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The Second Epistle of Peter

A New Creation Where Righteousness Reigns (Part 3)

November 12, 2017

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 3

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes 1

Listen once again to these closing verses of Peter's Second Epistle and then let's spend some time this morning thinking still more about these great events connected with what the Church calls "our blessed hope" – the second coming of Christ, the final judgment, and the new creation consummated:

2 Peter 3:9-18 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

(10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (11) Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

(13) But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

(14) Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. (15) And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, (16) as he does in all his letters

when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

(17) You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. (18) But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

The Bible, as you have heard often before, presents us with what we call the “already but not yet” doctrine of the kingdom of God. That is to say, Christ’s kingdom has come, but not in its finality. We are new creations in Christ, but we are not yet what we shall be. The curse for sin has been removed from us in Christ, but all the lingering effects of the curse remain in this present world and will do so until Christ comes again. We are still in this world, but our real citizenship is in heaven with Christ. *Already, but not yet* you see. We are to live and think as the new creations we are, and as Peter tells us hear, we are to be people looking out on the horizon, stretching our necks you might say as we look for Christ’s appearing. We are to *be who we are, not who we used to be.*

This morning then I want us to spend some more time doing just what Peter exhorts us to do – looking for and hastening the coming of the Lord – by thinking some more about these promised events that we are most certainly going to witness one day.

I am going to be quoting quite a lot this morning from the old Dutch theologian, Herman Bavinck who lived from 1854-1921 and was one of the greatest Calvinistic theologians. His works are in a multi-volume set called Reformed Dogmatics which have been translated into English. You can also now purchase an abridged one volume edition that is extremely well done and probably the best choice for most people.

The Re-creation of this Creation

Listen to this overview summary by Herman Bavinck: [Reformed Dogmatics, Abridged version, chapter 25] -

The Day of the Lord begins with the appearance of Christ on the clouds. ‘Day’ must not be taken in an excessively literal manner as 12 or 24 hours. In Old Testament times the day of the Lord was the time in which God, in a marvelously glorious way, would come to his people as king to redeem them from all their enemies and to

settle them with him in Jerusalem in peace and security.

Just as it does with so many prophetic/eschatological themes, the OT gives what you might say “temporal, earthly, miniature” days of the Lord as types or pictures of THE coming Day of the Lord. For example, Isaiah 13 prophecies of the destruction of Babylon and calls that event the day of the Lord. At the same time, the language here also points to the coming ultimate and final Day of the Lord that Peter is telling us about here in 2 Peter 3 -

Isaiah 13:1-11 The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. (2) On a bare hill raise a signal; cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles. (3) I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones. (4) The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle. (5) They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land. (6) Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! (7) Therefore all hands will be

feeble, and every human heart will melt. (8) They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. (9) Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. (10) For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. (11) I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

Often the New Testament will speak of the final Day of the Lord by referring to OT passages like this one which have already been carried out in their first, temporal meaning. Babylon was judged and destroyed by the Lord. And yet Jesus quoted Isaiah 13 and applied it directly to His final, second coming:

Mark 13:24-27 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, (25) and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. (26) And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and

glory. (27) And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Alright then, listen again to Bavinck explain it –

It was a great turning point in which the old aeon (age) passed into the new [ie, when the Old Testament era passed away and Christ came, establishing the present new age] and all conditions and connections in the natural and human world changed totally. According to the New Testament, the last part of the present aeon began with the first coming of Christ, so that now we live in the last days or the last hour

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Hebrews 1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

and he continues –

...and the aeon to come starts with his second coming.

Mark 10:29-30 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, (30) who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

“This age to come begins with the day of the Lord, that is, the time in which Christ appears, raises the dead, executes judgment, and renews the world.”

WE live in these last days! And more than any other era, we must be wise because as the Day of the Lord draws nearer and nearer, the activities of our enemy intensify. That is to say, we are living in the most wicked days and they are going to grow even more wicked:

1 John 2:18-19 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. (19) **They went out from us, but they were**

not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) **having the appearance of godliness**, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Notice carefully in both of these last texts that the evil ones John and Paul are warning us about *are people who claim to be Christians, not mere unbelieving pagans.*

The Resurrection of the Dead

Peter, you recall, reminds us that one of the “very great and precious promises” of Christ to us is that we are going to live forever in the new heavens and new earth, the New Eden, where everything has been put right. And when the Bible promises us this new life, it is not speaking about some

theoretical, nebulous, vapory philosophical so-called “life” that no one in their right mind really wants. The kind of place where there is a kind of ephemeral light glowing off of everything and you wander around in a long white robe surrounded by white marble pillared halls and you are supposed to think that is really neat. Nonsense. If you want a real look at the new creation Christ is making for us, just go back to Genesis and look at the first Eden before sin came.

Now, this real creation to come requires *new and eternal, non-corrupting bodies*. And I want us to give some more thought to this. Remember that quote from G.K. Beale that we ended with last time? –

It is doubtful that neither Christian steadfastness nor Christian morality, let alone Christian spirituality and Christian eschatology, can long be maintained without the dominance of this vision.”

