

Speeding His Return

Sermon of 2020-08-09

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Today we finish our Bold Obedience sermon series with a look at the 3rd chapter of Peter's 2nd letter to early-day believers. Remember, these are Peter's final words; he knows the time for his martyrdom is fast approaching. Final words are always significant. They seek to provide the best advice and counsel one has to offer. And this letter, and its final chapter, is no exception! Already through this letter Peter has reminded the early-day believers, and us today, of the importance of "doing the math" (of adding righteous virtues to the faith that we have received from God), of "holding to truth" (trusting and living out the Scriptures), and of "not being fooled" (not getting pulled in by false teachers ... wolves in sheep's clothing). Now he spells out clearly what we each are to do as we wait on Christ's Promised Return. If you have your bible, open it to 2 Peter 3 and follow along.

Why did Peter write this final letter? What compelled him, by the Spirit, to put pen and ink to paper one last time? Peter makes his purposes clear in this final chapter. He writes, firstly, to promote wholesome thinking that is based in the Word of God (both the Old and New Testaments) – verses 1-2. There was

plenty of false teaching circulating at that time ... misinformation ... untruths.

Peter wanted to ensure that those early-day believers (who were very dear to his heart because he had had the privilege of leading them to faith in Christ Jesus) were thinking soundly; that they were leaning on the Word of God to guide their thoughts and their actions and not the misguided, unholy thinking of false teachers. Secondly, he wrote at that time, to counter the words of the scoffers and false teachers who were boldly asserting that Jesus was not coming back – verse 3-7. Peter knew the truth, he knew Christ's promises, and he wanted those early-day believers, and us today, to remain confident of those promises! Thirdly, he writes to re-affirm God's nature and plans – verses 8-9. He affirms that God is infinite and eternal; not subject to time and space as we are. That God is patient and loving; wanting no one to perish, but all to come to repentance. He asserts that Christ's delayed return was for humanity's good. This truth is re-asserted in verse 15 where Peter declares, *"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation!"* Like God, believers are to be patient as they wait, in steadfast hopefulness, for that glorious day! Lastly, Peter writes to remind believers of their hope – verses 10-13. Christ Jesus will come again – His Day of Victory lies ahead. It will come like a thief, at a time no one but God Himself knows. And on that day, Peter says, the heavens will disappear – destroyed by fire -- and the

earth will be laid bare – melted in the heat. But that’s okay, because we hope not in the heaven and earth that now exists, but in the new heaven and new earth that Christ Jesus promised; the one He is presently preparing for us (John 14)!

As we wait, this last chapter of Peter’s final letter offers four clear action steps to be taken by those who have believed in Christ Jesus for their salvation:

1. Live Holy and Godly Lives (vs 11b-12a)

As those who look forward to the Day of God – eagerly anticipating Christ’s glorious and victorious return – our role is to live out the holiness that He has gifted to us and by doing so, to speed along the coming of that great and glorious Day! Here are Peter’s words: *“You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”* It is for holiness that we have been saved! As we choose to live in holiness we bring God’s salt and light to this evil, dark world. That salt and light enables others to see and know the truth and come to believe. Thus, as we choose holiness, we are actively partnering with God in bringing the renewal and restoration of this world to completion! We are, in fact, speeding along Christ’s Return!

Our holiness is not just vital for others, though. It is vital for us, as well. Why? Well, the new heaven and new earth that is our eternal hope is the place where “righteousness dwells”. It will be a place that knows no sin, no evil, no

wickedness, no falsehood. All who abide there – those who have chosen here to put their trust in our Holy God -- will be made completely holy, as God is holy, as they enter that new world. Thus, our present life, here on this earth, is in essence a grand rehearsal for the holy life we will live for all eternity. We are to practice – to live holiness/righteousness now – so that we are ready for the restored heaven and earth! Live holy and godly lives!

2. Make Every Effort to be Found Spotless, Blameless and at Peace (vs 14)

In this grand rehearsal, diligence and dedication is required on our part. Daily, moment-to-moment, we are to choose holiness and purity. This isn't a time for coasting along or for faking it! We have to put the work in to live out our holiness! The NIV says we are to "make every effort" – not just partial effort, not just "enough to get by" effort, not just "by the skin of my teeth" effort – EVERY effort is to be made, according to Peter! The Message translation says it this way, "Do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace!" Our best, because of Christ's work at Calvary, is to walk in righteousness, in holiness, in purity. When Christ comes for us we want to be as ready as we possibly can. We want Him to find us in a state of spotlessness and blamelessness. We want Him to be able to look at us ... whatever we're thinking, doing or saying in that

moment ... and be able to say, “Well done!” That’s the picture Peter paints here, and this should be our sincere desire as Christ-followers.

