

THE SCOFFERS' QUESTION

2 Peter 3:1-4

Intro: In the first verse of the second chapter after the Apostle mentioned “false prophets” in the past and “false teachers” who would come in the future, he went on to write in chapter two about the past. And he wrote of how God had judged false teachers and ungodly living in the past. As we come to chapter 3 we see that the Apostle Peter was concerned about the future, meaning the immediate future as well as for all time to come. See verse 3. So whether we look at the past or anticipate what is to come in the future, looking in both directions we see “false teachers,” those who will oppose the truth with false teaching, and ridicule the truth in their attempt to undermine the confidence that believers have in the Word of God.

We have been learning in our Tuesday Bible Class that it is inevitable that we will be involved in spiritual warfare. “False teachers” are members of our Enemy’s army, and they are very clever, and often very successful, in what they do. Peter reminded us of this in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 2.

So that is the way we should distinguish between chapters 2 and 3. God’s judgment upon angels, upon the world in the days of Noah, upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and upon Balaam, are all illustrations from the past in chapter 2. But in chapter 3, verse 3, we read that “there shall come scoffers in the last days.” And this is to be of concern to all of the people of God in every generation.

Now let us look at what Peter had to say in the first four verses of this chapter.

First he spoke of:

I. HIS SECOND EPISTLE (2 Peter 3:1).

First, notice how Peter addressed his readers, the believers mentioned in the first verse of 1 Peter 1. He called them, “beloved.” He used it again in verses 8, 14, 15, and 17. (Read each verse.) He used it also in 1 Peter 2:11 and 4:12.

Obviously this means that he was very fond of them, that he was not just

writing to them as a duty, but as a labor of love. He was deeply concerned that they be prepared to stand against any false teachers who would come their way.

In this we see that Peter was practicing what he had taught them to do in the seven words we spent a great deal of time with in chapter 1. He told them to add to their godliness, brotherly kindness.

I was listening to a message the other night given by Dr. J. Vernon McGee, and heard him say, as he always did when preaching, that great word, "Beloved." The Apostle Paul used it many times in his epistles. The Apostle John used it many times in his writing. James and Jude used it. And it is interesting that in the Gospels it is used over and over by the Father for His Son, the Lord Jesus. It is not a word that I have been in the habit of using, but it certainly expresses the way I feel about all of you. The Lord has brought us together in a great loving relationship. And this is the way the Father feels about us. We are His beloved ones, aren't we? And we all know that those we love are the people we are most concerned about. And if we know that people love us, then we are going to be willing to listen to what they have to say to us.

We all know that it takes time to write letters, and that is probably the main reason we don't write more letters. But what a blessing it is to receive a letter from someone we love! This was Peter's second letter to those people who meant so much to him.

But why did he write?

Here we come back to a word that we got acquainted with in chapter 1. Look at 2 Peter 1:13. (Read.) He was writing to them to *stir them up!*

It is often helpful to see how a certain word is used in other verses in the Bible. By comparing verses we can often arrive at a better understanding of a word.

This word is used twice in one verse in the Gospel of Luke, Luke 8:23-24:

23 But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy.

24 And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master,

master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.

To stir people up is to awaken them to a danger, and to encourage them to do something about it!

This same word is used also in John 6:18. I'll read verse 16 and 17 so you can get the setting:

16 And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea,

17 And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

18 And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

So all of this means that if you get somebody *stirred up*, you have really gotten something started. This is just the opposite of the indifference that many people show toward the truth today – and even some who are Christians.

In this case, Peter wanted to “stir up” their “pure minds by way of remembrance.”

Not many people have “pure minds.” It seems that some people are just waiting for people to say something that can be turned into something evil. What a wonderful thing it is to have a mind *uncontaminated* by the evil in the world around us, and even by the sin that is within us! When the Lord saves us, He purifies our minds. The mind is the source of action. A corrupt mind leads to sinful behavior, but a pure mind leads to a holy life. It was David's mind that he was concerned about when he prayed:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psa. 139:23-24).

“By way of remembrance” is an expression which means that we have been putting things into our minds which need remembering. You can't remember something that you do not know. And, of course, the Apostle Peter was referring to what they had learned from the Word of God, and, as he went on to say, from the teaching of the apostles.

If Peter had been with them, he could have done this *stirring up* by word

of mouth, but since he wasn't with them, he had to write to them. Let's remember that there is a real ministry in writing letters. The NT certainly teaches us that very emphatically.

Now the second verse emphasizes what I have just said to you. Let's call our second point,

II. WHAT THEY WERE TO REMEMBER (2 Peter 3:2).

Peter used to expressions here that include all of the OT and all of the NT. He said that they were to remember "the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets." The "holy prophets" were the preachers and the writers of the OT. And, of course, "the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior."

Now the only way you can remember the teaching of the OT prophets and the commandments of the apostles in the NT, is by reading and re-reading what they had to say. There is no way that any of us can hear them, because they are all gone. But they have left us a legacy of holy writings, holy because they are from God, but if we are to remember them, we have to know them. This is why we encourage you to read the Bible, and why we all need to come to church to hear the Word of God as it is taught. Whatever else of good books you may read, always give the first place to the reading of the Word of God. And to drive its words even deeper into your heart, make a habit of memorizing key verses which the Spirit of God impresses on your mind and heart as you read. And parents! Make sure that you are pouring the Word of God into the minds and hearts of your children.

But let us go on to verse 3 where Peter expressed one reason why it is absolutely important that we know the Word.

III. THE SCOFFERS ARE HERE, AND MORE ARE COMING (2 Peter 3:3).

Peter said, "Knowing this first." By this he meant that when we think of the times in which we live, this is what we need to know that is of the greatest importance. And it is this: There have always been scoffers, they are present with us today, and they will be a part of life in this world until the end of time.

A scoffer is a mocker. He ridicules what you believe. He tries to make you look foolish for believing what you believe. And this applies to any and everything that is taught in the Bible. You will get ridiculed if you believe that the Bible is the Word of God. You will get mocked if you believe that "God created the heaven and the earth," and even more so if you believe that He created it in six twenty-four-hour days. You will be ridiculed if you believe that Jesus Christ was God's eternal Son Who was born of the virgin Mary, and that He suffered and died that sinners might be saved. In fact, you will ridiculed today if you believe that there are things that are absolutely wrong and others that are absolutely right. In other words, people will think there is something wrong with you if you believe in sin. The prophets of the OT expected that there would be mockers, and there were. And the apostles of the NT preached the same message. There will always be mockers, and it is to be expected that instead of decreasing in numbers and influence, they will increase!

"The last days" began when the Lord Jesus returned back to heaven, and they will continue on for us until the Lord returns and takes us to heaven. So know the Book! And "be strong and of a good courage," as the Lord told Joshua. He needed courage to stand before the mockers of his day, and we need courage to stand before the mockers in our day.

Paul told the Ephesian elders that people would come into the church speaking perverse things, but also that people would come in from the outside with their mockery and heretical teaching. Cf. Acts 20:29-30. And all of us need to be awake as to what is going on, and we need to be prepared to do something about it. Paul even told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 that people would even go in search of teachers who would teach them what they wanted to hear instead of the truth that they needed to hear.

