



2 Peter 3:8-18

Show opening sequence of [Thief in the Night](#).

This film was produced in 1972 and it is claimed that over 300 million people have watched it. It was undoubtedly the "Left Behind" of its day, but without the commercial success of that series. There are two things that strike me about this opening sequence. One—why was this girl sleeping until 10 AM? and two—why is that shaver plugged into the wall? 😊

If you haven't seen it, the low budget film was not so much intended to educate as it was to motivate. It was a scare tactic shown in churches—especially to young people—to make sure they were ready for the rapture. "Jesus is coming like a thief in the night. Make sure you are ready!" Is this how the Bible speaks about the rapture and the second coming of Christ—as a scare tactic to unbelievers to be ready? Actually, this was precisely Jesus' intention when he taught about it in Matthew 24, the same verse that was quoted in the movie.

*But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. **44** Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matt. 24:43-44).*

Paul coined the phrase "thief in the night" in 1 Thessalonians but Jesus was the first to use this idea. But you will notice that Paul used the phrase and same idea for the same purpose that Jesus did—to prepare his listeners. *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1 Thes. 5:2-3).*

This is an enormous topic and I am tempted to teach everything the Bible says about it. But I do want to say one thing about the purpose for understanding the time of the end. The first purpose, as Jesus and Paul identified, is to warn the unbeliever to be ready. This was also the purpose of the Thief in the Night film. Brian Larrington told me that he saw it was he was about eight or nine years old and it scared him to death! He was already saved but it caused him to seriously doubt his salvation until his mom calmed the poor little guy down. This is an important reason for preaching on this topic so if you are not yet a believer, please heed this warning. Either you will die and face the judgment or else Christ will come and you will face the judgment, but either way, you must be ready.

But the other purpose for this topic—and the one that Peter takes—is to encourage and challenge the believer. As we will see in a moment, Peter directed all of his teaching at the Christian and not the unbeliever. Let's read this together.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 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.

Sorry to start on a negative note, but I have to point out that verse eight is one of the most misused verses I have ever encountered. The typical misuse concerns the topic of the age of the universe. Old earth proponents drag out this verse to bolster their argument trying to convince us that the word “day” in Genesis doesn't have to mean day because with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years. In other words, maybe God didn't create in six literal days. Maybe it was six thousand years—or six hundred thousand or six million or six billion?

But this assertion completely ignores the context of this verse. Peter is directly responding to the accusation of the scoffers from verse four. *They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”* The scoffers were scoffing at the promise of Christ' coming and subsequent

judgment. They claimed that God was not planning or not able to keep his promise since so much time had elapsed since the promise had been made. How much more true is this for you and me since another two thousand years have passed since Peter wrote this letter!

Peter has already reminded us that the scoffers deliberately forgot the truth. They willingly turned away from God's past truths which speak to his future promises. Moreover, verse nine frames the context of verse eight. *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness...* Peter is getting to the heart of the matter which is the character of God. His point is that God's character prevents him from making false promises. God has made this promise and God will fulfill this promise. But since the clock continues to tick along, Peter also wanted us to know that what appears as slowness to us is not slowness to God and is not evidence that he will fail to fulfill his promise.

With this context we can now rightly understand verse eight. *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* We must not take this in a hyper-literal sense and understand it to mean that only two days—not two thousand years—have passed since Jesus waked the earth. This is not a math class.

Humans: one day = one day

God: one day = one thousand years

Therefore, if train A is traveling east at 43 miles per hour for 18 hours and train B is traveling west at 37 miles per hour for 22 hours, but God is on train B, when will train C arrive at the station? ☺

The point is that God is not bound to time like you and me. He is not slow to fulfill his promise as we understand slowness. If God is not bound to time, for him, there is no such thing as past, present and future. These are all time constraints that apply to his creation and to his creatures. God does not experience one day after another in succession. Therefore, if he is not bound by time, could we say that this promise is already fulfilled? From his perspective, a promise is as good as a fulfillment. They are essentially one and the same. But on the other hand, since he created time and put us within time he accommodates himself to our time. Even though he is not bound by time, we are, and therefore he understands our difficulty with the concept of promise and fulfillment and wants to bring encouragement to us. *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness.*

Peter was very emphatic about this in verse ten. *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.* There are two emphases in this verse. The day of the Lord **will** come. It is definite and as good as done. The day of the Lord will come and it will come like a **thief**. Here we come back to that word thief again. Jesus himself said that he would come like a thief. Paul said that Jesus would come like a thief and now here we have the same description in Peter's second letter.

