is that this description is in such great harmony with what we know about the structure of our universe today. One of the commentators of the New Testament has written,

“The solar system and the great galaxies, even space time relationships will be abolished. All elements which make up the physical world will be dissolved by heat and utterly melt away. It is a picture which in an astonishing degree corresponds to what might actually happen according to modern theories of the physical universe.”

There are a couple of more points in the 12th verse, “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt.” That word, melt is be made liquid. So the heat is going to be so intense, that everything is going to become liquid. And further he adds, “With fervent heat.” There are two words for fire in this context, and this is a word that is used of extreme heat. It was used of fever, so when a person had a fever, there's nothing hotter than a fever. When your fever rises to a hundred and three or a hundred and four degrees, I don't know of anything hotter than that, and if it gets to a hundred and five, well that is fervent heat. And this word is the word that was used to describe fervent heat. So what is going to happen by virtue of the destructive power of the judgment of God is that this universe is going to melt with fervent heat. The atomic bomb for example generated heat to two trillion degrees centigrade, two trillion degrees centigrade. That's an amazing heat, and when the Bible speaks about the fervent heat of the judgment of God, I am sure that it is fervent.

In yesterday's paper was very interesting article in which Dr. Linus Pauling, who received a Nobel Prize for Chemistry in nineteen fifty-four and the Nobel Peace Prize in nineteen hundred and

sixty-two, made some comments regarding the history of this world of which we are a part.

Dr. Linus Pauling said Monday he is afraid within twenty-five or fifty years there will occur the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world. Now he said he was nevertheless an optimist, and that the human race might survive. Then he speaks about the various ways in which our universe might be destroyed. He said it might result from a world war, it might take the form of mass starvation, civilization might also end because of the collapse of the systems upon which all depends. He said that Paul Ehrlich a biologist has pointed out that the collapse could take many forms, the complete loss of Oceanic fisheries through over-fishing, marine pollution and the destruction of estuaries which could lead to global famine, or the end of civilization might result from weather changes induced by governments to improve the yield of crops, or might end by rapid destruction of the ozone layer. Nevertheless, Mr. Pauling is an optimist. Well from the standpoint of Scripture, we know that God is going to accomplish a catastrophic destruction of this universe as we know it.

In the light of this, Peter then secondly speaks of the duties that devolve upon Christians. In verse 11 through verse 16, he speaks of the duties. And characteristic of all the biblical writers you see, the moral imperative follows the eschatological indicative. That is God tells us what he is going to do and then there follows the imperative. There is an indissoluble, now the British would say indissoluble; there is an indissoluble link between conviction and conduct. And one of the striking things to me about this passage is the Christian hope is so different from the hope of the world. William Barclay in one of his commentaries, the commentary that includes his comments on 2 Peter says that heathen tombs and their inscriptions give us beautiful contrasts with the Christian faith. There have been three types of inscriptions on heathen tombs. He refers to them. In one of them there is expressed a philosophy of life that leads to hedonism. For example, found on one of the ancient tombs is, “I am nothing, I was nothing, so thou who art still alive, eat drink and be merry”—hedonism. He says on one of the tombs there is the expression of a philosophy that leads to apathy, in fact a philosophy of apathy. This was found on another tomb, “Once I had no existence, now I have none, I am not aware of it, it does not concern me”—apathy. And then there is one that

reflects the common despair. “Karrydos (that’s the name of a person) what is below? Deep darkness, but what of the paths upward? All a lie, then we are lost. What a difference the Christian hope gives. It is not apathy, it is not despair, it is not hedonism, but godliness.

Notice now, Peter’s exhortation. We’ll look at Peter’s counsel first, and I’ll just stress two or three things, then we want to look at Paul’s counsel which Peter cites, because that’s very interesting. First of all, he says in verse 11, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness?” Incidentally, this is in the plural, godlinesses, acts of godliness. So the first thing that should characterize the Christian is godly living. That’s very important my dear Christian friend, godly living, that’s extremely important. Now I do not want in any way to oppose law and grace. I am not suggesting to you a legalistic kind of holiness, but I am saying to you that in the New Testament, Christian believers are exhorted and urged and in fact, they are said they can have no hope of assurance of salvation apart from godly living, godliness. That should characterize Christians. Not perfection, but godliness in fact, he states in verse 14, “Wherefore beloved, see that you look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless.” Back in chapter 2 that’s the way he described those false teachers. Chapter 2 verse 13 he says, “Spots they are and blemishes.” And so Christians are to be without spot and blameless. Now that’s our ultimate standing of course, but by virtue of sanctification, godly living should progress toward that great goal.

The second thing that Peter counsels us about is found in the 17th verse. And I’m going to look down at the conclusion for a moment because for the next two points. “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware (guard yourselves) lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.” Error has many attractive faces. Often people come to me having imbibed some attractive error and often it’s something that has to do with the Christian life too. Error has many attractive faces, and so Peter urges us to guard ourselves from erroneous teaching.

And finally in verse 18 he says, “Grow.” Always the arithmetician, Peter talks about adding and subtracting in the first chapter, here he talks about increasing, “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” That’s why you’re here tonight I hope. It is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. I’ll say something about that in a moment again.

