

Sermon 21, A Holiness Checkup, 2 Peter 3:11-12

Proposition: The coming exposure of the works done on Earth is totally real, and it has profound ethical consequences.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see tonight the application of Peter's teaching about our Lord's return. The application is this: be holy. Set your life apart for total service and dedication to God. Peter tells us that the works done on Earth will be found out, and then he tells us what that implies for us before circling back around to what will happen before the judgment really gets going. Why does he do that? He wants us to know for certain that the coming judgment is real. It's totally real. It's not a myth, not a fiction. And because it's real, you need to live in light of its reality. You need to be holy, because Jesus is going to find out exactly what's being done on this earth.

I. The Truth: You Can't Hide from God, v. 11a

The truth of the matter is, you can't hide from God. All these things will be destroyed in the way that Peter just mentioned — that is, by fire. And what things in particular will be destroyed? The picture in the previous verse is of the heavens being ripped off from over our heads and the heavenly bodies burning in a humongous planetary conflagration. Then, with the heavens out of the way, the earth will lie naked and exposed to the penetrating eyes of God. Brothers and sisters, does this mean or imply that God can't see through outer space? Of course not. God knows already what's happening on earth. The point is rather that you can't hide from Him. Even if you think you're hiding from Him now, someday the utter folly of hiding from Him will be manifest, when the heavenly bodies that one might think of as interposing between God and you are ripped away and you see just how exposed you are to His eagle gaze.

You can't hide from God! How many of us have straightened our ties, cleared our Internet history, cooked the books, tried to forget the whole incident? We can at times hide our own guilt from ourselves. But we can't hide it from Him. Do what you will, He is going to know

what you did, and He is going to either reward you for it if it was good or hold it against you if it was evil. Hence Peter's description of the time when God will rip the lid off and take a good hard look at Earth and the things done on it. You won't be able to hide in that day.

II. The Consequences, vv. 11b-12

So how should you act now in light of the truth that God will find out the works done on Earth?

A. Be Holy, v. 11b

Peters says that the first thing you need is holinesses. You need a lot of holy conducts — holy actions that please God. Remember, holiness means being set apart from common use and dedicated completely to divine usage. To be holy is to exist for God.

Holiness is not just doing good things. It is a whole orientation, a whole purpose of one's existence. How can you be holy? Only by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is able to set your purpose to "living for God." Holiness is gospel holiness; it is a function of knowing Christ who died for you and whom God has made sanctification for you.

If you are in Christ, you are holy. You are called to grow in holiness by pursuing God, repenting of sin, and asking the Spirit to make you more holy.

Since holiness is an orientation, a living for God, rather than a specific action, holiness will manifest itself negatively by the things you don't live for. A holy person doesn't live for

- **Pleasure.** If you're living for God, you're not living for good sensations and experiences! You don't live for sugar, for food, for trips to Hawaii or hot sex with your hot wife or anything else, morally good, bad, or indifferent. You live for just one thing, and that's God, through Christ by the Spirit.
- **Power.** If you're holy, you don't need to be in charge. You can submit to your boss/husband/elders.
- **Prestige.** You don't care whether you get the credit, because you're not living for the credit. You're living for God!
- **Money.** A holy person isn't a servant of mammon. A holy person doesn't need an extra \$10,000 (or add however many zeroes you want to that) to be happy. A holy person already has what he's living for, which is God. You can't an extra 10,000 units of God. Either you have Him or you don't. And if you have Him, then your holiness is fulfilled and you are content.
- **Relationships.** A holy person doesn't make their family or spouse their be-all end-all. If you're holy, you have God, who is everything to you, and you can value other people and treat them appropriately because in God you have everything you need!
- **Knowledge.** A holy person can enjoy learning and knowing, but doesn't define himself by his knowledge because knowledge isn't what he lives for. He doesn't have to take extra helpings at the gossip buffet, because he knows Christ and lives for Christ, not for delicious tidbits about the so-and-sos.

