

Eternity

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[0 : 00] But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, 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.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives 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 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.

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. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 50] To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Well, good morning, everyone. Good to see you all. My name is Chris. I'm one of the church family here.

And I repeat my welcome that you already have from Bruce. I hope you'll excuse my sitting down because I can't stand for very long at a time.

But Simon Peter, you see on the back of the service sheet, there is one verse spelt out in three parts. Which will be the structure of what I am about to say.

When Simon Peter was speaking, not just writing, one of his hearers said to him as he got up to speak, quote, We are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

God our Father, may we have that same attitude of heart and mind today, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. It may help if you have the Bible open as well, page 1226, because I shall refer to other parts of that chapter, but concentrating on the last verse.

[3 : 08] Well, here we are within hours of the start of another year. It's tempting to think and talk about endings, since the Bible has so much to say about them.

End of a life. End of a king's reign. End of a war. And yes, end of a year. A text in that unusual book, Ecclesiastes, chapter 6, says, quote, Better is the end of a thing than its beginning.

Well, there's a thought. So I was tempted by the end of the Old Testament, as we have it in Malachi chapter 4, where we find a reference to the law and the prophets, and, quote, The Son of Righteousness, rising with healing in his wings.

That's where the hymn gets it from. Now, Malachi didn't know he was writing the end of the Old Testament. In fact, it hasn't always been the end. At one time, Two Chronicles was the last book of the Old Testament.

But that's another subject for another time. I was tempted by Malachi 4, or even better, the end of the New Testament, where you find the last promise and the last prayer of the Bible.

[4 : 23] Surely I am coming soon. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. If you're wondering where to focus your own night prayers this evening, here are two great

chapters to stretch your mind and warm your heart.

The end of the Old Testament and end of the New. But this morning, as you see, I've gone for a different ending, with links to where many of us have been this month.

The second letter of Peter has much in common with the only letter of Jude, part of our series in the autumn, in the Advent.

And our growth groups on Tuesdays have worked carefully through the last known letter of the Apostle Paul, known as 2 Timothy. And Paul wrote, and I quote, The time of my departure has come, 2 Timothy 4.

And now we see how Peter writes, 2 Peter 1, I know that the putting off of my body will be soon. So two men with the goal clearly in view, the prize and the crown, probably via the path of pain and suffering still to come.

[5 : 44] And having said all that, what about Simon Peter's very last words as we have them? You can see for yourself, but I will read that verse, the last verse we have from Peter.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, both now and to the day of eternity.

Amen. When a word comes three times in one sentence, or one verse, we naturally reckon it must be pretty important. I won't go too far off track here, but it's not hard to find texts where words like believe, or love, or faith.

I'll repeat it three or four times in a short space. But my word here is a different kind of word. Can you spot it? In technical terms, not a noun, but a conjunction.

This little word, and, three letters in English, three letters in Greek, where it actually comes four times, but we'll stick with the English this morning. Because as Peter wrote it, and as our translators have put it, the and word, is the link between three pairs of other key words, as set out on the back of our service sheet.

[7 : 04] But don't let's miss the obvious point that this is from another letter, like nearly half of the New Testament. Did you get many letters at Christmas?

Did you write, did you write many, or any? Do emails count? Especially if they're copies of what a hundred other people are getting?

They say that letter writing is a dying art. Thank God it was alive and well in the first century AD. Is it something we could practice more to the encouragement and joy of our friends?

just a thought in passing. The other not-to-miss word is but. I've left that in at the beginning because verse 18, which you have, is in sharp contrast to verse 17.

Beloved, he says, dear friends, don't get carried away by the errors of lawless people. but, verse 18, but grow in the ways that follow.

[8 : 13] We're often in danger of errors and lawless people. We always need verse 18. And the first pair of inseparable twins linked by and are grace and knowledge.

Grow in the grace and knowledge. If your mind switched to John chapter 1, you're not far out.

We may have heard that classic opening which has become a vital part of the Christmas story as read out loud in millions of churches. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father full of full of what?

Full of grace and truth. At its most basic level, here is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ never flinching from the truth and never deviating from that grace which is the undeserved love of God for rebellious and unlovely people like us.

And surely that must be our model, not just to learn that and tick those boxes but to grow in both directions. Grace and knowledge but you say well grace and truth, grace and knowledge not quite the same.

[9 : 34] So what's the difference? To put it simply, truth is truth and not just my truth and your truth, relative truth or fake truth but God's truth and knowledge in this context is the knowledge of the truth.

We can hardly grow in the truth, truth is there and does not change but to grow in grace and the knowledge of the truth, surely an annual, weekly or daily target by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Not named in this verse but clear from the first letter, verse 1 onwards. But growing in grace. Peter doesn't mean graciousness though that's not a bad growth point either.

How can we grow in that grace which is the free undeserved love of God? Here are my suggestions. Grow in understanding that grace.

Grow in welcoming that grace. Grow in thanking and praising God for his grace. Grow in loving to share that grace.

[10:41] Grow in loving to pass it on and continuing in that grace. Defined most clearly in our next pair of our Lord and Saviour.

Here's the next, the second and. The grow in grace knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Here we have two of the greatest words in the whole Bible held together by those three letters A and D and never to be separated.

And how Simon Peter loves to use this expression or one very like it in his letters. The first sentence of this letter has the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Still on the same page, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Few more lines down, the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I won't put all the numbers but our Lord Jesus Christ comes twice in chapter 1 and again in chapter 2 the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And the same title in this last verse which is my text for today. Now different English versions of the Bible mark the beginning of Matthew's Gospel in different ways.

[12:00] This ESV English Standard Version which is our church Bible has simply the New Testament. After Malachi turned the page the New Testament Matthew chapter 1.

