

THE APPOINTMENT

Jude 20-25

9-11—How many of those people who got into those four airplanes or went to work at the World Trade Center in New York or the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. that day expected the tragedy that would happen to them? They may have had many other things on their appointment calendars, cell phones or palm pilots, but not death from a terrorist attack. But to the terrorists and the El-Qaeda behind them, it was a very intentional, planned appointment.

Some famous “appointments” like that have been planned. Pearl Harbor may have surprised the United States, but the Japanese Navy had made very careful preparations for that attack. Months of preparation went into the D-Day assault three years later. Sometimes something planned has become greater than people expected it would. Gavrilo Princip only thought he would be killing Archduke Ferdinand of Austria on June 28, 1914, when that assassination started the events leading to World War 1. Lincoln thought he was to make a quick talk on November 19, 1863, not make the most famous speech in American history—the Gettysburg Address. And there are important events that have taken everyone by surprise. No one knew that a last minute rerouting of the president’s motorcade would lead to the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Alexander Fleming came back from a week’s vacation on September 28, 1928 to discover that staphylococcus bacteria he had left in dishes was invaded by a mold that we now know as penicillin. Roentgen left a cathode tube on a black box and noticed fluorescence on a nearby plate. He had discovered X-rays. A shepherd boy threw rocks into a cave in 1947 and heard the sound of broken pottery. He had discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls.

I spent three years in Cub Scouts. In Boys Scouts magazine “Boy’s Life,” they always had an article about a scout who used what he learned in scouting to rescue someone. In none of these situations did they plan to do anything great, but the situation placed it upon them.

But what about us? Our daily lives don’t make any great moment in history, any great scientific discovery or political event that affects many people. In the old TV show “Twilight Zone” there was an episode with actor Cliff Robertson about a wagon train of pioneers struggling through the American desert. Robertson played a pioneer whose son was deathly sick of a fever. He walked over a hill and ended up in the 20th century. He found some medicine from the future, ran away from pursuing policemen, and ended up back at the wagon train in the 1800’s. The medicine rescued his son, who became a doctor whose discoveries in medicine saved thousands of lives. But how many of us, after getting through college, after getting a decent job and succeeding in that work will do something that will change the face of the whole world? What difference does it make to the world if we get that degree, that job, publish papers, get that promotion, even that paycheck? What great destiny awaits us?

There is an appointment we all do face—death. It may come suddenly or after a long illness. It can come today, tomorrow, or years from now. But it will come.

In light of death all of what we do can seem a waste of time. An executor puts together all the assets left by us. They can be worth a lot of money. But as time goes, they are disbursed to others. We can go on campus and see buildings with names like Beardshear and McKay and Curtis named after former administrators, but who really knows these people anymore. In death what we do will end.

Yet another appointment awaits all of us. No, we don't know when it will come, but it changes everything. Jesus Christ is coming again to this world. We heard in our lessons about all the frightening things that will happen in the end. Isaiah wrote, "The leaves will vanish in smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants will die like flies." Mark wrote, "There will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning when God created the world until now and never to be equaled again. But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Then Jude tells us, "The day of Jesus will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah." Jude, like James who also wrote a book in the New Testament, was a half-brother of Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary. He assures us that Jesus' coming cannot be avoided.

But in the midst of all this fear and desolation is hope. Jude tells us, "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." Jesus will come to destroy all that is bad in this world. But even more He comes so that death is not our final appointment. We will live with Him! Therefore what we do now in our lives does matter.

Jude says, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." God had decided to reach people through you and me so that they also trust in Jesus. And that is more lasting and important than any presidential election, any bowl game victory, or any economic turnaround.

A church in East Texas decided it would focus on building a better community, not building a better church building. A church in Ohio passed up an opportunity to buy a prime piece of real estate to expand their facilities. Instead they decided to invest the money in community projects. A congregation near a correctional facility took up the challenge of offering a mentor to each released inmate. A group of churches is collaborating on bringing clean water to villages in underdeveloped countries.

These are all examples of what Jesus' coming can mean for us. We can give to others because unlike church buildings and programs and congregations, what will last is people—the people God wants in His eternal Kingdom, the people we can help "snatch" from the fire.

Jude concludes his letter with a blessing, one that encourages us to see each day as an appointment with Jesus. Because He is coming again and because He comes each day into our lives, what we do matters.

To Him who is able to keep you from falling and present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only one God our Savior be glory, majesty, and power and authority, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.