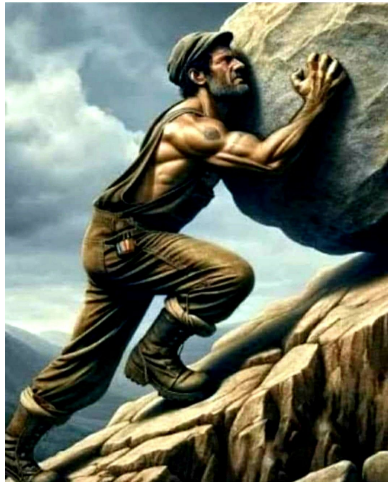


SERMON NOTES

George Pope, Guest Preacher
09/07/25



LIKE BUILDING BLOCKS OF HARD ROCK, today's music easily laid a sturdy foundation for what Bishop George Pope was about to share: *You never cease to amaze us; We acknowledge You in every victory; Every good thing comes from You; The enemy has no rights; the cross has sealed my destiny; I will not fear when the enemy comes near; ON THE DOORFRAME OF MY LIFE IS THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.*

2 Corinthians 9:10 NIV

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

The above *promise*, referenced by Pastor Paul, as he led us into a deeper understanding of the importance of giving, played in counterpoint to the hope, encouragement and fully detailed guidance of preparing for Jesus' Return in today's message.

Good Morning, Church! said Bishop Cope happily. *What I absolutely love about Christ Church is that whenever I return here I am thoroughly and at once surrounded by family where I am loved. By the way, Jesse asked why I was here so soon after my last visit; he had forgotten that was on Palm Sunday! In any case, do you remember what I preached on that day? A few hands shot up. It was in the DEFINING MOMENTS WITH JESUS series.*

That day I illustrated the humble and lowly character of Jesus. I referenced the donkey upon which He entered the city, and the joyous shouts and cries of His followers: Hosanna! To the Son of David.

With this, Bishop Cope began to pray: ***Holy Spirit, we welcome You. We can't do this by ourselves. You are holy and there's nothing better than You. Come, Holy Spirit, come.***

EXAMPLE: George Cope grew up in the Assembly of God church, his father pastor's church, where every Sunday night George was expected to be front and center at the church's evening service. Now this was the expectation: Be there EVERY Sunday night. Mornings too! Within a month's time on a Sunday evening there would come one of four sermons: Week one: Missionary Work; Week two: The Call of God; Week three: The Personal Work of the Holy Spirit; Week four: Jesus is Coming Back. Yes, we heard on a regular basis about heaven and hell. The further you get away the more difficult it becomes!

Unfortunately, we listen to too many murmuring and conniving words which draw us away from God's purpose for each of us: Jesus hasn't come yet; Maybe He's never coming back!

WE MUST LIVE OUR LIVES EXPECTING JESUS' IMMINENT RETURN!

2 Peter 3:1-13 NIV

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. [2] I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. [3] Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. [4] They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." [5] But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. [6] By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. [7] By the same word the present heavens

and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. [8] But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. [9] The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [10] 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 done in it will be laid bare. [11] Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives [12] 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. [13] But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

INSIGHT: 2 Peter 3:1-13 encourages believers to remember Christ's promised return, refuting scoffers who doubt it by pointing to God's past judgment of the world through the Flood of Noah and God's present patience. Peter warns that scoffers, living by their sinful desires, deliberately forget creation and judgment to justify their ungodly lifestyles. The passage calls for believers to live in holiness and godliness, waiting for the "Day of the Lord," when the current heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire and replaced with a new creation of righteousness.

A Reminder of Truth (Verses 1-2)

Peter begins by stating the purpose of his letter: to remind believers of the prophecies given by the prophets and the commands of the Lord, which are being forgotten by some.

Warning Against Scoffers (Verses 3-4)

He warns that in the "last days," scoffers will come, denying Christ's promised return and mocking the idea of it happening. They question where the promise of His coming is, suggesting the world continues on unchanged.

