



LOOK BACK

LOOK AHEAD

LOOK AROUND

GROW!

STAND ON THE
WORD

2 PETER 3.12-18

UNTIL HE COMES

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A ReVision Resource

Until He Comes: 2 Peter 3.12-18
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2 Peter 3.12-18: Introduction

Peter brings his second epistle to an end by circling back to where he began – looking to the Lord and growing in Him.

The new heaven and new earth are coming, and we should be preparing for them now. This we do, not by listening to the teaching of false prophets, but by standing firm in the Word of God. Look back to the promises of God and the words of prophets and apostles. Look ahead to the new world which is to be. Then look around and consider what the Lord requires of us in the way of holiness here and now.

Our vision of where things are headed will determine how we live in the present. Make no mistake about it, Peter insists: God is doing a new thing, and He's doing it even now, in all who look to Him, wait on Him, and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

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1 and 2 Peter can encourage, embolden, and instruct us, if we're willing to take the Apostle's words to heart. My prayer is that all who take up this study will do just that. Thank you for joining us.

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1 What Sort of People?

2 Peter 3.11, 12

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

The Story: The day is coming, as every Christian believes, when Jesus will return and God will remake the heavens and the earth, fusing them seamlessly into one new creation, where Christ in His glory reigns. Only the Lord knows when that day will be; our duty is not to speculate on things we cannot know (Acts 1.7), but to attend to what is clearly revealed. Peter says we must make preparation for the coming day of glory by pursuing lives of holiness and godliness, for by these we bear witness to our unflinching hope, even as we prepare to meet the Lord in glory (1 Pet. 3.15). The Christian life is rooted in the past, in the promises of God and in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ; however, it is oriented toward the future and the coming of our Savior to take us to Himself. Between those two perspectives we live in the present as men and women who expect to meet the Lord at any moment, and who are even now striving to be clothed with the glory that will finally be ours only when we see Jesus face to face and are like Him (1 Jn. 3.2, 3).

The Structure: A lot of ink and much hot air have been wasted speculating on the details attending the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those details, however, are not for us to know. In this interim period, in which Christ is working through His Word and Spirit to reconcile the world to God, we have work to do which is clearly revealed and which, if faithfully pursued, can make us much more fruitful than all the “end times scenarios” we might be able to conjure. Seek the Kingdom, bring holiness to completion in the fear of God, be His witnesses, make disciples, build His Church – really, isn’t that enough for us for this present time?

How can we use the fact of Christ’s imminent return to unite believers instead of dividing them?

2 Where Righteousness Dwells

2 Peter 3.13

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The Story: Peter's three-faceted orientation is crisply summarized here. The Christian looks *back* at what God has promised. Those precious and very great promises (1.4) can help us to partake of the very nature of God, as we pursue them faithfully and come to know more of the righteousness of Christ at work in and through us. The Christian, banking on those promises, also looks *forward* to the coming new world – a new heavens and new earth where sin is banished, death and sorrow are no more, tears are only of joy and rejoicing, and the light of God's glory illuminates everything and everyone in a perpetual banquet of worship and fully human living. Thus, in the *present*, the Christians "waits" or "looks." This is not a passive waiting, but an active one – as when the apostles "waited" for the promise of the Father in that upper room after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. It is a waiting and looking of prayer, mutual service, outreach to the world, personal sanctification, and pleading with the Lord to come again soon and take us unto Himself.

The Structure: In a sense human history is a kind of "waiting room." We're all "waiting" for the doctor to call us in and bring us to full health. What are we doing? Are we just lolling around the waiting room of history, mindlessly watching television, grouching about this and that, moaning and complaining, looking impatiently at our watches for this thing to be over with soon? Or are we engaging the people around us in friendly and perhaps Gospel conversation? Have we brought something to work on while we wait? Are we enriching our souls by reading or study as we linger in the waiting room? Do we help a mother with her baby? An old man who needs a seat? Or are we just content to sit and wait?

In your life, what does a typical day of "waiting" and "looking" for the new heavens and new earth entail?

3 Since You Are Waiting...

2 Peter 3.14

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...

The Story: Peter is a master in choosing just the right words. “Therefore” assumes that we agree with him about the ultimate disposition of things, as much, that is, as we can know. If we’re in that “therefore” group, a “then” follows: “be diligent.” These are the same words that Peter used in the first chapter. As his reference to the promises of God (v. 13) was meant to tie his letter back to its beginning, so this reiteration of “be diligent” recalls that lengthy exhortation to pursue the sanctified life contained in 2 Peter 1.5-11. The unspoken implication is that those who are not “being diligent” may not be in the “therefore” group. But toward what are we to be diligent? “...to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless”. That “spot and blameless” remark gets at the necessity of pursuing righteousness according to the teaching of God’s Law, which all who want to enter the Kingdom (1.11) and be great in it both do and teach (Matt. 5.17-19). The “at peace” comes as a result of walking faithfully according to the teaching of the Word of God, casting all our cares on Him, because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5.7; Phil. 4.6, 7).

The Structure: Working out our salvation is a daily calling (Phil. 2.12). We are saved by grace through faith; but we are saved to be, as it were, more fully saved each day as we “supplement” our faith with the things that pertain to salvation (Eph. 2.8-10; 2 Pet. 1.5ff.). So we have work to do each day as we wait through the corridors of time and history and look toward the coming of the Lord. Let us make sure that we are “found by Him” to be diligent in our waiting when He comes at last to take us to Himself.

