

## 2PETER 3:10-18    CBC 21.3.2021

We've reached the final part of our series, "*Heading for Home*". **Please read 2Peter 3:10-18 ...**

What do you think the future holds? I'm not asking for empty speculation. I'm asking about what you really believe. Because it will shape how you live. Think of the woman expecting a baby – that expectation affects how she lives.

Or think of the materialist who's expecting oblivion in a few short years – it affects how he lives: "*Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!*" Is that how we should live? Modern physicists predict cosmic collapse with alarming consistency – nothing survives. It may be ten billion years away, but they say it's coming.

The apostle Peter sees destruction coming too, but it's not an impersonal comic implosion. It's a meeting with the personal and living God. In line with the whole Bible, Peter calls that day "*The day of the Lord*" (v.10), because the Lord's glory will be seen, the Lord's will will be done, and the Lord's justice will triumph over all evil. And on that day there will be nowhere to hide. People who thought they could reject God in broad daylight will be judged in broad daylight.

And yet the end of everything tainted by sin doesn't result in nothing, but in *re-creation*. God has promised us "*a new heaven and a new earth*" (v.13) – that's what He said in Isa 65:17 and it's repeated in Rev 21 and 22. There'll be a new home for His people. So how we live really does matter. ***It's so very different from the secular view of the end!*** It's rightly called HOPE, because it's good news.

Peter tells us three times in vv.12-14 to "*look forward!*" – remember Peter is at the end of his life and about to die. Yet he's not looking backwards, but forwards! One reason we see so much despair today in the face of death is that secular society has robbed people of hope. They've nothing to look forward to. But Christians can live and die looking forwards, because we have a wonderful future! We're heading for home! And if we truly know this, it will shape how we live.

And that's Peter's point! God doesn't tell us about the future so that we'll have an intellectual edge over non-Christians or so that we'll feel smug because we know something that others don't. He tells us what the future holds for a very practical reason: so that we'll get ready for it – we'll know how to live! If we've rightly understood the salvation Jesus came to bring, it will shape everything.

### **1. LIVE GODLY LIVES! vv.11-14**

**v.11** "*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ...*" BECAUSE (v.13) "*we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*"

Do you see the logic? We're heading for a world marked by righteousness, so start getting acclimatized by living a righteous, godly life! Here's a point of continuity between the old world that's going to be burned up, and the new world that's coming. I won't be able to take my house, wardrobe, car or even my library – but righteousness will live on! That survives the fire. And the logic of this is that we should lead holy and godly lives that reflect God's righteous character.

It's striking: to many people, "godliness" seems such an old fashioned idea. But Peter insists that godliness is not about locking ourselves into the past – it's about being the people of the future. People tell us, "*You're on the wrong side of history*" – well, that's not what God says.

All through the Scriptures, righteousness, justice and peace are promised by God for His people – and now at last they're going to be delivered forever. Doesn't that make your heart sing? We're heading for the home of righteousness, where righteous people can be at home and be relaxed about it. That awkwardness you feel at having to draw a line at what you're prepared to do at work or in your family will be gone. You'll never again stick out like a sore thumb when you can't join in a conversation – because there'll be no more conversations like that. You'll be able to live to please Christ without feeling awkward and embarrassed.

And Peter says, If you're looking forward to that world, live for it now! Live a godly life! You needn't fear that will turn you into an impractical dreamer who is of no use in this world. Nothing is more practical than godly, righteous living. We can only be righteous as we treat other people rightly – as we practice justice and peace and honesty and self-giving love. If we would set our course every day to be holy and godly, our impact on the world for good would be massive! The Victorian social reformer Lord Shaftesbury is reported to have said that for thirty years not a single day passed without him consciously recalling that Christ was coming! It didn't lead to dreaming but DOING.

It's not a future focus that makes us ineffective as Christians. It's the lack of it! That's why many professing Christians don't appear to be following the Lord with much seriousness of purpose. They may be disciples of sorts, but their lives hardly inspire – they're just muddling along with the Lord.

The problem is that eternity doesn't mean much to us, at least functionally. It's not formative in the way we live our everyday lives. We've ceased to believe in our hearts that the Lord is coming back to take us to the home of righteousness. And so we've lost our true north – we've got no direction, no focus, and no motivation. No wonder then if we grow weary in the battle for holiness and wonder if it's worth fighting. And we begin to drift with the tide of the surrounding culture.

That's why preachers need to do more than talk about *today*. When we come to the Bible or gather as a church we need to be reminded of things that no-one else will remind us of. That life matters because there's going to be a day when God is going to ask us how we spent it. We're prone to forget this on Monday morning when we're faced with all the pressures of life. But Peter reminds us where we're going and urges us to get ready, because we have a wonderful future!

