

Living Now in Light of Later

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Preacher: Ricky Njoto

- [0:00] Our first reading is on the screen and both readings speak of the day of the Lord and how we live in the meantime.! Thanks Ron. The last chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi 4. Surely the day is coming, it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays, and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees of the laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.
- [1:16] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to you. The New Testament reading is from 2 Peter, chapter 3, and can be found on page 1227 of the Pew Bibles. It's our last reading in Peter's second letter. Chapter 3, from verse 1. Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I've written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles. Above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 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.
- [2:25] 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. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 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. 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. 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. For the day of the Lord will come like a thief. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?
- [3:41] You ought to live holy and godly lives, 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.

But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction.

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard, so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position.

[5 : 00] But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Good morning. Please keep your Bibles open to that passage from 2 Peter 3.

Well, imagine you're preparing for your dream overseas holiday. You've booked the tickets. If you're working, you've put in your leave request.

You've been counting down the days. What do you do as you wait? Well, if you're like me, when I desire to go on a holiday so much, I can't wait.

I start bringing that future into the present bit by bit. So, for example, you might learn a few words in the language of the country that you're going to go to.

[6 : 05] You might look at photos like that, of the beaches or mountains or cities that you're going to go to, and you start imagining being there. Maybe you might even try some of the food in advance.

Okay, we're going to try that one. No, not that one. Well, this passage in 2 Peter 3 says that Christian life is kind of like that. There's a future day coming, the return of Jesus, which is what we're looking forward to during Advent.

A day of judgment for the world, but a day of deliverance for God's people from this world's suffering. A day when we will be made completely holy.

And if we really long for that future, we'll start bringing some of that holiness that we're going to live in, into our lives now, by living godly and holy lives.

Let's take a look at what Peter says. Peter begins in verse 1 to 2. Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

[7 : 26] 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. As he has said repeatedly in the whole letter, Peter wants his readers to remember.

Because we are forgetful creatures, aren't we? And later on, Peter says that people have the wrong understanding about God because they forget, or they even deliberately forget.

And so he wants Christians to remember and keep remembering. What's there to remember? Well, the words spoken by the prophets and the command of Jesus through the apostles.

What are those? Well, I think based on the whole context of the letter, it's the message about holiness. Because the whole Old Testament called God's people to holiness.

For example, in Leviticus 11, God said to the Israelites, be holy because I am holy. Or the prophet Isaiah rebuked God's people because they were being sinful, corrupt, and they have spurned the holy God.

[8 : 59] And Jesus' command in Matthew 5, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Even Peter, in his first letter, he said, be holy in all you do.

Peter's point seems to be, don't forget that from Moses to the prophets to Jesus to the apostles, God's call has always been for his people to be holy.

Not holiness to earn salvation, but holiness because God is holy and his people are to be like him. And those who love him desire to be like him.

I think the call to holiness is a very easy thing to forget. If the Old Testament Israelites forgot about the need to live holy, even though they had the law to make sure that they lived holy lives, how easy would it be for us who have grace, who hear about the message of grace all the time, to forget about living holy?

Amen. And so, straight away, Peter gives a reason why remembering holiness is necessary. Verse 3 to 4.

[10 : 34] Above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 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. scoffers will come in the last days.

Well, the last days refer to the days between Jesus' resurrection and his coming again. That's now. Scoffers are here now.

And according to Peter, they are saying, where is this coming of Jesus? He's not coming back. The world has been the same since our ancestors died even since the beginning of creation.

They don't believe that Jesus will return in judgment. And if there's no judgment, then they can live however they want. And this is why they follow their own evil desires in verse 3.

[11 : 45] There's no judgment, so why live holy? Why? Now, people who don't believe in God certainly think this way, right?

God is not judging us. Well, God doesn't exist in the first place. And so, we're free to do whatever we want. Like this new atheist campaign that says, there's probably no God, so stop worrying and enjoy your life.

there's no judging God who's coming in judgment, so leave how you want. But I think it's not only atheists who think this way or who are tempted to think this way.