Listen to what Jude said in the verses 17, 18, and 19 of his epistle:

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

Just before the Lord died on the Cross, He sought to stir up His disciples about mockers and false teachers. Listen to these familiar words found in:

Matthew 24:11: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." And later on in the same message He said this:

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

25 Behold, I have told you before (Matt. 24:23-25).

There are many examples of false prophets and mockers in the OT. One specifically addressed to mockers is found in Isaiah 28:14-22:

14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.

15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

18 And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.

19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report.

20 For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.

21 For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.

22 Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth (Isa 28:14-22).

Noah had his mockers. Moses lived with a generation of mockers. Jeremiah was surrounded throughout his whole life with mockers. They

are always present in every generation. We have them in abundance today.

But what in particular was the message of the scoffers in Peter's day?

IV. THE SCOFFERS' QUESTION (2 Peter 3:4).

They were ridiculing the promise of our Lord's return. They were doing this in the first century; how much more damaging is the same question today! Wouldn't you think that if the Lord has not come back after almost 2,000 year, that He probably isn't coming at all?

And what those scoffers were saying then was absolutely true: "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." That is true! Things have gotten worse, but basically the world is just like it was when the fathers were here, and when the Lord Jesus left it to return to heaven.

One thing about the words of the scoffers that impresses me as I read it, is that at least they believed in creation, and that is more than you can say about scoffers and non-scoffers today. But what about the coming of the Lord? Is it all that important?

It certainly is! If the Lord does not come back, then all of his teaching is in question. And if He doesn't come back, what about us? Will we ever see Him, and will we ever be made like Him as we have been taught that we will be?

The Apostle Paul taught that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). He meant that we are the most to be pitied. That means that the coming of the Lord is very, very, important. It is foundational to our faith in Christ. If that is taken away, then we all really are just dreamers.

Solomon faced this in his day, and he expressed it right in the beginning of his book of Ecclesiastes. Listen to what he wrote looking at life from just a human perspective:

9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after (Ecc. 1:9-11).

Our Lord has this to say about His coming:

42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Matt. 24:42-44).

Concl: Let me remind you today that one of the most amazing characteristics of the age in which we live is that there are Christians all over the world who have not the slightest doubt in their hearts but that the Lord Jesus is coming again, that without any question the Lord will stand by His Word. I don't worry about that for one minute, do you? Of course we don't! We believe it because the Lord Jesus Christ promised that He would return. Listen again to those familiar words found at the beginning of John 14:

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

And then we have those wonderful words given to us by the Apostle Paul by revelation from God Himself.

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

Note in particular these next words:

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not

prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Let the scoffers scoff, and let the mockers mock, but for us our hope is in a totally faithful Savior, and in a Word that is like a solid rock.

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:16-20).

TRUTHS WHICH PEOPLE DELIBERATELY FORGET

2 Peter 3:5-7

Intro: In order study of 2 Peter, chapter 2, we saw that the Apostle Peter, for the most part, was looking into the past, from his standpoint. But in chapter 3 he was looking at his own present time, as well as into the future. And all of this was in support of what he said in chapter 2, verse 1, that there had been false prophets in the past, and that there would continue to be false teachers in the present and future. And so in the first four verses of chapter 3 he asked them to remember the words of the OT prophets as well as those of the NT apostles, both of whom said the same thing, that there would be scoffers in the last days. It seemed that particular truth that they would attack was the doctrine of the Lord's return. And so we read their charge in verse 4. (Read.)

And since our Lord went back to heaven almost 2,000 years ago, time has gone on like it did before, and still the Lord has not come. We have not reached that golden age in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah said this more than 700 years before the Lord Jesus Christ came the first time.

Even the faithful were disillusioned when, instead of establishing His kingdom, and delivering Israel from Rome, the Lord suffered and died as the worst of criminals would die, but crucifixion.

This is the way unbelieving men look at the promise of the Lord's return, that after all that was said by the prophets, and by our Lord Himself, as well as by His apostles, things continue on as they had been from the beginning, and the assumption is that the days to come would continue to confirm that there was, and is, nothing to that promise.

Now, as I said last Sunday, what they said was true, and people will readily believe such a ridiculing attitude toward the hope of the Lord's people. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, the world has witnessed summer, fall, winter, and spring. There is a saying among men that "history repeats itself." Even the book of Ecclesiastes says that "there is nothing new under the sun." Listen to the way Solomon began his book of Ecclesiastes:

3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

7 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

8 All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

9 The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

10 Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (Ecc. 1:3-18).

This is the way man unaided by the Spirit of God and the Word of God, looks at life.

But, as we go on to read our text for today, verses 5, 6, and 7, we find that while what the scoffers were saying, was true, it was not all of the truth. And this is what makes the message of false teachers so deceptive and misleading. Man is inclined in his simplicity to say that if part of what a man says is true, then all that he says must be true. And this is how and why many people follow a false teacher.

But now let us read our text for today, and keep in mind that Peter was speaking primarily about the false teachers of his own day, but what they did then is still being done today. And what the teachers say and did, is picked up and repeated by those who follow them.

(Read 2 Peter 3:5-7.)

In verse 5 Peter was speaking about creation. In verse 6, about the judgment of the world at the time of the flood. In verse 7 about what the Word of God reveals about the final judgment.

Now let me read these verses as they are translated in the NIV:

5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:4-7).

As you can see there is a difference in the way that godly translators have chosen to interpret the original words of verse 5. The KJV indicates that those false teachers chose to remain ignorant of the teaching of Scripture regarding creation. The men who worked on the NIV said that they chose to forget what they had learned from the Word of God.

It may be that Peter had different false teachers in mind: one group who knew what the Bible taught about creation, and rejected it; the other group, who did not know the Biblical teaching about creation, and were determined *not to know it*. Whichever way it was, there was a strong rejection of the Word of God.

Now let us look at verse 5. Here we have:

I. FALSE TEACHERS AND THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION (2 Peter 3:5).

The longer I live, and the more I study the Word, the more I am convinced of the importance of believing that "God created the heaven and the earth." That is how the Bible begins, and that is the foundational teaching of the Word of God.

And along with the Biblical teaching that God is the Creator, is the teaching that He is intimately involved in all that is taking place in the world. The world is not self-sustaining; it is sustained by God. He reigns over the whole world and throughout the whole universe. Our weather is not the result of chance. Our weather comes to us from God. And it is blasphemous to attribute it to "Mother Nature." "Mother Nature" is a figment of man's imagination, and it demonstrates how God-less our society has become. And conditions in our nation demonstrate what happens to a nation which is determined to live without God. Last night on the news which was telecast on one of our stations, comments from other nations about the United States were given, and it seemed that the consensus of other nations was that we are most violent nation on the face of the earth. And it told how cities all over the United States are having more trouble than they have ever had in recruiting men and women to serve as police officers. There is a huge price to pay when God is left out of our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia many years ago, Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

In Psalm 146 we read these words, beginning with verse 5:

5 Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

6 Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever:

7 Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners:

8 The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous:

9 The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

10 The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD (Psa.. 146:5-10).

To deny that God created the heavens and the earth, is to declare there is no one to whom we are ultimately responsible. We get to the place where we believe that there is no absolute right and wrong. And so everyone does what is right in his own eyes, and most of the time when he does this, he chooses the things that are abominable to God.