And as we live for that future, we actually "*speed its coming*" (v.12). That's a deep and mysterious idea! But the sovereign God who ordains the end also ordains the means to the end. He ordains that we should pray "*Your Kingdom come*" and that we should spread the gospel so that His harvest should be gathered in. And then the end will come!

Is Peter describing the way you live? Are you living a godly life because you're looking forward to Christ's return and the home of righteousness? That's how to head for home.

## 2. BE ON YOUR GUARD! vv.15-17

Even with so much to look forward to, we need to be watchful for danger because of the false teachers Peter has been warning about throughout this letter. Sadly, instead of using the present time to repent of their sins, they use it to indulge them! And they twist the Scriptures to justify their lifestyle.

In Peter's day they were distorting the apostle Paul's letters, which Peter puts in the same category as the other Scriptures – highly significant from the man who said that the writers of Scripture were carried along by God's Spirit (1:20-21). Paul writes with God's authority. But that doesn't stop false teachers twisting Paul's words for their own ends.

What does Peter mean by that? He's not talking about wrestling with genuinely difficult passages, nor unintentional misunderstandings, but misreadings that arise from a refusal to submit to Scripture. When Peter describes these people as "*ignorant*" (v.16) he doesn't mean they know nothing, but that they refuse instruction – whether from apostles or anyone else. They twist Scripture to justify the sinful life they've chosen, or to avoid discomfort, or to promote things they think will benefit them. Paul already knew that his teaching was abused in this way (e.g. Ro 6:1).

And Peter doesn't think this is a small matter. It's dangerous. The false teachers are unstable (v.16) and their teaching threatens to destabilize others. "*Be on your guard*" (v.17) – lest you get carried away by these errors and fall from your secure position. Peter knew all about having a nasty fall (Mk 14:66-72). He wasn't on guard, and he got badly bruised. He doesn't want that to happen to his readers.

Peter's concern is genuine. There's a tension here that the Bible won't let us escape. Scripture tells us clearly that those God saves He keeps. Yet it equally clearly warns us against presuming on God's grace and treating it lightly. If I'm not crying out to God to keep me, and making every effort to follow Christ, then my experience of God's salvation has a question mark against it.

If God has truly given me a new nature, it will mean I heed God's call to cling to Him. And I'll keep coming back to the foot of the cross for cleansing, and to have my vision cleared and my course corrected. Peter is asking me to check that I'm still living this way. "*Be on your guard!*"

Think of this. We have two letters from Peter, and they address two dangers that are always with us: persecution (1Peter) and false teaching (2Peter). One of these dangers is worse than the other, but it isn't (as we tend to think) persecution. It's false teaching. Think of the church in China compared to any country in western Europe. The Chinese church has been persecuted for most of the last 100 years and has grown massively. The church in the West has been riddled with false teaching and unbelief and has been virtually emptied. In the past 150 years mainline Christian denominations in the West have been destabilized from within by the undermining of biblical authority and the rewriting of Christian doctrine and morality. The results are clear: a powerless church whose views are often indistinguishable from those of the world.

Yet western Christians don't fear false teaching, but we're terrified of persecution. We've got it the wrong way round! "*Be on your guard*" against false teaching, Peter says. Well, are you?

### **3. GROW AS A CHRISTIAN! v.18**

Peter wants our stability, and the way to ensure that is to GUARD (v.17) and GROW: **v.18:** *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

The best protection against false teaching and its consequences is MATURITY – growing towards our destiny. Very simply, being a keen Christian! Waking up each morning and saying, *"Lord Jesus, thank You for saving me – I want to please you this day."* While others are pursuing wealth or prestige, growing Christians are pursuing Christ, in whom are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3).

We thrive as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Not just knowing more about Him, but growing in obedience to what we know. Treating His promises as genuine. Taking His commands seriously. And we need to cry out to God for this because every day represents a fresh challenge. But that's why Peter describes Jesus as our *"Lord and Saviour"* (v.18). *"Lord"* reminds us of His power to rule our unruly hearts, and *"Saviour"* speaks of His willingness to rescue us. So fix your eyes on Jesus! That's how to head for home.

### **CONCLUSION**

Is this hope yours? Are you holding it firmly? Is it holding YOU firmly? Is it changing your life? Brothers and sisters, God has very great plans for us. Do you think about His plans? Or are you making plans of your own? God's plans will mock our plans if our plans leave His plans out of account! SO

- Be godly – because we're looking forward to the home of righteousness
- Be on your guard – because false teaching is an ever-present danger
- Be a growing Christian – because Jesus is coming back for you.

*"To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."* (v.18)

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, keep us watchful and faithful as we wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fill us again with your Spirit, that we may be growing Christians. Help us to live godly lives and to share with others the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory both now and forever. Amen.

### **FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:**

- As we wait for God's new world, how can we help one another to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?