

“Big-Picture Hope”**2 Peter 3:10-13****December 27, 2020**

Thanks to all who have made this difficult and challenging time a little brighter and filled with hope. (Lights, adopted families, major jumpstart for helping foster families this year, helping orphans in Latvia, generous church) I want you to know what you have done, in the final analysis, is not about Covid-19. It is about the Kingdom of God, which is in one sense here right now, and in another sense is still yet to come! What we have done and what we are doing is much, much bigger than mitigating the effects of the pandemic; in fact it's much bigger than our own lives and careers and brief tenure in this world! As followers of Jesus we need to be reminded of the truth we have big-picture hope! It is a hope that takes us far beyond what we now see and experience, but it also takes what we are now doing for the Lord and weaves it together with what is yet to come! (Bible in a year-see the masterpiece God is painting! It is bigger and better than we can imagine! Let's fast forward to the grand finale!)

2 Peter 3:10–13 (ESV)

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...

(Explain the day of the Lord-God's grand finale!)

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.

As many of you know, this time of year a lot of blogs and periodicals devote an entire issue or section to the past year in review—and as you might guess this time around they didn't lack material given all the drama 2020 has given us!

In World magazine's 2020 year in review they wrote about the pandemic, and then they had quite a section listing a number of notable or famous people who died in 2020—people like Kobe Bryant—the famous Los Angeles Laker basketball star, Alex Trebek the host of the popular T.V. game show Jeopardy, a number of famous musicians like country star Charlie Daniels and rock guitarist Eddie Van Halen. Most of the well over 200 people on the list were sports figures, entertainers, TV personalities, Hollywood actors, politicians, authors, or people who had some

significant influence on popular culture. What was fascinating though, was that in addition to this list of very famous people, the editors at World decided to attach an addendum—a list of people we have never heard of before, like 46-year-old Marlon Alston, a bus driver, church musician and Deacon, and an entrepreneur, a man who mentored boys without dads in the North Lawndale community of Chicago. Or, for example, a woman named Patricia H Thatcher, 79 years old, she sang in her church choir for 42 years, worked with refugees, and taught Bible studies. Or Elsa Stewart 62 years old, described as “a pastor’s stalwart prayer warrior and encourager,” she served Christ in Chattanooga Tennessee. These three people, and all the others on the additional list were known mainly by their loved ones, church members and neighbors. They all died of Covid 19. There were no televised ceremonies at Staples Center or tributes at the Grammy’s for these people.

The common denominator for all these people was not fame and fortune, but death. Kobe Bryant at 41 years old, and Patricia Thatcher at 79 years old have one very important thing in common, and of all things it is death! Most of us don’t like to think about death, but this crazy pandemic has forced us to think about it. We can’t seem to escape it. Seen public service ann?

“Wearing masks saves lives.”

This almost sounds like a secular version of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in the first century when he said:

1 Corinthians 9:22 (ESV)

²² I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

Paul was, of course, not talking about saving people from physical death here, but rather saving people from dying apart from Jesus Christ.

This is where we who are followers of Jesus must recalibrate our thinking and our reactions to threats of death. We can be responsible and cautious with respect to the pandemic, but we must not be distracted or consumed by it. We have a much more important mission to attend to because the world in which we now live is not the final picture God has planned! And we do ourselves as well as others a great disservice if we act as though it is. (both phys./spir. Important)

Just as human beings die, so too this universe is going to die—or more accurately be destroyed. And Peter in his second letter makes it clear focusing on this future reality is the motivation for living differently right now. (Look at verse 11)

2 Peter 3:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness...

Prophecy never has been exclusively about timelines, but lifelines—the connection of this life with the life that is yet to appear.

In his first letter Peter was dealing with people who wondered why they were going through such intense suffering, and in so many words Peter says:

Faith that pleases God is often best nurtured in conditions we find undesirable.

Now, however, the problems Peter was facing were false teachers and mockers who were saying God is not going to intervene and interrupt what has been going on for time immemorial! “Chill out,” they said. “God isn’t coming to judge anyone. We have heard that before—and where is the promise of his coming?”

You see, here Peter is dealing with people who were quite smug about the idea history was going to keep marching along without any interruptions from God, or any final judgment or consequences for ungodly behavior. Peter knew people in the

church could be adversely influenced by this kind of thinking so he wrote:

2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

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.

Judgment is coming—you can count on it. (Trillions of supernovas!) And, when you start thinking that what you are building or accomplishing outside of a relationship with Jesus is anything that is going to last, you'd better think again! Just as ocean tides come along and sweep away your carefully constructed sandcastles, even so, God who brought this universe into existence by his word is also going to melt it by his word.

Peter is telling us not to think of this universe as permanent when in reality it is only temporary. It is not the final world God has planned. He has something infinitely better for us. And the fire God is bringing to his grand finale is not only going to totally change this world we are familiar with, it is going to expose everything in this world that cannot possibly be a part of the next!

So what we have here is both a physical and moral come to Jesus moment. What is going to last? It is the purity, righteousness, humility, and love of God in our hearts. It is the character of Jesus formed in our hearts that is going to last! And apparently it takes nothing less than this first world to securely form that in us!

We cannot escape the changes that sometimes overwhelm us, but we can choose to trust God does not subject us to those changes to defeat us, but rather to help us fix our eyes on a city whose builder and maker is God.

Jesus loves you and has promised to walk with you through this world to get you to the next one. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He has promised to come to you through His Holy Spirit and abide with you. How does this work? Trust!

Are you looking ahead? If you are a follower of Jesus you should be! If you aren't, you are setting yourself up for discouragement, or even worse! Look finally at what Peter tells us in verse 13:

2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

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

This to me is one of the most exciting verses in the Bible. We are waiting—expectantly, longingly, excitedly, for the final masterpiece. There is a new world headed our way. It is described in the final book of the Bible—the book of Revelation (21:1-5)

Revelation 21:1–5 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

The grand merger—going to heaven?—to be with Christ—but Jesus is coming back—heaven is coming to earth. The heavenly Jerusalem is not

new, but it is new to this earth. (Hebrews 12:22-23 it is filled right now with the living God, myriads of angels, the church of the firstborn, and the spirits of the righteous made perfect)

That additional list—one more

Patricia Frieson 61 a retired nurse, she was the first person in Illinois to die of Covid-19. While in the hospital she posted on Facebook a message that began, “Until the good Lord calls me away from this world to the next, I want to make it clear that I believe in Jesus Christ as the True Lord and Savior.”

Do you?

