

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – July 5<sup>th</sup> 2009**  
**2 Peter 3:10-13**

There is a well-documented strange incident in northern Peru which was related to Ian by his pastor friend there, William Panduro. Suddenly thick black clouds descended on ordinary afternoon and people thought it was the end of the world. William remembers that in a town where there was a lot of godlessness, grown men came onto the streets and were falling and weeping, begging God for mercy. It was just a freak moment that passed, but it left its mark on the town. Would there be the same effect in our culture? We are so cynical about notions of heaven and hell. We are the first major civilisation without a doctrine of the afterlife at the centre of what we believe. Surveys might say that we believe in heaven but when you scratch the surface, all it is is an upgraded prosperous version of the life that we have now. After all the idea of the Day of the Lord, heaven and hell, glory and judgement, is all so medieval. Even in Christian circles, in our songs, we are hard pressed to find songs about the glories of the life to come.

Our lives go on, one day after the other, with the media constantly distracting us with entertainment, and things are valued not on whether they are right or wrong but whether they are fun or boring. Then, as Peter says, one night your comfortable world will no longer continue, and the heavens will disappear at the voice of the Lord. The heavens will disappear, the elements of the sun moon and stars will be destroyed by fire, and the earth will be laid bare, so that all human activity and arrogance will be revealed. Justice delayed is not justice denied.

The One who came to bring salvation to the world through his death on the cross will come a second time, to judge all those who trust in their own strength. The fire refines, purges and heats up the dross, thus leaving a restored heaven and earth. Creation will be set free! This stuff that is our world will be cleansed and purged of its corruption.

Peter had referred us back to the Flood in verse 6 when the world was not obliterated, but the world was washed clean of its wickedness. So likewise he will do it again but this time by fire. cf Malachi 3. This is the Christian hope, not floating around on the clouds twanging harps, but a new heaven and a new earth, Paradise Regained. No, we shall have resurrection bodies, empowered by the Spirit.

Since everything will be destroyed by fire, then how shall we live? If we look at lifestyle magazines then we should eat drink and be merry, or get the latest fashion or perhaps a new kitchen. Such people do not have a sense of the future. Rather we should live a holy and godly life, not in fear that God will strike you if you put a foot out of line, but looking forward to a new heavens and a new earth. We would be so caught up in our imaginations, so anticipating and longing for a world of noble deeds, acts of generosity, of kindness unsurpassed that we would want to live in a world like that now, positively. Our striving for the world to come will speed the return of Jesus Christ.

It is said that because we have nothing to die for we thus have nothing to live for. Because we have no vision, have lost sight of the long term, we have been reduced to the banalities of Big Brother. This does not mean we have to go and stand with our suitcase on Box Hill waiting for the return of Christ, or go around saying Hallelujah. Some of the most powerful saints have been the quietest, and most humorous. The world does not need sour-faced saints. Since we are looking forward then we need to make every effort to be found spotless and blameless and at peace with Him, fit for that world. In 1 Thessalonians 5:4 we are to live as Sons of the Day, of the Light. We live lives based on that that. Let that looking forward inspire you to a holy life. We can have an apocalyptic view of the end, but rather it would be better 'to be found doing my duty'. Or as Martin Luther put it: 'If I knew that the world would end tomorrow I would plant a tree'.