

When It All Melts Away

By Linda Rex

December 10, 2023, 2nd Sunday | Advent—One of the small things we like to do during Advent at our house is post a wish list on the refrigerator for each member of our household. We find this to be quite helpful in picking out stocking stuffers and other little gifts for one another. This practice helps those of us who aren't good gift givers to be attentive to one another's desires and interests.

This morning I was reading in our New Testament passage for this Sunday, 2 Peter 3:8–15a, about a deep desire of God's heart. This desire is much deeper and much more costly than any stocking stuffer we may imagine. Indeed, the Triune God has already gone to great extremes to enable this wish to come true if at all possible. The apostle Peter tells us that God's desire is that no one perish, but for all to come to repentance. In the end, there may be some who refuse to come to repentance, but God's desire is still that every person does. Peter says that for this reason, our Lord Jesus has delayed his return in glory—it is God's great patience and longsuffering that is our salvation.

In this letter, the apostle Peter was encouraging the believers to hold fast their faith in Christ in the face of false teachers and damaging heresies. He was reminding them of all that was theirs in Jesus, of the grace and love of God, and that there was coming, in God's good time, a judgment in which our Lord and Savior would return in glory and make everything right. The heavens and earth will melt away one day, he said, revealing the hidden glory of the new heavens and new earth.

The day of the Lord or *parousia*, in the context of Peter's second letter, is when Jesus returns in glory to establish the new heavens and new earth. Because it will come "like a thief", it will come unexpectedly. Peter says this is important to remember because as we live our lives day by day, we want to be attentive to what God is up to—patiently working to bring about the salvation of many people. If this is what God is up to, then we want to be living in such a way that we are full participants in what God is doing, and in this way, anticipating and "hastening" the return of Christ.

One way we do this is by being diligent to be found by our Lord in peace, spotless and blameless as members of the Body of Christ. The source of our peace, our spotlessness, and blamelessness, is not in ourselves or our efforts, but in Jesus alone, as we trust in him as the one who is the Prince of Peace, the spotless Lamb of God, who took all blame upon himself, so that we might be found without blame when brought to judgment. Our diligence then, has to do with our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, our dependency upon his finished work, and looking to him to finish what he has begun in us. We are diligent to live in the truth of who we are as God's adopted children, in loving union and communion with Father, Son, and Spirit and each other.

When we consider the new heavens and earth, as Peter calls it, we are told it will be a place where righteousness dwells. Righteousness, or right relationships with God and one another as I like to put it, will be the hallmark of our existence then. So, as citizens of that kingdom even now, the Body of Christ is called to reflect even now the righteousness Christ forged for us on the cross. In Jesus' death and resurrection, we find the old self melted away and replaced by the new—in Christ we are new creations. Peter tells us to live in this reality even now, resisting the temptation to fall into old patterns or ways of living that are dead and gone.

Just as one day, this temporal existence will melt away and our new existence which is hidden with Christ in God will be revealed, we look forward to when this earth and the heavens will melt away and God's new heavens and new earth will be revealed. Meanwhile, we live in this

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broken, sin-wracked world and in our broken, sin-wracked flesh, trusting in our Lord and Savior's redeeming grace and love. We diligently seek to be who God has declared us to be, living in peace, spotless and blameless, grateful for the longsuffering patience of our God, which is our salvation.

Father, Son, Spirit, thank you for giving us a hope—a new heavens and new earth to look forward to in anticipation, and a new life forever with you. Grant us the grace to live even now in right relationship with you and one another, in your perfect peace, spotless and blameless, as we trust in your salvation, through Jesus our Lord and by your Spirit. Amen.

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; ...” 2 Peter 3:8–15a NASB