

Spiritual Survival: Looking Forward

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[0 : 00] So thank you very much for having me. I'm going to just lower this a small bit. If you want to turn your way to the 2 Peter, where you've been walking through this summer.

I'm going to start my timer here as well. 2 Peter chapter 3. And we'll be looking at verses 11 to 16 in particular.

So 2 Peter, before we read, 2 Peter is a letter. And so I think instead of just jumping into a text and reading it in isolation to the rest of the letter.

I think it's better for us to just remember that it is a letter. And that we should take a running jump at it. Don't just fly into the text and try to have a bit of context. So what I did is I read and listened to 2 Peter and 1 Peter over and over again.

To try and get just a feeling and to just really have in my mind exactly what Peter is trying to say to his people. Peter is at the end of his life and he is writing to them and he is exhorting them.

[1 : 22] And so I'd like to just read out kind of a sketch of 1 and 2 Peter. Just to give us a bit more context so that as we get into the verses we have that running jump to it. So the Apostle Peter is calling believers to remain faithful to the end.

He says you've been born again to a living hope, a salvation into which angels long to look. So don't be surprised at trials. Be holy. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. For the Lord's sake submit to every institution. Endure sorrow of unjust suffering and trust the Lord.

Husbands and wives live as God has called you to. All the time that is passed is sufficient for doing what the Gentiles want to do. The end of all things is at hand.

Therefore be self-controlled and sober minded for the sake of your prayers. Again, don't be surprised when persecution comes. This is to be accepted. And remember Jesus.

[2 : 31] Entrust yourself to a faithful creator just like he did. Elders, shepherd God's flock well with a right heart. Everyone, be humble. You have an enemy.

He is a vicious lion, but resist him and he will flee from you. Hold fast. God will restore you. He will confirm you. He will strengthen you and establish you. And in second Peter, brothers and sisters, his divine power is granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

In other words, you have all that you need for the Christian life. Therefore, make every effort to grow in Christlikeness. If you're not growing, you've lost sight of the fact that you've been cleansed from your sins.

And as long as I, Peter, am alive, I'll keep reminding you about these things. This isn't a man-made myth. I've seen Christ transfigured on the mount. So believe me, this is God's word, not an invention of man.

False teachers will come among you as they always have. They are condemned, but God knows how to rescue his own people and keep the unrighteous under punishment.

[3 : 39] These false teachers promise you freedom, but they themselves are slaves to corruption. They'd be better off if they had never known the truth than that they knew it and turned from it.

They'll laugh at the idea of a promised judgment day. But God's word is true, just as he called creation into being by his word, so he will call creation to an end by his word.

The day of the Lord is coming. The day of the Lord is coming. Like a thief in the night, as Jesus said, the day of the Lord is coming. And so as we come to verse 11 to 16 of chapter 3, have that in your mind that Peter has been calling, exhorting, reminding us of who we are, what is coming.

The false teachers will come among us, that we have all that we need. And so let's begin reading in verses 11 with this in mind. Let's start first in verse 10, I think.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. He's borrowing Jesus' language from Matthew 24. And then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

[4 : 54] Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people you ought to be in lies of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

Because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn. But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our brother Paul also wrote to you, according to the wisdom given him.

As he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

Now, I'd like to start off with, as I was thinking through this, I'd like to start off with just saying that I was convicted when I read 2 Peter and 1 Peter.

[6 : 06] And maybe you will be too, maybe you have been as you've gone through this summer. I was convicted of the fact that I rarely give thought to the second coming of Christ. I don't know, maybe I'm alone in that.

I do read the Word of God, and I love the Lord, but I've noticed that for the last, for months, I could go months, I'd say, without having thought of the fact that Jesus could come back tomorrow. And it's something that when you think of it, you go, how could I have forgotten something so clear, something that Jesus promised he would do?

And it should be something that I think about often. I mean, we talk a lot about how Jesus intervened the first time when he became a man. And Jesus, who in the form of God did not account equality with God, something to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking the form of being born in the likeness of man and being found in human form.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient, even to the point of death on a cross. And we should speak about this. We speak about how Jesus became a man and how he rose again. But I have noticed, at least in my own life, that I've failed to consider and to hasten the second coming of Christ.

