

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 14 March 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Not Willing That Any Should Perish”

2 Peter 3:8-12

On Sunday, 12 January, 2014, the internationally-famous Golden Globes awards ceremony was held in Hollywood, California. As usual, Hollywood’s movie stars were preparing to receive worship from an adoring world for their performances in the past year. However, a curious event happened shortly before the stars were to begin walking down the red carpet into the hotel. The members of the press were gathered around the red carpet, and were snapping pictures, and waiting for the stars; but then, without warning or explanation, a large pipe in the wall of the hotel burst; and raw, stinking sewage began to spray everywhere. The red carpet that the stars were to walk on was covered in vile filth. People ran for cover, and workers had to scramble to clean everything up and mask the smell before the stars got there. The members of the press said it was as though it were literally raining sewage on them.

When I read this story, I was reminded of **Nahum 3**, in which the Lord warned the wicked people of the ancient city of Nineveh, *“Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts...I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile”* (**Nahum 3:4, 6**). I can’t think of a modern city on earth that better mirrors this description of ancient Nineveh than does Hollywood. The Hollywood movie industry is a modern-day “harlot,” which literally sells witchcraft and whoredoms (sexual perversions) to nations and families all over the world. Year after year, the Hollywood film industry spews vile, abominable moral filth all over the world. Their movies glorify every kind of wickedness, and break down and destroy families. I can’t help but wonder if God allowed some literal filth to be spewed at them that day, to show them what *He* thinks of their performances!

Yet, does God *have* to speak to people through providential “coincidences”? No. He has spoken through His Word. God has clearly warned man of the consequences of his sin. He has also shown us that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our sin-Bearer, who laid down His life to pay for our sins. His hand is outstretched still, pleading with men to repent and be saved. Jesus said that all manner of sins and blasphemies (including blasphemy against Himself) shall be forgiven unto men—except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (rejecting the Spirit’s call to be saved). God is just, and cannot tolerate sin: yet, His merciful heart does not *desire* to destroy men. God desires to *save* men, and to make them into new creations.

We have been talking, in recent weeks, about the last days, and about the attitudes that will prevail in the world as the time for Christ’s coming draws closer. Now, in today’s Scripture, Peter reveals the *heart* of God toward man as that day approaches. The heart of God is that He does not wish to destroy men, but to save them. The title of this message is *Not Willing That Any Should Perish*.

Read 2 Peter 3:8-13.

I. The Lord’s plan for sinners (vv. 8-9)

In **verses 1-7**, Peter talked quite a bit about the scoffers of the last days. He specifically pointed out that scoffers would mock the idea of the Second Coming of Christ. As the years pass by, scoffers become increasingly smug in their belief that Jesus will never return, and that judgment will never come. They mock Christians for their “old-fashioned” and “out-dated” belief in the Second Coming of Christ. Take heart, though, Christian! Peter gives us two reasons why we should not be dismayed at the seeming delay of Christ’s coming.

First, we need to remember the **timelessness** of God. Peter admonishes us not to be ignorant of the fact that *“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”* Peter is quoting from **Psalm 90**. Let’s turn there, and see what Moses said.

Read Psalm 90:1-4.

Moses’s message in **Psalm 90**, and Peter’s message in **2 Peter 3**, is clear: to God, time is nothing! We think that 2,000 years is a long time; but to the God who is eternal, and who is not bound by time, 1,000 years, or 2,000 years, or any amount of time, is absolutely nothing. He sees the past, present, and future all at the same time. It is all the same to Him.

As God’s people, we should not be dismayed at how long it is taking for Christ to return. On the other hand, we should not become complacent and say, “Well, it’s been a long time, and Christ still hasn’t returned; so, let’s just relax.” No, Christ has commanded us to watch and wait for Him, as though He could come at any moment. We should never get tired of watching and waiting. God has an appointed time; and that time is drawing nearer every day.

Now, not only should we remember the **timelessness** of God; we should also remember the **tenderness** of God. (**Read verse 9.**) The lost world mocks the fact that after 2,000 years, Christ still hasn’t come back; but little do they realise that one of the main reasons that Christ is delaying His Coming is that He is mercifully giving them the opportunity to be saved! He isn’t “slack” concerning His promise to return. He hasn’t forgotten. He continues to delay because He wants as many people as possible to be saved before the day of His wrath begins.