God's Past Judgment (Verses 5-7)

Peter counters their disbelief by reminding them of God's power to judge. He points to the creation of the world out of water and the Great Flood,

which destroyed the world of that time. The current heavens and earth are "stored up for fire" and reserved for judgment on that coming day.

God's Patience, Not Delay (Verses 8-10)

The scoffers interpret God's apparent delay in Christ's return as indifference. However, Peter explains that "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day". God's delay is not because He is slow but because of His patience, giving people time to repent.

The Call to Holy Living (Verses 11-13)

In light of Christ's imminent return and the coming destruction, Peter calls for believers to live holy and godly lives. They should be found pure and blameless, eagerly awaiting the Day of the Lord when the present heavens and earth will pass away and be replaced by a "new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells"

FURTHER INSIGHT: 2 Peter 3:1-13 is a powerful passage that addresses a warning about scoffers, the certainty of Christ's return, and the motivation for believers to live holy lives. Peter encourages his readers to remember the prophets and apostles and to not lose hope in God's promises despite the long wait.

Scoffers in the last days (verses 1-7)

- A reminder for the faithful: Peter begins by reminding believers to recall the words of the Old Testament prophets and the commands of Jesus, delivered through the apostles.
- The rise of scoffers: He warns that in the "last days," mockers will appear who follow their own sinful desires and scoff at the promise of Jesus's return.
- Their deliberate ignorance: These scoffers deliberately ignore two key historical facts: that God created the world by his word, and that he previously judged the world with the great flood. Peter uses the flood as proof that God has intervened in history before and will do so again.

- The world reserved for judgment: He states that by that same divine word, the present heavens and earth are being held in reserve for destruction by fire on the Day of Judgment.

God's timing and patience (verses 8–10)

- God's different perspective on time: Peter addresses the apparent delay in Christ's return by explaining that God's perspective on time is different from human perspective; with the Lord, "one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day".
- The reason for the "delay": He emphasizes that God's patience is not slowness, but a merciful desire for all to repent rather than perish.
- The sudden Day of the Lord: The passage warns that the Day of the Lord will arrive unexpectedly, like a thief, resulting in the destruction of the heavens and earth by fire.

The promise of a new creation (verses 11–13)

- A call to holy living: In anticipation of this coming judgment, Peter asks what kind of lives believers should lead, urging them to live holy and godly lives.
- The promise of new heavens and a new earth: He concludes by offering hope in God's promise of new heavens and a new earth where righteousness will reside, providing motivation for believers' present conduct.

We need to understand Peter's deliberations and urgency as he points to Jesus' Return, indeed, to what is going to happen. Here is a random list of things which will occur and be emphasized before Jesus' Return:

- Believers will be surrounded by false voices.
- There will occur major issues, wars, tumults throughout the world.
- We must remember all predictions announced in the Bible.
- We must hold on to Jesus' promise of His Return.
- The enemy is working hard to get us to question everything God has said, just as he did in the Garden of Eden.
- We will be surrounded by scoffers of the Bible and faith in God.

- We need to be CAREFUL. That is, full of care of how we live our lives, hopefully to the Glory of God!
- 2 Peter 3:11 NIV
- ***Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.***
- Consider precisely how we live our lives before Jesus' Return: are we seeking holiness and godliness as opportunities to reflect our love of God?
- Are we serving God fully, utilizing our God-given talents?
- Remember, we await a NEW heaven and earth!

MODERN DAY PARABLE: Jesus was a story teller. So, here goes! Do you ever feel your life is spinning fast or perhaps out of control, but you are actually getting nowhere? Are you furiously spinning your wheels, to put it another way. Suddenly, into today's modern parable, a fellow is abruptly awakened from sleep in the middle of the night. His room is filled with an amazing bright light. Jesus stands before him and says, "I have important work for you! Come outside." With this, Jesus and the sleepy fellow move into the back yard where there stands an immovable boulder. "Just push against this rock with everything you've got! That's it. Do this every day for as long as you can." With this, Jesus disappears. The man and the huge backyard boulder are left alone together. He wants to be an obedient servant of the Lord, so the man pushes harder and harder. Still, the rock doesn't budge.

