

HEAVEN'S BANKING SYSTEM

II PETER 3:11-13

BECAUSE THE HEAVENS AND EARTH AS WE KNOW THEM WILL BE REPLACED BY A NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH, WE MUST SPEND OUR TIME ON THINGS THAT HAVE ETERNAL VALUE

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II PETER 3:11-13

In my everyday life, I often forget that I am headed ultimately for heaven. In other words, I get caught up with the business of life. You would think that being a minister would make it easier to keep life in perspective. But just like you, I get absorbed in what's going on in my life at the moment. I focus on saving enough money for retirement, paying the weekly bills, and on the everyday tasks of my job.

I'm kind of ashamed to admit this, but there are many times I find myself doing tasks such as preparing a sermon, preparing a Bible study, or visiting people in the hospital, without looking for God's guidance or help. I've been a pastor for about 30 years and things come naturally to me, like many of you who have been doing your jobs for a while.

These days, I seem to be doing much better since I have been serious about spending a Sabbath time before God. I think that our attention is directed to worldly things at the expense of spiritual things.

Let me give you an example. I'm not quite sure if this happened here or at the church I used to pastor. But this morning, I feel generous and gracious so I'll attribute this incident to the church I used to pastor. The one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that even the deacons were extremely materialistic.

One day, I went to visit one of my deacons at home. I had a nice visit with him and his family. Before leaving I said, "Deacon, before I leave, would you like me to read from your family Bible, bless your house and your family?" He said, "I'd like that pastor.

Son, go get our family Bible. It's the big book that we are always referring to." The boy came back ... with the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue.

I'm pretty sure that was at the other church. Our board members diligently study their Bibles, ... right?

Even though there is once again talk about the end of the earth as we know it and the coming judgment, this passage is meant to be positive rather than negative. This passage is meant to be an encouragement to followers of Jesus Christ. One of the problems we believers face in the United States is that we have life too good here. We really do not long to leave this earth and go to heaven. If you look at the history of African American Gospel, this theme of going home to heaven permeates each song. Even today, some of Andrae Crouch's songs like "Soon and Very Soon," "It's Gonna Rain," and "It won't be long" all talk about the time we will be going back to heaven or when Jesus is returning to take us to heaven.

It seems to be that when Christians start to undergo persecution and when things get tough, those are the only times that we focus on, or long for heaven. But Peter's encouragement to us is the main idea of this morning's text. **BECAUSE THE HEAVENS AND EARTH AS WE KNOW THEM WILL BE REPLACED BY A NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH, WE MUST SPEND OUR TIME ON THINGS THAT HAVE ETERNAL VALUE.** For example, chasing after wealth, power, notoriety, material possessions are in the end chasing after the wind. We need to keep the material world in proper perspective. The material things we acquire such as wealth power, influence, or other possessions must be used for eternal purposes because our worldly possessions and accomplishments will all be burned up on the judgment day or left behind at the grave.

Verse 11 and the first half of verse 12 gives us some insight into heaven's economic news. In other words **PURSUING HOLINESS BY LOVING GOD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER WILL LAST THROUGH ETERNITY.** At a rich man's funeral one person asked a friend close to the family, "How much money did he leave behind?" The friend answered, "All of it, madam, all of it." As we study through the rest of Peter's letter we must remember that the grave is no longer a legitimate marker. Peter saw Jesus raised from the dead. He saw the empty tomb and the grave

clothes folded up and left in the tomb. Peter saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. In fact, Peter raised an old lady from the dead himself. Peter knew that we are eternal beings, created to live in eternity. Since we are eternal, we need to work for eternal treasure, treasure that will stand the test of eternal time.

And so in the first phrase of verse 11 he reminds his people of the eternal economy. Last week we talked about how the heavens and earth as we know them will be eaten up by fire. It doesn't matter how much real estate we own, how much money we have in the bank, how high on the corporate ladder we are, ... in the end, it will all be burned up and vanish in an instant. In fact, from science and observation we realize that every thing and every one is decaying and dying. Science postulates that the universe will one day flame out and die.

So here is what we know. We are eternal beings. We will live beyond the grave, beyond the existence of the physical universe. When everything physical has passed away, we will live on. If that is so, then what are some things that will live on with us?

In the second half of verse 11 Peter instructs us on how to make deposits in our heavenly bank accounts. Last week Peter told us what to believe about the end of the world. This week he emphasizes how we are to act based on that belief. All throughout the history of the church, theologians have argued about the order of events leading up to the end. There are many views. However, Peter is not interested in that. What he is interested in is our preparation to live in eternity. He asks the question like this. Based on the fact that Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead, and based on the fact nobody knows when, and based on the fact that we will have to live eternally where He sends us, what do we want to be doing when He comes? To put it another way, if we believe that Jesus died for our sins and if we believe He will judge us, shouldn't those beliefs motivate us to live lives that He will be pleased with? Peter, Paul, and Jesus insist that we marry up faith with works, and theology with life. In other words, we prove who we are and Who we belong to by the way we conduct ourselves.

