

December 10, 2017 – 2 Peter 3:8-14 & Mark 1:1-8

Hollywood is very good at coming up with fictional ways for humanity to be destroyed. It's a standard sci-fi movie storyline. Something happens that brings the earth to the brink of annihilation. And then a group of people have to either stop the apocalypse or survive the results of it. Whether it's zombies hoards or mad scientists or just good old nuclear armageddon. We're very good at conceiving of new ways to destroy ourselves.

I think, to a certain extent, we as human beings are programmed to expect the world to end. You can have a person who has no faith in God's Word whatsoever, and yet they still have this nagging feeling that this world can't last. That whether they want it to be or not, this world is temporary. It's a ticking time bomb that's going to one day self-destruct. It's only a matter of time. And there's nothing that we can do to stop it.

They're partly correct. This world is temporary. It's end is only a matter of time. But it's not going to self-destruct. It's going to be destroyed. Intentionally. By its creator.

St Paul compares it to a potter looking at a pot and saying, "You know, this didn't turn out right. I'm gonna start over." So he takes his pot, shatters it into a million pieces, and tosses it into the oven. If the pot could talk, it would be horrified at the notion. But to the potter? He can just make another one.

The same is true of our world. The idea that God would just throw this universe in the fire sounds awfully extreme to us. But to God, it's no big deal. He's a creator. It's in his nature to create. He can just make a new one. And so he shall.

And yet, the timing and method by which God ends this world is important. And it's the reason why St Peter spends time this morning going over those events with us. Oh, sure, some of this we've heard before. When he says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief, he's all but quoting Jesus.

But then he goes on. And he says, "*The heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved... Since all of these things are thus to be dissolved... the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved.*" Three times, he uses that word. Dissolved. It's kind of an interesting expression.

I've seen a lot of movies about the end of the world. None of them portrayed it dissolving. Melting away like lump of sugar in a cup of coffee.

When I saw it in our lesson this morning, I immediately pulled out my Greek text to see whether this was an accurate English translation. And it is. But, there's a little more to it. Because there's another, more common way to translate it.

Untied. Peter describes the end of the world as the universe coming untied. Unglued. Unravelled. It's as if all of creation is a giant, woven cloth with a loose thread. And on the last day, God's going to give it tug. And the whole piece of fabric will just fall apart.

It's quite an image. And it shows just how precarious our existence is. That everything we know. Our homes and businesses. The earth and trees. Sky and water. The very bodies that we live in. Could one day just unravel. Dissolve. Into chaos.

And the interesting thing is that it wouldn't even be that difficult for God to do. I had a fellow pastor point this out once. What would it take for God to destroy the world? Would he send his Spirit to do it? Would he issue a command? Would he say a word?

No. As we talked about in our midweek service this past week, God sent his Spirit, issued a command, and said a word, to create the world. To sustain the world. To hold all things together. But to destroy it? For that, he just has to do... nothing.

Nothing at all. Take a step back. Pull his hands out of creation. And we just fall apart. By Him and through Him all things hold together. Without him, we're nothing. Literally.

God is the loose thread in the fabric of existence. Pull him out of it, and it all unravels. And we see that happening on a small scale every day. Because it's easy to blame God for the problems we see around us. To blame him for grief and suffering and corruption.

But every day, by our sin, we tell him that we don't want him in our lives. That we don't want him holding us together. Holding our world together. And every once in a while he says, "Alright, have your way. Here's a glimpse of what that looks like. I'm not the one causing you to fall apart. I'm the one holding you together."

Peter spells that out for us in our Epistle. He tells us that the world is going to be dissolved, but in contrast, we are to be people of holiness and godliness. This earth and its corruption will dissolve and melt away, but the new heavens and new earth that God will bring will be a place where righteousness dwells.

Holiness, godliness, righteousness. These are the things that hold this earth together. These are the things of God that will be found when all creation is remade. These are the things that we are searching for. That we are waiting for.

And how long do we wait for them? Well, that's the other topic that Peter brings up. How long? How long until this day when the earth is dissolved and untied and unravelled? How long until God fulfills his promises?

We don't know. The people that Peter was talking to obviously felt like it was taking far too long. That God was being awfully slow to keep his word.

But Peter points out two flaws with that kind of thinking. First, it's kinda silly to use words like quick and slow when it comes to God. We perceive time relative to our short, mortal lives. Where each year is likely one of only 80 or 90 or 100, at most. God doesn't see time like that.

And to prove his point, Peter paraphrases a passage from Psalm 90: "*with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*" Ironically, that psalm was written almost exactly a thousand years prior to Peter himself. So basically, Peter is saying, "You know this really old passage about God's perception of time? In God's eyes, it was written yesterday." He's using a description of God's timelessness to illustrate God's timelessness.

So when we're trying to understand God's timing, we need to see things from his perspective. But, at the same time, we also need to consider the possibility that maybe God isn't being slow. Maybe he's being patient. And for our benefit.

Peter writes, "*but [God] is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" It's easy to look at this world and say, "God why don't you do something about this? Why don't you put an end to all this suffering? All this sin and corruption? Why don't you just come back and make everything perfect?"

But we need to realize, there's no turning back from that. When Christ returns, that's it for the unbelieving world. They get no more chances to have faith in Christ. And we get no more opportunities to share the good news with them.

So maybe God isn't being so slow after all. Maybe all these many years since Christ died and rose again have been a gift to us. An opportunity to reach others so that all might reach repentance.

2,000 years ago, a man named John the Baptist came as a voice in the wilderness. Preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness before the day of the Lord would come. Before Christ would come the first time in a Bethlehem stable.

Today, you and I are that same voice in the wilderness. Preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness before the day of the Lord comes again. Before Christ comes a second time on clouds of glory. Gathering the faithful and dissolving this cursed, sinful creation so that he can start anew.

"*Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.*" It's not just the message of a strange guy in the desert who ate locusts and honey. It's our message to a dying world. To a world that knows its own end draws near. And needs the very good news that we have to share with them. Amen.