

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – June 7th 2009 2 Peter 3:1-7

Ian began by telling us of a family friend who was on the Island of Phuket in Thailand in December 2004 when the sea suddenly receded very quickly. This friend recognised this as a sign of an imminent tsunami and ran off the beach screaming as she went “everyone of the beach, everyone off the beach!” Hardly anyone took any notice and some derided her as a crazy American.

Of course the tsunami hit and thousands of people were destroyed, not that the tsunami was a judgement from God, but the crowd on the beach are very much like the scoffers that Peter describes in this passage. Here we have Christians who are warning people to save themselves and put their trust in Jesus before he comes to judge the living and the dead. But they are ignored and scoffed at – ‘these Christians are so dramatic, so intense, so apocalyptic – do they really believe that stuff?’ Their scepticism is confirmed – after all, *apparently* the apostles had claimed that Jesus predicted that he would return. In the same way they had scoffed at Jeremiah and at Malachi saying ‘everything goes on just as it has and it is a lot of old myths.’ It’s like today when people say ‘there is no judgement, so relax, stop worrying and enjoy your life – we have one life, one chance, so *carpe diem*’. This philosophy is deeply attractive amongst people today, and even amongst Christians. There is a real reluctance amongst Christians to come across as too intense, too committed or too dogmatic, after all who wants to be seen as a fundamentalist? But we want to appear cool and sophisticated.

But however scientific, measured and reasonable the faith can be, actually there comes a point as a Christian that you have to commit to a supernatural view of the world. Yes, there are physical laws, weather patterns, and lots can be explained; but at the end of the day we do not live in a closed mechanistic world. The Word of God sustains it. This is Providence. Because God created the world by the Word He will judge it by the Word. It’s in our Creed – it’s what we believe.

We have a very real illustration of judgement in verse 6 when Peter reminds us of the Flood in the time of Noah. God created the world out of the chaos, the *tohu v’bohu*, and distinguished the waters into the ones above the sky and the ones in the seas. Genesis 1 answers the question of Why God created this world – because he loves us. Then by chapter 6 of Genesis God grieves over the world and man’s wickedness ‘where his thoughts were only evil all the time’ and He closes the waters together again in the Flood in a kind of ‘de-creation’. This was a theological judgement. This was a major catastrophe. Peter says God is destroying the world. Jesus warns in Matthew 24 that God will bring judgement by fire, purging the world, cleansing it of its wickedness and we will see a new heavens and a new earth. The fact that everything seems to go on is just an illusion. The only reason it does for the time being is that God has appointed a time when there will be judgement and the destruction of men and women.

This may sound medieval, alarmist and pessimistic. But if you take the judgement out of our faith and notions of lost and saved and heaven and hell, then the effects are that divorce rate will go up, greed, hatred and jealousy take over. What you believe about the world will determine how you act. If you think there is nothing over us then you will be the same as those around you. If you believe that God is a rottweiler looking to strike you if you make a mistake then it will be difficult to believe that God loves you. That’s why, if you believe that God is holy, almighty, but that He gives us Jesus that we might live in His love, then we can sing His praise.

It is a mystery why Jesus has not returned and very taxing theologically and biblically. But if we are being scoffed at then that is a sign that we are in the truth. Take courage, take heart, and live holy, godly lives as we look to that Day.

Ian then read a long extract of an article written by A N Wilson who has returned recently to faith. Link: <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2009/04/conversion-experience-atheism>