

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
November 29, 2009

A Hopeful People

2 Peter 3:1-13

Key verse: “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Kevin Miller tells a story that illustrates one of Peter’s main points about the Second Coming of Christ. Miller had rented a car for a business trip. He says that he normally had an I-PASS in his own car, a device which signaled that he had prepaid for tolls. Since he was not used to stopping for tollbooths, on this business trip, he blew right past the first tollbooth.

After passing that first tollbooth, Miller says he immediately thought: “This car doesn’t have an I-PASS.” But then he reasoned, “This car belongs to the rental-car company—not me. They’re probably responsible for any tolls. That must be what your rental money covers.”

When he drove past the next toll without paying, he told himself: “Even if I am responsible for the tolls, there’s only a few tolls between here and my destination—maybe \$4 round trip. I’m sure there’s some threshold where they don’t even bother sending you a bill for the tolls. I mean, it wouldn’t be worth their time to send me a bill for only \$4. Nothing’s going to happen.”

After Miller returned home from that business trip, several months went by. Sure enough, nothing happened. But then, six months after his trip, Miller received some mail that read, “Notice of Toll Violation.”

Miller was partly right—the authorities didn’t bother sending him a bill for his measly \$3.90 in tolls. Instead, they added a \$20 fine for every one of the five tollbooths he had driven past. His total bill came to \$103.90!

“I about had a heart attack,” Miller remembers. “They had me dead to rights. They had a photo of my rental-car’s license plate. They even knew the exact lane number I was in. The fact that months had gone by and nothing had happened didn’t mean that nothing was ever going to happen.” (from *Preaching Today*)

In this week’s passage about the return of Christ, Peter is saying: Wake up, folks! Just because the Lord hasn’t come back yet, don’t let anyone tell you that He won’t return! “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness,

but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come...."! (vv. 9-10a)

Earlier, in verses 3-4, Peter has warned about "scoffers" who in the last days would say: "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!"

The "last days," both here and elsewhere in the New Testament, describes the period of time between Christ's first coming as a baby to Bethlehem and his promised return to earth. The "scoffers" were active in Peter's day, as they are in our time. They make the same mistake that Kevin Miller made about his tollbooth bill. They falsely reason that because Christ has not yet returned, He never will.

Peter answers the scoffers with these three responses:

1. Just as surely as God's Word came true when God spoke the universe into existence and later sent the flood, God's promise of Christ's return will also come true (verses 5-7).

2. The scoffers fail to realize that God counts *time* differently than humans: "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (v. 8).

3. The Lord is delaying his return, and the judgment that will come with that day, because He doesn't want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (v. 9).

However, Peter assures us, "the day of the Lord will come." He then describes how the cosmos will pass away: "the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed" (v. 10).

The ultimate purpose of the cataclysm described in verse 10 will be God's creation of "new heavens and a new earth" (v. 13). John describes this same scenario in Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away....He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (vv. 1 and 4).

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, described the new creation in words that emphasize that *all will be made new*. Wesley said: Not only humanity, but "the whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigor, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a higher degree... as high as the understanding of an elephant is beyond that of a worm" ("The Great Deliverance").

Now, whenever we read what the Bible says about the end of times and the final judgment day, it can make us feel both joy and some fear. But if we know Jesus as our Savior, these words of Frederick Buechner are comforting: "The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will bring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the

judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully” (from *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*).

One final lesson from this week’s text should not be missed: Peter makes clear that the Bible’s teaching on the end times has one major purpose for our lives. Not to fill our time with endless speculation about when and how the Second Coming will occur. Not to tickle our ears or satisfy our endless curiosity. No, what the Bible tells us about the end times has this primary purpose: *to motivate us to receive Christ and then to live godly lives*. Peter says it this way: “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...” (vv. 11-12a).

I am counting on heaven, aren’t you? I want to be ready for His return and to help as many people be ready as I possibly can.

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