Man wills to reject that God created the heaven and the earth. And in doing so, he rejects the truth of Scripture that God is sovereign over the affairs of men and nations. Peter was saying here in verse 5 that men of

their own will either choose to remain in ignorance of the Bible, or they know what the Bible says and willfully reject the teaching of Scripture regarding the world in which we live.

Remember what Genesis 1 teaches us about water in the days of creation.

But let us go on to verse 6.

Have all things continued as they were from the beginning? Since we are talking about water, let us go on to see what Peter said about:

II. GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THE EARTH AT THE TIME OF THE FLOOD (2 Peter 3:6).

(Read v. 6.)

Those who believe that the flood was just a local situation, will have trouble explaining this verse. This is not the way things started at the "beginning of creation" (v. 4). This is what Genesis chapter 1 tells about creation. In the first two verses of the chapter we read this:

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:1-2).

In the beginning water filled the earth and what we call today, the atmosphere. But then we read this about the second and third days of creation:

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:6-10).

So the Lord separated the waters, and created a firmament, which He called "heaven." Then the Lord gathered the water on the earth together, and He made seas, and dry land appeared. And He looked upon it all and

“saw that it was good.”

But what happened at the time of the flood? This is what the Lord said as He spoke of His return to the earth:

36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Matt. 24:36-39).

People were just living for pleasure, and gave God no place in their lives. And what does the book of Genesis tell us about the time of the flood?

Listen to what we find in Gen. 7:19-23:

19 And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered.

20 Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.

21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man:

22 All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.

23 And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.

In creation God separated the waters from the dry land to prepare the earth for man; at the time of the flood He used the water to destroy all life that was upon the earth except for the people and the animals which were in the ark. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, warning people of the coming judgment, but no one believed what he was saying. And so they died under the judgment of God.

What a picture of our world today! People are interested in pleasure, but very few are concerned about God. So what is going to happen? Look at verse 7 where we have a summary of what the Bible teaches about:

III. THE JUDGMENT IN THE LAST DAYS (2 Peter 3:7).

(Read v. 7.)

Listen to what we find in Hebrews 10:24-31. (*To do despite* in verse 29 means *to insult* the Spirit of grace.) (Read the Hebrews passage.)

Even from many pulpits in our country people have been told and/or are being told that people do not need to fear judgment from God because God is a God of love, and eventually it is going to be all right with every person. People have been told that we are all going to the same place, but we are just going different ways – the Mohammedan through Mohammed, the Buddhist through Buddha, the Jew through Moses, and so on. But the Bible tells us that the only way to God is through Christ, through faith in Him Who died for the salvation of sinners. Without Christ only “perdition” is ahead, not extinction, but eternal judgment.

So no one is to be deceived into thinking that because Christ has not come, that He will not come. The Apostle Paul told the believers at Thessalonica that the day is coming “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His might angels,”

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (2 Thess. 1:8-10).

Concl: This is the truth. This is the judgment which will fall upon all who have not received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Don't be deceived into believing that since that day of judgment has not come, that it will not come. We will learn in the verses which follow why the Lord has not come yet. But He is coming! And what Paul told the people in Athens when he was preaching on Mars' hill, this is the truth. Here are his words:

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The day of judgment is coming, and there is only one way to escape that judgment, and that is through Christ who died to save sinners from the punishment due them because of their sins. If Christ is your Savior, you are safe. If He is not your Savior, you are still in your sins and under the judgment of God which is sure to come. Don't believe those who say that judgment has not come, and so it is not coming. They are false prophets, and if you believe what they believe, you will face the eternal judgment of a holy God. But turn to the Lord now. This is the day of salvation. The Lord has give us this wonderful promise which you will find in His own words in John 6:37:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

So come to Christ today. Repent of your sins, and "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

2 Peter 3:8-10

Intro: I have taken the name of my text for today from verse 9 here in 2 Peter 3 where Peter said that “the Lord . . . is longsuffering.” And as we consider what that means, there is not a person who has ever lived but what can be thankful that He is *a longsuffering God*.

Somehow we haven't paid as much attention to the longsuffering of the Members of the Godhead as we should. What does it mean? Well it means that all of the Members of the Godhead are patient, that they bear long with people in their infirmities and even in their sins. This is an attribute of God which was demonstrated over and over and over again as the children of Israel traveled from Egypt to Canaan. This does not mean that God excused their sins, but it does mean, as David expressed it in Psalm 103, speaking of the Lord,

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities (Psa. 103:10).

It was the longsuffering of the Lord that prompted the question found in Psa. 130:3, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”

Hogg and Vine in their book, *Notes on Thessalonians*, said this:

Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy.

The Apostle Paul, after mentioning many of the sins of men, asked this question of those who were critical of others:

3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Rom. 2:3-4).

Longsuffering is produced by love because the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians said, “Suffereth long.” He was saying that *love is longsuffering*.

To say that God is longsuffering means that God often puts up with things which are very displeasing to Him, even abominable to Him, and it can be

displeasing to God, and think that they are getting away with it just because God does not judge them immediately for their sins. This is one of the most common mistakes that people make. God hates sin, and God judges sin, but He doesn't always judge sin right after it has been committed. Right here in 2 Peter 3 we have an example of the longsuffering of God. Those who sarcastically asked the question, "Where is the promise of His coming?," thus questioning the faithfulness of God, were certainly deserving of the immediate judgment of God.

In Peter's first epistle, chapter 3 verse 20, he spoke of how "the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." Genesis 6:3 tells us that God waited for one hundred and twenty years before bringing judgment upon the whole world in the days of Noah.

And where could we possibly find examples of the longsuffering of God than in our own day. Sin is running rampant in our day. Couples live together and have children without being married, and they even parade the fact of what they are doing. Adultery is everywhere. It does not hinder people in their careers like it used to. Homosexuality is even being accepted by many churches. But does this mean that people are getting away with what they are doing. Absolutely not! What it means is that God is longsuffering. But, as we have it in our text for today, the long-suffering of God does not mean that God will not judge sin. He most certainly will. And anyone who is persisting in sin in any form had better repent and turn to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before they experience the awful judgment of God. The Apostle Paul was describing man in his sinfulness when he quoted from Psalm 36:1 as he wrote to the church at Rome, saying of men, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18).

The three verses that we will be looking at today, verses 8, 9, and 10 in 2 Peter 3, really give us the answer to the scoffers' question in verse 4. They were scorning the promise our Lord had given that He would come again, saying that things had not changed from the time of creation. But Peter wanted the believers in those days to see how wrong the scoffers were in their calculations.

