

2 Peter 3

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[0 : 0 0] chapters 1 to 3 really, just keep it open there, that would be really helpful for me. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that useful to see where we're going. But let's pray and let's ask for God's help.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight. Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. So, what we're doing tonight, slightly different.

Normally, our regular diet as a church is to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter. And that means that God sets the agenda rather than just preachers coming with our own agenda.

And it connects the right commands in the Bible with the right truths in the Bible. Because if you just work through the Bible, you've got the promises next to the commands.

And it helps us understand how the Christian life fits together. But sometimes you can get to the end of a series in a book. And it's only just as you get to the end, you're really starting to get a grip on what it's really about.

[1 : 0 4] So, having worked since Easter through this brilliant little letter in the New Testament to Peter, we're just going to have an evening now where we consolidate that by having an overview. If you like, we're going from Street View to Google Earth tonight.

Having gone through it bit by bit, we're now going to get the bigger picture of what's the whole letter about. Now, obviously, primarily that means I hope this will be a benefit if you've been coming along week by week.

Because it's a way of consolidating some of the themes that might have struck us as we go through. But if you've just come tonight for the first time, I hope that looking at 2 Peter like this, although we're moving around a bit, and a bit of effort to keep up, but actually might prompt you to go away and read 2 Peter a bit more slowly, and think a bit more carefully about what Christians believe about the future and how to live in the light of it.

Really, there's one big idea drawing together the themes of 2 Peter. It's that if you want to be effective in the Christian life, if you want to be fruitful in your life, if you want to make a difference in your life, if you want when you stand before Jesus at the end of your life to feel that you have spent your time well, then you need your eyes to be fixed on the day of the Lord.

It's the day that Christians speak about in our creeds, our statements of faith that we have as Christians. We saved Jesus together, and we've said it for many centuries, that Jesus ascended into heaven, he's seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

[2 : 3 7] And we see it in the accounts of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. In Acts chapter 1, the disciples are with the risen Jesus, and they see him ascend into heaven, and he gives them this great promise.

He says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and he gives them a great commission, he says, and you will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And then as they look up as Jesus ascends into heaven, angels say to them, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you've seen him go into heaven.

So as Christians, this is a fundamental building block of our faith, that we're waiting for Jesus to come in glory. And I said this this morning, but it's worth thinking as a Christian, I hope I never get to heaven.

Sometimes people think that being a Christian is about trying to get into heaven. I hope I never get to heaven. Because heaven is the waiting room for souls who have died when they go to be with God, because they've died before the return of Christ.

[3 : 46] And it's better than being alive in our broken world today. It's better by far. But better still will be that Jesus returns while we're still alive, and we can greet him and live with him.

He'll bring with him the souls who've been waiting in heaven. But we're told when Jesus comes in glory, every eye will see him, and he'll bring in the new creation, and we'll live there with him forever.

Now when Peter writes to Peter, he's got that future day of the Lord firmly in view. And we're going to look at four things about that great day of the Lord together. I don't normally use alliterations, but these four, I do have four S's.

Okay, so the first one. So you'll have to bear with that. The first one is the day of the Lord spurs us on. In chapter one of the letter, you get these strong words about striving, and focusing all your energy.

If you look at verse five of chapter one, of 2 Peter, page 1222, verse five. For this reason, make every effort. And then he lists what you have to do.

[4 : 45] He lists seven virtues. Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, love. Verse 10, he says, therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort.

There it is again, this diligence that he's calling us to. And one of the things that we grow in, in the virtues that are listed from verse five, is perseverance. So real Christianity, authentic Christianity, it demands everything from you.

It's a passionate thing. It's purpose-driven. But it's not a works-based religion. It's not make every effort to do these things to get right with God. Peter's very clear about that.

The last verse of the whole letter gives the key. He says at the very end, the last verse, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It's about growing in grace.

You begin the Christian life in grace, accepting a free gift from God of righteousness and new life, and you continue growing in that grace. He says at the very beginning, that I read at the start of the service, that verse five, the make every effort bit, he says, for this reason, make every effort to add to your faith.

[5 : 55] What's the reason? Well, it's that God has already given us everything we need, God's power and his promises. Verse three, his divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life.

And verse four, through these, he has given us very great and precious promises. So human religion says, you have to obey to get accepted.

But true religion from the living God says, you're accepted. Therefore, strive to live out what God has given you. We grow in grace. And it's possible to say that you're a Christian, but really to have other things as the real driving forces in your life.

That actually, what we strive for are the things that everyone around us strives for. Comfort and leisure and fitness and popularity and career and food and achievement and financial reward.