Of course this means making a conscience effort, in the power of the Spirit, to live in the righteousness that is ours through Christ Jesus. It means avoiding compromise as we travel in this world. It means saying “No” to temptation and “Yes” to God. It often means making tough choices that are counter to what this world proposes for us. “Make every effort ... do your very best!” Peter says. Put in the work of purity and peace each and every day.

The beautiful thing is that we have been promised Christ’s Righteousness and His Peace. These are not things we actually have to earn. Peter isn’t speaking here about ‘works-based’ salvation. He speaking about claiming what is already ours!

2 Corinthians 5:21 declares, “For He (God) hath made Him (Christ Jesus) to be sin for us; that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him (Christ)!”

Peter is saying, “Live out your standing before God. You are Righteous! Choose to BE what you are!”

Romans 5:1 declares, “Having been justified by faith, we have Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The animosity that our sinfulness created between us and God has been removed through Christ's cleansing blood; we are at peace with God. Peter is saying, "Live in the certain knowledge that you and God are at peace thanks to Jesus Christ!"

Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him!

3. Be on Your Guard! (verse 17)

In other words, keep watch, be alert, stand firm! Why? Peter says, "so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position." In Peter's day there were plenty of lawless men spouting errors, and following them would lead those early believers away from God (as he emphasized through chapter 2). The same is true in our day. Many within the church and outside of the church claim to know and declare truth, but their words contradict God's teaching through His Holy Scriptures. We need to be on guard.

As we reflected last week, that means knowing and applying the Bible in our day-to-day living. It means testing the teaching and instructions that we are receiving against the trustworthiness of God's Word, and walking away from anything that is not in line with His Truth.

Be on your guard!

4. Grow in the Grace and Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (vs 18)

In contrast to those who are led astray, Peter encourages those early-day believers ... and us today ... to keep on growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. 2 Peter 3:18 is a great verse to memorize, because it speaks such basic, simple truth.

First, we are to grow in grace. Grace is the unmerited/unearned favour of our God. Grace frees us from guilt and shame, and from the effort of trying to earn our place and be “good enough”. Grace declares us to be “worthy”. Grace forgives every sin and cleanses us completely. Grace enables us to walk in faith and choose the life of holiness that is made possible through Jesus. Because of grace, we are God’s adopted children, able to reflect His nature/His character here on earth. As we journey with God we are to seek to grow in grace! It is amazing and, in many ways, unfathomable ... but it is ours to receive in greater and greater measure.

Secondly, we are to grow in knowledge. Growing in the knowledge of Jesus helps us to understand and value His character, His values, His virtues. And the more we know Jesus the more we will want to be “like Him” – righteous and true.

Knowing God, through Jesus Christ, is what brings real abundant life for today and for all eternity!

Peter concludes his letter by saying, instead of falling for the lies of sinful men which lead to death, choose to grow; choose life! Grow in grace! Through grace, you will learn to see yourself as God sees you ... His cherished and holy child. Grow in the knowledge of Jesus, the One who saved and redeemed you for all eternity. Make knowing and following Him your first priority. From that heart knowledge will flow the sincere longing to be like Him.

How do we grow in grace and in our knowledge of Jesus? By reading God's Word and studying it alone and in fellowship with other believers who are seeking to know Him too, and through prayer ... open conversation with Father, Son and Spirit -- the God who loves us with a never-ending love!

Grow!

So, to summarize this last chapter of Peter's final letter to the church -- as we wait ... as we look forward to Christ's Return or the day He calls us Home with certain anticipation ... what sort of people ought we to be? Here's what Peter, inspired by God the Spirit, declares:

We are to be:

Holy and Godly – verse 11

Waiting / Anticipating – verse 12

Hastening – Speeding along that Day – verse 12

Diligent – “making every effort”, “being on guard” – verse 14, 18

Without Spot / Blameless – verse 14

At Peace – verse 14

Growing – verse 18

And in living in this way, we will be people committed to Glorifying God, which is why Peter ends his letter with these beautiful words of benediction:

“To Him (Jesus, the Righteous One) be glory both now and forever! Amen!”

(verse 18)

That, my friends, is our primary work here on earth. And that, my friends, will be our primary work in the new heaven and the new earth! Let’s be people who steadfastly choose to glorify God ... through our thoughts, our words, our actions, our love.