Peter says that we are to live holy and godly lives. All through the Bible God tells the nation of Israel and us the church to be holy because He is holy. Holy is one of those words that we as Christians use all the time. We use it like we know what it means

and maybe we have some vague idea of what it means. Let me make it simple. Holy means to be set apart for a specific purpose. We could take an ordinary cup, dedicate it to God, and use it only for Communion. From that point on, that cup can only be used to celebrate communion. It can never again be used to serve tea or coffee. It has been set apart for only one purpose. God is holy in the sense that He is One of a kind. There is no other god like Him. All other gods are false gods and not gods at all. God exists and He has set Himself apart to be in a real love relationship with us. The New Testament refers to Christians as saints. The word for saints is simply the same word holy. We as believers are called holy ones. If you have received Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you are a saint. You are a holy one. In other words, we should not be like the people around us. We should be different. We should be set apart from the unbelievers. Again, that doesn't mean we are to be obnoxious or antisocial or loners. Jesus told us that He wants us to live in the world without being tainted by the world. What it does mean is that our purpose for living is totally different from unbelievers. Let's just take our society. Our society values human achievement, success, money, popularity, and pleasure. God's people have been set apart from the rest of the world in that we are to value love, ... true love; love for God and love for each other. The kind of love we are to exhibit is not the self-centered, self-seeking, self-gratifying love of the world. Our love is to be modeled after Jesus. Holy love is based on humility, gentleness, service, and self-sacrifice. Acts of kindness, humility, and service are what characterize godly lives. I don't think that Christianity is all that complicated. If we read, and reread the Gospels, and then try and pattern our lives after Jesus, we can't be too far off the mark. And keep in mind, we are to pattern our lives after the Jesus of the Bible, not some made up Jesus. What never ceases to amaze me is that every pathetic attempt of mine to do good will be rewarded by Jesus. I can't do anything or accomplish anything without His help. Oftentimes He will do things through my life, and then give me credit for it. We make deposits in our eternal bank accounts by humbly following, obeying, and loving God; love that spills out onto those around us. Just think about this one kind of demonstration of love. If you were to lead someone to faith in Christ at school or work. At the end of time, the workplace, the school, and all the accomplishments recorded at those places will all be burned up at the end of time. All your accomplishments will be burned up. But what will remain in eternity is this, a grateful friend for eternity and a "Well done good and faithful servant," from Jesus. Acts of

love and service will be remembered forever.

I'm sure I read the first half of verse 12 many times, but I didn't realize that in some way, we can effect the heavenly economy. This one sentence is loaded with meaning. First of all, we are to live these holy lives excitedly looking forward to the Day of God. Let me try to give you the literal translation of this phrase, "looking forward to and hurrying the coming of the day of God."

First let's talk about the word coming. It is a technical word the New Testament writers used to refer to the second coming of Jesus. It refers to the end of time as described by Peter. The Old Testament writers described this period of time as the Day of the Lord. What is interesting about this wording is that in almost every case except 2, the phrase is "day of the Lord." Here Peter uses the day of God. I think this is intentional because the early church always referred to Jesus as Lord. Here, arguing against all the false teachers of his day and our day, Peter identifies Jesus as God. Jesus is not some tragic human martyr. Jesus is not the husband of Mary Magdalene or some other crazy story, and Jesus' flesh and bones are not in some ancient tomb turned to dust. Jesus was fully human but He was fully God as well. Jesus physically rose from the dead. He is alive. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We as believers are eagerly looking for Him to return.

Here is what else is interesting that I never paid much attention to. Peter says that as we live holy and godly lives eagerly watching and waiting for Him to return, we can actually have a part in speeding up that time. The famous commentator, William Barclay gives 3 ways in which we do this. First, we speed up the time of Christ's return by prayer. Did you ever think about "The Lord's Prayer?" We say, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus taught us to pray for the kingdom to come. As we start to pray for the return of Jesus, it helps us to keep our lives in perspective. We don't get overly excited about all our accomplishments and achievements. We tend to loosen our grasp of all our possessions. And we don't get overly depressed about the injustices we have suffered or the illnesses we face because we know that eternity is a lot longer than our short time on earth.

Barclay goes on to say that Preaching is the next way we hurry up the coming of

Jesus. Jesus said that the gospel would be preached throughout all the world. As each one of us personally evangelizes our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and classmates, we help to fulfill that promise. As we support our foreign missionaries with money and prayers, we help to fulfill that promise.