So, is this meant to strike fear into our hearts? I intentionally created a powerpoint slide that looked somewhat ominous with slightly creepy font (see front page). So which is it—are we supposed to be afraid or encouraged? I already answered this in part at the beginning of the message but let me fill it in a bit.

The unbeliever is to tremble at the day of the Lord. There is no level of fear that is too great when an unbeliever faces the return of Christ and the judgment. Now of course we want that trembling fear to turn into genuine repentance and saving faith so that they do not need to be afraid.

Is there fear for the believer then? I would say that there should be a reverent fear and I'll talk about that more in a moment, but let's return to the 1 Thessalonians passage to answer this question.

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. If you stopped reading at verse three you might get the impression that Paul wanted everyone to be afraid but look at the next three verses.

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Do you see? As believers this day will not surprise us like a thief in the night because we are part of the day. If we know the Lord we are already prepared for his coming. This assurance of salvation and absence of judgment then, is the foundation and motivation for how to respond to the day of the Lord.

By the way, this is our first point of application and Peter was very careful to drive his letter toward application. In verse eleven he wrote, *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be...?* That's a great question to ask everyday of our lives. What sort of people ought we to be? In light of the glorious gospel, what sort of a person should I be today? How should the gospel effect my decisions, actions, motivations and affections today? So, application number one is that we are not in darkness. We are not to fear but be encouraged.

Our second application comes in verse 12—*waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God*. The implication here is that we can hasten the day of the Lord, that we can somehow speed up the timetable on the end times. Peter did not give any hint as to what this means or how we can hasten the coming of the Lord.

There is, however, a segment of evangelical Christianity that feels they are able to do this. This group believes that we are already in the millennium or that the millennium is a spiritual reign of Christ and therefore, the world is getting better and better. More than that, we are to usher in the kingdom by "reclaiming the culture" and when we make the culture good enough, Jesus will return.

I have several thoughts on this belief. First of all, I don't see any evidence that the world and the culture is getting progressively better, but that's just my observation. Second, this notion of reclaiming the culture tends to be centered on politics and certain politicians. The basic idea is to

pass good laws which will outlaw bad and sinful behavior. If we had a “moral majority” then our nation would be a much better place. I think we would all agree that we would like our legislatures to pass good laws. I would rejoice if abortion was outlawed. I am not saying that we should not vote and devote some time to politics and societal problems but neither should we fall into the trap of thinking that we can reform and reclaim the culture.

I heard an excellent point from John MacArthur recently who said that when it came to morality in a culture, the nation of Israel in Jesus’ day was the most moral culture in its entire history. They had temple worship, they had gotten rid of all idols and the Pharisees had strict moral codes to guide everyday life. It was a not utopian culture but it was the best Jewish culture ever, and look where it got them. Last week I said that the goal of parents is not to produce “good” children but rather godly children and in the same way, the goal of Christians is not to make a “good” culture and a good society but rather a godly society through the spread of the gospel.

But we still haven’t answered the question regarding how we hasten the day of the Lord but I think it quite likely has to do with what I just said—the spread of the gospel. For example, In Matthew 24:14, Jesus said, *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* Christ will not return until the gospel has been proclaimed to every tribe, nation, people and language. So does this mean that if we reach the entire world with the gospel that Christ will come? In other words, can we “hasten” his return if we work harder at missions? I would not be dogmatic on this point but it certainly makes sense when you consider Jesus words here, especially when you combine it with the next application from Peter.

The third application comes in verse fifteen—*count the patience of our Lord as salvation.* This perfectly matches verse nine. *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.* We may be impatient for the Lord’s return, and in a sense, that’s a good thing. The second to the last verse in the whole Bible reads, Come Lord Jesus! Maranatha! We are to long for his coming but the paradox is that we are also to be patient because what looks like slowness to us is more time for unbelievers to come to repentance. Remember, Peter is still responding to the scoffers who say that Jesus is not coming and his promise will not be fulfilled. But now we learn that not is the promise to be fulfilled, but another promise is built into the other promise—the promise of an expanded kingdom of believers, the promise of additional souls entering into saving faith.

