

# He Comes to Rain Destruction!

A sermon based on 1 Peter 3:18-22

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You've heard all about it in the news. It's been tragic. What's been going on in Ferguson, Missouri in aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown and the subsequent trial of the police officer who shot him has been tragic. Cop cars burning, buildings destroyed, shameless looting, chaos in the streets, dozens arrested, eruptions of heated arguments on social media, demonstrations in over 150 U.S. cities (thankfully, mostly peaceful), pure outrage over the controversial death of one boy.

As one American journalist wrote, "America, we have a problem." But it's not just us. Famine, poverty, wars, terrorist activity, political unrest, religious intolerance, increased immorality, general godlessness, it's all around us. It's all around the world. Are you surprised? Even Jesus preached at length at how things would get so bad before they got better. He foretold how corruption would reign before the end of the world would come.

I know we just finished up talking about the end times last Sunday, but there's really such a close connection between the two seasons, End Times and Advent. The word Advent literally means 'he comes.' During Advent, we wait in eager anticipation for Jesus to come, yes, as a child born in Bethlehem on Christmas. But we also look ahead to the future because he's coming again. Today, as we see the world around us crumbling into pieces, we are reminded that he comes to bring, to rain down destruction.

Now, be honest, when you take a look at this section from 1 Peter, do you have a hard time seeing how these verses fit with the theme of our sermon? I mean, just take in everything that Peter writes here. Seems he doesn't have one bad word to say. It's all good news here. It's pure gospel. It's awesome!

But now, why then such a harsh theme, talking about destruction in a section that so clearly points to deliverance? I guess I would have to take the blame for that. I am, after all, the one who came up with it. But before I do that, I want you to take a closer look, especially at the illustration Peter uses. Do you see what event he points back to? One we're all familiar with, Noah and the Ark.

Let's talk about Noah. Why did God have him build the ark? Well, in the words of our 1st Lesson, "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth." So his solution was to wipe the slate clean, clear the earth of wickedness with a worldwide flood, and start all over with all those who were righteous, Noah and his family. God was literally going to rain down destruction.

But remember, that didn't happen right away. How long did it take Noah to build the ark? 120 years. And it wasn't as if Noah was doing this in secret. Just think of the size of the ark. Everyone had to know what he was doing. I'm sure there were taunts, like, "Look at what ol' man Noah is doing. That guy is off his rocker."

But I'm sure there was just as much curiosity and questions. 120 years. Lots of time for Noah to warn the people of God's judgment, the impending flood and the massive destruction. Lots of time for the people to come to their senses, see their wickedness, and repent.

And so, 120 years came and went, the ark was completed, the rains came, the earth flooded, and all the people were safe on the ark?!?! No, all that warning, all that time, the wickedness and corruption never ceased, and only eight were saved from the rains of destruction.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, here we are in Advent, starting off with Jesus' promise, made in the gospel, that he's coming back. What kind of world is he going to come back to? Well, can't say that things have gotten any better. The corruption in Noah's day, the corruption in Jesus' day, it's the same corruption in our day. It hasn't changed, therefore we can be sure God will still keep his Word. He will come back one day and destroy this.

Now, we could sit here and talk about how many in the world are going to face eternal condemnation when that destruction comes, but first we need to look at ourselves. Where will you be when it starts to rain?

Ideally, every one of us would be ready for the day. We'd be in our Bibles every day, showing perfect love to everyone, even those people who we don't like, but still showing love in what we think and say and do. We'd be faithfully serving God by obeying the Ten Commandments. We'd be eagerly doing our part to build up and expand Christ's kingdom by sharing the gospel with everyone and warning of the nasty weather up ahead...ideally. But realistically, I don't know that I'd be completely ready for the showers. Would you?

I can't honestly say that my mind is set on godly things and not earthly and wicked things 24/7. Can you? I confess I have angry thoughts towards others, am slow to forgive when others wrong me, have feelings of discontent when I look at other's situations. I can't honestly say that every word that comes out of my mouth gives glory to God and doesn't grieve the Holy Spirit. Can you? The lies, the cursing, the gossip? I can't honestly say that every moment, I'm letting my light shine. Can you? Actions that appear self-serving because they really are. Failing to show support and love for those who desperately need it. Not being willing to go out of my way to help a friend out because it inconveniences me.