So let’s permit these things to dominate our thinking this morning. Listen again to Bavinck –

The first event that follows the appearance of Christ is the resurrection of the dead by an omnipotent, creative act of God (Matt 22:29; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:38; 2 Cor 1:9). The Father

specifically carries out this work by the Son, who is the resurrection and the life...*Undoubtedly Scripture teaches a general resurrection, a resurrection not only of believers but also of unbelievers and of all human beings*, and attributes this resurrection to Christ as well (Dan 12:2; Matt 5:29-30; 10:28; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:12-13). [emphasis here is mine]

This is an incredible, encouraging, and fearfully sobering truth which is very often something even Christians are ignorant of. Namely, that EVERY human being will “live” forever. That is to say, the Lord is going to raise up in literal resurrected bodies, ALL human beings, the wicked and the righteous. So that ALL will enter eternity in resurrected bodies. However, as our confession of faith puts it:

At the last day, such of the saints as are found alive, shall not sleep, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other; although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to his own glorious

body. [London CF]

Now, once again with Bavinck’s help, let’s give closer thought to the nature of YOUR resurrection body. That is to say, let’s consider as well as we can *who you are going to be in the new creation.*

This [ie, the resurrection of the righteous to life] is the real, the true resurrection, an event in which believers, united in soul and body, enter into communion with Christ and are being re-created after God’s image....In this resurrection the identity of the resurrection body with the body that has died will be preserved.

Jesus arose with the same body in which he suffered on the cross and which was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. At the time of Jesus’ death many bodies of the saints were raised and came forth from their tombs (see Matt 27:52). In the resurrection of the last day, all who are in the tombs will hear Jesus’ voice and come forth. *Paul teaches that the resurrection body proceeds from the body that has died, just as from the grain that has been sown God raises up new grain:*

1 Corinthians 15:35-38 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised?

With what kind of body do they come?" (36) You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

Now, keep listening. This gets more exciting yet!

In the Christian religion this identity of the resurrection body with the body that was laid aside at death is of such great significance that it is diametrically opposed to all dualistic theories in which the body is merely an incidental dwelling place of prison of the soul. [The Greeks for example taught this] The essence of a human being consists above all in the most intimate union of soul and body in a single personality; they belong together.

And this is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote:

2 Corinthians 5:1-4 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our

heavenly dwelling, (3) if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. (4) For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

ANY notion that teaches that in eternity, in “heaven,” we are going to float around as disembodied spirits is absolutely contrary to God’s Word. And yet if you were to make careful inquiry to most Christians, this is exactly what they believe and have been taught. In contrast, listen again to Bavinck summarize it for us:

The continuity of an individual human being is maintained as much in the identity of the body as in the identity of the soul. Christ’s redemption, therefore, is not a second, new creation, but a *re-creation*. It was God’s pleasure to raise the fallen world up again and to free from sin the same humanity that sinned. This deliverance consists in the forgiveness of sin from all the consequences of sin, including the complete triumph over death as well.

Death is the last enemy to be annihilated. And the power of Christ is revealed in the fact that he not only

gives eternal life to his own but in consequence also raises them up on the last day. Christ is a complete Savior: The rebirth by water and Spirit finds its completion in the rebirth of all things. Spiritual redemption from sin is only fully completed in bodily redemption at the end of time. *The Christian church and Christian theology, accordingly, vigorously maintained the identity of the resurrection body with the body that had died.*

And why is this vital? *Because for us this addresses the questions such as “Will I still be me?” “Will my loved ones still be my loved ones?”* Or will we all be so new, so different, that only the very vaguest of suppressed memories of one another will linger? Scripture says “absolutely not” to the latter idea and “absolutely yes” to the former. YOU will still be YOU. Your loved ones who die in Christ will still be who they were, and yet – well will all be new. New in the sense that all sin, all aspects of the curse, all effects of the fall that linger in and on us now, will be gone.

Here is a very practical application from Bavinck that I think is worthy of our consideration at this point as well:

This has implications for the care of

the dead. Cremation is not to be rejected because it is assumed to limit the omnipotence of God and make the resurrection an impossibility. Nevertheless, it is of pagan origin; it was never a custom in Israel or in Christian nations, and it militates against Christian mores. Burial, on the other hand, is much more nearly in harmony with Scripture, creed, history, and liturgy; with the doctrine of the image of God that is also manifest in the body; with the doctrine of death as a punishment for sin; and with the respect that is due to the dead and the resurrection on the last day. Christians do not, like the Egyptians, artificially preserve corpses; nor do they mechanically destroy them, as many people desire today. But they entrust them to the earth’s bosom and let them rest until the day of the resurrection.

Finally, let’s close with this extremely encouraging truth:

As our Lord’s own resurrection shows, the final resurrection maintains continuity between the earthly body and the glorified resurrection body. Persons *retain their individual identities*. Precisely how this happens we do not know and should not speculate. What is important is the substantial unity as well as qualitative distinction between what the apostle calls the “natural body” and the

“spiritual body.” (1 Cor 15).

[Paul] asserts that the resurrection body is not a rehabilitation but a re-formation from one that is weak, perishable, and mortal to one that is clothed in imperishability and glory. There are therefore important differences between our present body and our future one, as is evident from the contrast between Adam and Christ.... In these respects it is distinguished even from the body that humans possessed before the fall; it is immortal, imperishable, spiritualized, and glorified....

The resurrection body does not come from heaven but from the earth. It is not a self-generated product of the spirit or the soul, but arises from the body that was laid in the grave at death. Accordingly, it is not spiritual in the sense that its substance is spirit, but it is and remains material. That material matter however is no longer organized into perishable flesh and blood but into a glorified body.

What kind of people should we be in light of all these things? Godly. Holy. And joyful! People full of hope. People who, when death strikes, do not grieve as those who have no hope. Because as the old Puritans used to say, *the Christian's dying day is his best day*.