I want to point out this morning that:

- 1) In verse 8 Peter was writing about **GOD AND TIME**.
- 2) In verse 9 Peter was dealing with **GOD AND HIS PROMISES**.
- 3) In verse 10 his them was **GOD AND JUDGMENT**.

I. GOD AND TIME (2 Peter 3:8).

One thing the people of God have had to learn from the very beginning, is that God does not keep time like we do. True, He has given us minutes and hours and days and weeks and year, and that is how we calculate our time. But when God gives a promise, unless He specifies in that promise a particular time, He is free to fulfill the promise whenever He chooses. And if a lot of time goes by, and He has not done what He said He would do, we are making a big mistake by concluding that, therefore, He is not going to do it. We think that either He has changed His mind, or else for some reason He is not able to do what He said He would do.

Both of those calculations about God are false. God never changes His mind concerning His promises. He is always faithful to His Word. And so we read in the Word, from the prophecy of Habakkuk, speaking of a revelation from God given in a vision,

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry (Hab. 2:3).

And the writer of the book of Hebrews had this verse in mind when he wrote the words we find in Hebrews 10:35-37:

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

God waited for approximately 4,000 years after He gave the promise to Adam and Eve that the Seed of the woman would bruise the Serpent's head, but in God's time the Lord Jesus Christ came, born of the virgin Mary, and sealed the doom of the Devil when He, the Lord, died on the Cross.

Many expositors of this eighth verse of 2 Peter 3 believe that Peter, when he wrote it, had in mind the words that we find in the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90, verse 4:

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

The Lord Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross, according to our timing, almost 2,000 years ago; *in God's timing it has only been two days!* When

thirty years according to man's timing. According to God's timing that was hardly any time at all. And Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son," so that God did fulfill His promise which was more almost 4,000 year old.

Abraham and Sarah waited for over twenty-five years before Isaac was born, and they had really given up hope that they would ever have a son. And so Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham so that they could have a son by Hagar. But when Abraham and Sarah were both too old to have a son, God gave them Isaac.

You see, when we consider God's promises according to our timing, we will always be wrong. But God is neither unable nor unwilling to fulfill His promises. He always does what He says that He will do, but according to His own timing.

So you see how foolish those scoffers were. If they continued to judge God by Roman time, they were facing a certain eternal doom. May God keep any of us from making that mistake.

But let us go on to verse 9.

II. GOD AND HIS PROMISES (2 Peter 3:9).

What we have said about God's timing is true, but we still have to face the fact that now, here at the end of the twentieth century, the Lord has not come. How are we going to explain this delay?

Well, before we look into verse 9, let me remind you of some of the things that Peter had mentioned up to this point about the people to whom he was writing.

And I ask you to go back with me to 1 Peter 1:2 where he called the people to whom he was writing, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God."

And then in 1 Peter 2:9 he called them "a chosen generation."

And then in the first chapter of 2 Peter he told these same people to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure" (v. 10).

He meant what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the believers at Thessalonica, and said,

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

Notice those words, “chosen to salvation.” We could say that they were *elected to be saved*. But when did this election take place? Did it take place at the time you and I were saved, or just shortly before? No. In Ephesians chapter 1, verses 4 and 5 Paul wrote,

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Ephesians 1:4-5).

So this means that everyone who has ever been saved, whether in OT times, or NT times, down to November 21, 1999, has been saved because they were, we were, chosen by God, elected for salvation, before the creation of the heaven and the earth.

Now let us read 2 Peter 3:9. (Read.)

“Slack” means *late*, or *tardy*, as though He might not come back at all, or because for some reason He was unable to come. No, that is not the reason at all. The explanation is in God’s longsuffering, and Christ’s longsuffering, and the Holy Spirit’s longsuffering, “to us-ward,” the KJV has rendered it, meaning *toward us*. And now let me read the rest of the verse using that word “us” as it applies to the rest of the verse: “not willing that any *of us* should perish, but that all *of us* should come to repentance.”

Now who are the “us” that Peter was speaking about? They are that great company of people whom God chose for salvation before time began. Many “of us” have been saved. I think I can actually say, most of us! But there are still some of the elect who have not been saved! And the reason that the Lord has not come yet, is because there are still people in this world today who are the elect, who most certainly will in God’s time come

drawing them in, one by one.

Let me say that it never was God's intention to save everyone. If that were His purpose, no one would ever have died without Christ. We have a God Who is mighty enough to do whatever He intends to do. Don't think of Him in heaven wondering who is going to be saved. He knows who is going to be saved, and He has chosen each one of them, and He is not coming back until all of the elect are saved who will complete His church.

Peter is not concerned about the schedule which the Apostles Paul and John were led to write about. He is dealing with the big picture, and the ultimate purposes of God. All of the elect will in God's own time and way "come to repentance," which by the way, is like faith, a gift from God. See 2 Timothy 2:25.

This is why the Lord has not yet come for us.

But now let us go on to verse 10, the last verse in our text for today. And to this verse I have given the heading:

III. GOD AND JUDGMENT (2 Peter 3:10).

Again let me remind you that Peter was not giving us an outline of all that is involved in the coming of the Lord. He does not tell us that the Lord is coming for His saints, and later with His saints, to reign upon the earth, but he gives us the broad picture dealing with the subject he has been concerned about in chapters 2 and 3. That subject is God's judgment.

"The day of the Lord" is a day spoken of repeatedly in the OT. Sometimes it is referred to as a day of great blessing, but at other times as a day of great judgment. Here Peter was speaking of the judgment part of the day of the Lord, before the time of the new heavens and the new earth which he will mention in verse 13. Before all of that time of eternal blessing arrives, there will be a terrible time of judgment in which "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." And the person who thinks that this will never happen, is only deceiving himself. What man thinks on his own amount to nothing. The place where we will always find the truth is in the Bible, the Word of God.

You and I who know the Lord, and who read and believe the Bible, know truth about the future which unregenerate men know nothing about, even though they may be the leaders of the governments of the earth. Politicians are working to bring about a war-less world in which there will be lasting peace, and in which everyone will have all of his needs met. They are working at a task they will never be able to accomplish. There is not going to be peace on earth until the Lord returns, sin is forever removed from the hearts of men, and we are living in a new heaven and a new earth where only righteousness will dwell.

Concl: So let us not listen to those who scoff at the Word of God. They are going to learn too late that the Word of God is true from beginning to end, and that all that they have been teaching is lie.

How thankful most of us can be, I would hope this is true of all of us, that we face the prospect of eternal life instead of eternal death, and all because the Lord Jesus Christ died to put away our sins. But we still have the priceless privilege of preaching the Gospel to all men. We don't know who the Lord is going to save. That is not our business. Our business is to tell them to flee from the wrath to come, and that is by calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ to save them.

If there are any here today who are without Christ, let me urge you to call upon Him to save you. He alone is the Savior. The promise of Scripture is that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). But it is equally true that those who do not call upon the name of the Lord will suffer the judgment of God eternally. So come to Him today, and be saved.