But the world is striving for all those things because it doesn't know that Jesus is coming back. If Jesus is not coming back, you may as well strive for those things.

[6 : 58] But he is coming back. If you know one day, maybe today, the Lord Jesus will return. And when he does, he'll transform our bodies into resurrection bodies and live with us forever in a renewed world.

It makes sense to make every effort to be godly now. In verse 11, he talks about having a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And striving like that, because it doesn't make sense to strive like that unless Jesus is coming back, striving like that gives you an assurance that you do have saving faith, that you do belong to God.

If we're not growing like that, we should be concerned about it. But in verse 10, he says, therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election.

In other words, it gives you assurance, it gives you confidence that you really are chosen by God and called by God. if you can look at your life and think to yourself, well, look, I know I'm not the person that I should be and I know I'm not the person that I will be, but I'm not the person that I used to be.

[8 : 03] There are changes in my life because I've put what I believe about Jesus into action. That gives us assurance that you're striving to grow.

It's the old bicycle principle, again, that you get again and again, really, in the Christian life. But, you know, we've just taught our older two children to ride bikes recently and one of the hardest things about learning to ride a bike is that whenever you stop, you fall off and you have to teach children that they just have to keep going and if they keep pedaling, they'll stay up.

And in the Christian life, don't get weary and stop and fall away, but we keep going because the day of the Lord is on our horizon. So I think that's worth reflecting on as we get to the end of 2 Peter, to be able to think of yourself, are there any areas of our lives, of my life, where I can see some progress, some growth in my living for Christ, in my godliness, that can give me reassurance that I have faith, I do belong to Jesus and I can look forward to that rich welcome when Christ returns.

The day of the Lord makes us strive. But secondly, we learn in 2 Peter that the day of the Lord gets scoffed at. Being a Christian has this great simplicity to it, right?

You trust Jesus came and died and rose again to give you grace. You trust that he will return to welcome you into his kingdom. And in the meantime, you strive to walk his ways.

[9 : 34] But one of the key themes of this letter to Peter is false teaching. And Peter describes the scoffing that goes on in chapter 3. You look at chapter 3, verse 3.

Above all, you must understand that in the last days, that's the days between Jesus' ascension and his return, in the last days, scoffers will come scoffing and following their own evil desires.

They will say, where is this coming? He promised. Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. I don't know about you, but I think it's great that the Bible says this.

Because it means when people come to you and they scoff that you believe that Jesus will return, because they say, the world doesn't work like that. The universe has always gone on as a closed system.

And why would we have to believe that anything catastrophic would happen again? When that happens, you don't think to yourself, oh yeah, maybe I'm backing the wrong horse being a Christian. No, one of the first things you think is, God told me this would happen.

[10 : 41] God told me you would say that. God warns us there will be scoffers who will say that. And the scoffing doesn't just come from the world. It invades the church.

We see that all across Scotland today. We're warned of it here in 2 Peter. In Scotland, Scotland used to be known as the land of the book, but there are plenty of pulpits of churches in Scotland where the return of Christ and its implications for how we live today would not be preached.

You would not hear that. And that shouldn't be any surprise to us. It's the theme of chapter 2 of 2 Peter. We just look at verse 1 of chapter 2. But there were also false prophets among the people.

Just as there will be false teachers among you, they will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.

Now, why would the physical return of the Lord Jesus be something that people would be keen to deny? We might think it's an intellectual problem, but there's something deeper going on.

[11 : 50] The issue is that if Jesus has been raised bodily from the dead with a resurrection body, that's physical, and if he, therefore, will bring to the world a physical new creation where his people will live righteously with him forever, then what we do with our bodies is hugely significant to God.

And the false teaching around the time of 2 Peter might have been saying things like this. When it comes to being spiritual, how you feel on the inside matters a lot more than what you do on the outside.

So if you forget about Jesus' actual physical bodily resurrection, you can exchange authentic Christian hope for a spirituality that says, the body doesn't really matter. One day we're going to leave all this physical stuff behind and our souls will ascend to a higher plane of fluffy clouds and souls without bodies and warm feelings.

So don't really worry about practical godliness. So you can carry on in unrepentant sin without worrying about it so much because what you do with your body doesn't last into eternity.

And we pick up some key themes about that in the chapter, chapter 2 about the false teaching. One of the key themes is that God really will judge sin. He will punish unrepentant sin.

[13 : 07] If you look at verse 9, he goes through a number of examples from history and in verse 9 he says, if this is so then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

Unrepentant sin will be punished even if some people teach that it's fine. We also hear that the false teaching is appealing. Verse 18 it says, they, the false teachers, mouth empty, boastful words and by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.