Some of us oldies were used to earlier versions which print at that point the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

William Tyndale 1534 didn't use Peter's words in the title of his landmark translation but it somehow became standard practice for many later English Bibles the King James the Revised Version the Standard Version and so on but I confess not so many as I thought when I started looking to check up the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is still in many Bibles that are in print. Now there's nothing wrong with referring to the Saviour of the world simply as Jesus the name given before his birth and at his birth the name Jesus simply that that's what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John usually call him it may be the simplest way of speaking when we are witnessing to a friend talk about Jesus this Jesus said Peter again on his feet among the crowds at Pentecost this Jesus you crucified God raised up but it will do our friends no harm at all if sometimes they hear us call him our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ I need hardly point out you can't have one title without the other if he's your Lord to obey he is equally essentially a Saviour to trust why?

because it's as a result of his saving work on the cross that one day every tongue will call him Lord now if that doesn't mean very much to you at the moment do hang in there and keep listening if you will you might pick up some clues before the end as to what this is all about he becomes Lord because he died on the cross as the Saviour now here I'm overlapping with the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2 and it's also Paul whose letters are commended with a smile by Peter who gives us Galatians 6 and the source of the hymn When I Survey the Wondrous Cross based on that verse in Galatians 6 far be it from me that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and this morning's hymns not chosen by me but loved by me have these titles not quite in the same line but clearly in the same verse name of all majesty we began with then

[15:07] Saviour of Calvary Jesus is Lord and from the same writer tell art my soul the greatness of the Lord in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice and a few more where they came from Isaac Watts wrote join all the glorious names all the names Caroline Noah wrote at the name of Jesus every knee should bow but we must move on now to now oh yes when must we be growing sorry when must we grow in grace now and to the day of eternity we must first grasp the fact that Peter is not just signing off with a standard farewell greeting Merry Christmas Happy New Year love and kisses your friend Peter Peter knew a time when he was rebuked by Jesus for his careless words he learnt his lesson and when he comes to write what he knows that many will read though he could hardly guess at the multi-million readership he was to have but now every word is going to count like now another three letters a word that strips away all our excuses for putting off what we plan to do the time for repentance when's that now the time for trust is now the time for obedience is now the time perhaps for new openings in Christian service is now above all the time for growing in this verse and glory is now glory to

God the time is now you can add to that little list yourself Paul again 2 Corinthians 6 now is the favourable time now is the day of salvation is there some commitment that you or I need to make before this year ends we've got 12 hours we're also good at postponing decisions or jobs that may prove tricky or worse here again the words of another letter writer James whoever knows the right

thing to do and fails to do it for him or her it is sin James 4 17 especially if our procrastination is in danger of damaging the glory due to our Lord to him always be the glory now and not just tomorrow and here's the and to the day of eternity when I used to travel up the M6 a lot more than

I ever will again I used to glance for no more than two seconds at a little chapel high up on the bank on our right hand side going north and overlooking the non-stop traffic one glance and it's gone as you're speeding along at 70 miles an hour now if you were the pastor or leader of that little chapel and you knew that thousands of drivers and their passengers would glance up at your chapel every day what would you choose to put on the end wall just visible from the road for a moment some of you may even have seen it you wouldn't put morning service 1030 or welcome useless you wouldn't spell out John 316 the writing would be too small and no one would have time to read it anyway well whoever made that decision and I have no idea and I can't tell you where it is or was whoever it was chose one word in enormous capital letters from the ground to the roof does anyone know what the word was did you see it as you travelled up the M6

I think it was the M6 well I'll tell you if it wasn't the M6 it was the M1 but the principle's the same well there's that little chapel high on the hill overlooking the road and the word somebody chose in almost capital letters eternity eternity shouts at the drivers just for a moment and it's gone I hope it didn't make any drivers go into the ditch and find eternity sooner than they expected to but how about that for a stunning thought provoking even scary single word I couldn't think of a better Jude in his letter that we looked at before has a lot to say about eternity so does Peter so does Paul and so does our Lord Jesus Christ what does it profit anyone to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of my father he who believes in me has eternal life they out for ourselves treasures in heaven as one 20th century writer put it it's only against the background of eternity that things appear in their true proportion and assume their real value things including our wages our spending habits our jobs our entertainment our leisure our hopes and ambitions our fears and worries especially at the cusp of the year if you sometimes found

Jude's letter hard to take as he knew we would take this dimension from the whole of 2 Peter 3 which we've heard most of it read through Peter knew and seems to have loved Psalm 90 which again I commend for our end of year Psalm a thousand years are but as yesterday so teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom and to end the year not in misery or complaint but in thankfulness and praise well not in booze either but in praise yes number them 365 I'm starting to count on over again except it'll be 366 next time and one day will be our last or this world's last after which eternity there will be a day

[22 : 15] I have several books of prayers on my shelves for use in private or to fit into a church service many of them have prayers for a new year but I couldn't find any for the passing or ending of an old one the hymn book does better here's a sample from a hymn book from a hymn for your mercy and your grace faithful through another year hear our song of thankfulness saviour and redeemer hear I'll read that again for your mercy and your grace faithful through another year hear our song of thankfulness saviour and redeemer hear but I'm going to end now with one prayer which uses some truly ancient words from that number 90 in the Psalms of David in the Bible which Peter and Paul both loved so much so let us pray

Lord you have been our dwelling place in all generations before the mountains were brought forth or ever you'd formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting you are God you return man to dust and say return oh children of man twelve thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past we bring our years to an end like a sigh we are brought to an end by your anger by your wrath we are dismayed return oh Lord how long have pity on your servants satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days and we are glad to be able to add through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour Amen