I just realized I've just not been doing it. Maybe I don't want to be coming across as some sort of apocalyptic nutter, someone who has a sign in their garage, you know, the end is nigh.

[7 : 23] And although that is not the gospel, it's not the gospel to go out and show a sign that says the end is nigh. Because that's not necessarily, specifically Christian.

That is part of the Christian message. And so I don't want to be a weirdo who only talks about the end times. But then I don't want to be someone who ignores that part of scripture that calls us.

And so I had to repent of it. But I want to ask you this morning, try something for me. Just picture Main Street down in Carragalline. I was thinking of Balancholic where I live, but I also know Carragalline as well.

I want you to think of Main Street down in Carragalline. You can see the Carragalline Court Hotel, there's the Catholic Church, there's the Super Valley, there's a little bridge, there's the hill. And I want you to ask yourself this question.

Do you believe that one day all this will be gone? Do you believe that? Do you believe that one day Carragalline will not exist?

[8 : 25] That it will be broken down and that there will no longer be that place? That the house I live in right now won't be there. There will be a new heavens and new earth.

Now think about that. Do you really believe that? That's a big thing to believe. But I want you to let the weight of that just rest on you. Jesus has promised he will return to judge the living and the dead.

The universe as we know will pass away. The towns we live in, the jobs that we work, the houses we live in, there will be no more. Yet all men will be brought before the judgment seat of Christ.

There will be a new heavens and a new earth. Some believe that the present universe will be destroyed ultimately. In other words, that God will destroy the universe and that he'll make a new one from scratch.

While others still hold that it'll be melted down and sort of reduced to its original elements and then built back up. And I think that that second interpretation is more in line if you look at Romans 8 where Paul says, And so you see in verse 12, And you know, I was trying to picture that.

[9 : 53] I was like, what? You know, if I was a director in a film, how would I direct the heavens being set on fire and dissolved and the heavenly bodies melt as they burn? And what can we point towards?

I'm sure we could hire some really skilled CGI guy to do it. But the whole idea is that it's humbling and it's scary. And that only God can do that. Men can burn down buildings, but we can't burn creation.

And so moving on, I suppose the main thrust of what I want to look at this morning is that in light of this, in light of the surety of Christ's return, we should be godly.

It's simply the message. There's no need to make it somewhat complicated than it is. But while we wait for Christ, we should try and be more and more like Christ by the power of his spirit.

And so what I'd like us to do is look, I suppose you could look at, if you want to call it, the verbs that are in these verses. What does this look like? Godliness is something that we all as Christians hope to attain to and hope to grow in.

[10 : 56] It's not a place you arrive at and go, I'm no godly. But rather it's a matter of degrees where we come from one measure of glory to the other, more like Christ. But have a look in verse 12.

So I'm going to look at waiting, how we can wait in godliness, how we can hasten in holiness, being diligent and counting God's patience as salvation. So four things.

So the first one being waiting. Look at verse 12. So in verse 12 it says, Waiting for and hasten the coming of the day of God. We should be waiting for Christ's return. Waiting is always forward looking.

So if you see someone sitting on the side of the street and you ask them, you know, what are you doing? And he goes, I'm waiting. You wouldn't go, okay. You'd say, well, what are you waiting for? Waiting always has, it might sound obvious to stay, but waiting always is something that's in the future that you're waiting for.

It has an object. And so our waiting is for the return of Christ. And how do we do that? It's not a passive waiting.

[11 : 55] So if you'd move on just two words later in the verse, it says that we're hastening the return of Christ. We don't passively wait. It's not just to sit there and, you know, like you're waiting for a bus.

You can sit and wait for a bus. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to hope the bus arrives alone. In Ireland you're going to have to do. But hastening, we don't passively wait. We actively wait. And to hasten means to earnestly desire it, to hurry it along, so to speak.

