



LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, September 18, 2011

(See the interview with Revivalist Dr. Charles Booth in the Cultural Resource unit.)

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Lection – 2 Peter 3:9-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 9) The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (v. 10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

(v. 11) Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, (v. 12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

As a little boy growing up in the Abyssinia Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia, where my father was the pastor, I always looked with great expectancy to two events on our church calendar year. One was Passion Week, where six churches within the community including my “home” church gathered, devoting a week to commemorate and celebrate the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The other was the Annual Fall Revival experienced by the entire city. I can remember persons coming from around the Park Place community and beyond to “enjoy” powerful preaching and inspiring music. It was during the Annual Revival where many were saved and experienced God’s presence like never before. The emphasis on “saving souls” impacted more than the local church. It impacted the community! For many African American churches, the Annual Revival was then the highlight of the year. Thus, great care and attention went into selecting the preacher and inviting local church choirs to participate.

Well, today in most African American churches, this type of Annual Revival is a relic. It has been replaced by Conferences and/or when revivals are held no longer do we have one preacher and local church choirs but rather multiple preachers and a guest artist. The driving force now is to grow the church by inviting a “renowned” preacher, and the emphasis on salvation has been supplanted by promoting the church through attracting the “saved.” I believe that a renewed emphasis on saving souls coupled with reviving the saved will positively impact the local church and engage us to, once again, place evangelism at the forefront of our ministry visions. I applaud the placement of the theme of “REVIVAL” within the African American Lectionary, for it is a tradition we should and must allow to live again.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 2 Peter 3:9-12

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

We live in a world that celebrates the immediate, the right away, and the now! We place far too much emphasis on the pursuit of more, Now! I believe this mindset of immediacy has created a disconnect between living for the now and planning for the future. Culturally and religiously, our elevation of the Now causes us, even within the Church, to improperly prioritize. If we are not careful, we will make every decision in light of today, not taking into account the reality of tomorrow. In essence, we will seek to satisfy ourselves and will strive to sanitize our lives of those things that may be necessary for the amazing (though perhaps long and difficult) journey that God has ordained for us—this journey, ending with what the writer of our text calls “THE DAY OF THE LORD.”

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Within 2 Peter, we are challenged to live our lives with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as our inspiration for how we live and plan. It is the expectation that one day the Lord will return that provides us the strength and discipline needed to make healthy decisions, live holy lives, contribute to the world, and enjoy life. This is why we need revival again and again.

Though as the writer shares, Jesus Christ has delayed his coming so that others can repent, confessing him as their Lord, the DAY OF THE LORD is still to come. He announces this because after the fall of Jerusalem, coupled with the aggressive opposition of the Gnostics and others towards Christ's followers, many who believed became discouraged. They found themselves living between the painful reality of their today and the uncertainty of tomorrow—how long would it take for Jesus to return? So Peter admonishes them to stay the course and to live their lives in light of eternity. Though he tarries, as the old saints say, we should continue to live as if he is coming back today.

In light of eternity, what should disciples of Jesus Christ embrace to aid us in dealing with waiting for The DAY OF THE LORD? We need revival, revival that reminds us that we are created in the image of God for the purposes of God, especially if we do not have a personal relationship with God. We need revival that informs us that it takes daily work, prayer and repentance to discern and accept what God has prepared for us. We need revival to remind us that Jesus Christ is faithful to his promises.

The opponents of the faith, during the time of the Apostle Peter, used what appeared to be the delay of the Parousia as “evidence” that the words of Christ were not true. These harsh and continuous attacks on the faith community caused some to doubt and others to at least wonder. They watched the church fathers and mothers die without the manifestation of the return of Christ.

So, the writer declares, in no uncertain terms, that Jesus Christ is coming back and offers a reason why he has delayed. The implication of his delay is more a statement of his amazing patience and never-ending mercy for those who do not believe than a negation of his promises. He delayed so humanity would be granted opportunity to come into the saving reality of the Cross. Thus though he has delayed, we can still take Jesus at his word. This is to encourage us, as well, who like our faithful fore parents, wait for him to come. In a time of great cultural confusion, economic distress, and societal upheaval, his coming would be a welcomed relief. Yet, we continue to serve him with gladness and faithfulness no matter how long it takes, trusting that his promises are true.