So what are we to do while we wait? Verse 14—*But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.* Peter carefully chose the phrase “without spot or blemish” to represent the polar opposite of the false teachers whom he describes as “blots and blemishes” in chapter two. We are to be found without spot or blemish. In verse 11 he said we are to live lives of godliness and holiness.

Remember last week we talked about repetition, well I think we’ve all heard this before, haven’t we? Be holy. Be godly. We all know this but aren’t always sure what it looks like. Is it just a matter of staying away from that bad list of sins? Is it that we are supposed to be better than the

guy sitting next to us? I may not be able to be the most righteous guy in the church, but I think I can get in the top ten. Is that good enough?

Let me try to illustrate godliness and holiness with a verse I memorized recently. I am working on memorizing Matthew chapter five because the Bible quizzers are learning Matthew this next year. Many verses are already hitting me between the eyes, which is one of the benefits of Bible memory. In the process of learning each word, each phrase, each verse and each chapter, there is a great deal of review and repetition built into the process, right? And what do you call it when you think about the same verse over and over? We call that meditation. Now you might just memorize the verse and not really be meditating on it, but there is great potential for that.

But finally to the verse—Matt 5:6. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.* What stood out to me is the word satisfied. Oh how I want to be satisfied, but such a place too often escapes me. I am hungry for something, I know this much. I look for satisfaction but often remain hungry. The world cannot satisfy our hunger, no matter how hard we try. Are we agreed on that? But here's the thing. God cannot satisfy our hunger either. Do you agree with that? OK, let me clarify that last statement. God cannot satisfy our hunger unless we are hungering for the right thing. Go back and look at the verse. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness**, for they shall be satisfied.* If I hunger for something other than the righteousness of God, then I can never be satisfied.

We all hunger for things that we know are sinful and not holy. That's the stuff we know we shouldn't hunger for. But many of us also hunger for Christian things which end up being poor substitutes for Christ. We hunger after Christian service because we like to be seen doing good things. We hunger for influence among other Christians and may subtly claw for power and recognition because we are starving for it. But to the observer, and even to our own hearts, this hunger may appear to be a hunger for righteousness, but it's really a hunger for Christian behavior, not for Christ the person. Do you see—we miss the satisfaction of being filled because we have the wrong hunger.

We just picked up Ryan after two weeks of Foundation Camp at Living Waters. From what we have heard so far, I would highly recommend this for your young teen. As he was telling all of his crazy stories yesterday—including one from Josh that I can't tell from the pulpit—he said something in passing that really struck me. He said, "We didn't really do a lot of fun stuff, but we had a blast." Foundation Camp is not like the usual week of camp. It's tough. When they're done they all get t-shirts that look like Army shirts, with the idea that they just finished a sort of Christian boot camp. Of course they do fun stuff, but fun is not anywhere near the focus or priority. So they didn't really do a lot of fun stuff, but they still had a blast doing hard things. They had a blast because they endured the challenge together and made new friends in the process. Moreover, they had a great deal of fun even though no one was necessarily aiming at fun. Do you see? They aimed at righteousness but got fun thrown in as a bonus, but had they aimed at fun they would have gotten neither fun nor righteousness.

When you aim at anything less than the righteousness of Christ—if you hunger for anything less than the righteousness of Christ, you will never be satisfied. Furthermore, all sin is a hunger for something but we think that since we are Christians, what we need to do is stop being hungry.

We need to turn off our hunger for these sinful things. So then we view holiness and godliness as a kind of eternal self-denial. Where we're hungry all of the time but never satisfied. It's like a strict diet where we never get to eat anything we like. But this is a twisted form of holiness because Jesus said that we would be satisfied. In fact, Jesus wants us to be satisfied.. Holiness is not a matter of pretending you are not hungry but rather learning to be hungry for the proper thing. This is the kind of waiting of which Peter spoke.

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