LIVING FOR THE LORD IN THE LAST DAYS

2 Peter 3:11-14

Intro: The whole of chapter 3 in 2 Peter deals with the question of the scoffers which is given to us in 2 Peter 3:4. (Read.)

Peter said in verse 3, at the end of the verse, that those scoffers were “walking after their own lusts,” and so the question really was an attack on the teaching of the apostles, and the prophets before them, that the day was coming when Christ would return and judge the world for its sin. They were taking comfort in the fact that, as they said, everything had continued as it had been from the beginning.

But they were overlooking the historical fact that God had judged the world, the whole world, at the time of the flood. And we know from Scripture that there have been many other times when God has judged men and nations for their sins. So, while in one sense, what they said was true, yet in another, with respect to God’s judgment on sin, they were very, very wrong.

In addition, they were assuming that, if the Lord had not returned in some thirty years after His ascension, He would not return. And so their assumption was that the world would go on and on, and people could live any way they wanted to live without fearing that they would be judged for their sins. They deliberately chose to ignore what the Scriptures had to say about God’s judgment in the past.

Furthermore, they were wrong in saying that since the Lord had not come back after those few years, therefore He would not come back. They did not know that how God keeps time, and how we keep time, are totally different. In fact, God lives in eternity, not time. So a thousand years to Him are like a day to us.

John Newton was very right when in his hymn, *Amazing Grace*, he wrote those words, speaking of when we will be in heaven,

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we’ve first begun.

How thankful we should be that there will be no end to the blessings that

will be ours in heaven. But that is another subject we can enjoy at some later time.

So the Lord is not slack concerning His promise to return. He is not willing that any of His chosen ones should be lost. He has ordained where and when they will be saved. And so He is awaiting the fulfillment of His own plans for the salvation of His own.

The truth is that the Lord is coming, and He will judge the world. No one knows the time, but ultimately the heavens and the earth as we know them today will be burned up under the judgement of God. We read this in verse 10 in connection with “the day of the Lord.” So all who scorn the truth of the Lord’s return, will suffer the eternal consequences of not having sought salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This brings us to our text for today – verses 11 through 14. And in verse 11 we see:

I. THE APPLICATION OF THIS TRUTH TO BELIEVERS (2 Peter 3:11).

It is bad enough to contemplate the consequences that will result for those who scoff at the truth of the Lord’s return, *but what are to be the practical results for those of us who know the Lord?* It is easy for us to stop with what it means to unbelievers, but what is it supposed to mean to us? (Read verse 11.)

The word “dissolved” is translated either this same way in the other translations of the Bible, or “destroyed.” The Greek verb is λύω, which means *to loose, to untie, to break up, to demolish*. It is the opposite of what the Apostle Paul said, speaking of Christ, “In Him all things consist” (Col. 1: 17b). The whole universe *consists, or is held together* by our Lord, and when He is ready *to untie it all*, He can do it! And He will do it!

Since, then, things will get worse, and not better, to use a question which Francis Schaeffer made famous, a question which he got from Ezekiel, “How should we then live?” See Ezekiel 33:10. Such news to the people of the world often brings the response, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow we die.” But that is not to be the attitude of those of us who

know the Lord. A Christian will respond positively to what Peter wrote here in verse 11: “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”

The word “ought” in the Greek is the word *δεῖ*, and it means *must*. We don’t have a choice. If we are to please the Lord, instead of throwing restraints to the wind, we are to be more holy and more godly in our daily walk. “Conversation” here does not mean *our talk* (although it includes our talk), but it means *our walk, our conduct, our behavior*. And I believe that “holy conversation” is a walk in which we abstain from sin in all of its forms, and instead seek to be righteous in all that we are and do. And “godliness” means that we are to seek to please God.

But, you say, aren’t we supposed to be living like this now? And the answer is, “Yes!” But Peter would have us know that the worse conditions get in the world, the more holy, the more godly, we should seek to become. It is like those words, “so much the more,” in Heb. 10:25,

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The more the world shows its perversion, the more we should seek to be mature in Christ. Instead of reading our Bibles less, we need to be reading them more. Instead of praying less, we need to be praying more. Instead of attending church less, we need to be attending church more. Instead of spreading the Gospel less, we need to be spreading it more. Instead of hating sin less, we need to be hating it more. Instead of loving Christ less, we need to be loving Him more.

Peter was not saying that this is what we can do if we want to; he was saying that this is what we *must* do, and what we *must* be!

So I trust that this verse will really strike a responsive chord in our hearts, and that we will see God’s blessing in taking steps to make sure that we will be more holy and more godly in our daily living.

But let us go on to verse 12. Here we have that which also should be anticipating:

II. THE DAY OF GOD (2 Peter 2:12-13).

“Looking for and hasting unto the day of God” can be translated *watching for and eagerly awaiting the day of God*. From the context I believe we can say that “the day of God” is *the eternal state* which Peter went on to describe in verse 13 with its “new heavens and . . . new earth.”

John MacArthur has done an excellent work in his series on *Origins* in pointing out that when God finished creating the heaven and the earth in the beginning He took great delight in what He had done. It was all just as He wanted it to be. He not only saw that it was “good,” but it was “very good”! But when man sinned, the heaven and the earth fell under the curse. And it will not be until there is a new heaven, and there is a new earth, that the Lord will again delight in His creation. And the reason He will be able to delight in it again in an even greater way will be because in the new heaven and the new earth *righteousness will dwell*. This means that righteousness will find its permanent dwelling place. Sin will be no more. We will be perfected, and we will dwell eternally in an environment that is totally and permanently righteous.

So we are to remember that we are living in a universe now which is under the curse of God. The people of the world are seeking their perfection here, but it never will be. Our politicians, at least the majority of them, do not understand that the problem of this world is sin, but if they did, they could not do anything about it. Only Christ can save us from our sins. Only He can make us new inside and outside. We live in this world, but we are not “of” this world. We are here waiting for the coming of the Lord, or for the day that the Lord will call us home to heaven, but this world is not our home. We are here to glorify God, and we are here to spread the Gospel to every creature with whom we have anything to do. But we are never to lose sight of that glorious day that is to come, which will follow the breaking up of this present universe, and in which the new heaven and the new earth will be brought into existence.

Do you know who was the first one in Scripture to speak of the new heaven and the new earth? It was Isaiah, and he wrote about it twice in the prophecy which bears his name. Here are the verses.

The first is in Isaiah 65:17:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

The second is in Isaiah 66:22:

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

And then after Peter's reference in our text for today, the only other time they are mentioned is in Revelation 21:1:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

First will come the destruction of the first heaven and earth, but this will be followed by the creation of an entirely new order where sin will never enter, but where righteousness will have its eternal home.

Remember that Peter was not giving us the entire plan of God regarding the future. He was speaking in general terms of the passing away of that which we know now, and the establishing of God's perfect order, "the day of God," in which there will be no sin, no sickness, no death, no infirmities of any kind, nothing that defiles, but all will be in perfection, according to the righteousness of God Himself.