And finally Penance will help to speed up the day. As we repent as individuals and as a church family, we bring the day of the Lord closer. The Jewish rabbis used to say that the sins of Israel prevented the Messiah from returning. They went on to say that if all of Israel would perfectly keep the Torah for only 1 day, the Messiah would come.

With each passing day, we know the return of Jesus is getting closer. Let us eagerly live for that day by living holy lives. Further, let's do our part in hurrying up that day by prayer, preaching, and penance. These things will all keep us focused on the fact that even though we are decaying day by day and the universe is winding down, we are eternal beings destined to live in heaven. **PURSUING HOLINESS BY LOVING GOD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER WILL LAST THROUGH ETERNITY.** I know that many of us have been hurt in this world but in heaven we will perfectly love and be loved. That is certainly good news for those headed for heaven.

On the other hand, the second half of verse 12 has bad news for unbelievers. You see, **ALL WORLDLY PURSUITS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS WILL BE BURNED UP IN THE JUDGMENT.** The world spends its time, money, and energy chasing after things that will not last. We chase after youth, ... yet we will all get old. Think about this. Donald Trump is building a new luxury high-rise in Chicago . People will pay millions of dollars to buy condos and businesses in it. I'm sure the building and living spaces will be beautiful. But from the moment it is built, it will start deteriorating. And one day, it will be destroyed by fire when Jesus returns. It will be reduced to ashes. Every great art masterpiece, no matter how beautiful or how expensive will be burned up and reduced to ashes. The Art Institute, the museums, every grand and high building, will be reduced to ashes. The houses or apartments we live in will be reduced to ashes.

It doesn't matter if you were the CEO of a major corporation or a person just one step above homelessness. When we die, we will all die without anything. There is

nothing in this material world that will remain in eternity. Peter says that the very stuff that the universe is made up of will melt away. And then everyone whether rich or poor, powerful or powerless, pretty or ugly, will all have to face the judgment of God.

They don't want to believe judgment follows our lives and eternal consequences follow the judgment. That's why so many people are hungry to believe things like the DaVinci Code and the Judas Gospel are true. They hunger to believe that Jesus really didn't raise from the dead and they hunger to believe He is not coming to judge us. But He is alive and He is coming to judge the living and the dead.

Once the world effectively gets judgment out of their heads, they are still left with a dilemma. They are then forced to admit they are working for nothing. In other words, life is then ultimately meaningless. If the grave is all there is, and if the universe is deteriorating and one day going to burn up, then they are faced with a meaningless existence. So they take on the attitude, "Eat, drink, and be merry, ... for tomorrow we die." They have become so depressed over this that people are addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, and the pursuit of pleasure.

I think that people know that there is a God and that He will judge our behavior. The world tries with all its might to suppress the idea and that drives them to the uncontrolled and inexplicable drive towards grasping at every piece of pleasure it can get. And the crazy twist is that people come to love things, which are temporary and use people, who are eternal. Our society is backwards. People love things and use people. That leads nowhere. We as believers should never be confused. We should always remember and remind one another that we are to use things and love people. We are to use material things to sustain our lives, to love God and to love one another. We must remember this because **ALL WORLDLY PURSUITS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS WILL BE BURNED UP IN THE JUDGMENT.**

God told Noah that He would put the sign of the rainbow in the sky to remind Himself and us that He would never again destroy the world by water. However, we should remember that the world will someday be destroyed by fire. So every time we see the rainbow, we should remember that God is faithful. He brought Noah and his family through the flood. He will bring us safely through the judgment. That is the day we should anticipate because verse 13 says that is good news for believers. The rainbow should not only remind us of the judgment. It should also remind us **THE DAY**

WILL COME FOR JESUS TO REWARD US FOR LOVING HIM. Here is where we have to keep a balanced outlook of who we are and where we are going. In other words, we have to be humble in remembering that we can never be good enough or do enough good things to make through the judgment and declared righteous. We must remember to add the grace of Jesus Christ to all our efforts. In other words, we have to remember, as the first phrase in verse 13 states, that the bank is sound. Authentic Christians always remember to add God's grace to everything we do. No matter how hard I try to be holy, and no matter how much progress I actually make, I will always be short. You and I have to humbly remember to add the finished work of Jesus on the cross on our behalf and His holiness to all our attempts at being holy. Sin and Satan may have their way with the world and unbelievers, but Jesus has the last word. Jesus has promised to forgive us from all our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He has promised to bring us safely through the judgment on the basis of His goodness and His righteousness, not ours. We remember that by preaching the gospel to ourselves every day. Whenever we lead someone to Christ, we should review our own relationship with God and renew our commitment to His goodness and His righteousness and humbly ask Him to continue to apply them to our lives.

