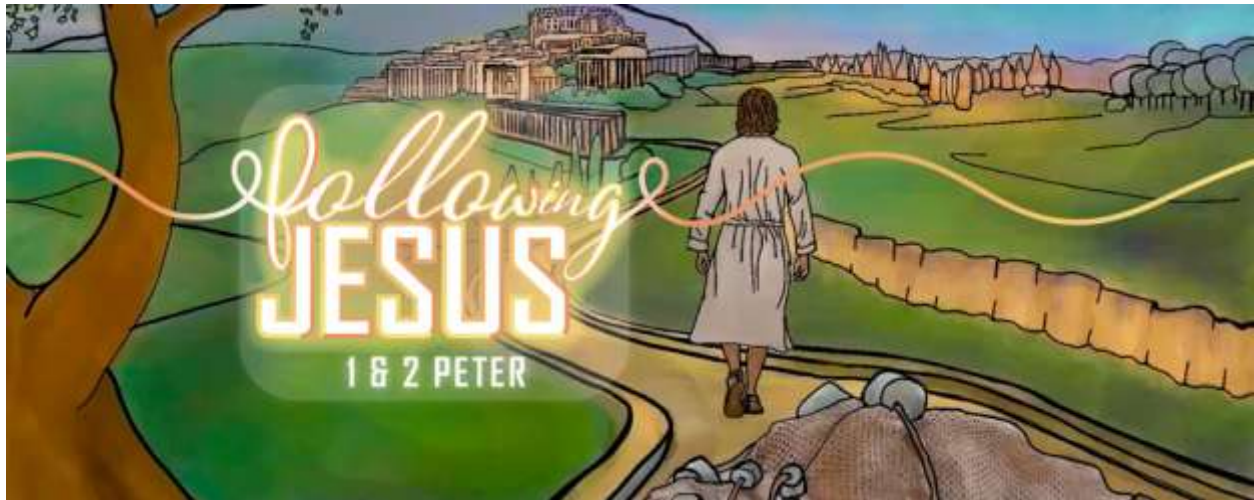


Following Jesus
1-2 Peter
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
August 31, 2025

TEXT: 2 Peter 3:1-13



Good morning, Beloved. I love to be around godly people who are older than I am. I have noticed that people whose godliness and commitment to Christ are really deep get more hopeful as they get older. If you haven't realized it yet, as these mortal bodies start to age and change, you are able to do fewer things than you thought you could.

But though our bodies fail and get weaker in one sense, people who know Christ well become more hopeful. They become more hopeful for a very particular reason: As you get older and walk longer with Jesus Christ, your confidence in people lessens a little, becomes a little more realistic, and your confidence in Jesus Christ goes up and up and up. The promises of Christ and the promise of His Word begin to really fuel your hope. That is what we have as we near the end of our summer series in 1 and 2 Peter.

Peter has been walking with Christ for three decades. He writes these two short letters, and, near the end of his life, he is reminding us of our scriptural hope of the end. It is a powerful portrayal of Christian hope. That hope, as we will see, is a hope of a completely renewed creation where evil has no place. That is a Christian hope.

Let's look at this passage together. It starts off in a way that assumes we have been tracking with him. He says in 2 Peter 3:1:

"This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved."

He calls them “beloved.” I love to call you “beloved.” The New Testament writers love to call you “beloved.” Jesus likes to call you “beloved.” Deep down, you need to know this. I love how often this is mentioned in the Bible. If you wonder who you are, that is just one word that the New Testament is constantly calling you. We are beloved.

He says this is his second letter. If you have any doubts about that, he continues, in 2 Peter 3:1:

“In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder ...”

“Sincere” is an important adjective. A sincere mind is different from a skeptical or cynical mind. We will see in this passage that there is an anti-type to the sincere mind. A sincere mind is a mind that is dedicated to God and knows enough of the trustworthiness of Scripture to keep pressing forward. Peter says he is reminding us of essential things. He is not always seeking something novel, but instead, he is reaffirming something true. Sometimes it is important not to look for the *new* thing, but to remember the *true* thing. So he says in 2 Peter 3:2:

“... you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles ...”