Is that what you are looking for, longing for, eagerly awaiting, and sure that in God's time it will come? Then you must show your hope by a holy life and godly behavior. I am very much concerned that there are many people who profess that Christ is their Savior, but whose lives show that their main interest is in this life, and that they are not interested in what the Word of God has to say about the new heavens and the new earth. They are more concerned about having a good time here on earth, and getting all of the "things" that make them happy, or that they think will make them happy. But holiness and righteousness are not of interest to them.

The Apostle John gave us the only two ways that people can go as he described what God revealed to him about the future, both for the people who are trusting Christ, and those who are not trusting Christ. Listen to what he wrote in Revelation 21:

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall

there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev. 21:3-8).

Oh, make sure that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, that you love Him, that you are trusting Him and Him alone for the salvation of your soul. There are only two ways. Christ is the Way. Twice Solomon told his son in the book of Proverbs what we read in Prov. 14:12:

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

And he said it again in Prov 16:25

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Obviously he did not want his son to make the greatest mistake a person can make, that of choosing his own way instead of God's way.

We have one verse to go, verse 14. Many expositors feel that this is the beginning of a new paragraph in what Peter was saying, and it may be. I plan to come back to it, the Lord willing, next Sunday. But the "wherefore" ties it in with what we have been considering today in verses 11, 12, and 13, so I want to close with this verse.

Verse 11, the last part, gives us one practical exhortation connected with the subject of the Lord's return, and what will follow. Here in verse 14 we find another practical exhortation. Let's call it:

III. AN EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE (2 Peter 3:14).

Notice how lovingly and tenderly the Apostle addressed the people of God, "Wherefore, beloved." And then he added, "Seeing ye look for such

things,” that is, the new heavens and the new earth. But let me pause here for a moment and ask each one of you, is this what you are really looking for? Here Peter used the same word that he did at the beginning of verse 12. It means that this is what you are anticipating, the one thing you are waiting for more than anything else, the day of God when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Is this what you are waiting for?

Or are you waiting for Christmas? Or are you waiting for the beginning of the new millennium? What are we waiting for today? Peter said in so many words, “If you are waiting for the Day of God, then this is what I want you to do,” and he went on to write,

Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (v. 14b).

Peter was fond of that word “diligent,” or “diligence.” Cf. 1:5, 10, and here in 3:14. By “diligent” he meant to do it now, to put forth as much effort as it would take to accomplish the goal. It was his way of saying that we should “put first things first.” And Peter included three things.

First, to “be found of Him in peace.” This would first mean to make sure of your salvation, and then to be living “in peace” with God.

Second, “without spot.” This would mean living so as not to be defiled with anything which is positively sinful.

Third, “blameless.” This word would point to the absence of anything that should be in a Christian’s life.

So Peter seems to be saying here that we need to be living in the closest possible fellowship with the Lord, avoiding any and everything that would be a sinful “spot” on our lives, but also being careful that we are not failing to do or to be what we should be doing, or being. There is a negative side to the Christian life, but there is also a positive side. For example, I might not be a liar, but it may also be true that I am not as loving toward my brothers and sisters in Christ as I should be. I may not be taking the Name of the Lord in vain, but it may be that I am not speaking of Him to those who do not know Him. I may not go to bars or places of ill repute, but I may have grown careless about meeting with the Lord’s people. A Christian is not just a person who doesn’t do certain things, but he is a person who does what is positively good and right in

the sight of God and of men.

We all need to be diligent about our relationship to God, and to people, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

Concl: So as conditions get worse in the world, they are to get better in the church, and in the lives of the people of God. When the Lord comes, which is next in His plan, He must find us waiting in expectation for Him, and living so that we will not be ashamed when He comes. This is what the Apostle John said in 1 John 2:28-29:

28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

So how do we live for the Lord in the last days? We live just like we are always to live, only with greater diligence and with greater love for the Lord. And this in spite of conditions in the world. In fact, the more the world deteriorates morally, the greater is the need that must be living in all holy behavior and godliness. May the Lord enable us to do His will according to what we have seen in His Word today.

THANKSGIVING 1999

Intro: Thanksgiving is, according to Scripture, to be one of the main ways in which a child of God is to be identified. We are to give “thanks always for all things” (Eph. 5:20). And our thanksgivings are to be directed toward God alone.

Thanksgiving is a way we have of identifying our blessings from the Lord. And since the Lord is the Lord, and because He is good, we know that all things that touch our lives are designed by Him for our good, for His glory, and for our blessing.

And thanksgiving is a way of telling the Lord that we are grateful for what He is doing in our lives, which means *for* us and *in* us. It means that we recognize God’s hand in all of the circumstances of our lives.

Much that we experience in our lives from day to day, comes in the form of trials and testings. If we are to give the Lord “thanks always for all things,” then this means that we must praise Him for the trials, too. And we usually learn that some of our greatest blessings come to us in the trials that we experience. We recognize the hand of the Lord in these things too.

Many times in Scripture we read statements like we find in Psalm 136:1:
O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever.

And since He is good, always good, what He does is good. David said in Psalm 18:30, “As for God, His way is perfect.” He works all things together for our good (cf. Rom. 8:28). And so whatever may be the way of the Lord with us, sooner or later we learn that it is good, it is a blessing, and we need to praise the Lord for all that is going on in our lives. It is thanksgiving which expresses our acceptance of His will, and that which always brings peace to our hearts. Both the OT and the NT exhort us to be continually praising the Lord.

In the few minutes that remain, and in order to set the keynote for this Thanksgiving Day, I want to point out to you from the Word, from verses which I am sure that most of you know very well, some simple truths for us to remember on this Thanksgiving Day. We as Christians do not have just one Thanksgiving Day every year. but *every day is to be a Thanksgiving*

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ing Day!

The first verse of these I want to giving you is found in Eph. 5:20 to which I have already referred in part. Listen carefully to what it says:

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a big order, and none of us obeys that perfectly. But if you look at the context of that verse, it will help us to see that this is one of the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit will enable us to be thankful, to be thankful always, and to be thankful “for all things.”

This includes what we like, and what we may not like. It includes what we have asked for, and those things which we would never ask for. The Lord is very reasonable and very good and very right in all that He says, and He would never have given this to us in His Word if it were not His will, His good and perfect will.

So when we think of thanksgiving, remember the words “always for all things.”

The second well-known verse that I want to give you this morning is found in 1 Thess. 5:18:

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

And here I would call your attention to the words, “in every thing.”

Have you ever told the Lord that if He would take you through a trial, or if He would lift some particular burden that you have in your life, that you would praise Him? And perhaps you have told Him that you would praise Him forever! Well, when we do that we are forgetting those words, “in every thing.” It is not when we get *out* of our trials, that we are to be thankful, but while we are *in them*. None of us enjoys suffering of any kind. Our Lord did not enjoy suffering, nor the prospect of suffering. But we are to be thankful while we are “in” whatever our circumstances may be, we are thankful because we know that the Lord is with us. We are thankful because we know that He has good purposes in what He is doing. And we are thankful that our lives are in His hands. All of that gives us sufficient reason to be thankful.

