

Looking To The Future by Jeff Strite

Acts 1:6-1:11

It seems Moody Bible Institute supports a home for mentally handicapped children. One day the President of Moody (Joseph Stowell) went there for a visit. While walking through the corridors, he noticed that the windows were covered with tiny little hand prints. He asked the director, what that was all about.

The director replied, "The children here love Jesus and they're so eager for Him to return that they lean against the windows as they look up to the sky."

(David Daniels, sermoncentral.com)

APPLY: Those handicapped children were looking for Jesus to return. They loved Him so much and were so eager to see Him come that they literally watched the skies for His return.

And that's pretty much what the Disciples were doing here in our story this morning. It's not so much that they were watching for His return... they didn't want to leave in the 1st place.

As I was reading this passage in Acts 1 it struck me that some might get the impression that we shouldn't be eager for Christ's return. After all, the angels said to the disciples: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11

It almost like the angels were telling the disciples that they shouldn't be like those kids with their handprints on the windows. When the angels declared "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" it's almost as if they were saying... don't get too wrapped up in Jesus' coming back

But that's not what it's saying. In II Peter 3:9-14 Peter (who was there that day) wrote this:

"...the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Peter is telling us – it's a GOOD thing to be looking forward to Christ's return. In fact Jesus' 2nd coming is going to be a GREAT thing for us.

1 Corinthians 2:9 declares "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"

Oh? What is that God has "prepared" for us who love Him?

Well, for one thing, in Revelation we're told that when Jesus comes again: there will be "...a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" Revelation 3:2-5a

He's going to make everything new!

ILLUS: How many of you like the house you live in right now?

I love my house. It's got a few things I could improve, but for the most part it's a great house. But, you know, if a wealthy man were to come along say to me: "Jeff, I'm build you a brand new house. It's going to have everything in it you could possibly want. And it's going to have an attached 4 car garage and workshop.

And on the outside there'll be barn with a couple of horses in it. There'll be a waterfall that'll cascade into a stream filled with fish. And ALL the expenses for that house will be paid for for the rest of your life. You can do whatever want around the house, but it won't matter because everything will be taken care of."

Now, do you think I'd take that guy up on that?

In a heartbeat.

Not that I don't appreciate what I've got, but what I've got doesn't even compare to all that.

Revelation is telling us, when Jesus comes again God's gonna move us out of the shack we live in now and move us into a mansion. There'll be no rent, no mortgage, no

heating bills, no utilities. When Jesus comes again, there'll be nothing to worry about because He's going to make EVERYTHING NEW.

And 1 John 3:2 expands on that by telling us "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

We're going to be LIKE Him?

So, what is Jesus like?

Well He's powerful. He's all knowing. He's immortal. He'll never die.

But MY body is mortal.

My body will grow old and sick and one day – I'll die.

But for the Christian, that's not really a problem.

Stewart Hamblin wrote about a song about that.

It's called "This Ol House" and he wrote to talk about his mortal body.

Sing it with me if you know it:

"This old house once knew my children; this old house once knew my wife
This old house was home and shelter as we fought the storms of life
This old house once rang with laughter; this old house heard many shouts
Now she trembles in the darkness when the lightnin' walks about

Ain't a-gonna need this house no longer, ain't a-gonna need this house no more
Ain't got time to fix the shingles, ain't got time to fix the floor
Ain't got time to oil the hinges nor to mend the windowpane
Ain't a-gonna need this house no longer - I'm a-gettin' ready to meet the saints."

He was saying – the day's going to come when I'm not going to need this mortal body. I'm moving out of this perishable body to a body that will never die. Paul said it this way:

"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with

immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

'Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O grave, is your victory?'" I Corinthians 15:51-55

And we could go on and on and on about all the great things that we'll have when Jesus comes again. And so Peter writes: "look forward to the day of God."

But not everybody's excited about Jesus coming back.

ILLUS: Back in 2005 NBC launched what they called a "theological thriller called Revelations.

The heroine was Sister Jo, a nun investigating strange phenomena that may signify the Apocalypse.

The executive producer of the show said "Sister Jo believes in Revelations but she refuses not to have hope. She feels that humankind can come together and forestall the end of days."

She wants to "forestall the end of days?" Why on earth would anyone want to do that? I mean – didn't we just read about some of the cool stuff we're going to have and experience when Jesus comes back?

Yeah... but not everybody is going to be happy when the end of days comes about.

Jesus said as much in Matthew 13:24-30 where He told this parable about His 2nd Coming:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.

When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

'An enemy did this,' he replied.

The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.

Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'

Then Jesus explained the parable this way:

"The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

"Essentially, when Jesus comes again – there's going to be lots of folks going to hell. They will be thrown into fire and weep and gnash their teeth. That's not a happy outcome!

Now, this is NOT what God really wants to happen.

As Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." II Peter 3:9-10

God doesn't want anyone to perish.

He wants to gather everyone into His kingdom.

He is patient with us, hoping and working to bring about repentance in our lives and the lives of those around us.

But God is realistic enough to know not everybody is going to take that route.

Jesus warned His audience:

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matthew 7:13-14

But why would anyone choose that wrong path?

Why choose a road that God tells us will lead to destruction and death?

Because it's broad and wide.

Have you ever heard the phrase: "You need to be 'broad minded'"?

What does that mean?

It means that you need to be more open to alternate lifestyles and opinions.

ILLUS: Do you remember the blowup over Phil Robertson's comments about homosexuality recently. Many people said that Robertson was being "narrow-minded" and bigoted. Now bigotry is a bad thing... but we need to be clear about this: God calls us to be narrow-minded when it comes to the matter of what is right and what is wrong. He's not asking us to be hateful and bigoted, but He does expect us stand where He tells us to stand.