This is Peter's way of summarizing the whole canon of Scripture: Remember the words of Scripture.

A couple of Sundays ago, Peter urged us to pay close attention to God's Word as a light in the darkness. Now he says remember the prophets. It is a way of summarizing the Old Testament. Remember the commandments of our Lord and Savior, the Gospel narratives, and also the instructions we received through the apostles. So Peter knows the other New Testament writers. He is about to refer, next week, to Paul's own writings.

Then he says this, in 2 Peter 3:3:

“knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing ...”

So, scoffers scoff. This is a Semitic expression, where we have the noun tucked in with the verb. It's like, “I dreamed a dream.” Here, “scoffers scoff.” They come in the last days. Remember that the New Testament writers believe that they are *in* the last days. The last days are not something that produces the end of the world at the end of history. The last days in the New Testament are the great era that we are in now, that starts with the death and resurrection of Christ. Yet, though God's new world has been launched, there will be people who still don't get it, and there will also be people who are just in the habit of jesting about everything.

That is a bit of a feature of our society today: constantly joking,; constantly making fun; spoof this. It's a way of protecting oneself against taking something seriously. Yet here, the “scoffing”

thing, or the mocking, is related to the desire to simply do your own thing. We will see the specific scoffing in just a moment.

That type, where everything-ridiculed, is not a mode of discourse that God loves. I like a good joke, and humor is something that can be used to honor God, but scoffing and ridicule are not in the spirit of how God loves human speech to be used. Psalm 1:1-5 says this:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on His law he meditated day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

In 2 Peter 3:4, Peter tells us the specific nature of the mocking, or scoffing, that the Christians he's addressing were encountering:

“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 specific charge, or question, or doubt, or skepticism is: “Where is the promise of Jesus's return? Jesus said He was going to come back, and it just looks like everything is continuing as it was. Where is the realization of His promised return? The world continues as it is since the beginning of Creation.”

You might be thinking, “What is so dangerous about that question?” We are told that it is a question asked in a scoffing way, but there is an implicit conclusion to that question. “Where is the promise of His coming?” is really way of saying, “He's probably not coming.” And, if He's probably not coming, the sermon from last Sunday about the reality of God's righteous judgment at the end gets quietly pushed to the side. And, if He is not coming, and everything is just going to continue as it always has been, then I guess we are free to just live as we want.

There is a third implicit consequence to that: If He is not coming and everything is just going to continue the way it is, then the primary responsibility that God has entrusted to His followers is probably not that important either. There is a whole set of things that come with this. So Peter wants to address it. As he addresses it, he ends up describing the future hope that we long for as believers.

Peter says in 2 Peter 3:5, concerning the scoffers:

“... they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the Word of God ...”

We have seen throughout these letters that Peter, the Galilean fisherman, turns out to be Peter the Galilean fisherman, follower of Jesus, who reads the Bible a lot, because his writings are saturated with quotations and allusions to the Scriptures. So when he says “pay attention to the Scripture,” he is telling us to do something that he himself is doing. He notices something that has never occurred to me, though maybe it has to you. What he notices in reading Genesis is that the universe actually had a beginning. Okay, I’ve thought of that. But his point here is to address that scoffing thought that the universe has just always been how it is. He says, “No, that’s actually not true. There is a beginning out of water, through water.” The opening verse of the Bible, in Genesis 1:2, says:

“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”

Genesis 1 says that God separated the waters from above and below.

But Peter continues by saying that not only was there a beginning to the universe, but there will also be a judgment of God. In 2 Peter 3:6, he says:

“... by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.”

He is describing the Flood. Creation is not eternal and independent of God. It is fragile and dependent on the Word of God.

When Christine and I met, we were in seminary. We would meet and we would memorize the book of Hebrews together as a way of getting to know each other. I still remember some of the lines that I had never noticed before. One of those lines was Hebrews 1:3:

“[Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power.”

I had not really noticed that before, not just that He is the Creator, but He is the Sustainer. He holds this whole thing together by His Word of power, daily, hourly. That means you and I are held together by the Word of Christ’s power.