And right along with this verse in 1 Thessalonians 5, let me give you Phil. 4:6-7:

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6 Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Remember that Paul was in prison when he wrote these words. And remember, too, that he did not know what was going to be the outcome of his imprisonment – whether he would be released, or whether he would die. But in spite of all of that, he taught us here by the Holy Spirit that when we are pleading with God for deliverance of any kind, let it always be “with thanksgiving.” That means that we are not angry with the Lord. But it means that we are trusting Him, grateful that we can turn to Him, rejoicing that He hears and answers prayer. And this is when the blessing of the Lord comes to us before our prayers are answered in the form of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding,” and that is what garrisons our hearts and minds “through Christ Jesus.”

When we pray with thanksgiving, we are doing what King David said we should do when he wrote Psalm 9 which I read just the other day:

1 I will praise Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvelous works.

2 I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy Name, O Thou most high.

Concl: Let's make this a real Thanksgiving Day, a day which only we as the Lord's people can have. We have so much to be thankful for. The Lord daily loads us with His benefits. And in those areas of our lives where the going may be a little rough for us just now, let's praise Him for those trials too, because they are always blessings in disguise.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

A GREAT APOSTLE'S FINAL WORDS

2 Peter 3:14-18

Intro: I have been a little undecided about whether or not to give two messages on the last five verses of 2 Peter, or one message. But I finally decided to finish our study of the epistle today. The Word is so rich that it would not be a problem in most cases, to give a message on each verse. But since we are coming to that time of the year when the Christians throughout the world remember the birth of our Lord, I plan to bring two or possibly three messages having to do with the birth of Christ, and then either on the last Sunday of December, or the first Sunday in January, to speak of the new year. So that is my plan for now.

But today we come to the last verses of the great epistle, verses 14 through 18. I trust that the Lord has blessed you in hearing these messages on 2 Peter like He has blessed me in preparing them, and giving them. This is an epistle that is very needed at this period in the history of the world in which we live. Today false teaching abound both inside as well as outside of the church. And we are certainly living in days in which we are seeing evidence of what the Apostle Peter called, “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (1:4), or, as he said in 3:3 with respect to the scoffers, that they were “walking after their own lusts.”

So just as the Apostle Peter was greatly concerned about the day in which he lived, we ought to be just as concerned in the same way that he was about the day in which we live. If all generations since the Lord went back to heaven needed to be looking for Him to return, how much more should we! And if godly living should have been the objective of the Lord's people in past days gone by, how much more should it be our purpose in life today. From a moral standpoint things are really bad today, and getting worse. This is like the Apostle Paul said that they would be. He called them “perilous times” in 2 Timothy 3:1. And by the word “perilous” he meant that they would be *hard to take*, *dangerous*, and even *savage*. We might think that this would be the time for us to keep as far away from the people of the world as we possibly can, but instead both with the Apostle Peter as well as the Apostle Paul, and I could add Jude and John to that list, these are days when holy living should be our objective. We are here in this world to please God. We are here to glorify Him. We are here to show the world that we love God and that we love the Lord Jesus Christ. And the way we show our love for God is by

doing what He has told us to do in His Word. That is why produces holy people who live holy lives. Peter did not believe that we would ever be sinlessly perfect in this life – nor did any of the other writers of Scripture believe in sinless perfection. But they all believed that we need to grow spiritually, and that means to grow more and more like our Savior. The Lord’s work in us will not be finished until at last we see the Lord at His coming.

So we must not forget those seven important words which Peter mentioned in chapter one, those words which he called “these things” and which need to be added continually to our faith. Let’s purpose in our hearts that not a single day will go by but what we are spending some time reading the Word, and in prayer, thinking about our own lives and how we can live lives that are more pleasing to the Lord.

Last week, at the close of my message, I spent a brief time on verse 14 here in 2 Peter 3. But as I said then that I might come back to that verse again today, this is where I would like to begin as we come to the last words of Peter. Remember that he told us in chapter 1 that, as he said, “shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.” And so, as I have said repeatedly in our study, this makes his last words very important words.

Have you ever thought about what you would say to your spouse, or your family members, and friends, if you knew that you only had a short time to live? The fact is that none of us knows what a day may hold for us, and so the lesson of this epistle for all of us is that what we would want to say then, and what we would want to be then, is what we ought to be talking about and seeking to be every day that we live. If it will be important to say certain things then, then they are important now. So let’s all be talking more about the Lord, talking more about His Word, and seeking by God’s grace to be more pleasing to the Lord in the way we live each day.

Well, let’s see what Peter had to say in these last five verses.

First of all, in verse 14, Peter was saying, if I may paraphrase his words,

I. BE LIVING NOW LIKE YOU KNOW YOU WILL BE LIVING THEN (2 Pet. 3:14).

In verse 13 the Apostle Peter had projected us all to the eternal state, the “new heavens and . . . new earth.” He has taken us past all of the events which will follow the coming of the Lord for us, all through the Tribulation, and the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth, all of the final judgments, and the casting of Satan into the lake of fire – to the new heavens and the new earth. What will our lives be like then? Verse 13 tells us that in the new heavens and the new earth *righteousness dwells, righteousness will at last found its home*. There won’t be any sinning then because you and I and all of the redeemed will be incapable of sinning. We will then be what God has saved us to be, and so we will only do what is pleasing to Him.

We can’t imagine what that will be like, can we? There will be no more sinful and corrupt lusts. The word “perilous” will be unknown to us. All will be perfect, and God will once more look upon His creation, and call it (and us) “very good.” Then we will fully know what peace in God really is. Then we will be absolutely spotless and blameless. All of the spots caused by sin will be gone, and all of the things that we have lacked will be present in our lives. If people without Christ could go there, they would hate every minute of it. Only those of us who know the Lord delight in even the prospect that such a day is coming.

So a great day is coming, and we need to get in shape for it now.

But let us go on. Again in verse 15 and verse 16 we come to a very important subject which Peter had touched on before:

II. THE LONGSUFFERING OF THE LORD (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

The more we really understand how wonderful things will be some day, the harder it is to wait. And remember that the scoffers will always be with us, saying that if the Lord has not come in the past 2,000 years, what makes us think that His promise is still valid? And so Peter said, “Account.”

This is the fourth time that Peter has used this word in this epistle. The other references where this verb is found are: 1:13; 2:13; and 3:9. It is the Greek verb, ἠγγέομαι, and it means *to think, to consider, to regard*. In 2:13 it is translated *count*, as it is also in 3:9.t. Peter meant that they were not to put any other interpretation on the fact that the Lord has not come.

Time is measured out to man in terms of God's purpose in salvation, as Peter explained in 3:9.