This kind of thinking can easily tempt and penetrate the church as well. And that's why Peter wants us to be careful. So, some people might claim they believe in Jesus, but they don't believe that Jesus judges at all.

The God who judges doesn't fit their idea about what God should be like. There are plenty of so-called Christians who think that.

[13 : 03] Like this banner at a church on Collins Street, the Ten Commandments, the most negative document ever written. Why? Well, maybe because they think that God can't be that judgmental.

And therefore, people like this might not be afraid of living unholy lives. To these people who think that Jesus is not coming in judgment, Peter replies, verse 5 to 7, 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.

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged, that is the flood, Noah's time, and destroyed. 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.

Again, Peter gives us a reminder, because often people forget or even deliberately forget the truth or suppress the truth.

God created the world and he has destroyed it before with the flood. He has judged before, and so he can and will do it again, this time by fire.

[14:42] Creation had a beginning and so it will have an end. So where is this judgment then?

Where is Jesus? It's been 2,000 years. If people in Peter's day were already scoffing because Jesus had not returned then, 20 to 30 years after Jesus' death, even more so will people scoff now because we have been waiting for 2,000 years.

Peter answers, verse 8 to 10, 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.

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.

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.

[15:57] Again, Peter starts with, do not forget. It's easy for us to forget that God's patience is not the same as ours.

Jesus hasn't returned, not because he is slow in keeping his promise, or because he doesn't want to return, and so he's delaying it. Of course he wants to return.

We are his bride. He loves us. He longs to live with us. He longs to return. But God is patient, way more patient than we are.

And he's waiting because people are lost, and they need to be found. Didn't Jesus say there's still that one sheep that he needs to chase?

And then perhaps another sheep, and then perhaps another sheep. God is waiting because judgment is real, and it will be final, and that is scary. The world will be destroyed, and it will come like a thief, meaning those lost people will have no idea that it's coming.

[17:14] They won't be ready, and so God is waiting very, very patiently for them to come home. I had a friend who became a Christian and went to my church, and during one Bible study, I said, I can't wait for Jesus to come back.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. And she said, I want Jesus to come back, but I hope he can wait until my dad becomes a Christian.

Her dad wasn't a Christian, and suddenly I realized I often want Jesus to return because I am tired or I am frustrated. But God delays because he loves not just me.

He wants everyone to come to repentance, and so he's waiting very, very patiently.

Jesus is coming back, even though for us it takes ages.

[18:30] Now, if Jesus is coming back in judgment, what do we do in light of that future? Now, here I think we move to the heart of the passage.

Verse 11, simple application.

Peter gives us three reasons why we ought to live holy and godly lives. Verse 11 to 12, you ought to live holy and godly lives 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. While we wait, we get busy living holy and godly lives because by doing that, we speed the coming of Jesus.

Now, we're not told how our holy lives contribute in God's sovereign plan exactly, but at least we know that our lives and actions matter to God.

[19:53] It seems that Jesus is waiting for unbelievers to repent and believe and for believers to keep repenting and keep maturing to build up his body.

So, instead of just sitting around and waiting for Jesus to return, we can get busy living a holy life to speed its coming.

Another reason why we need to live holy lives is verse 13 to 14. But in keeping with this promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

So, then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him.

Now, you might ask, why must Christians make every effort to be found spotless and blameless, blameless if we are already made spotless and blameless by Jesus alone and not by our effort?

[21 : 12] Well, yes, we are saved by grace through faith alone, not by effort or works. Our works are not worthy enough to win our salvation. Only Jesus' works and death and resurrection can do that.

And yes, the status of being spotless and blameless has already been given to us in Jesus only by his death and resurrection.

There's nothing more we can add. But, aren't we frustrated? Our status is righteous, yes, but our actual righteousness in this life as we try to live it out fluctuates, doesn't it?

It waxes and wanes. As we try to be more and more holy, we fail. But in that new creation, Peter says in verse 13, righteousness dwells, it stays.

Don't we long for that? A world where our hearts finally love what God loves all the time? Don't we long for that?

[22 : 33] And just like the holiday illustration, if we long for something in the future so much, we start practicing it in the present. Because we just can't wait. That's what Peter says.

