

WHAT OUGHT WE TO BE?

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the 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 therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." II Peter 3:10-11.

Since the first of January, I have been preaching a series of Sunday morning sermons on Bible prophecies under the general theme of "Unveiling The Future." On the first Sunday I spoke on the subject, "Why Study Prophecy?" Among the reasons for studying prophecy, we discovered the following:

1. It constitutes a large portion of the Bible.
2. It strengthens our faith in the Word of God.
3. It is enlightening.
4. It enriches our lives.
5. It increases our usefulness.

It is the mark of wisdom to know what God's program is and where we are going, just as it is the height of folly to press on without knowing whither we are bound.

In our second study we noted "Shadows Of Coming Events." Some of these shadows relate to general conditions and others to specific events. Among them are the following: increase of deception, false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines and pestilences, simultaneous earthquakes, racial intolerance and persecution, undependability of man, false prophets, religious indifference and world-wide evangelism.

The third sermon was on the subject, "It Is Later Than You Think." Three things indicate that it is later than you think.

1. Anarchy.
We are producing a generation of rebels against authority.
2. Apostasy.
There is an increasing desertion of beliefs once confessed and an abandonment of standards once acknowledged.
3. Apathy.
People are not especially hostile to the churches; they are simply ignoring them.

On the fourth Sunday we considered the question, "Is God Through With The Jews?" We learned that God raised up the Jewish race and established the nation of Israel that Israel might reaffirm and teach that there is but one God. Also, that she might be a repository for His truth on this earth, that God through them might give the world a Saviour, that Israel might be a witness for God before the other nations and that through her He might save the world from moral decay. God gave the Jews a law, which they defied, a land which they defiled and a Lord whom they denied. The Jews have been shamefully treated and barbarously tortured and martyred, but God is not through with them.

As to "The World's Greatest Coming Event" we emphasized its certainty, its consequences and its challenge. In view of the certain return of Christ, all Christians should wait in patience, walk in purity, weep in hopefulness, witness in faithfulness, work in diligence and watch in readiness. The unsaved should repent of their sins and receive Christ as their Saviour.

When the Lord returns for His saints the dead in Christ will be raised, the living Christians will be raptured and all believers in Him will appear before His judgment seat in order to receive a reward for every righteous deed which they did from the time of their salvation until their departure from the earthly scene, as well as for the influence of their works thereafter. Rewards have been promised to faithful believers in Christ for the services which they render for Him. The number of the rewards will depend upon the amount of work which Christians do for Christ.

We learned that the Antichrist will be an intellectual, oratorical, political, commercial, military and religious genius. We considered some fourteen things which he will do and then contrasted him with the Christ who is our only hope.

We then got a glimpse of "The Great Tribulation" which will take place after the Christians have been caught up or translated and during the reign of the Antichrist. It will last for seven years, but the last half of it will be far more severe than the first. It will be a time of unparalleled suffering. From this outpouring of divine wrath the children of God will be kept.

In the sermon on the battle of Armageddon, we discovered where and when it will be fought, the cause of the battle, who will lead the contending forces and what the outcome will be.

Following the Great Tribulation there will be a "Golden Age" of one thousand years during which Satan will be bound, and the world will be free from his deceptions and wiles. Those who will arise in the first resurrection and all of the Christians will reign with Christ during the millenium. At the end of the thousand years the wicked dead will be raised and the final doom of Satan will be sealed. The millenium will be a time of glory for the Lord Jesus Christ and for all of the saved.

On last Sunday we studied about "The Great White Throne Judgment" which will follow the second resurrection, or the raising of the wicked at the end of the millenium. Christ will be the Judge, and all of the unsaved, but the unsaved only, will be judged before the "White Throne." The purpose of this judgment will be to ascertain the degrees of punishment for the wicked.

Now, in the light of all of these facts which we have learned about the future, what manner of persons ought we to be?

This question appears in Peter's great chapter on the second coming of Christ. After reassuring his readers of the certainty of this great event and its unexpectedness, Peter goes on to describe in vivid language what the immediate effects of it will be. It sounds like the result of a vast atomic explosion. So, if things are doomed, then a wise and sensible person will give his first and chief attention to that which outlasts the stars.

There are two realities--things and persons. Notice how things and persons are placed in juxtaposition in this verse, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." Things have to go, but persons remain. The consciousness of existence and the sense of responsibility are indestructible. They may be darkened, but not extinguished. One is reminded of this fact as he stands beneath the shadow of the Colosseum in Rome. That great amphitheater seated 87,000 people. The population of a vast city flowed hither. There they gazed on exciting spectacles, clapped their hands and rent the air with acclamations. Wealth, beauty, fashion, nobility and imperial pomp gathered there. Where are these human physiognomies and the hum of many tongues now? Silence now reigns throughout that vast area, and all around is crumbling ruin.

No thoughtful person can attend a funeral service without being reminded that "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out." It is said

that when Alexander the Great lay dying he commanded his soldiers to see to it that when he was borne to his last resting place his hands should show outside the coffin, in order that mourners might see how empty they were. Truly it has been said, "You can't take it with you!" All these things will be dissolved. We are so thick-headed about this. We just cannot take it in that "the earth and all its works will disappear." Nothing really belongs to a person that can be taken from him by economic change, storm, sickness or death.

"Out of this life I shall never take
Things of silver and gold I make.
All that I cherish and hoard away,
After I leave, on earth must stay.
All that I gather, and all that I keep,
I must leave behind when I fall asleep,
And I wonder often what I shall own
In that other life, when I pass alone.
What shall they find and what shall they see
In the soul that answers the call for me?
Shall the great Judge learn, when my task is through,
That my spirit has gathered some riches, too?
Or shall at the last it be mine to find
That all that I'd worked for I'd left behind?"

What manner of persons ought we to be?

1. Grateful.

We should be thankful for the Saviour, the Scriptures, the churches and the assurance of a home in heaven.

2. Circumspect.

We should be living in "all holy conversation." The old-fashioned English word "conversation" has lost its original meaning, until today it means small talk, and the one who can talk most and say the least is rated as the best "conversationalist." But the true meaning of the word is behavior, or conduct, or manner of life. "Holy" means set apart. The Christian is to walk in a path set apart from the world. How great is the need for Christians to live the separated life. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

3. Godly.

We should be living in conformity to the will of God. We should see to it that God has His rightful place in the program of our lives. God is looking for people who will accede to His wishes and obey Him. An ungodly person is one who simply thinks, speaks and acts without any reference to God; one who does not consult Him about anything. Any person who has the grace of God in his heart will think much about God. God will enter his calculations, God's presence will be his joy, God's strength will be the basis of his confidence and God's glory will be the chief end of his being.

Paul taught us that "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present age." That is a simple and clear way of setting forth the duty of the saved to themselves, to others and to God. Christians have an obligation to others--to live righteously. They have an obligation to God--to live consistently for His glory.

4. Hopeful.

Not only should we live right and render a faithful service, but we should be looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the Lord. A special blessing is pronounced on all of God's children who are watching and longing for the Lord's return. If He should come today, would He find you watching?