For a people who understand opposition and oppression, the DAY OF THE LORD has always served as motivation. Our ancestors lived in two worlds, never empowering this world to be the end all be all. For most of them the promises of Jesus Christ were ALL they had. And it is clear they were enough!

While we are waiting, our lives should be active; revival aids in this effort. It reminds us, refreshes us, and raises us to stand for our Savior yet one more day. Lord, send a revival.

The writer in verse 11 offers a challenge to his audience. He calls them to live holy lives. Holiness is the inward and outward character of God that we can express daily both through conversation and conduct. Holiness here is not simply an intellectual assent to the idea of spiritual purity but a concrete and practical commitment to the ways and Word of God that others can witness. It involves the undeniable wedding of spirituality with morality, which in turn births praxis. For those who lived during the latter first century

and the beginning of the second century, it was important that they commit to the standards set by the Lord Jesus Christ. These standards were more than the don'ts of the faith but rather concerned the dos of the faith too. They required compassion, hospitality, and courage. They involved the willingness to serve their generation as martyrs for the sake of the salvation of the world. They involved an uncompromising allegiance to the life of Jesus Christ and a non-negotiable determination to please him, even when others were angered by such allegiance.

Please note that this is required now as it was then. Those who live in expectation of his coming should do so committing daily to the standards of the Lord Jesus Christ. This means caring for the poor and living Christ-centered lives. This means serving as a conduit of forgiveness and upholding the name of our Lord Jesus Christ through our conduct. It means making every effort to stand up for righteousness though we may be attacked and mistreated. Holiness should be expressed not just by the type of clothing we wear but by our actions, especially towards others. So while we wait, we are active. Our activities are governed by the Holy Spirit and framed by the inexhaustible love of God perfectly portrayed on a hill outside of Jerusalem on a heart-breaking but liberating Friday.

Our works shall cause us to live with a sincere desire for his coming. The writer paints this intense picture of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The use of graphic language clearly shows us that in his mind the DAY OF THE LORD will be the pivotal moment in human history. For in this moment all things both good and bad will submit to God through Jesus Christ. In this moment, no one will escape. The truthfulness of one's life will be clearly evident and the DAY OF THE LORD will come without warning. Then the writer says for those who believe, "*we live with haste.*" Haste here means to sincerely or earnestly desire something. Lord, we sincerely desire that you revive us again as we actively await your coming.

Celebration

So, what do we desire? We desire the day when Jesus Christ shall return in all the splendor of his glory. We look to the day when after the suffering of this journey we will finally see him face to face! We look to the day when all who confessed him will be vindicated. We look to the new day when his sacrifice, on an old rugged cross, will pay off, again! We look to that glorious day when we shall live no more between two worlds but shall be united with him. We look to the day that inspired our ancestors to maintain a song in their hearts even while under vicious oppression. We look to the day that my 84-year-old father and 82-year-old double-amputee mother have lived for, THE DAY OF THE LORD! For in that day, we will sit down at the Welcome Table and declare what a time, what a time, what a time! You talkin' bout a time!

Descriptive Details

This text is replete with images that both disturb and challenge. The preacher must be willing to paint this picture so that the hearer can grasp the profundity of the DAY OF THE LORD!

Sights: A thief; the heavens passing away, the elements being dissolved by fire, a consuming fire that has the ability to melt everything in its path; the Lord returning;

Sounds: People praising God in revival because they believe the promises of Christ and have the promises of Christ on which to depend; a loud noise as the heavens pass away; the shouts of those who rejoice at the DAY OF THE LORD; and

Colors: The colors of the elements of the earth; the burnt-orange flames that will destroy the elements; and the color of heaven as it is set ablaze.