For one thing, the Lord wants His covenant people, Israel, to be saved. Jesus told the Jews shortly before His crucifixion that because of their rejection of Him, Jerusalem would be destroyed and scattered, and that their house (the Temple) would be left desolate; and He promised that they would not see Him again until the day when they say to Him, *“Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord”* (**Matthew 23:39**). In other words, Christ promised that He will *not* return to earth until Israel repents, and acknowledges Him as their Messiah! This has not happened yet; but during the future Tribulation period, it *will* happen.

However, it isn’t only Israel that God wishes to save. God wants *all* men to be saved—every nation, tribe, tongue, and kindred on earth. Let’s make this personal. If *you* have not truly repented and placed your faith in Christ, He is waiting for *you* to receive Him. The door of mercy is still open, and He is calling to *you*. You are still alive and breathing; thus, you can still be saved! Also, we are still in the church age. The Rapture has not happened, and the Tribulation has not begun. God is being merciful to you. Why would you choose not to come to Jesus now, while you have the chance? The door is still open, and the invitation still stands. *Right now*, Jesus is speaking to your heart. Christ does not wish for you to end up in hell. He loves you. However, there is a condition for salvation. *You must repent.* (**Read verse 9.**)

To “repent” means to turn to Christ for salvation. In so doing, you turn your heart and mind from sin. To repent does *not* mean to try reform your life, so that God will accept you. It’s just the opposite. It means to *stop* trying to earn your salvation. It means to *stop* thinking that you are a good person. It means to acknowledge that Jesus paid the full price for your sin, so that you could be forgiven. It means to believe on Him—to cast all your trust upon Him. It means to acknowledge Jesus as the new Lord and Master of your life. The Lord says, **“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).**

II. The Lord’s plan for the Heaven and Earth (vv. 10, 13)

(Read verses 10 and 13 again.) We have seen that the Lord has a plan for sinners. His plan is that He wants to save them! However, here in **verse 10**, we see that God has a plan for the rest of His physical creation, as well. His plan for creation is that one day, He will destroy the heavens and the earth with fire. Then, God will create a new heavens and new earth, which will be free from the taint of sin and its curse.

Now, look closely at **verse 10** again. **(Read verse 10.)** Peter says that **“the day of the Lord”** will come as a **“thief in the night.”** What is the **“day of the Lord”**? The Day of the LORD is not one particular 24-hour day. Rather, it is a long period of time. It is the last part of human history. The Day of the LORD is a period in time when God will deal with mankind both in judgment, and in blessing. The Day of the LORD will begin with the Tribulation period. That will be the time when God deals with man in *judgment*. However, it will continue through the 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ. (During this time, God will deal with man in *blessing*.) It will end with the destruction of the heavens and the earth. Let’s look at a couple Scriptures.

Read Zephaniah 1:14-18.

Read Zechariah 14:1-3, 9, 16, 20-21.

In the **Zephaniah** passage that we just read, the **“day of the LORD”** clearly refers to the Tribulation period—that terrible seven-year period when God will pour out His judgments upon mankind. The Day of the LORD will begin immediately after the Rapture. That’s why Peter says that the **“day of the Lord”** will come **“as a thief in the night.”** The Rapture of the New Testament saints will happen suddenly, and without warning. One moment, Christians will be here on earth; and in a nano-second, they will disappear. A shocked world will then be left behind on this earth to face the most awful, horrific period in human history—the Tribulation. As soon as the Tribulation begins, the Day of the LORD will begin. However, the **“day of the LORD”** will not end with the Tribulation. It will continue all the way through the 1,000-year Kingdom to follow; and it will end shortly after the Kingdom age, when God destroys the universe with fire. The destruction of the universe will be at the tail end of the Day of the LORD; but it will still be *part* of the Day of the LORD. That’s why Peter says that the heavens and earth will pass away **“in”** (or “during”) the **“day of the Lord.”** When the **“day of the Lord”** ends, there will be literally nothing left of this present universe.

