**LOOK FORWARD TO THE DAY OF THE LORD!**

January 1, 2017

2 Peter 3:1-18

Key Verse 3:11-12a – *“Since everything is going to 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.”*

Over the course of these last few days, we have studied the book of 2 Peter with one particular question in mind; what does it mean to live a holy life? Usually, we think of living a holy life as another way of saying living a boring life that is devoid of joy, pleasure and enjoyment, solitarily secluded up in a faraway temple to ward oneself from all the evils and temptations of this world. Does this sound appealing to you? Probably not. In fact, most people long for the exact opposite of the image presented. They seek to indulge all their senses and experience everything there is to experience in life, only wishing to fulfil their sinful desires. Why bother with all the self-denial when you can just live life to the full and deal with the consequences later… if there even is a later? However, through this book, Peter takes a sledgehammer to these notions and to the people who teach them. Instead, he reminds that it is God’s gift to us in calling us to live a holy life and that it is only through God that we are able to do so. 2 Peter 1:3:4 says, ***"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."*** We are not called to be an ascetic or a libertine but instead to be followers and imitators of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And it is through living a life ruled and guided by Jesus that we receive the hope of His second coming and look forward to the day of the Lord, when He will establish His eternal kingdom and bring restoration to all things. I pray that through today’s passage, we may learn anew what it means to look forward to the day of the Lord and how we are to live a holy life before God.

**Part 1: Beware of the Scoffers**

May we read verses 1 together, ***“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.”*** The final chapter of 2 Peter begins with a reminder to the believers to encourage them towards “wholesome thinking.” But what does Peter mean by this? Usually we think of “wholesome” in the context of television programming and food. One dictionary definition describes it as “promoting health or well-being of mind or spirit.” But Peter goes much deeper than that. We spend a lot of time on unwholesome things, not just in the moral sense but also in practical ways of devoting all our attention to things that ultimately do not give anything substantial in return like daydreaming scenarios or being anxious over things that we have no control of or can do anything to affect whatsoever in life.

Peter then reveals what it means to think wholesomely in verse 2, ***“I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.”*** The key to wholesome thinking is dwelling on the word of God much like the person described in Psalms 1 who meditates day and night of God’s word and in turn, experiences the full richness of God’s blessings as they prosper in whatever they do (Psalms 1:1-3). When we dwell upon God’s law and promises, we become rooted in them and they become the foundation not just for our faith but also the very way we live our lives. Thus, it is essential for us as Christians to really devote ourselves to internalizing God’s word spoken to us through the Bible so we may stand firm in Him through every situation we face in life.

Sadly, not everyone shares the same opinion of God’s word. May we read verses 3 and 4 together, ***“Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”*** Much like the false prophets and teachers of chapter 2, Peter warns the believers of scoffers who deny the second coming of Christ and the judgment that will follow. Rather than living before God, they choose to solely follow their own sinful desires and thoughts, coming up with all kinds of philosophies and rationalizations along the way that on the surface appear true but upon closer inspection, are shown to be deceptively hollow. One of the chief arguments described in verse 4 is one that echoes even more in our time than in Peter’s. From the dawn of creation, generations had come and gone yet the world seems to keep on going just fine on its own. No matter what good or evil is done, the world keeps spinning on its axis. This gave rise to three main possibilities; (1) There is no God, (2) If there was a God, He is not there now and (3) If there is a God, then he either too powerless or too indifferent to do anything about the state of the world and mankind. Though different, all three lead to the same conclusion; why bother with notions like holiness or morality when living a life governed by your desires and creating your own sense of right and wrong will lead to the same end?

However, there is a fatal flaw in such thinking. May we read verses 5 to 7 together, ***“But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”***  Scoffers and false teachers such as these fail to think of the One who was there even before Creation itself. Blinded by their sinful arrogance, they forget that the Voice that spoke of His promised return is the very same Voice that spoke our universe into existence with all matter and life in it sustained by His Word. They intentionally forget that the waters that the earth was formed out of were the very same waters that deluged it as God’s way of enacting punishment for mankind’s depravity in the time of Noah (Genesis 6-9). In the same way, God warns us that our present world will not be judged by water but by purifying fire and when this takes place, there will be no next time. But why is God taking His time in bringing His judgment upon us instead of dealing with the problem of sin this very instant?

**Part 2: The Day of the Lord**

May we read verses 8 and 9 together, ***“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** In ancient literature, a thousand is used to represent any really huge number much like how we use the word “infinity” today. The point remains the same though; God exists outside of and is not limited by our sense of space and time. He operates on a schedule that only He knows. However, out of His great love and mercy for us, He wishes to give us a chance to repent. The sentiment is echoed in the words God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel; “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!” (Ezekiel 33:11). It is for this very reason that God sent Jesus Christ into this world to reveal God’s own heart for each and every one of us wayward sinners in the hope that through His death on the cross for all our sins, we realize how dire the consequence of our sins is, breaking our rebellious hearts of stone and giving us repentant hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). Rather than giving us the punishment we rightly deserve, God showed His forbearance through nailing Himself to the cross. Therefore, we should count the delay of Christ's coming as an act of mercy and patience until all people from all nations are gathered into the fold and not one is lost (John 10:16, 26–30). The tragic irony is that the false teachers take God’s patience, which is giving them an opportunity to repent, and turn it against God as an evidence that Christ is not coming, despite knowing He will return in the same way He ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:9-11). It will be an unanswerable indictment on the judgment day, when God asks the scoffers and false teachers of Peter’s day and our own time, “Why did you take my gift of time for repenting and use it as an argument for unbelief?” So, do you find yourself doing the same?