Every evening the gentleman returns to his bed absolutely exhausted, and complains: *If God really cared, He'd have made things easier for me. That rock hasn't moved one inch.* Discouraged and done-in, he asks: *Why, God, have you asked me to do this? I can't. I just can't anymore.* At this, Jesus stands before him. The room is filled once again with amazing light. "Why, Lord, why. That rock hasn't moved at all. Day after day, month after month, I've tried. But to no avail." Jesus replies, *"I never asked you to move the rock, only to push against it with all your might. Look, there have been benefits. My dear friend, you have grown stronger in the process. Your arms are built up! Look at your core too. Strong. And your faithfulness. Every day, one after the next, you have grown to be an obedient servant. Know this: moving the rock is My job; growing in strength and faithfulness is yours!"*

The lesson we learn here is that as we face Jesus' Return, we must go way beyond the discouraging and faithless voices which say "It'll never happen."

WE MUST P - U - S - H

In Matthew 24 there are four stories which point in various ways to the critical importance of how exactly we live our lives!

CONSIDER THIS:

- People were warned that one stone would not be left upon another in the destruction of the temple, which, in fact, occurred in 70 AD.
- Action and activity is life.
- Ask: *How should I live my life?*
- For self alone?
- To the Glory of God?
- For other people?
- *Where does God stand in my heart, as I move out and about?*
- *Has God taken His rightful place on the throne of my heart?*
- God has given me life.
- *Do I choose life or death.*
- *In what ways am I preparing for Christ's Return?*

WE MUST P - U - S - H

P: PASSIONATE PREPARATION

- Matthew 24:42-44 NIV
- **"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. [43] But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. [44] So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**
- Even Jesus Himself had to say: I don't know what day I'll return but I will return!

- We must get up every day, acknowledging the impact of God and His Word.
- We must come into alignment with God's perfect will for each of us.

EXAMPLE: One morning, upon seeing his friend Brian who had just suffered a heart attack, yet miraculously recovered, Bishop George shouts out: *I've been praying for you!* Brian replies: *Well, you are religious; I'm not.* George says, *"I don't live in religion. It's all about relationship with God Himself. Anyway, I have to say, GOD SPARED YOUR LIFE FOR A REASON.* Brian didn't know how to respond as he lowered his head. George's spirited and heart-felt words continued to minister to his friend: *Do not live in fear at all. Live in anticipation of what God can do!* And I am sure that advice had good results. We need to consider our conversations, our witness, our guidance; we need to weigh our every word!

Yes, we must NOT live in fear. We must live in the anticipation of Jesus' Return. He is coming back!

THE CHIEF QUESTION IS: ARE YOU LIVING WITH PURPOSE, JOY AND LOVE?

In joy, Bishop George asked each of us to turn to our neighbor and say: MARANATHA!

INSIGHT: In the Bible, "Maranatha" is an Aramaic exclamation found in 1 Corinthians 16:22 which means "Our Lord, come!" or, in some interpretations, "Our Lord has come!". It functions as both an urgent prayer for Jesus's second coming and a confident confession of His present Lordship, reflecting the hope and longing of early Christians for Christ's return to establish His kingdom and make all things new.

Meaning and Origin

- **Aramaic Origin:**

The word comes from Aramaic, the language spoken in the Middle East during the time of Jesus and the early church.

- **Two Interpretations:**
- **"Our Lord, come!":** This interpretation is a fervent prayer, a plea for Christ to return.
- **"Our Lord has come!":** This reading is a confident declaration of Christ's presence and victory.

Biblical Context

- **1 Corinthians 16:22:**
The Apostle Paul uses "Maranatha" at the end of his letter to the Corinthians, a typically Greek-speaking audience.
- **A Watchword:**
It likely served as a "secret password" or watchword for early Christians to identify each other during times of persecution.
- **Connection to "Anathema":**
Paul places "Maranatha" after the Greek word anathema (meaning accursed), creating a powerful contrast: a call for the Lord's return is a blessing, while a lack of love for Jesus is accursed.