So how do we do that? How do we hasten the day of the Lord? Again, I think it's a pretty straightforward answer, but when we do all that we can to help accomplish the Great Commission, we are hastening the Lord's return.

And we should pray to that end. Look at the end of Revelation. He who testifies to these things says, Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. We should pray that Christ would return. And we should pray knowing that he will not return until the gospel has gone forth to all nations. He will not return to the gospel, which came through the whole world as a testimony to all nations, as Jesus said in Matthew 24.

[13 : 00] Therefore, we should pray. On a practical level, look in the news today. You should pray for Egypt. There is a power struggle.

And we know from the word of God that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness. And we know that what's going on there in that country right now has implications for the rest of the Middle East.

And someone's going to land up with more power than somebody else. The dust will settle, and someone will have power. And we should be praying, Lord, whoever it is, we know that the heart of the king is like a stream in your hands.

Whoever it is who has power in Egypt in two years' time or three years' time when there's stability, would you please, Lord, make sure that that person allows for greater freedom for Christians. That's how we should be praying. Look at the news. Take that as your prayer points. Think globally and pray that the Great Commission would be carried out. And think locally as well. Am I sharing the gospel with my friends?

[14:02] Am I using every opportunity and making the best use of the time? Because the days are evil. Verse 14. We go to verse 14.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found in him without spot or blemish, and at peace. I think that peace they're referring to, you know, think of Romans, therefore having been justified by faith.

We have peace with God. Peace. You don't have to be worrying is God going to destroy you as a Christian because his wrath is gone. There's not any wrath left for any Christian.

God didn't get rid of 90% of it on the cross for his people. He got rid of 100% of his wrath. There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. We have peace. And we should seek to live in peace with all people.

But I want us to focus here on the words being diligent and without spot or blemish. And the word diligence here is the same word that Peter used back at the start of chapter 1 when Simon was speaking a few weeks ago on this passage.

[15:09] He said when he entreats us to make every effort to make our calling and election sure. So he's at the end of his letter now he's just reminding you keep going, make every effort, be diligent to grow.

It's also the same one he uses in 115 where he says, you know, I'll make every effort to remind you of these things. I'm going to be diligent to remind you to be diligent. So, it's a striving, it's a daily effort and to be found in him without spot or blemishes.

Now I was thinking about that, I was like, why did he use that kind of language? I mean, it's kind of in stark contrast to what he used in chapter 2. He says we shouldn't have spots or blemishes and he actually describes false teachers as blemishes and stains.

Not that they have stains or blemishes, they are blemishes. But I was wondering, Peter doesn't point out big inconsistencies but rather small things, spots and blemishes.

You know, if I took you outside, we drive a silver polo, it's about 14 years old. If I took you outside and I showed you the bodywork of our car, it's got dents and scratches.

[16:23] It's not spring chicken and it's got a few dents and a few bumps in it. Thankfully, there are no missing doors or windows. And that's really handy.

So it's roadworthy. Now when it comes to cars, that's fine. You don't even need a car to be absolutely perfect and without blemish or spot. But as Christians, I think we can be too easily fooled into thinking that godliness is just about dealing with the missing cars and windows.

And we just glaze over so easily the little dents and the small spots of blemishes. You know, I suppose in my thinking, I kind of think, as long as I don't crash with big sins, then that'll be fine.

But really godliness, something very helpful which I'd like to read to you in a minute, godliness is really the sum of a thousand small things. If you ever think about how Jesus lived his life, I mean, you think of Jesus in his ministry, but I like thinking of, imagine what Jesus was like when he was a teenager, when he was asked to do something that no teenager likes being asked to do to do the washing or clean up.

Or what was Jesus like when he was really hungry and was struggling with being cranky? Or what was Jesus like when someone, you know, when he stubbed his toe? Or when someone was just really rude to him for no reason and he was trying to buy something off him?

[17:43] I mean, kind of, that really is godliness being lived out. I'd like to read from you from Kevin DeYoung. He's an author. He wrote a book about holiness, a hole in our holiness, we call it.