So you get enticed away by teaching that affirms that you can live in a way that your flesh wants to live. Our sinful desires want that. We want to be affirmed in that.

But we also learn that the unrepentant sin that's being approved of is harmful. We think it's good because it feels good but it causes harm and we see that in verse 13 where he says to the false teachers they will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.

It's harmful to be told that things that God says are not good are okay. And in verse 19 they promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity.

[14 : 27] For people are slaves to whatever has mastered them. So it looks like freedom and certainly I can think of times when living as a Christian I look at the non-Christian world and it looks like freedom but actually Peter says it's captivity because the things that you follow the desires you follow master you and you can't stop living for them.

So 2 Peter has a really sharp contemporary edge for us today. There's two letters by Peter in the scriptures. The first one is really encouraging Christians to understand what's going on in persecution from without the church and saying stand fast this is the true grace of God.

This letter to Peter encourages Christians where the problem is more within the church false teaching and in the church in Scotland today the kind of false teaching described here in chapter 2 is very attractive to us.

It appeals to us in two very different ways I think. One is that it's attractive in the age of scientism. We have non-Christian friends around us who believe scientism which says you shouldn't really believe anything unless it can be proved through empirical evidence.

That's scientism. So rather than accept there might be a God behind the science that we can observe in the universe around us scientism says you've got to rule out the idea that there's a God because we can't prove it by empirical experiment.

[15 : 56] Now if you're sensitive to that as a Christian then how about taking Christianity and stripping away the idea of a great future day of the Lord that's a catastrophic intervention by God into the universe he's made.

It's attractive isn't it? It makes your faith much more reasonable sounding to the non-Christian and so we're attracted and I remember being at church with I've written here with a lady who'd been going to church her whole life but basically it was my mum and this was remarkable so my mum grew up going to church she met my dad in a church youth group they went to church kind of their whole lives I was a young adult took my mum to church there was a sermon on 2 Peter chapter 3 about the day of the Lord my mum said afterwards I didn't realise Jesus was going to come back I thought that when what would happen is just that you die and your soul goes to be with God isn't that stunning?

she must have been to hundreds of church services no one had ever explained to her that Jesus will come back in the same way that he went and rain on the world why didn't that happen?

was it just a fluke? no it's because the ministers didn't believe it so they didn't preach it it sounds more plausible to the modern world view not to preach that but of course we're not just attracted in that kind of way intellectual acceptability to denying the day of the Lord we're attracted in exactly the same way that the early church was attracted that if we can accept that Jesus won't return physically then my personal inner feelings my worship experience matters but my practical godliness does not matter it doesn't matter if I fall out with people and I never bother to resolve the conflict it doesn't matter if I don't get my hands dirty helping people in need it doesn't matter if I have sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman if I have an affair if I get drunk if I lose my temper a Christianity that offers great feelings and never challenges me one of the great reformers Thomas Cranmer 500 years ago he said this he said what the heart loves the will chooses and the mind justifies and so we look for ways to rationalize in our belief system ways of living that our heart desires so the day of the

Lord gets scoffed at but Peter writes to assure us and correct us that's our third point the day of the Lord is surely coming so first he raises the question of authority whose words are you trusting about God and about the world and about ourselves how do we know this day of the Lord that sounds impossible to imagine is really coming well we know it because we can trust the words of the scriptures of the Bible and Peter addresses that in two ways he talks about the new testament that he's writing and his colleagues his fellow apostles are writing and about the old testament as the prophetic writings so we see what he says about the apostles at two different points in chapter one verse sixteen he talks about his own personal eyewitness testimony chapter one verse sixteen for we the apostles did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our lord jesus christ in power but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty he received honour and glory from god the father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory saying this is my son whom I love with him