John Polkinghorne, British physicist and believer, reflecting on this, was simply in awe of Christ’s ongoing power. I want to direct your attention to the reality of His ongoing sustaining of the world. If Christ lets go of you, you fall apart. If Christ lets go of this world, it falls apart. Peter’s point is that the world that we encounter in Genesis is a world where God acts to create. He creates a world with design, order, and intention. But it is also a world where God, the living

God, is actively involved, and He responds—note carefully—to human conduct done on the earth.

In Genesis 6, humanity multiplies on the earth, which was our original charge: be fruitful and multiply. But, after the fall, in Genesis 3, our multiplication ends up being a multiplication not just of image bearers of God, but a multiplication of sinful people doing sinful things. The touchstone of our sinfulness is to not receive a spouse as a gift from God, as Adam does in the Garden and to burst into poetry when he sees his bride, but in Genesis 6, human evil is people taking other people for their own use. That one thing summarizes it all. God saw the wickedness of humanity, that it was great, and God said, “I’m going to judge this world.” Notice that the judgment that comes—and Peter has used this analogy before—is a judgment that removes unrighteousness and provides salvation for those who trust Him. Those always go together. There is never judgment without salvation, and there is never salvation, meaningfully, without God’s righteous judgment.

The flood narrative in Genesis 6 to 9 is widely attested in other ancient Near Eastern texts. This is an interesting thing. Other ancient Near Eastern writings outside of the Bible talk about it. Now, there are some differences, but it is mentioned. Greek historians mention it as well. Early Christian apologists who were introducing the Bible to people who had never read it before often made this point. They said the events described in the Bible are attested outside of the Bible. At the end of this judgment, we see that only Noah and his family are left, and they emerge from the ark like a new Adam, and Noah’s first act is worship. He builds an altar and he offers a sacrifice of praise to God. God reaffirms humanity’s calling to Noah and his family. In Genesis 9:7, God tells Noah and his family:

“And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”

Then God says, “I’m going to give you a sign.” In Genesis 9:12-13, God tells Noah and his sons:

“This is the sign of the covenant that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth

God gives Noah a sign of a rainbow and says, “You’re going to see the rainbow in the sky, and that is a sign that I will never again judge the world with a flood.” He says, “It is a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth, and”—note this carefully—“the earth is not going to be destroyed.” So, remember that when you see the rainbow. Some scholars think that the image of the bow also has the significance of God as a warrior Who has set His bow down. So when you see the rainbow, from the Bible’s perspective, you are supposed to see the rainbow and think God made a promise that He would never destroy the world again by a flood. That is a template.

Peter says by the same word, that is God's Word, the heavens and earth that now exist, the “now” world—notice we’re not in a different world than the world that Noah was in—the world that we are in now, Peter says, is stored up for fire. In 2 Peter 3:7, we read:

“by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”

The world is kept until the Day of Judgment. Notice that what is destroyed in the analogy of Noah is the destruction of the ungodly. It is not just ungodly persons, but it is ungodliness. You know deep down in us there is a longing for unrighteousness or injustices to be set right. The God of the Bible says, “I’m going to do that.”

Peter says in 2 Peter 3:8, calling us “beloved” again:

“... 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.”

Peter shifts from encouraging us with the reality that creation doesn't have an independent, always-the-same existence, to the reality of God's judgment. He shifts now to the question of the timing, which was part of the scoffers’ question. He responds in a wonderfully exemplary way by quoting the Bible. He quotes the only Psalm that is attributed to Moses, Psalm 90. In Psalm 90, Moses gives a set of descriptions that celebrate God's power, God's strength, and also God's righteous judgment. Peter quotes Psalm 90:4:

“For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday ...”

In the Hebrew text, the Septuagint translation has it the way Peter cites it: “A thousand years is like a day.”