And he puts it well. He said, Holiness is the sum of a million little things, the avoidance of little evils and little foibles, the setting aside of little bits of worldliness and little acts of compromise, the putting to death of little inconsistencies and little indiscretions, the attention to little duties and little dealings, the hard work of little, small self-denials and small self-restraints, the cultivation of little benevolences and little forbearances.

Are you trustworthy? Are you kind? Are you patient? Are you joyful? Do you love? These qualities worked out in all the little things in life determine whether you are a blight or a blessing to everyone

around you, whether you are an ugly spiritual eyesore or growing into a good-looking Christian. And although Christ is speaking in a different context, I think it's helpful to remember his words. He said, you know, one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. I suppose if I give an example from my own life, if I'm praying for Egypt and praying, as I described already, that God, the kingdom of God would be further through that conflict and that he would bring peace.

[19 : 15] And then I go out and my wife asks me to empty the dishwasher and I'm like, then I can't separate the two. I can't be cranky with my wife and then think that that's fine because I'm praying for big things.

That's how we work out our salvation. So, something that's been very helpful for me that I would pass on and that I think Peter is drawing attention to here is spots and blemishes. Look for those things that you think, it's not that small. It's not any small thing. It's part of my personality or I've always been that way. But if it's not in line with the word of God, just get rid of it. Ask him for his help. Unless you think, I know what it's like to be hearing preaching about holiness and sometimes you can just feel like you're being whacked over the head and you can just find it, yeah, I know I should be better and I'll try and do better. But look back to chapter 1. We have all that we need. We have everything that we need. Holiness, being Christ-like is not a pipe dream.

[20 : 20] It's not something that the Lord gave us just so he could watch us, you know, fumble. He gave us a goal, Christ-likeness, and he's given us everything that we need. Now we see that God sovereignly changes us, but we have to pick up and go and make every effort.

You're not going to wake up one day as some, you know, holy saint with a ring around the back of your head. We have to make every effort and grow. Be more godly today than you were yesterday. Even if they're small steps, they're steps nonetheless. In verse 15, I want to just look at a phrase here where he says, count the patience of the Lord as salvation. I've read this loads of times and I never really understood what he meant by that. It's not terribly complicated when I actually thought about it. So, the word count here can mean to consider or to deem or to account, to think of. So, we could put it like this. We could say, consider the patience of the Lord as salvation or deem the patience of the Lord or think of the patience of the Lord as salvation. So, to put it simply, when we consider why God hasn't come back yet, we should understand this to be an account, on account, of his patience.

[21 : 37] A patience with the aim of salvation which Paul, he spoke of in Romans chapter 2 and he said, you know, do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

God's patience as an expression of his kindness is there so that sinners will repent. So, if someone comes up to you and goes like, oh well, Jesus is taking his time coming back and they're snacky but I think you can just kind of quickly retort and say, that's because he's giving you time to repent. You've got time. I can't guarantee you much longer than this minute but you have time. People will laugh at the fact that Jesus is coming back and they'll caricature it and think they were like, you know, they'll think they were kind of like, you know, Armageddon kind of people but it is a note and it is a part of the gospel and we should warn people of the wrath to come. So, when someone says, you know, I don't see any signs that he's coming back, then we can clearly say to them that's because he's giving you time to repent. He's calling his people to himself and once that's done, there will be no more time to repent.

That's it. Verses 15 and 16, let's have a quick look at those again. Count the patience of the Lord as salvation just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

[23 : 02] There are some things in them that are hard to understand which the ignorant and the unstable twist to their own destruction as they do with the other scriptures. Now, I want to address this because this is part of the text I've been given and it might seem just a little bit separate to what I've spoken of already about being holy and how we should hasten and wait for the Lord but it's really important.

Peter refers to Paul's letter saying that Paul also wrote about these things and in doing so he's emphasizing the fact that they're in agreement about these things. So he didn't have one apostle going I think this is how it's going to play out and this is what you should do and another apostle going well no I think you know they're all in agreement and Paul is we understand he's passed away at this time his letters are in circulation probably for quite a while and so he's going on to point out that there are some things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand.