May we read verse 10 together, ***“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”*** I have mentioned the “day of the Lord” several times but now is the time to really think about what it means. We usually think of it as how the end of the world looks like in all the books and movies; a time of great destruction, upheaval and despair. This is partly due to how it is described in the Old Testament. The “day of the Lord” is the future time when God would vindicate his holy name, bring judgment on the unbelieving, and gather his people into a new kingdom of righteousness and peace. We can see where Peter got the paint for his picture if we look at a few of these Old Testament prophecies. Joel 2:30-31 says, “I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and pillows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” And Malachi 4:1-2 says, “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire…But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.”

However, it was Jesus who first put together the imagery of the day of the Lord and thief in the night. He said in Matthew 24:42–43: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.” The apostle Paul took Jesus’ teaching and passed it on to the church at Thessalonica in a similar manner to underscore how unexpected this day will be but also to encourage us to live in faithful readiness for it will be a day that, despite pain and hardship, will ultimately bring life and joy in the end just like the labour pains of a pregnant woman (1 Thessalonians 5:2–4).

Peter was not saying anything new or unexpected. The expectation had been around for many centuries that God’s wrath would one day boil over in a fiery destruction of the ungodly and the world which they idolized. But it does not refer simply to an annihilation of creation, but rather to a cataclysmic purging and supernatural transformation of creation as God reverses the curse of sin and restores all things to how they were at the dawn of creation, this time with us included! So in verse 13, Peter lays hold of the promise of ***“a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.”*** The promise comes from Isaiah 65:17 where God says, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create.”

Most people try to find meaning in life by building something that will remain long after they are gone. We strive to overcome our sense of finiteness by trying to achieve something great that everyone may remember us by. Some people build equity and get a great sense of power and success by looking at their house and thinking through their portfolio. Some build professional reputations through skill and hard work and get a sense of power and success from their heavy responsibilities and the numbers of people that look to them for leadership. Some people build artistic expressions and exalt in what they have created. Some, more simply, build hobbies and collections, gaining a sense of superiority from the size of their collection or the richness of their garden or the shine of their car or the wonders of their social media page. The false teachers in 2 Peter lined their pockets with money (2:14–16); elevated themselves above authority (2:10), built a notable reputation as smart interpreters of Paul’s hard letters (3:16; 2:18), and gave themselves to sexual licentiousness. Peter’s response to us and them is this: in the end, all these things will be nothing but ashes.

**Part 3: Live As Holy People**

So with all these warnings of last days, scoffers, false teachers, day of the Lord and judgment by fire, how are we supposed to even live? May we read verses 11 to 12a together, ***“Since everything is going to 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.”*** We are not called to live in fear of such a day. Rather, we should look forward to it for that is that when Christ will finally return and we may dwell with Him forever in His heavenly kingdom. Additionally, by living holy and godly lives we can speed its coming through preaching the gospel for as Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” But how exactly are all these things related?

Think back to the very first chapter of 2 Peter where he lists of the characteristics of a holy and godly life. 2 Peter 1:5-8 says, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love." If it feels like there are too many to keep track of or that there is far too much going on in the entire book of 2 Peter to remember, here is the easiest way to do so; just think of Jesus. Jesus offers us the very illustration of how to do so in so many ways (sharing the Gospel, forgiveness, service, charity etc) but I personally find His holiness to be at its most prominent in the very subtle and ordinary ways He revealed God’s holiness to those who sought Him. In all these things, Jesus made obeying and serving God the greatest priority, serving as a template for all those who follow Him. Though He is holy, Jesus chose to live among the unholy and the ungodly to show us what living a holy life is all about. We bear no holiness or perfection of our own but Jesus calls us to be, just as our Father is (Matthew 5:48) for we have learned through this book that holiness is not born from one’s individual efforts but is a gift freely and solely given by God. And even when we do stumble (which is all the time), we are invited to come before God for forgiveness and try again for, as the famous quote goes, “saints are the sinners who kept on trying.” Our trials, hardships and even our failures can be a source to reveal God’s holiness when we seek to glorify Him in everything that we do.

One of the best examples of this is the beautiful story of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite. Moabites were staunch enemies of the Israelites and notorious idol worshippers. Their worship even included burning children in sacrifice to their god. Ruth turned her back on all of that idol worship culture, and became a faithful worshipper of the God of Israel. She said, "Your people will be my people, and your God my God." Ruth was an ordinary poor country girl. She lived a hard life. Her husband died young so she had to work in the fields to support herself and her mother-in-law Naomi, despite Naomi’s constant pleas for Ruth to go back to Moab and live a better life among her own people and culture. Yet, Ruth revealed God's holiness by trusting the God of Israel, under whose wings she came to take refuge. She revealed God's love in her love for her mother-in-law. "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Because of her great trust, the Lord blessed her to marry a husband who was equally as loving and faithful to God, and even more remarkably becoming an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Her greatness is not because she was extraordinary or special but that in every critical choice, she always chose God… which is the very essence of what it means to live a holy and godly life.

In conclusion, we have learned from the book of 2 Peter that are called to live a holy and godly life through the help of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although there are many influences and temptations pulling at us from every direction, it is through consciously choosing the path leading to God that allows us to stand firm in all circumstances. Through Him, we are also able to endure many difficulties in life for our ultimate hope lies in the coming day of the Lord, a hope so great that it shapes and influences the very way we live our lives at this very moment. I pray that in whatever we do, God’s holiness may be revealed and draws others towards Him.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!