Let’s look now at Paul’s counsel given through Peter in verses 15 and 16, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;” In other words, in the midst of your Christian living, do not think that the delay of the second coming of the Lord is slackness, count it or regard it as longsuffering for salvation. This verse you see, is parallel with the 9th verse when he says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness but is longsuffering toward you not willing that any of you should perish, but that all of you should come to repentance.” So account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, wait and realize that throughout the long years of the absence of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, or his return to take us to be with himself that is the longsuffering of God that leads to the salvation of the saints. Suppose the prayers of some of the saints two or three generations ago had been answered, and the Lord had come? What about you? Where would you be? So part of our responsibility as Christians is to reckon that the reason or to reckon that this delay from our standpoint, in the Lord’s coming, why the reason for that is that more might be gathered into the body of Christ.

“Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul has spoken.” Isn’t it nice that one apostle refers to another apostle and calls him our beloved brother Paul. And think, Paul was the fellow who got up in the church at Antioch because they had freedom to get up in the church at Antioch, you wouldn’t have freedom today, if you got up in most of the churches, they were either say he was an oddball or else they’d send for the deacons or elders to have you exited from the congregation. But in the early days when the saints met together, there was freedom of utterance. They had the opportunity to stand on their feet, and so the Apostle Paul

stood up and rebuked Peter to his face. And here is Peter speaking sometime afterward and calling Paul his beloved brother Paul. There was no schism in the apostolic company as some of our New Testament Scholars sought to prove a few generations ago.

Then he goes on to say, he said now Paul wrote about this thing that I’m talking about. But then he adds, “As in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to be understood.” Isn’t that comforting? Yesterday I had someone come in and I was down here at the Chapel, someone came in to speak with me and had a nice time together, and in the midst of our conversation, she spoke to me, I had been urging her to read the Scriptures a little more, and she was saying, “Dr. Johnson, I find reading the Bible often so difficult.” And I said, “Well I do too.” I do find it difficult, and I was very comforted to think about the fact that Peter read Paul’s letters and found in them some things that were hard to be understood. Now one of the ways in which God tests our desire is just by this matter of Bible reading. And so it’s not on the surface, he doesn’t cast his pearls before the swine. He doesn’t throw that which is holy in front of the dogs. You have to dig for it a little bit, but if you’re really interested, you’ll dig. It’s really a test of your constancy. So, there are some things hard to be understood. I find some things very hard to be understood. And incidentally Peter, if you’re listening, I find some things hard to be understood in your writing too.

[Laughter]

Now he says, “In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest.” Now that word wrest, is an interesting Greek word, it means to twist or torture. Now what do you do when you torture someone? Why you torture someone in order to make them say something they don’t want to say. That’s why you torture them. So there are some people who handle the word of God and they twist and they torture it and they try to make the word of God say something that it does not say. Now poor exegesis leads to that, and no exegesis leads to that too. And there are many people who read the Bible like that, they make it say what they want it to say, they have already made up their minds what the Bible is to say. And then they say it. That’s why there are so many novel interpretations of Holy Scripture.

I have a student who's studying right at the seminary right now, under me. A lovely person far as I know, we've had some interesting conversations. But he cannot at this stage really do sound exegesis; he must have something novel and different. He really is in my opinion; he's twisting, torturing the Scripture. Now fortunately, he's a believer, true believer, but he just hasn't learned yet how to read the Scripture, come to understand it and let it truly give him its message. He wants to give it the message that he wants it to have. Unfortunately, there are lots of people like that, always following after some novel interpretation. And then inventing a number themselves, and then sometimes, having the nerve to say afterwards, "I don't want to be novel."

Now we have a great deal of that today. We have a great deal of it in, I'm sorry ladies, I love you, every one of you, I really do, but there is today, in evangelicalism a movement on the part of both some women and some men to twist the things that the Bible says about women, so that by virtue of their twisting and torturing of the text, they may appoint women to the office of deacon, the office of elder, also to have women preach, and to have a completely egalitarian relationship in the church with men. Done by Bible believing people, but it is twisting and torturing Scripture.

He says, "To their own destruction," because, of course, he is speaking about individuals who are not Christians. I do not suggest that an individual who follows a wrong interpretation loses his salvation. It's possible for a good Christian to twist and torture the Scripture too. You know how I know it? Because I've done it, I've read a passage and wanted it to say something. And thought up a means by which it could say that, I'm sorry, but I have occasionally taught something that later on I had to retract.

Now he says, "As they do also the other Scriptures unto their own destruction." That indicates that Peter regarded Paul's writing as Scripture. He says, "As in all his epistles" and then "as they also the other Scriptures unto their own destruction." Peter regarded Paul's writings as on a level with the Holy Scriptures. The apostles were conscious that other apostles spoke the word of God.

Finally he concludes, and our time is up, in verse 17 and verse 18 with a final negative and positive word, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge,” there Peter closes on the note with which he began this epistle. Back in chapter one and verse two he said, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” And then in verse 5, “And beside this giving diligence add in your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.” A Christian will never, never grow to full maturity in Jesus Christ until he possesses knowledge of the truth. May God help us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Next week, the Lord willing, we want to begin a study of 1 Timothy, changing our note a little bit, and the subject will be “Paul, Timothy and the Doctrine of the Church.” We’ll deal with some of the questions that have to do with the local assembly. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity to read and study Holy Scripture, and we pray O Lord, that Thou wilt deliver us from twisting and torturing the word of God ...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]