I am relieved that's in the Bible. Because I think we're fooling ourselves if we say that the Bible is simple to understand and I kind of feel sorry for people who do kids Bibles and they come to passages that are really hard to do which is like you can't really get around how complicated that is. Paul was a gigantic intellect and he spoke in ways that are just that are really rigorous rigorous and strong and watertight but in order to be watertight and rigorous and strong they're quite complicated sometimes.

But Peter says that there are ignorant and unstable people out there and what they do is they twist the word of God and that word can actually even mean to torture.

[24 : 44] I always like to think of, you know, remember Stretch Armstrong remember those toys, anything like that, any kind of squishy toys, you pull them and you can twist them but if you let go of them they just go back to the way they were.

And one of the great things about the Reformation I suppose and was there before the Reformation was just being reminded that the best way to interpret scripture is with scripture and that we shouldn't twist the word of God. And notice why he says they twist it to their own destruction.

I'm sure every single one of us in this room, if we're being honest, there have been times you've read the Bible and gone, I wish that wasn't there. I'll be honest about it, I just wish that wasn't there. Whether it's something that convicts me or something that I think is not fair and oftentimes I've gone on to understand it better and go, okay, that's not actually saying what I think it's saying but there have been times when I've gone, if that wasn't there I wouldn't miss it in some ways.

But whenever we change the Bible it's always a loss, it's never again. Never. No one ever wins by changing the Bible.

[25 : 52] And when you have teachers, false teachers, who will, by ignoring passages of scripture, they're actually, their people are losing out and they're only doing damage because the word of God in its entirety is profitable.

It's good for us. Some of it is better swallowed than chewed, as Spurgeon said, but it is all good for us and we need it all. And so when they twist the scriptures they do it to their own destruction.

And so look at verse 16 and this is very important. He says about Paul's writings, he says, as they do the other scriptures. So they twist Paul's writings as they do the other scriptures. And so Peter here I think is clearly affirming the writings of Paul whose letters were known in circulation for a while as scripture.

Some have said that these verses are not saying this, but I think even aside from the clear sentence structure there, if you look at the fact that if we found Paul's letter, another letter of Paul today in Caracol, if we managed to find another letter of Romans part 2, we wouldn't hold that as scripture.

We would say that's a fantastic find and we can get a mind even more into the mind of Paul, a view, but we wouldn't hold that as scripture. And so, what he's saying is that if they twist Paul's letters, if Paul's letters and he's referring to them as not scripture and they twist them, then they're just twisting Paul's letters.

[27 : 13] They're not twisting scripture. If I write a letter to someone here about the Christian faith and they twist it and misinterpret it, they're not going to get destroyed for that. But if it's scripture they're twisting, you see the link?

If it's not scripture then it can't be eternally fately. And so, that's just a run through of those verses, but I want us just to recap.

Ask yourself again, think about it this morning, later today, when you go to work tomorrow, whatever you're doing. That Christ's second coming is coming and that he is coming back.

He will come back to judge the living and the dead. In the meantime, let us be holy and about our master's business, the great commission, until he comes or we die.

We can also die. So, one of those will come. I used to think in terms of motivation, the fact that one day I know I'm going to die, but I just forgot the fact that you might actually die, Christ might just come back, and he might meet you before you get to meet him, as it were.

[28 : 23] He might show up by surprise. You know, one of my first passages of scripture that I ever memorized, and I hope I can do it justice this time. It was Mark 8. And he said, you know, Jesus was speaking to his disciples, and he said, if anyone will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it. He said, you know, whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, and of my words in this wicked and adulterous generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

I'm sure I've missed out a small bit, but the point being that Christ will come back, and as he said himself, will I find faith on her? So let's lay aside every weight and every sin which clings so closely and run with endurance the race that is set before us.

And in closing, I'd like to just read from Isaiah 40, which I think really speaks to how temporal this life is and how small we are really.

Isaiah 40, verses 6 to 8. All flesh is like grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it.

[29 : 52] Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Let's pray.

Let's pray.