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest rating, how would you assess the state of your “being diligent” at this present time? Can you see any areas where you need to improve your diligence?

4 The Patience of the Lord

2 Peter 3.15, 16a

...and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand...

The Story: There are at least three senses in which we should “consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation.” First, as mentioned yesterday, there is the additional time allotted to us for working out our own salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12). We must not be idle, but diligent, about the matter of growing in our relationship with the Lord, in godliness and holiness. Second, there are many opportunities God affords us for declaring His salvation to others. We are called to be His witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.8). Every day we can encourage a fellow believer in the salvation of the Lord and reach out to the lost with the Good News of the Kingdom. Finally, the Lord Himself continues preparing a place for us in the new heaven and new earth (Jn. 14.1-30). I’m not entirely sure what this means, but it indicates that the Lord is busy even at this time preparing a greater salvation for us in the new heaven and new earth, a salvation so great that we won’t mind having to wait just a bit longer to enjoy it.

The Structure: The respectful and appreciative mention of the Apostle Paul here should put to rest any idea of those two being rivals for leadership in the early Church, as some have supposed. Paul submitted to Peter in Jerusalem, and, in doing so, confirmed his calling to the Gentiles. And Peter submit to Paul’s hard but necessary corrective in Antioch (Gal. 2). Both men knew, loved, and respected on another, because both men lived for the salvation of the Lord in every respect.

Are you entering into the full “patience of the Lord” during this time of waiting?

5 The Other Scriptures

2 Peter 3.16

...as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

The Story: Do you sometimes find the Apostle Paul's letters to be a bit, shall we say, challenging? You're in good company. So did many people in the early Church, maybe even Peter! But just because Paul is hard to understand in places doesn't mean we shouldn't make the effort. Paul wrote about the same things Peter was writing about, and with the same authority. Peter had already made a *de facto* claim of revelation for his epistles (2 Pet. 3.1, 2); now he makes the same claim for Paul. Paul's letters are of the same character as the "rest of the Scriptures" and should be regarded as such. We must not neglect a single word that God has written down for us, no matter how hard it may be to understand. If we don't work hard to understand his letters, how will we keep from falling into the snares of "untaught and unstable" false teachers, who interpret Paul in ways contrary to the drift and thrust of all the rest of the Bible?

The Structure: Believers must not be content with a kind of "status quo" Christian faith. We are encouraged by Peter to press on to maturity – as also by Paul, the writer of Hebrews, James, John, and all "the rest of the Scriptures." Yes, of course, this can be hard work; but the reward of growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is well worth the effort we must put into it. As we wait and look for the Lord, we must press on to know Him more fully, and that means more diligent effort in learning His Word.

What are your goals for learning more of God's Word this year?

6 Wicked and Unstable

2 Peter 3.17

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked...

The Story: Peter puts the words, “wicked” and “unstable” (v. 16) together. Wicked and unstable people misinterpret Paul and all the other Scriptures. If we are unable to discern their false teaching, we may end up becoming like them! How should we “beware” to avoid being “led away”? Obviously, by being grounded in all the Word of God, including the teaching of the Apostles. But we also “beward” when, like Peter, we warn one another of false teachers, pointing out their errors and explaining how their departures from the sincere milk of God’s Word can cause us to lose our footing on the path of righteousness. We are all our brothers’ keepers in this important matter.

The Structure: There will always be false teachers in the Church. Some will claim to have some “special insight” into the Scriptures, and to be in possession of an understanding that doesn’t really agree with anyone else. Others will say we don’t have to have anything to do with the Law of God. Still others will come using the language of the faith to teach an entirely different religion, which is not true religion at all. Are we ready to “take care” against such dangers?

How does the leadership of your church seek to guard its congregation against false teaching? What about you?

7 Grow!

2 Peter 3.18

...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

The Story: Peter began his second epistle emphasizing the need to grow in the Lord. He ends it at the same place. Others may twist and wrest the Scriptures and boast in having special insights about this, that, or something else. Our task is to grow, and growing means knowing Jesus Christ more fully and more intimately, increasing each day in the reality of eternal life (Jn. 17.3). “Knowledge” here is not simply head knowledge – a merely intellectual accomplishment. It is a relationship in which the reality of Jesus increasingly becomes the reality which is us (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We can know that we’re growing in the knowledge of Christ when we are becoming more like Him in every respect. Then He gets the glory, not us. This, indeed, is the end of all our hopes in the Christian life: to know Christ in His glory and to make His glory known.

The Structure: There is always room for us to grow, as individual believers and as congregations of the Lord’s people. We must not be “sluggish” about this (Heb. 6.12); instead, growing in Christ and seeking to glorify Him must occupy all our waking moments, so that, in every area of our lives, we are learning how and finding the power to live for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10.31).

How do you determine the state of your growth in Christ at any given time? When was the last time you adjusted your effort at growing in the Lord?

For reflection or discussion

1. What is your understanding of the new heaven and new earth? What will this new creation be like? How much does anticipation of and preparation for this new world factor into your daily experience?
2. How can we know when we are growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? What does Christian growth look like?
3. What is the Gospel? How does the end of the story – judgment, the new heaven and new earth – factor into how we share the Gospel with others?
4. What is your present practice of reading and studying the Word of God? Can you see any ways this might be improved, so that you grow more consistently in the Lord?
5. What's the most important lesson you take away from 2 Peter?
6. How are you seeking to incorporate that lesson into your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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