Significance for Christians

- A Call to **Hope**: It embodies the Christian hope for Christ's triumphant return.
- A Call to **Faithfulness**: The phrase encourages believers to live in a way that aligns with Christ's teachings, preparing for His coming.
- A Call to **Unity**: Reciting "Maranatha" can unite believers around the shared hope of Christ's return and His reign.

**STAY READY FOR JESUS' RETURN
ALWAYS AND IN ALL WAYS
BECAUSE
YOU CAN'T WAIT TO SEE JESUS!**

U: UNWAVERING THROUGH DELAYS.

- Matthew 25:1-13 NIV
- ***“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. [2] Five of them were foolish and five were wise. [3] The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. [4] The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. [5] The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. [6] “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ [7] “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. [8] The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ [9] “ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ [10] “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. [11] “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ [12] “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ [13] “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*”**

In Jesus’ time the bridegroom remained at his father’s house to add on rooms for himself and his bride. No one knew when such work would be completed and therefore, precisely when the bridegroom would arrive for his bride. So, brides had to stay ready in all aspects for the bridegroom to arrive any time unexpectedly. Brides were to remain unwavering through any delays, just as believers are now instructed to remain unwavering as well. Waiting is one of our greatest weaknesses. Just remember, God’s delays are not God’s denials!

EXAMPLE: Some might ask God: *Why don’t you do something about the world? It’s a mess and you could do at least something, right?* God’s answer: *I am doing something already. I created you! Utilize the time in your life to its fullest extent, thereby fulfilling my purpose for you, so you can better serve in My plan and Mission!*

GOD’S DELAYS ARE NOT GOD’S DENIALS!

S: STRATEGIC SHARING.

- Matthew 25:14-30 NIV
- ***“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. [15] To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. [16] The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. [17] So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. [18] But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. [19] “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. [20] The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ [21] “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ [22] “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ [23] “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ [24] “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. [25] So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ [26] “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? [27] Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. [28] “ ‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. [29] For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. [30] And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’***
- We risk condemnation when we do nothing with what God has provided.

EXAMPLE: When Bishop Cope was a young boy he was well aware of his pastor father's expectations. One day he was facing yet one more Sunday service; at this service he knew special emphasis would be placed on the Holy Spirit and people's response to God's presence. George determined that he was not ready for any of this, so to appear to be caught up in some serious and soul-searching prayer time, he crawled under the church's piano, remaining prostrate and motionless. A fellow parishioner, a bricklayer, bent low, eyeing the youngster hiding uncomfortably under the piano. He knew what was going on, all that hiding and posturing. The bricklayer slid down under the piano and placed himself squarely upon George's back! He whispered: *You know you can't run away from God! He wants you to fulfill His destiny for you!* "That changed everything for me!" said Bishop Cope. "Because of that bricklayer, my ministry was saved!"

As Bishop Cope arrived at CCO this morning he noticed an industrious fellow cleaning the foyer windows with a squeegee. He thought to himself: Now there's a fellow using his talents to the Glory of God, a good use of time, I must say, as we are all called to use our respective talents to the Glory of God as we await His Return!

CONSIDER THIS:

- With your God-given talent(s), share.
- With your God-given talent(s), use it to full extent to God's glory.
- With your God-given talent(s), give of your time.
- With your God-given talent(s), listen for His Holy Spirit prompts.
- With your God-given talent(s), spread smiles.
- With your God-given talent(s), come closer to God and His people.

H: HEARTFELT HUMANITY.

- Matthew 25:31-36 NIV
- ***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. [34] 'Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to***

drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, [36] I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

A Christian response to people in need is to show love, mercy, and compassion by meeting their physical and spiritual needs, following the example of Jesus Christ, and giving generously. This involves actions such as giving food and shelter, donating time and money to charity, and extending grace and a listening ear to those suffering from hardship or injustice.

Biblical Foundation

- **Jesus' Example:**
Christians are called to follow Jesus' example of compassion and service to the poor, sick, and marginalized, as described in passages like Matthew 25:40.
- **God's Commands:**
The Bible contains numerous commands and examples of caring for the needy, including caring for widows and orphans, sharing resources, and showing hospitality.
- **Stewardship:**
Christians are encouraged to be generous and cheerful givers, as "it is more blessed to give than to receive".