This was the teaching also of the Apostle Paul. Peter called him "our beloved brother Paul." That is, Paul also believed and taught that God had an elect people, and that Christ died specifically to save them. Also, that the reason that Christ had not returned was because there were those yet to be saved, chosen of God, whose salvation would complete the body of Christ. And Paul, like Peter, was not speaking on his own, but it was "according to the wisdom given unto him." And this means that both of these men wrote under the direct guidance of the Spirit of God. One place that the Apostle Paul spoke of this was in 1 Corinthians 2:7-12:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Now we do not know what letter Peter was referring to. And there are other examples of letters which we do not have. For example, in 1 Cor. 5:9 Paul said to the Corinthians, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators." This had to have been written before 1 Corinthians was written, but this letter is lost to us. Also in Col. 4:16 we read these words:

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

We don't have any record that "the epistle from Laodicea. But this should not bother us. This does not mean that we have lost part of the

word of God. All of the Apostles who have written books, or letters, that are in our Bibles, wrote other letters, good letters, but they were written like you and I write letters. Not all of their writings were inspired by God just because they were apostles. So let not be concerned because we do not have the letter which Paul wrote to the believers to whom Peter was writing. You and I can write letters according to the wisdom given to us, but that does not mean that our letters are inspired by God. It means that we can write about things that God has taught us from His Word. I hope I am making myself clear because scoffers like to take advantage of believers by saying that we don't have all of the Bible. When Paul wrote Romans, the two Corinthian epistles, Galatians, and all of the other books that carry his name in our Bibles, he was writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, but he wrote other letters, which I am sure were good, but they were not written under the same direction of the Spirit, and so were never intended by God to be a part of the Bible.

However, we must agree with what Peter said about Paul's writings in verse 16 of our text. There are many things that are hard to understand. In fact, apart from the ministry of the Spirit, they are all impossible to understand. Sometimes it is hard for us to understand passages in the Gospels in which our Lord declared that there were some things that He did not know. The unstable and unlearned like to use these to indicate that our Lord was just a mere human being after all.

It is difficult for us to put together all of the pieces of prophecy that are yet to be fulfilled. We all have to admit, as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 13, verse 12, that "now we see through a glass darkly." But the day is coming when we will understand it all. But until then, we need to keep studying the Word, and praying that the Lord will enlighten us concerning the truth.

So don't let people lead you astray, and don't let them sow doubts in your mind and heart concerning the Bible. God has given us His Word, all that He intends for us to have. And He has preserved it for us. We have it in our own language. Let us read it, and enjoy it, and pray over it, and seek to grow daily, by God's grace, in our understanding of it.

Let me point out one important truth about Paul's writings which we see in verse 16. Notice the expression, "the other scriptures." Here we see that the writings of Paul were already being considered as a part of the

whole Word of God. And it may have been true also of the writings of Peter and some of the other NT writers.

Now we come to the last two verses of the epistle. And here we have:

III. A WARNING AND AN EXHORTATION (2 Pet. 3:17, 18).

First,

A. The warning (v. 17).

We cannot be too careful concerning the teachers we listen to. “Ye,” or *you* (plural) is emphatic. So this is a warning for every professing child of God. We need to be standing on guard continually for ourselves. It is as Lenski has said, to use a familiar expression, “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.”

When Paul called false teachers “wicked,” he was using the same word that he used in 2:7 in describing “the wicked” in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the word ἄθεσμος, and it means *criminal, lawless*. Those who tamper with the Word of God will be held accountable to God. This is high on the crime list with God. It is capital crime! But they often lead away even true believers, and this always results tragic effects in a person’s life. It is impossible to be in error concerning the truth, and to be steadfast in living, faithful to God and to His Word.

Therefore, we need to know the Word so that we are prepared to judge everything that we hear in the light of what we know from Scripture.

Finally we come to the Apostle Peter’s final word in this epistle, and his final word in the two letters he wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

B. His closing exhortation (2 Pet. 3:18).

I am not minimizing any other verse in the Bible, but I believe I can truly say that as far as our lives are concerned, other passages may equal this in importance, *but none can surpass it*. The warning was the negative side; this is the positive side. We all need to keep growing as Christians as long as we live on this earth.

2 Peter 3:14-18 (7)

The exhortation itself indicates that it is possible not to grow, and there are many true believers who fall into that category. They may be saved, but today they are right where they were when they were first saved. We get alarmed if a child is born, but does not grow. But somehow we can talk to Christians, and it is apparent that they have not grown, but little is done to help them. And most of the time they don't know that they need help.

Peter here was speaking of the same process in the spiritual life that he wrote about in chapter 1. Cf. 1 Peter 2:2-3:

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

There are a couple of other verses that speak of growth in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: Eph. 4:14-15:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

These three passages all have three things in common:

- 1) They all speak of our need to grow.
- 2) They all speak of the Word.
- 3) They all speak of Christ.

The exhortation in our text, 2 Peter 3:18, is for us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The only place we can learn about the Lord is in the Word of God..

In 1 Peter 2:2, 3 we are told to desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow, if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

In Ephesians 4:14, 15 we are told that "speaking the truth in love" we "may grow up into Him in all things," and the "Him" is Christ.

Now growth is a physical term as well as a spiritual term. When we are saved, we have been born again. And we need to grow to maturity.

When each of us was born, we, too, needed to grow. Our mothers faith-

fully fed us, cared for us, and both of our parents helped us to walk, taught us various things, protected us from illness (as much as they could). But our growth was the development of the life and abilities which were given to us at our conception. And this differs with all of us in many ways, even though we all have many similarities. We all have learned to walk, and to talk, and to feed ourselves, and to take care of ourselves in ways in which God has provided for us. But as we grow, some have skills in one area; others in different areas. Some are great with physical skills; others are not so gifted. Some are very gifted mentally; the rest of us are not so gifted. But our growth is the development of what we are given from the very beginning of our existence.

The same is true of us as Christians, although here we all have the same resources for the Christian life. The Lord may use us in different ways, but now we are talking about growth. Growth is the development of all that was given to us when we were saved. And what were we given when we were saved. We were all given Christ. We learn to know Him through the Word. We learn how good and kind and gracious He is. We trust His grace for the strength that we need from day to day. And this is all tied in with the Word of God.

So the Christian life is not looking for more, but learning to live with what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter himself has told us in this epistle that all we will ever need in order to grow to maturity, is Christ. We need to know Him, and to trust Him, and to seek to be like Him. This is what growth is. And let us always remember that just as God gave growth to us from our conception, and as God gives growth to all living things, so He gives the increase to all of His people who faithfully walk in fellowship with Him, using the means that He has provided for us, mainly His Word and His grace.

Concl: The last words of God's servants are of great importance, especially when they are spoken, or written, like Peter's words, as his last words to the Church. Moses' last words are found in the book of Deuteronomy. Paul's last words in 2 Timothy. Our Lord's last words in John 13 through 16. And here we have Peter's last words in 2 Peter. May we all take them to heart, and remember how extremely important it is for us to keep growing each day in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And perhaps one of the first and most important truths we need to learn about our Lord is that if Jesus Christ is

2 Peter 3:14-18 (9)

our Savior, He is also our Lord. We need to read our Bibles faithfully. We need to pray constantly. We need to be with the Lord's people for instruction, fellowship, and to join in worshiping God. We need to be obedient to the Word. But let us always remember that Christ must be at the center of it all. We need to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) because death means more of Christ.