I know that some of us are thinking, “Aha! Here it is! Here's the mathematical table that gives us the chronology of the universe. That’s it! Six days of creation; the world must be 6000 years old. That’s it! The math works out.” If you have that thought, you are not the first to have that thought. Some people in the ancient world had that thought. One early Christian writing called *The Epistle of Barnabas* used this formula to calculate the age of the universe. He said six days of creation means that there are 6000 years. The world is 6000 years old. In his day, in the first century, it means that that must be the last day. A thousand years. Millennial reign. I got it all worked out. Well, it doesn't necessarily work that way.

What *is* the point? “A thousand years is like a day.” Is that a literal formula? Or is it instead Peter trying to help us see that a thousand years of historical time is equivalent to one day of theological time? Is it just a figurative expression to help us see that we seem to be in a hurry when God is not, and that God is delaying for a really important reason?

If you were here at Kenwood for the Revelation series, you may recall how we saw that throughout Revelation God's delay in returning is to provide space for the Great Commission to be fulfilled. As much as we long for—and I long for—that world that Peter describes, a world in which only righteousness dwells, every day that we wait, or weeks that we wait—rather, every day that *He* waits—is one more day for people to believe. One more day. I think if we could all see with great clarity what Jesus Christ accomplishes in the world in one day, we would just weep. Yesterday, as just a small part of His work, a group from our church participated in the prison ministry. One hundred ninety three people decided for Christ yesterday. That is just one thing that Jesus Christ did yesterday. If we could see it all over the world, we would be amazed.

In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter says:

“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.”

So to the scoffing questions, “Where is His coming? Is He coming back? Does His creation exist as it always has been? Can I just live however I want? Can we neglect our responsibilities?” Peter says these aren’t true. God creates the world. God interacts with His world. He responds to human conduct on it. The patience of His delay is to provide space for people to come to repentance and to come to faith, and to provide space for us to be about what He told us to be about: “Go make disciples of all nations.”

If you are not actively involved in disciple-making, I want to ask you right now, why not? That is something that we all should be involved in, because Jesus said to *all* of us, “Go make disciples of all nations.” That is an increasing emphasis here at Kenwood. We want to support you and equip you, but sometimes we need to simply tell you, “You can do this. Jesus told you to do it. And by the way, better than any book or process we can give you, Jesus himself said, ‘I will be with you.’” So if you want to be with Jesus, then just do what He's doing. It's awesome.

In the last part of the passage, Peter describes for us what the Lord's return will be like, what the Day of the Lord will be like. “The Day of the Lord” is Old Testament language for God's return, His Day, when He will set all wrongs right. Peter starts, in 2 Peter 3:10, by saying:

“the Day of the Lord will come like a thief ...”

This reflects Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24. Jesus says that the Day of the Lord will come, and it will be like a thief. This is a rather surprising image, for Jesus to say, “When I return it will be kind of like a criminal coming.” Yet it gets your attention. It is not the criminality that is in view. It is the observable behavior of thieves, that they come when you are not expecting them. Because if you knew they were coming, then you would have your outdoor cameras set, and you would be able to watch them, safely, from your basement. So you don't know when that

Day is coming.

Jesus says this, though, in Matthew 24:43:

“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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

So far so good. He is coming when you do not expect it, so be ready.

But what does being ready actually mean, according to Jesus? Does it mean just hunker down, watch the news, and wait? No. Jesus, in Matthew 24, goes right into describing the faithful servant. The faithful servant, in their readiness, is doing what the master asked them to do. The unfaithful servant is neglecting, and saying, “My master is delayed. Who knows when he's going to come back?” So the unfaithful servant eats and drinks with his buddies and neglects his task from the master. Readiness, according to Jesus, is being about disciple-making.

In the second part of the passage, in 2 Peter 3:10, Peter says that when the Lord comes:

“then the heavens will pass away with a roar ...”

It's going to be loud. Verse 10 continues:

“and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

The *ESV* says “the heavenly bodies.” The Greek text says literally “the elements.” This is where it gets more challenging. Peter says that the elements will be burned up and dissolved.