- The world. A holy person recognizes that God is going to rip the lid off and look at the world to see what people are doing on it. He knows that God will not be pleased to see someone living for the world, because He wants to see holiness!

Brothers and sisters, what do you live for? If you're living for this world, repent! This world is passing away. Pleasure, money, and all the other idols of our age are passing away. And so you and I need to be sure that we are not living for them, but for God. That's what holiness is!

B. Be Godly, v. 11b

But though holiness is very important, it is not the only characteristic of the person who recognizes that inspection day is coming, that God is going to destroy the heavens and take a good hard look at the earth. The person who's wrapped his mind around that truth is also godly. To be godly is above all to live in a way that's dutiful and respectful toward authority, both human and divine. A godly person listens to his boss, his parents, his elders. A godly woman submits to her husband. And above all, a godly person pursues the duties of piety — reading the Bible, praying, worshipping with God's people, and giving to the church and to the poor.

Are you a godly person? Is your life built around the duties of piety? Again, a life that's built around these other things is not a godly life. Let me mention some of them:

- Sports. A life built around who's playing whom and who's winning and who the best players are is not a life that's built around worshipping God and doing what pleases Him!
- Work. A life built around accomplishment in the office, getting accolades, billable hours, raises, contracts, clients, overtime, etc. is not a life built around the duties of piety. Yes, a pious person works hard — but he doesn't live for work, or measure his self-worth and identity based on his work. A godly person builds his life around time with God, and especially time with God shared with God's people. He is all about corporate worship, and you will probably see him leading family worship and engaging in private worship too. You will see him working and working hard, but you won't hear him talking about work as though it defines who he is.
- Family. A life built around family, a life where certain family activities are sacrosanct and the worship of God has to yield to them, is not a godly life. It may be a good life in a lot of ways. But Peter doesn't say "Since God is going to rip the heavens away and burn the planets, make sure you spend some time with your kids today." Compared to sports and work, it's obvious that family is a much better thing to spend your time on. But a godly man doesn't say "My family needs x event more than they need to worship God." Not true. Never true! Obviously, I'm not saying that family events are evil or wrong. I'm just saying that acts of godliness, something required as we see the end of history approaching, are not built around family but around God.

Brothers and sisters, these things are good and important. I like sports, work, and family as much as the next guy. But please don't think of them as godliness! I'm not saying that godliness requires that you have no family and no work and never play any sports. Rather, I'm saying that all the family activities, sports activities, and work activities you can ever do will never add up to

godliness. Godliness means ordering your life around your duties to God. It means making the worship of God your first and fixed priority to which everything else in your life has to yield. And yes, the primary threat to godliness among churchgoers like us is not evil things (“I can’t be godly because I’ve got three murders to commit tomorrow”) but good things (“I can’t be godly because I have to feed my kids”).

So pursue godliness. That means pursuing the worship of God. You live for God (holiness) and live to worship God (godliness). These are the non-negotiables for anyone who recognizes that the time is short and that Jesus is coming back to take a good hard look at the earth and the works done on it.

C. Anticipate God’s Day, v. 12a

But in addition to holiness and godliness, the approach of God’s day demands a certain level of anticipation. You need to be looking forward to it.

I remember the last movie I really, really anticipated: *The Return of the King*, Peter Jackson’s epic take on J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy. I spent a lot of time looking forward to that film. I could hardly wait until I got the chance to go see it. I loved it. Brothers and sisters, you need to be like 13-year-old me, fixated on something exciting that’s coming closer and closer. But the thing you need to be fixated on is not some film, but rather the coming day of God.

Every dog has his day, we say in English. Or we might quote Tennyson, and say “Our little systems have their day.” What does it mean to have one’s day? It means your time to shine, your time in the spotlight, your place in the sun, your fifteen seconds of fame. To have your day means to enjoy the period of time, however brief, when you get to experience and possess the thing you’ve been seeking. God’s day, then, is the day when God will bring to pass all the things He really wants to do on this earth. It’s the day when God will be glorious, when His fame will be known, when He will condemn the wicked and save His people and set everything right permanently. You and I need to anticipate this day. How can we do that?