But the world's not comfortable with that. It's not "broad minded" enough. It's not an attitude that is wide enough to accommodate whoever wants to go that way. It's not a way that is wide enough to allow folks to live and think and talk anyway they want.

But God warns us: don't be deceived, there will be a time of judgment. And He warns that those who choose the broad way and the wide gate will suffer punishment.

ILLUS: Have you ever heard of Mt. Vesuvius? It erupted in 79 AD and completely annihilated the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. What amazed archeologists that uncovered the site was the lava from the volcano encased the bodies of the dead. When the site was investigated, the bodies had long since decayed, but the lava left a "mold" that could be filled with plaster and tell the tale of the last moments of those who died. Some of the things they found:

- The owners of a house were hiding their valuables in their well when they fell in and died.
- A dog was still chained up to a fence.
- A woman held an infant in her arms while two young girls clung to the hem of her dress.
- A man was trying to pull a goat by its halter outside the city wall.
- The remains of one woman were found next to a wine vat. Inside the vat were over 100 silver dishes and 1,000 pieces of gold, One of the silver cups bore this inscription: "Enjoy life while you have it, for tomorrow is uncertain."

The tragedy was - the people did not have to die.

They'd been warned.

Ancient Roman records indicated that there were weeks of rumblings and tremors preceding the actual eruption. There were even ominous plumes of smoke visible from the mountain several days before the volcano erupted.

They'd been warned.

But they couldn't be bothered.

They'd have to give up too much for a warning they really didn't want to listen to.

In the same way, when Jesus comes again there will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth by those who knew the warnings but ignored them because it was too "narrow" a lifestyle.

So, for those of us who belong to Jesus the 2nd coming is going to be a great day. But for those who don't belong to Him... it will literally be hell.

But now I want to go back to that statement by the angels to Peter, James and John and the rest:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11

Why are you standing around looking up into the sky, the angels asked.

But why ask why?

Why imply that they shouldn't have been just standing around?

Well down through history, people who seem sure that Jesus is coming back at a specific date tend to just "stand around"

ILLUS: Back in the second century for example, there were the followers of a false prophet named Montanus who believed that Jesus was coming back in the next few days. So, they sold their belongings and climbed up a nearby hill to await Jesus' return.

Then there was Pope Sylvester II who predicted Jesus' 2nd coming in January 1, 1000. The result was that rioters filled the streets, and pilgrims headed to Jerusalem to wait for Him.

7th Day Adventism got its start from a man named William Miller. He predicted that the day of Christ's coming would be Sunday, March 21, 1844. His congregation, many in white robes, went to meet Jesus on a rooftop. When Jesus didn't come - calculations were revised to October 22, 1844.

My point is this: the natural reaction of believers is to "stand around" and wait

ILLUS: It's kind of like the folks whose favorite team or band or entertainer is coming to town and the rush down to the ticket office to be the first ones to buy the tickets. They want to make sure they don't miss the performance.

And that same kind of weird mentality leads some to do the same thing with Jesus return. They tend to “stand around” and wait.

Then, there are others who stand and around... and sell books. Books about Jesus’ 2nd coming where they speculate about dates and times that Jesus said were only known to the Father.

Jesus said: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Matthew 24:36

I’ve known of TV evangelists who spend their entire careers focusing on the 2nd coming. It’s like they say little or nothing about any other topic in the Scriptures.

ILLUS: Now, let’s think about that for a moment.

How many books in the New Testament are books of “prophecy”?

Just one, isn’t’ there? Revelation.

Now Revelation tells us a lot about the 2nd coming of Christ... and there are smatterings of scriptures throughout the rest of the New Testament that tell us more about that topic. But the bulk of the New Testament focuses on something else entirely.

The rest of the New Testament focus less on the date of Christ’s return, than it does on our responsibility to live as obedient Christians, so that we might successfully bring the world to Jesus.

The focus of the New Testament is not about WHEN He’s coming. The focus is HOW we should live till He gets here. The main message out of Scripture is that we need to live our lives in such a way that we make people jealous of what we have – to make them hunger and thirst for that righteousness and relationship we enjoy as children of God.

Note: after the angels spoke to the disciples, these men obeyed Jesus and went back to Jerusalem where they waited for the power of the Holy Spirit He’d promised them. And when the Spirit had come upon them they began to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Because of their obedience in this... 3000 were baptized at Pentecost and 1000s more came to Christ from that day on.

That’s our call.

Not to get caught up with the teachers who want to focus on WHEN Jesus will come again, but rather to focus on HOW we are to live till He gets here. That’s God’s goal for our lives – to rescue the perishing, to help Him meet His objective to bring as many as possible to repentance and salvation in Jesus. Because He wants us to take as many with us when Jesus comes to get us at His 2nd coming.

That's our job.

That's our challenge.

Not to stand around staring at the sky... but to work until He returns.

ILLUS: Back in 1780, the Connecticut House of Representatives was in session. The sky above began to become dark. Scarily dark. Many of those in the House were believers who were firmly convinced that Jesus could return at any time, and glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand.

Many wanted to adjourn the session, but a Colonel Davenport rose and said,

"The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not.

If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment.

If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty.

Therefore, I wish that candles be brought."

Rather than fearing what is to come, we are to be faithful till Christ returns.

Instead of fearing the dark, we're to be the candles whose lights point to Jesus.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Mt 5:16

We are called to be the light of the world.

So let us not be satisfied with just sitting around speculating about when and how Jesus will return. Let us instead be convicted of the need for us to be found doing our duty **WHEN** He returns.