So what happens when Jesus returns? According to Peter, the Day of the Lord will come with a loud sound like a roar. In the Bible, the loud sounds at the Lord's coming are trumpet sounds. Revelation is a very loud book. There are lots of loud voices. The best and loudest sound is the sound of every created creature singing, in Revelation 5. When John hears Jesus speaking in Revelation 1, Jesus' voice is like the sound of many waters. That is loud, like Niagara Falls. But here Peter uses the word “roar.” Lions roar. Peter says when the Lord comes back he will roar like a victorious lion, and that will be the sound of His victory.

But then, continuing in 2 Peter 3:10, Peter says that the elements will be burned up.

There have been three interpretations as to what this means.

-The first interpretation is that the word “elements” means what we tend to think it means:

earth, air, fire, and water. They will be burned.

-A second interpretation as to the interpretation of this is that this word is used in the Bible to describe fallen angels. So will it be the case that when Christ returns there will be a judgment and that evil powers will be removed?

-I think the third and best interpretation hears this as recalling Jesus' language in Mark 13, where Jesus says that when the Son of Man returns the sun will be dark and the moon will not give its light, the stars will be falling and the powers in heaven will be shaken. I think this is what George Caird calls "cosmic dissolution language," meaning that the visible universe will be shaken, or it will be changed. It will be reconfigured in some dramatic way.

How will this visible world be reconfigured?

The last part of the verse is the most important and, not coincidentally, the most difficult. In the *ESV* translation, in the last part of verse 10, Peter says:

"the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

If we look at other English translations of 2 Peter 3:10, we notice the translators' difficulty. We see that the translators select very different expressions. Here's a selection of some of the other choices: The *CSB* says "the earth and the works done on it will be disclosed." The *NIV* says "the earth and everything done on it will be laid bare." The *King James Version* says "the earth and the works done on it will be burned up." You can see in your pew Bible that there is a little footnote on this expression, that the *King James* translation is following a textual variant.

What is Peter saying here?

A very literal translation of this verse says that "the earth and the deeds done on it will be found." It is the Greek verb *heurisko*. It is what Archimedes said in the bathtub when he figured out how to weigh the king's crown. He said, "Eureka! I found it! I figured it out!" What does Peter mean? That the world will be judged with fire, and that everything done on planet Earth will be found out? That is the image. Everything will be known. No secrets. We know we cannot hide things from God. In the end, what we do will be tested by fire. That is what I think the imagery is here. The imagery of fire for this world is related to the analogy of the judgment that was produced by the waters of the Flood. In the Flood situation, what happens when God judges the world with water? The world itself remains, but unrighteousness is taken out. I think for many readers of the Bible, maybe in part due to the influence of the *King James Version*, we have imagined that the end of the Bible's vision is that the world is incinerated. I don't think that is actually the Biblical picture. It is not Peter's picture here. What is removed is unrighteousness and ungodliness.

How do we know if we are reading this correctly? I think we can know by what Peter says next. If this is true, if the at the end of your life what you do is tested and refined by fire, then how should you live now?

See how Peter says it in 2 Peter 3:11-12:

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 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 (lit. elements) will melt as they burn!”

Since all these things are this way, he says, what kind of people should you be? You should be people who strive to live lives of holiness and godliness, because whatever you do in the name of Jesus Christ, it passes the test of the refining fire. Whatever is in your life that is not for Christ, or is on your own, doesn't make it through that refining fire. He says we should “wait for and we should hasten the coming of the Day of God.” That is a fascinating word choice. How do you and I contribute meaningfully to accelerating the return of Jesus? What can you and I possibly meaningfully contribute to hastening, or making Christ come sooner? How do we play a role in that? The only way I see in Scripture that we play a role in that is to work diligently at the work He gives us to do, because He said, “when that work is finished, I'll be back. When the gospel has been proclaimed to all nations, I'll return.”