[19 : 31] I'm well pleased we ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven and we were with him on the sacred mountain it's extraordinary isn't it peter was there and you see the link he's drawing between having seen jesus on the mountain that day at a midpoint in his ministry where they saw him it was like the curtain was drawn back and they saw this brilliant glory in jesus physically present among them and then it's hidden away again and jesus walks to the cross but then he rises and ascends and peter knows he will come back because i saw him glorious on the mountain and he's sharing that with us we trust him because he's saying i didn't get this second hand i was there on the mountain i saw it and then he says this he says something similar in chapter 3 16 about paul's writing he calls paul's writings scripture says he writes the same way in all his letters speaking in them of these matters his letters contain some things that are hard to understand and many of us would agree with him there and people distort it but he says as they do the other scriptures so peter they're saying the apostle paul's writing are scripture for us to trust and he affirms the prophets back in chapter 1 from verse 19 i'll just read verse 21 for us he says for prophecy never had its origins in the human will but prophets though human spoke from god as they were carried along by the holy spirit so the old testament those prophetic writings promising a great day of the lord that will be wonderful and terrible in salvation and judgment they were being carried along by the spirit of god so our authority is scripture and it's trusting that scripture that makes you secure that's the voice that we need to listen to not the voices of false teachers or different people's ideas pulling us away and as we listen to the voice of scripture we see that the day of the lord is certainly coming it's surely coming chapter 3 verse 10 have a look at that with me chapter 3 verse 10 peter says but the day of the lord will come like a thief unexpectedly the heavens will disappear with a roar the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare do you know what happened on the 29th of october 1992 nothing nothing happened that's why it was significant because it was the date that a korean based group mission to the coming days had highlighted as the apocalypse and they were in sydney australia that night and to the amusement of many australians they'd done a massive flyering project to warn people that the day the apocalypse was coming that night at 2am and everyone must prepare so in classic australian style people in sydney all started having end of the world parties that night and when 2am came and went nothing happened except that a group of koreans stood confused and bewildered and one australian joker in sympathy put his arm around one of the korean cult members and said cheer up mate it's not the end of the world and of course we don't know when it's going to happen do we and as simon manchester said last week in mark 13 it's a good thing that we don't know it's been a good thing for the church that for 2,000 years we've not known when the day of the lord will happen but of course the assumption for people around us is that life has always gone on the same and god never intervenes and why are the scoffers wrong well peter says for a start it's not even true that life has always gone on like that historically that's not true the cosmos was created by the word of god and then there was a catastrophic flood in the world in judgment he says it in verse five he says they deliberately overlook that verse six that by these waters the world at that time was deluged and destroyed and it's extraordinary when you look across

the different cultures and you can do this on the internet or you can do it more effectively in a proper library at the different cultures and ancient civilizations and how many of them have a flood story in their history a story of a catastrophic flood and seeking to explain what on earth happened and God warns but one of the reasons we struggle with that is because for 2,000 years since these credible stories eyewitness accounts of Jesus and his miracles the world has not ended yet and what Peter tells us is the Lord has a wonderful reason for that we see it in verse 9 the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness instead he is patient with you not wanting it's been a long time and I'm so thankful that Jesus waited until 2001 before coming back so that

I had the opportunity to turn back to him the prophets saw the day of the Lord the apostles say that Jesus came through death and out the other side and ascended into heaven and through their word we can be assured the day of the Lord is surely coming so how does that Peter ends the letter as he started it making the link between Jesus future day and our practical godliness today verse 11 of chapter 3 since everything will be destroyed in this way what kind of people ought you to be you ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming it's a surprising promise isn't it that actually by being more transformed and holy and godly and being God's witnesses to the end of the earth we can speed the coming of the day of the Lord and in verse 13 he says but in keeping with his promise we're looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells so then dear friends since you're looking forward to this make every effort to be found spotless blameless and at peace with would they see that you believe that today is a gift of the

Lord's patience to give others the opportunity to hear of Jesus and turn to him in faith for salvation and would they see that you believe that if you showed them your calendar your diary and your bank statement would they find there evidence that you really believe Jesus could come back any day one man in history who believed that was Anthony Ashley Cooper the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury he was led to faith by his maid when he was nine years old and he became a social reformer and his legacy included the Shaftesbury Society Shaftesbury Homes the Church Pastoral Aid Society which is still going today the Bible Society to get God's word out across the world the Association for the disabled the London City Mission the YMCA the YWCA he was in Parliament and he spearheaded the Lunacy Acts to care for people better with mental health issues the Children's 10 Hour Working Bill the

Chimney Sweeps Bill the Colliery Bill that took children and women out of their minds and the Education Act that made for the first time in the UK state education obligatory for all children so that everyone could read and write he reshaped our whole country how did he do it what spurred him on what he was asked at the end of his life and he said this I do not think that in the last 40 years I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord's return that's the day of the Lord spurring somebody on it surely coming and it should shape our lives today let's pray together heavenly father we praise you and thank you for this word this word of your spirit a word of reminder and just as Peter says that he wrote it to stimulate his hearers to wholesome thinking we ask that by your spirit you would enable us to reflect in wholesome thinking on all that you have promised may our lives reflect deeply a great conviction that the

[28 : 16] Lord Jesus will return thank you for your patience that in 2000 years he has not returned yet strengthen our faith in these promises we pray for our good and as we enable as we let them transform us for the good of those around us that we might be effective witnesses and on Jesus great day we will be found spotless and at peace with you we ask these things in Jesus name amen we we we we're we're going to sing together in response to God's word he