How would you and I look if Jesus returned right now? You know, at least in Noah's time, the people knew when the rains of destruction were coming. It was no secret that they had 120 years to turn their lives around. We have no idea when Jesus is coming back. But that doesn't let us off the hook.

The scariest thing would be for us to be caught in sin and unbelief when Jesus returns. Because those who are caught outside when it starts raining judgment will face eternal destruction. And if Jesus returned right now, or 2 hours from now, or 20 years from now, we would all deserve those rains of destruction.

It's not a matter of if, but when. When Jesus returns, where will we be? When Jesus comes to rain destruction, we'll be safe in the ark of God's grace. That's our comfort. That's God's promise. Jesus, he comes to rain destruction and flood the world in judgment, but we're safe in the ark of God's grace.

You see, just as God provided an escape from judgment in the preaching of Noah and then in the water that floated the ark, so he has provided an escape from judgment that again will most certainly come. The escape from judgment Jesus himself provided by coming in grace...first as a child to save the world from sin, and a second time in the future to save us from this world of sin.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, this section, these verses, are saturated with the sweet gospel. I know you had your big feast on Thursday, but I think this section would give that meal a run for its money. Where do we even start?

How about here, "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you do God." That's why we're preparing for Jesus to come at Christmas. His entire life's work, summarized in that one statement.

"Christ died for sins." Sin, evil, guilt, that's our problem, one we don't have a solution for. But Jesus' solution was to die for those sins, to die on our behalf, in our place.

"Christ died...once for all..." Those words proclaim the gravity and finality of Jesus' words on the cross, "It is finished!" It really is finished. Although we still sin, Jesus' one act, his sacrifice, covers all sins of all people. That was the boast he preached to the spirits in prison. Peter was talking about hell there. People often misunderstand why Jesus went down to hell after he died. It wasn't to suffer. That eternal suffering was finished on the cross. No, Jesus went to the prison of hell to boast in his victory.

"Christ died...the righteous (one) for the unrighteous (ones)..." That's really the heart of Jesus' work. For us, a substitution was made. The Father loaded the blame for the sins of the whole world upon Jesus, who had no sin. The waters of destruction were rained on him, but we got his righteousness. We're safe.

And finally, "Christ died...to bring you to God." The waters of eternal destruction were rapidly rising around us, but Jesus didn't just throw us a life ring and hope we'd weather the storm. He jumped in, and he brought us safely into his ark of grace through his life, death, and resurrection.

During Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the coming of the Christ-child who suffered the rains of destruction so we could be safe in the ark of his grace. But even now, during Advent, we prepare for his second coming to save us from this world of sin, because the rains aren't done yet.

But as we wait for his return, we aren't on the outside looking in. Even now, with all the corruption and wickedness of the world around us, we're safe inside the ark. How can we be sure? Peter tells you, "This water that symbolizes baptism now saves you."

Now, we usually look at baptism as God washing us clean of our sins. But what was God's purpose in using water for Noah and the flood? He used it for destruction, to clear the earth, to drown the wicked and corrupt people. And in the same way, God has used water in your baptism...to destroy, to flood your sinful nature, to drown your Old Adam, to rain down destruction on the sins that plague you.

Who would've thought the only reason we're safe in the ark of God's grace is because we were already drowned in the water? Your baptism is what keeps you prepared for Jesus to come. Your baptism is what keeps you safe in the ark of God's grace.

And now we wait. Are the final rains of destruction 120 years down the road? We don't know. But, through God's grace and through our baptism, we're prepared to patiently wait. And, by the grace of God, we're prepared to patiently warn others.

You know, a few weeks ago, when that polar vortex hit the lower 48, there were a lot of people who died because they weren't prepared. But they were warned. Meteorologists warned of the danger of being caught in the storm.

Friends, the storm is coming. Jesus will return. We don't others unprepared when the rains start falling. And so, we will warn...and we will share the gospel, that "Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God." Lord-willing, God will continue to bring many more to the safety of his ark of grace.

This world is falling to pieces. The end is near. As we wait this Advent season, our prayer is, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus, come!" He's coming to rain destruction on all the sin that still corrupts the world. But we're safe from the waters because we've been saved through the waters of baptism. And so for us, we're not afraid of his return. Yes, he's coming to rain destruction, but he's also coming to rain deliverance. That's for us, because he keeps us safe in his ark of grace. Amen.