The longer you walk with Jesus, the more hopeful you become. You see Him changing lives. Peter's last statement, in 2 Peter 3:13, is:

“But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

Remember the question of the scoffers: “What about His promise?” Peter comes back and says, “No. No. You want to talk promise? I trust His promise, *and according to His promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*”

This is the scriptural hope. Sometimes we imagine new heavens and a new earth as a brand new universe. Now, it may be that. God certainly can do that. But the word “new” in the Bible, in both Greek and Hebrew, and in examples I'll show you, is also used for “renew.” When the Lord talks about a new moon in the Bible, it's not like every month He launches a brand-new moon up there. It is a new moon. When God talks about a new covenant in Jeremiah, it's not actually a brand-new one. It is a new covenant that is renewing a covenant relationship that was broken and now has been repaired. When we say in the New Testament, “If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation,” it means that we are new in a sense, but we are not a *de novo* brand-new creation at that moment. In the Bible, “new” is often used in this wonderful way

that it is “new” in the sense that what was bad and broken and sinful or evil has been taken out or repaired, and now it's like new. Praise God. This I believe is the ending that the Scripture envisions.

We know that Peter has been reading the Bible. We will hear him say explicitly next Sunday that he is not reading only the Old Testament, but he is also reading Paul, which is kind of cool, to think that they're reading each other's works. This is the same perspective that Paul has in Romans. Paul says in Romans 8:18:

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

What is that?

In Romans 8:19-20, he says:

“... the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility [in the garden], not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ...”

The fallenness of humanity is not God's great design or end place. What is this hope?

In Romans 8:21, Paul says the hope we have:

“... the Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

The hope that we have is that the Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption, or sinful people doing sinful things on it, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

We will never again hear a line like the one we hear in Genesis 4 when God says that the blood of your brother is crying out to Me from the ground. Creation laments in a personified way. It laments unrighteousness done on it in any form: the taking of life; the exploitation of people. We do all kinds of dreadful things. The hope of the Bible is that we are forgiven of those dreadful things by the willing sacrifice of Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb, and that when He returns in glory, there will be a refining, fiery judgment, and evil will be removed, and this world will be totally renewed. I long for this, and I know that this will happen. That is why, though our mortal bodies fail, I know that God intends to renew this world and that we are going to play an important part in that in the end.

How does this passage call us to action?

Number one: **Don't get swept up in a culture of mockery and scoffing.** It's around us. This kind of make-fun-in-a-coarse-way, and mock this, and then I'll just mock that in return, and then you can mock my mocking of your mocking, it goes nowhere. It goes nowhere good. It does not produce the fruit of righteousness in us. So just opt out.

Number two: **You can counter skepticism and uncertainty about the Lord's delay in returning with a clear understanding of theological history.** The analogy of the Flood. Creation is from God, but it is fragile; God interacts with it and will remove unrighteousness. This keeps our eyes on the Lord. It also means that we love the Lord *and* His Creation, but we do not worship the Creation. We never say "Mother Nature" because Mother Nature does not exist. The world exists, but Creation doesn't have some independent, personified powers of its own. I am all for praising God for the woods, and I like to be outside, but I never want to worship Creation. I worship the God who created Creation. That is a subtle but important difference. We trust the promise of Revelation 11:18 where God says now is the time to destroy, not the earth, but to destroy those who destroy the earth.

It is a warning. If you think, "Well, I can live for myself and do whatever I want; I can take advantage of other people," you are going to end up, no matter what your intentions are, committing acts of unrighteousness, and the God who sees and knows everything is going to pass us all through a refining fire at the end. What is done for the Lord is going to pass through that.

Number three. That means that **we have got to pursue holiness and godliness, and that we have got to trust that our disciple-making labor is not in vain.** In fact, that is what He asked us to be doing. All our work will be tested, and what is done in His name will remain.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for a passage that is deep and rich and paints a picture for us of what is to come, while also telling us how to live now. Lord, we ask Your forgiveness where we have gotten swept up into a culture that loves to delight in scoffing and mocking. We ask for forgiveness for that, Lord. We pray, Lord, for forgiveness where we have neglected the primary responsibility we have from You, to be about discipleship and disciple-making. And Lord, we pray now that You would help us to pursue godliness and holiness, to live in the light of Your return, to live as people of hope in a world that is searching for meaningful hope. We thank You, Lord God, that You are not slow regarding Your promises, but intend to fulfill every single one of them at Your time and Your way. We give You the glory in advance.

In Jesus' Name, Amen