By the way, maybe you find it odd that the “heavens” will burn and melt. We can understand our atmosphere melting, because we know that it is made up of atomic matter; but how will outer space “melt”? Well, scientists have come to realise, in recent years, that space actually

does have “substance” of some kind. We used to think that outer space was simply “nothing”; but scientists are finally realising that space is “something.”

Do you realise that this verse demonstrates the scientific accuracy of the Bible? Peter says that “*the heavens*” (which includes outer space) will “*burn up*.” How is that possible, unless what we call “outer space” actually has substance? Outer space is *not* “nothingness.” The Bible makes it clear, starting in **Genesis 1**, that the heavens *do* have substance. This is why the King James Bible uses the word “*firmament*” to describe the “heavens.” The translators of our King James Bible used the word “*firmament*” for the heavens because “firmament” implies that there actually is “firmness,” or substance, to the heavens. Why did they wish to convey this idea? Because the *original Hebrew language* of Scripture implies it!

You see, our English word “firmament” is translated from the Hebrew word *raqiya*, which means “expanse.” It has the idea of a hard, firm substance, such as metal, which has been hammered thin, and expanded. This Hebrew word *raqiya* literally implies that the air and outer space have substance! By the way, the KJV translators were not the first ones to notice the meaning of this word. When Jerome translated the Latin Vulgate Bible back in the 400’s, he used the Latin word *firmamentum*. Our KJV translators simply took Jerome’s Latin word *firmamentum*, and made it into the more English-sounding word “firmament.” Jerome was an expert in the Hebrew language, and he realised that the Hebrew word *raqiya* implied that the heavens have actual substance. It wasn’t until recent times, when scientists began to study the black holes in space, that they began to realise that outer space has real matter! Don’t let anyone tell you that the Bible is unscientific, folks! It has taken 6,000 years for man to begin to understand some of the scientific statements that have been in the Bible all along!

Now, *why* do the heavens and the earth need to be destroyed? The Bible says that this present heavens and earth must be destroyed because it is groaning under the curse of man’s sin. Adam’s sin brought disease, decay, and death not only upon *man*, but also upon the *animal kingdom*; and it brought decay to all creation!

Read Romans 8:18-23.

Read Isaiah 65:18-25.

Brethren, this present universe is decaying and breaking down. Scientists call this “the second law of thermodynamics.” All systems in nature wind down, become disorganized, and eventually break apart. All non-living things wear down; and all living things die. Death afflicts not only man, but animals; and it is all the result of Adam’s sin. Am I saying that animals and plants grew fangs, and stingers, and thorns, and nettles, and developed the ability to devour, crush, trap, poison, and destroy their prey, *after* Adam sinned? Yes! It was *not* that way before man’s fall into sin. Everything was “very good”—until man sinned.

Brethren, we’ve got to remember who God is. First, He is a holy and just God. His curse upon sinful man, and upon the universe in which man lives, was right and just. Secondly, God is all-powerful, and is in complete control of nature. This means that He can reverse the course of nature at will. In the beginning, God created a perfect universe, where there was no such thing as death or decay. However, when man chose to rebel against God’s law, God brought death and decay into nature. He caused animals to kill and eat each other, and to kill

man. He caused the very ground to become difficult to till. That is the way it has always been since the Fall. Yet, during the Kingdom age, God will *slow down* the death process drastically; and people will live hundreds of years again, as they did before the Flood. **Isaiah 65:20** says that a person who is 100 will be considered an “infant.” The ground will bring forth food abundantly. Also, animals will not harm each other, nor harm man. Yet, as wonderful as the Kingdom age will be, it still won’t be perfect. There will still be sin and death, even during the Kingdom age. For there to be a perfect universe again, as there was before the Fall of man, it will require the complete destruction of this present universe.

It is not God’s will that this sin-cursed universe remain the way that it is. God *will* create a new one. The 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ, though it will be far more perfect than our present world, will still fall far short of “perfect.” There will still be a sin nature in the survivors of the Tribulation, and in their descendants; and consequently, there will still be death and decay. God’s ultimate purpose for the *redeemed* remnant of mankind is to create a new heaven and earth for them, where there will be no sin or curse at all. It will not be a universe built upon the *ruins* of the old; it will be entirely new!

