

2 Peter 3:8-15

God's Peace

December 10, 2023

I am struck by the ideas and images found in this little eight verse section of 2nd Peter, one of the smaller, less well-known epistles in the New Testament. For instance;

“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day.” In this age of geologic time with an understanding of the world's life in terms of billions of years, one might guess that if Peter was writing a letter to the church in our time, he might say, “with the Lord a day is like a million years, and a million years is like a day,” and it would be no less true.

For modern people, this text has given believers room, biblical space if you will, to accept the scientific understanding of an older rather than a younger universe. In that regard it is commonly quoted, and that topic is its most common application.

Yet here in 2 Peter it addresses a different question, not the question of geologic time, but the Lord's time, the delay of the Lord's return in troubled times. I often speak in a joking way about how quickly time passes, the earth spinning like a top. When troubles come, time can stop altogether, and whatever the trouble is has a way of seeming never to end.

“The day of the Lord will come like a thief . . . the heavens will disappear with a roar . . . the elements

will be destroyed by fire.” This image of the sudden consummation of the age of earthly life, and the great judgment has always managed to capture the imagination of people, believer and unbeliever alike, *especially* those for whom time has stood still. It hovers over our lives and our faith understanding, and religious voices are not the only ones speaking it.

Although no one knows when it will come, and it has already been delayed 2,000 years, which is a long time for people who on the average live less than one hundred, and everyone up until now who has tried to predict the end, has been wrong, nevertheless, it is still common for people to believe in an immediate end, one way or another, a time of reckoning. This is always on our mind, even those who do not express it in religious terms.

It evokes a situation of hardship endured by people who no longer look for the alleviation of their pain in the short run, but seek instead, an eternal deliverance. In view of these considerations, this judgment, it sets up a question.

Besides the possibility of the sudden appearance of the Day of the Lord like a thief, and observations about time and the approach of this reckoning, there are some other things to keep in mind as we consider this question:

1 - Sin/Human Responsibility - We are small and weak in the grand scheme of things and must assume humility as a life-attitude because of the limitations

that we share as human beings, even in the industrial, and computer age. That humility should cause us to be slow to act, especially in ways that may carry negative outcomes. One thinks of Artificial Intelligence as an example.

2 - God's Grace - which at this time of the year is focused on the Incarnation, God assuming human nature to offer an example of faithful living, guidance that can be applied in personal ways as well as in terms of community life, and sacrifice on behalf of people, for their forgiveness, their healing, and their liberation.

The upshot of all this is that we, all of us, have by God's grace, been given a measure of freedom to work in the direction of "*becoming*," something. In this text there is a question, in view of the anticipated Day of the Lord and its apparent delay, and of Sin and Grace . . . "What kind of person ought one to become?" What a question *that* is?

And of course, the answer is also given, "You ought to live holy and godly lives . . . making every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at *peace* with God." This question raises others. What does it mean to live a holy and godly life? How can we in our weakness make an effort to be found spotless and blameless? How can a person pursue peace with God, when we are at odds with God in so many ways?

Peace with God is the topic of this day, the second Sunday in the Advent season. And of course the idea

of peace with God is connected with another idea that is also a part of the Christmas proclamation, "peace on earth, good will to all the people." In addition to being hopeful, the faithful are to be a people of God's peace, the kind that, as Paul put it in Philippians, surpasses understanding.

Notoriously, of course, life on earth is *not* particularly associated with either kind of peace, with God, or on earth, the kind that by God's grace an individual can experience, or the kind associated with the lack of conflict, especially violent conflict.

Like hope, which was the emphasis last Sunday, peace is an aspiration made possible only by God's grace. As desiring of it as people generally are, the universal human experience is to discover the many ways that peace has been threatened, disrupted.

Peace is often associated as something that happens, rather than something done. In this case from 2 Peter, the implication is that through grace people *can* pursue peace.

Let us be clear about the theology of the church. There *is no* possibility for us, for human beings, to be holy and godly, or to generate blamelessness in life in such a way that God would be obliged to acknowledge it. In terms of the human disposition and nature, there is no peace with God, or with ourselves, or between ourselves, or in the world. There is no foundation for peace on earth.

So we should not be surprised when peace turns out to be impossible. Let us remember that what is impossible for human beings is *not* impossible for God, who is the source of all peace. The reflection of the Advent season is that we celebrate *God's* decision to make peace with *us*, by sending Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace. It would seem to be less than gracious to refuse the offer.

The, "Day of the Lord," itself, represents an already determined fact of life that precedes any thought or action on the part of human beings. The idea that we can pursue peace with God is drawn from the fact that God has decided for, and acted upon, peace with us. As we say, it is because God has loved us, that we can love God.

Human effort does not produce blamelessness or love or peace. Because of *God's love*, Jesus came, and now the things we do in the pursuit of peace with God matter. Peace involves human effort, but it does not come through it. It comes from God's grace, revealed in the birth and life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Paul wrote, *we have* peace with God, no matter the passage of time before the end; no matter the hardship encountered along the way.

And God's Peace is the source of every other kind of peace; in our hearts, and in the world, for which we pray, and to which we aspire, and for which we strive. Amen.

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