If people are planning on facing the judgment based on their own goodness, good works, and righteousness, they are for sure lost and destined to spend an eternity in hell. We have to remember that we will only make it through the judgment if we depend totally on the righteousness and goodness of Jesus as He applies it to our lives on our behalf.

We can count on that. The bank is sound. Jesus' work on the cross is sufficient to cover our debt of sin. We are safe. And like people who have invested in retirement plans, the second part of verse 13 reminds us that we should live our lives waiting for our investments to mature. If you are reading along in the NIV, it says, "we are looking forward to." The phrase is actually more positive. It means that we are eagerly looking forward to this day. We are supposed to live in anticipation and expectation of this final day. Again I have to kind of chastise us because most of us, including me, have gotten very comfortable in this world. We kind of like it here. But that means that our vision is too nearsighted. We must remind one another that heaven

is a million times more beautiful than anything on earth. Heaven is more joyous than anything we could ever experience here on earth. And we will never get sick, or hurt, or experience any loss in heaven. We will live in permanent love, joy, peace, and contentment. Life will be perfect. It was easy for the slaves to write about going home to heaven because the lives they lived here were oppressive, discouraging, and dehumanizing. They sang about leaving this world to go to heaven. They eagerly anticipated heaven. Even though many of us have it pretty good here, let us remember that we have much more waiting for us in heaven.

We can eagerly anticipate going home because as the last phrase in verse 13 points out, in heaven, we will be enjoying the fruits of our investments. There are several things that amaze me about the judgment and heaven. Every good thing that we have ever done has only been accomplished by God's provision and God's grace. And yet, He is going to reward us in heaven for it. Let me give you a plain, simple example. Let's say we help out someone financially. First of all, we only have the job we have because of God's provision, His leading, and His grace. The money we make at our jobs doesn't belong to us. It all belongs to God. When we see a person who is in need of financial help, God the Holy Spirit is the One Who put the compassion and desire in our hearts to help. So with God's job, with God's money, and with God's prompting, we give to a poor person. And when we get to heaven, God is going to reward us for that. To me, that is incredible! It would be enough if Jesus would just forgive me of my sins and take me safely through the judgment. But to reward me beyond that for things I did with His resources and His empowerment? That is incredible.

Let's look at our new home. It seems that if in the redemption process, God is going to get rid of all the decayed stuff, and start all over again and create the world perhaps the way it was before the fall. Our present physics, chemistry, biology, and other sciences will no longer apply. Keep in mind, our world changed catastrophically with the fall, the flood, and the tower of Babel. Space, time, physics, biology, and chemistry were all changed so dramatically that we can't even begin to understand the world as it was prior to all these events.

I don't think I could say this any better than Jesus. Listen to Jesus' promises concerning our eternal homes:

“¹Don’t be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. ²There are many rooms in my Father’s home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. ³When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. ⁴And you know where I am going and how to get there” (John 14:1-4 / NLT).

What could we possibly want or have here on earth that could come close to a personally built home by Jesus for us? And we do know how to get there and occupy them. We need to continue to pursue holy lifestyles and not get confused by the world. We do that by reading, studying, and obeying His truth as spelled out in the Bible. It will all pay off in the end. **THE DAY WILL COME FOR JESUS TO REWARD US FOR LOVING HIM.**

I feel compelled to say this one more time. Jesus is spending His time preparing our eternal homes. Our lives here on earth are all about God preparing us to live in our eternal homes. As we go about our everyday business it will help us to never get too excited or too depressed about the ups and downs in this life if we continue to remember this. **BECAUSE THE HEAVENS AND EARTH AS WE KNOW THEM WILL BE REPLACED BY A NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH, WE MUST SPEND OUR TIME ON THINGS THAT HAVE ETERNAL VALUE.**

I think that those of us who gone to church a long time need to remind ourselves to intentionally focus on eternal things because it is easy for us to forget these truths as well. A friend emailed me this story:

“One day, a man went to visit a church. He got there early, parked his car, and got out. Another car pulled up and the driver got out and said, ‘I always park there! You took my place!’

The visitor went inside for Sunday School, found an empty seat and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, ‘That’s my seat! You took my place!’

The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing. After Sunday School, the visitor went into the sanctuary and sat down. Another member

walked up to him and said, 'That's where I always sit! You took my place!'

The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment, but still he said nothing. Later as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood up, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet.

Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out 'What happened to you?'

The visitor replied, as His hat became a crown of thorns, and a tear fell from His eye, 'I took your place!'"

It will be good for us to always remember that only because Jesus took our place on the cross, we can look forward to the end of time, the judgment, and the new heavens and earth.

Let us spend our time focusing on things that will last through eternity and forget about those things that will be burned up in the end.