Now, since the universe is going to pass away, how should we, as Christians, be living our lives? That is the most important question of all; and it leads me to our last point.

III. The Lord’s plan for His saints (vv. 11-12)

(Read verses 11 and 12 again.) It is fascinating to learn what it will be like after this universe is destroyed. It is fascinating to examine the glimpses that God has given us of the new heaven and earth. However, if we treat this merely as a “fascinating study,” and do not allow it to touch our hearts, then we’ve missed the whole point! These truths that God has given us concerning the end of our present universe should compel us to *live* a certain way. Peter says that these truths compel us to a “*holy conversation*,” or “way of living.” The realisation that everything in this universe will one day pass away compels us to “*godliness*.”

Read Ephesians 1:3-5.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

God’s plan for His people in this world (*and* in the world to come) is that we should live holy lives. Before the foundation of the world, He chose us to live holy and blameless lives; and as we wait for the grace that will be brought to us at Christ’s appearing, that is exactly how we should be living. Christian, God’s plan for you while you’re waiting for Christ’s return is to live unto godliness. The only thing in this life that will matter one *iota* in the endless ages of eternity is that you served God in this short time on earth, and lived for Him. As you serve God, you are laying up treasure in heaven.

Brethren, there are only two things that will survive the destruction of this present cosmos, and that will continue on in eternity with God. One of those two things are **the souls of those who are saved**. If you know Christ as Saviour, then your soul, and the souls of those whom you have had a part in leading to the Lord, are the only treasures from this life that will survive the “great inferno,” and enter into eternity. Apart from our souls, though, the only treasure that we know here on earth which will survive the destruction of the universe is the Word of God.

Jesus said, **“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (Luke 21:33)**. *That* is how precious God’s Word is!

Christian, how precious is this Book to you? How often do you get up in the morning, and go through your day, and work, and study, and do other necessary things--yet never pick up your Bible and read it, or try to commit it to memory? Brethren, this Word is the only treasure that will last after the heaven and earth have passed away! Why, then, would we let it sit on the shelf, and not read it? This is the Word of God! God has given us this Book so that we might know how to *live our lives* for Him--and how to *die* for Him! We *desperately* need this Book!

Back in the 1990’s, a missionary named Nik Ripken went to Eastern Europe, and interviewed hundreds of Christians who had survived through the years of communism. While he was in Russia, he met some Christians who told him about a time, back in the 1950’s, when three pastors in their region of Russia decided that they needed to hold a conference for their young single adults, so that they could meet believers from other house churches, and encourage each other in the Lord. At that time, many people were being saved; but they had to keep dividing their house churches, and creating new ones, so that each house church would be no larger than 10 or 20 in number. The small size of their congregations made it easier for them to hide from the police while they were meeting for church. However, the downside of this was that the young people didn’t know many youths outside their own house church. (And oftentimes, their church consisted almost exclusively of their own extended family members.)

Well, there ended up being about 700 people between ages 18 and 30 at the conference! It was incredibly daring for them to hold this conference; and, not surprisingly, the authorities got wind of it, and arrested the pastors, and sentenced each of them to three years in prison. Nonetheless, they managed to put on the conference before the authorities caught up with them. During that week, the pastors did a game with the young people, to see where they were spiritually. Because the authorities were always confiscating Bibles, *none of them owned a Bible*; and they had no hymn books or other religious books, either. What songs and Scripture they knew had been taught and passed down to them orally, by their churches and families. And so, the pastors challenged the singles to get together in small groups, and to reconstruct the four Gospels from memory. They also challenged them to reconstruct whatever songs and hymns that they knew. At the end of the week, they combined the efforts of the groups, and found that they had reconstructed *all of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*, with only half a dozen mistakes! They had also reconstructed the lyrics of more than 1,200 hymns!

