

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
May 26, 2013

Hope in the Day of the Lord

Read 2 Peter 3:1-15a

Key verse: “The Lord isn’t slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives” (2 Peter 3:9).

The more I see some of the extreme ideas people put forth about *the end times*, the more I appreciate the Methodist way of handling this doctrine. We Methodists believe in the Second Coming of Christ. This doctrine is mentioned in our Articles of Religion. Most Methodists regularly affirm this doctrine when we recite the Apostles’ Creed, proclaiming that Christ “will come again to judge the quick [meaning *the living*] and the dead.”

We live in hope and joyously look forward to God’s restoration of His good creation! But we are, as a rule, reluctant to get too caught up in speculative details about how and when all of this will take place. Instead, our emphasis is on living for Christ *now*, living holy lives *now*.

That is basically the direction and movement of this text (2 Peter 3:1-15a). It takes on the “scoffers” who deny a final judgment. The text also assures believers that Christ will fulfill His promise to return to earth. But the takeaway from all of this discussion is this: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be? You must live holy and godly lives, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God” (vv. 11-12a).

The “scoffers” argued that, since the world has continued without divine judgment—seemingly forever—then there will be no final judgment or Second Coming of Christ. This attitude was accompanied with a lax approach to personal morality, which makes sense: *no judgment, no need to control my lusts and sinful “cravings”*:

“Most important, know this: in the last days scoffers will come, jeering, living by their own cravings, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? After all, nothing has changed—not since the beginning of creation, nor even since the ancestors died’” (vv. 3-4).

Peter’s answer to the scoffers could be summarized as follows: Just as God, by his Word, created the world, and, by His Word, sent the Old Testament

flood as a judgment—God’s Word also promises that Christ will come again in final judgment (vv. 5-7).

Further, the “scoffers” mistake God’s unearthly approach to time-keeping, and God’s patience, with a failure to keep his promise: “Don’t let it escape your notice, dear friends, that with the Lord a single day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a single day. The Lord isn’t slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a dreadful noise, the elements will be consumed by fire, and the earth and all the works done on it will be exposed” (vv. 8-10).

Having refuted the unbelief of the “scoffers” and reassured Christians of Christ’s return, Peter moves to the great takeaway: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be? You must live holy and godly lives” (v. 11).

As in Peter’s time, we have plenty of “scoffers.” They deny the truth of God’s Word, including the Second Coming and final judgment. But we are called to live in hopeful anticipation of Christ’s return. Since this present material reality is only temporary, we are called to live “holy and godly lives”—separated *from sin to God*. As someone put it: “What would you like to be doing when Christ returns? That is how you should be living each day.”

And because we are assured of God promise, we joyously look forward to the restoration of God’s good creation. “We are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (v. 13).

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)