Practical Expressions of Care

- **Providing for Basic Needs:**
This includes donating food to food banks, providing meals for the homeless or elderly, and helping with clothing and shelter.
- **Serving the Community:**
Many Christians participate in community events like youth clubs and exercise classes, and they also provide assistance to people in need in their local areas.
- **Demonstrating Love:**
The core of the Christian response is to treat others with the same

grace, mercy, and love that God has shown them in Christ.

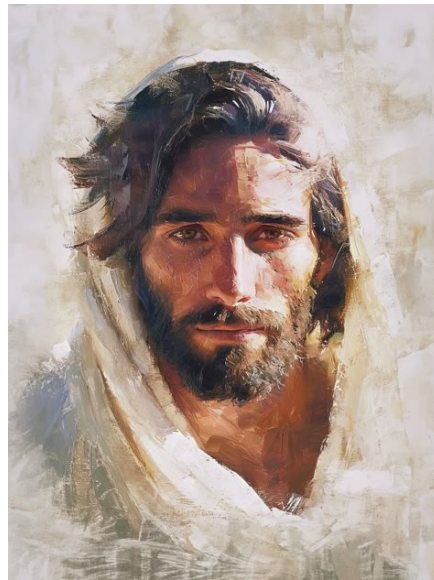
Why Christians Respond to Need

- **To Glorify God:** By helping those in need, Christians demonstrate God's love and character to the world, letting their "light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).
- **To Fulfill God's Purpose:** Caring for the poor and vulnerable is an expression of pure religion and an act of worship, as "whoever is kind to the needy honors God" (Proverbs 14:31).
- **To Show Commitment to Christ:** Helping those in need is seen as a sign of a mature and committed Christian who desires to live a life of service.

**OUR GENUINE RESPONSE TO
HUMAN NEED
MUST BE SEEN AS OPPORTUNITY
TO SERVE GOD.
RESPONDING TO HUMAN NEED
IS NEVER TO BE VIEWED AS AN
INTERRUPTION!**

Every act of kindness, every smile and hug is ***prayer in action***. How are you feeling today? Are you pushing against the rock which never moves? It's OK. You don't have to move it. Jesus will do it! But here is something that you can do. **PUSH**. Take a serious look at how you are preparing for Jesus' Return. Live every day as if He is coming back that day! God celebrates your faithfulness, especially while you push against that backyard boulder! And as to moving that big rock, well, know this. The rock will move when God says it's time. Friend, keep pushing! MARANATHA! Jesus is coming!

A time of intense prayer began. *I need to keep working on what You, Lord, have given me to do. Holy Spirit, speak to the Church. Jesus told us to push until His Coming. And, Lord, we are not to believe the muffled voices of the enemy trying to discourage us and lead us away from God. Keep us strong and vigilant. Help us not to grow weary, Lord.* And as his prayer continued, Bishop Cope carefully led us into a robust version of **IN CHRIST ALONE, MY HOPE IS FOUND**. Once again, God stood within the joyous praises of His people. Once again, our hearts were filled.



In Christ alone, my hope is found
 He is my light, my strength, my song
 This Cornerstone, this solid ground
 Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
 What heights of love, what depths of peace
 When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
 My Comforter, my All in All
 Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
 Fullness of God in helpless babe

This gift of love and righteousness
 Scorned by the ones He came to save
 'Til on that cross as Jesus died
 The wrath of God was satisfied
 For every sin on Him was laid
 Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

There in the ground His body lay
 Light of the world by darkness slain
 Then bursting forth in glorious Day
 Up from the grave He rose again
 And as He stands in victory
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on

me
 For I am His and He is mine
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
 This is the power of Christ in me
 From life's first cry to final breath
 Jesus commands my destiny
 No power of hell, no scheme of man
 Can ever pluck me from His hand
 Till He returns or calls me home
 Here in the power of Christ I'll stand