How were the Russian Christians able to endure unspeakable hardship, oppression, starvation, separation of families, imprisonment, torture, and brutal death for all those decades? How did their churches not only survive, but *thrive and grow*? First of all, because they were *convinced* that they *must* obey God rather than man--that they *must* meet for church, and read the Bible, and evangelise. They had taught their children to *expect* persecution and death, just as surely as the sun rises in the morning. They had taught them that it is an *honour* to die for Jesus. Secondly, they *hid the Word of God in their hearts*, and taught each other through songs and hymns and spiritual songs. They were spiritually disciplined. They were ready to be separated from family and friends, and to stand alone for God in prison, with nothing to feed their souls except the Scriptures and the spiritual songs that were hidden in their hearts. By the way, when Nik asked the *grandchildren* of the Christians who had survived communism how much of the Bible *they* knew, they couldn’t even name all the books of the

Bible; and they knew only a few scattered stories from the Gospels. The wealth and prosperity that came with *religious freedom* had already caused them to set their heart on *things of this world*, instead of the things of God. Brethren, I ask again: “How precious is the Word of God to you?” If *you* had to go to prison for a decade, could you survive spiritually with the Scripture that you know? Would you be able to stand for Christ, and not recant? As Christians, we are to watch and wait, and live as though Christ could return at any moment. By the way, Peter says that as we live for God, we are not only looking for, but are “***hastening unto***” the “***day of God.***” (Read verse 12 again.) What is the “day of God”? It is the eternal “day” that will begin when the new heavens and new earth are created. Peter is telling us that by serving Christ, we are literally “hastening” (or “speeding up”) Christ’s coming, and the coming of the new heavens and earth! Now, how is that possible? How could *we* speed up God’s agenda? Doesn’t God have a set time for these things? Yes, He does. However, we need to remember that God has set His timetable *according to man’s response* to Him!

Let’s look at an example. In **Leviticus 26**, God commanded Israel that on every seventh year (“the Sabbath year”), they were not to plant crops: they were to let the land rest. God warned Israel that if they would *not* let the land rest every seventh year, He would raise up foreign enemies against them, and would drive them from their land. Why? Because then the land would lie empty, and it would finally get its “rest”! Well, guess what? Israel went 490 years without observing their Sabbath years; and God was keeping track the whole time. Every seventh year, God marked down that Israel had not observed the Sabbath year; and when 490 years were up, God told the prophet Jeremiah that Israel was going to be taken into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. He said that Israel would have *one year* of captivity for every *Sabbath week* they had failed to observe; and that added up to 70 years. Of course, God knew that Israel would disobey Him; and He knew that He would send them into captivity. Yet, He still gave Israel the opportunity to respond to Him. He said, “If you obey me, I’ll bless you; but if you disobey, I’ll drive you from your land.” Well, guess what? That means that the arrival of the Messiah would be delayed! Israel had to be in her land for the Messiah to come to them.

Think of that! The timing for the birth of the Messiah depended upon Israel’s obedience to God! Similarly, the timing for Christ’s *Second Coming*, and everything that will follow it, depends, in part, upon *Christians’ obedience to Him now*, during this church age. There are souls that need to be *saved*; and God has commissioned us to win them! In a way that we can’t fully understand, God has set His time for Christ’s return according to our obedience. Do you want to hasten the Day of God? Then get busy, and tell people about Christ!

We don’t know when the Rapture will happen--which means that we also don’t know when the Day of the LORD will begin. However, one day it *will* happen, suddenly and unexpectedly. To the world, it will come like a thief in the night. They won’t be prepared for it. They will be stunned and bewildered. However, to Christians, the Day of the Lord should not come upon us as a thief. Christ has told us that He is coming; and we need to be ready!

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:4.

Conclusion: The Bible says that as the time draws near for Christ’s return, evil men will “***wax worse and worse.***” We can expect Hollywood to keep flaunting their wickedness in God’s face. We can expect that men’s hearts will get harder and harder. However, we can *also* expect that until the Rapture happens, souls will continue to be saved. Christ is willing and ready to forgive all who will come to Him. If you

need to repent and receive Christ, why put it off any longer? And to those of you who *are* saved, I would ask, “**Are you serving God?**” Are you endeavouring to live a holy life? Are you watching for His return? Are you looking forward to the Day of God—the eternal day, when there will be a new heaven and earth?