Since or because you are looking forward to that place righteousness where righteousness dwells, make every effort to practice it, to live it out.

Truly converted Christians don't just look for free forgiveness. Truly converted Christians desire a holy life because they see that God's holiness is beautiful.

And God's will afraid of hell. Many people become Christian only because they are scared of hell, but not because they actually want to live with the holy God.

They're afraid of hell, but they don't want to actually live in heaven. They're only scared of hell, so they only want the free forgiveness. They say the sinner's prayer, they get baptized, and then that's the end of their discipleship because they think that's how they earn the free forgiveness.

[24 : 00] If that is you, if you realize you've only wanted to escape hell but haven't really wanted to live with God, can I say the door is still open and ask God to give you a heart that actually longs for him and his holiness.

Peter here wants Christians to desire to look forward to the world where righteousness dwells as we dwell with the holy God.

And one sign that we desire that world is if we practice it right now. Not perfectly, of course, but still we make every effort, like Peter says.

So first reason, we live a holy life because somehow it speeds the coming of Jesus. And second reason, we live a holy life because we look forward to that world of righteousness that we practice it in the present.

Third reason, verse 17 to 18. So third reason, here Peter goes back to the false teaching.

[25 : 48] The lawless influence. Third reason, we need to grow in grace to become more and more mature and holy so that we don't get carried away by the error of unholiness that Peter has warned us about.

Because the thing is, we never stay still spiritually. Some of you already know that I like to play bass.

Music. I have to practice playing music, playing my bass for at least 10 minutes every day to keep improving. Right?

If you singers here, if you like playing music, you know that's true. When I don't practice, like when I'm on holiday, I don't stay at the same level.

I actually become a little worse. My hearing is a bit off. My timing is a bit off. My fingers stiffen. Spiritually, it's the same.

[26 : 58] There's no such thing as being stagnant in our faith or in our holiness. When we stop growing in maturity and holiness, we don't stay where we are.

We become weaker. We become more prone to temptations and to sin. We become more prone to listening to bad teachings.

And if we keep going down and down and down, the danger is that, like Peter says, we fall. That's what this text and other texts like Hebrews 6 warn us about.

Now, as Andrew has mentioned last week, true Christians cannot fall away completely. Because it's not the strength of our faith or our holiness that sustains us.

It's the strength of our Savior. And friends, He is strong. He keeps those He loves because He has bought us with His precious blood.

[28 : 11] But that's from the divine perspective. From the human perspective, no Christian is so secure that they don't need the reminder, the constant reminder, to keep producing fruit.

Because as Peter has said in chapter 1, our holiness, our fruit, tells us, confirms to us, of our status in Jesus.

When we stop growing, we need to worry and self-reflect and to pray for help. So let's live holy lives so that we speed up the coming of Jesus because we desire that world of righteousness and so that we don't fall away.

Now, let me leave you with two simple applications. First, I think the first application is keep up with, let's keep up with our Bible reading.

Because we're forgetful creatures. And so we need to fill our minds with scriptures. And the more we read the Bible, the more we remember.

[29 : 38] That's what Peter wants us to do, to remember. And as Peter is saying, we are at risk of getting carried away or even falling away altogether if we forget biblical truths.

Second, let's live a holy life. Jesus is coming like a thief when we don't expect him. So get ready.

What are the sins that you still love? Sexual sin? Greed? Selfishness?

If you still live in any sin, make every effort to leave it behind. Now, that effort might involve doing difficult things.

Like getting an accountability partner, being open to someone that you can trust. Praying hard about it.

[30 : 49] Make every effort, Peter says. Jesus is coming. Make every effort to leave holy. But in the end, we make every effort not to earn God's acceptance, but because he's already promised us a home where righteousness dwells.

And we want that. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this reminder that you are patient, but you're also the God who fulfills all your promises.

And Jesus will return. So help us, Lord, with the power of your Spirit to live holy and godly lives as we wait for that coming of Jesus.

And so that people who see us might desire that life and might want to know Jesus. In the name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen. Amen.