First of all, we have to know what it is and bring it before our attention. We can do that by reading the Bible. We can do it by reading stories about the horrible evil perpetrated on this earth and spending time crying out in prayer to God to come and save us from this present evil age. We can do it by simply being sick, injured, or suffering. Any experience of evil up close and personal will lead a true child of God to cry out and long for the time when God makes everything right and we no longer experience and endure these awful afflictions.

Secondly, though, we have to be deliberately cultivating our love for God. Yes, there’s the negative motive of revulsion against the evil that runs rampant on this earth. But positively, you and I need to be cultivating our love for Jesus, such that we long to see Him! If we are truly His bride, we should be wanting to get to the wedding day and enjoy our bridegroom! Brothers and sisters, if we’re doing worship right in this church, it will enflame our hearts with a desire to see Jesus. It will make us long for the day of God, because that’s the day when we get reunited with our beloved. So what if the planets have to burn to make that happen? If I can see Jesus, that’s all I really want.

D. Bring God's Day Faster, v. 12a

So with those twin motives of escaping evil and finding Jesus, you and I are enabled to actually hasten the apocalypse. That's right. Peter literally says that we can bring that day faster. What? How does that work? Hasn't God fixed the day of judgment, as Paul says in Acts 17? Well, yes He has. But Peter just told us that God is delaying so that all can reach repentance. The faster people repent, and the more they seek Jesus, the sooner this day will come. Is Peter speaking in objective terms, such that the end of the world was going to be on June 3, 3065, but now that 500 million additional people have become Christians the date is being moved up to August 5, 2764?

I don't think so. Rather, the idea is really of a subjective hastening. The more you long for it, the more you anticipate it, the faster it will come. It might as well be objectively sooner because it will feel a lot sooner to you.

So did you get that? God's day is coming. Make it hurry up. Make it come faster. That day will deliver you from evil and see you placed securely in Heaven with Christ your bridegroom forever and ever.

Can you wait? I can't. But the more you and I live for money, sports, family, jobs, and on and on and on the more we'll be able to wait. The less we will anticipate the day, and the more we will worship our time on earth right now. Don't be that way. Look for the day. Hasten its coming by living holy and godly lives.

III. The Prelude to God's Day, v. 12b

After all, the day is undoubtedly coming. Peter circles back around to this point. Why? Because it's so far-fetched. It's so unrealistic. It's so far from where we live and how we think.

A. The Heavens will be Burnt

The heavens will be burnt. Yes, really. We're not sure what this will look like, but we can be sure it will be bad. I absolutely loved the one sentence quoted from the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter* in one of the commentaries: "And as soon as the whole creation is dissolved, the men who are in the east shall flee to the west . . ." ¹⁰ Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Not.

The heavens will be burned. This present order of creation can and will come to an end in a gruesome and brutal way.

B. The Planets will be Melted

The planets will be melted, just as Isaiah predicted: "And all the powers of the heavens shall melt, and the sky shall be rolled up like a scroll: and all the stars shall fall like leaves from a vine, and as leaves fall from a fig-tree" (Isa 34:4 LXE). This is not a good sign — except that it is the sign that Jesus is coming back, and so it's an incredibly good sign. Brothers and sisters, before God even takes His first look at humanity He will burn the heavens and melt the planets. Does that bode well for sinful people like us? Of course it doesn't. But we will have confidence in the judgment, because Jesus already took our penalty.

¹⁰ *Apoc. Pet.* (E) 5, quoted and translated in Jorg Frey, *The Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 414.

So how about it? When God rips the lid off and looks in, what will He see? Will He see you, walking in holiness and godliness in Christ? Or will He see you being unholy and ungodly, living for pleasure, organizing your life around work and sports and family? Brothers and sisters, make every effort toward holiness and blamelessness. You already have everything necessary for such a life, because you have Christ and His Spirit. Walk with them, and you will be holy when God's day comes. Amen.