



## PRESENT FUTURE

Pastor Al Detter II Peter 3:11-18 English Standard Version  
5:30, 9:30 & 11:00am Grace Church March 8-9, 2008

One day I got a phone call from a seminary friend. I could tell something was wrong. He was pastoring a church and was at Wednesday night ministries along with his family. Word came to him that his house was on fire.

He told me, "Al, when we got to our house, it was fully engaged in flames. It burnt to the ground. Nothing was left but the clothes on our bodies. We lost everything."

"To be sure, we lost some pretty important things. But here's what hurts the most. All the pictures we had of our family are completely gone. And I lost my entire library and all my seminary notes." I felt so bad for Marlin. We cried together over the phone. Everything was dissolved by fire.

Last week we opened the subject of the 2nd coming of Christ and the end of the world. Marlin and Patti's house was but a small illustration of what's to come when Peter says that the earth and the heavens will be completely dissolved by fire.

Over the past 5 weeks, I've tried to paint a canvas of faith that's been a good foundation for you because you can't get any more bedrock than what we've been studying. Today we finish Peter's last emphasis—the coming of Christ and the judgment of the world.

Peter's emphases in his little letter have been about 4 things:

- 1) Growing to maturity in our faith.**
- 2) Fully accepting the Scriptures as God's Word to us in a dark world.**
- 3) Steering clear of sensual passions and teachers who twist the Scriptures.**
- 4) Fully believing in the 2nd coming of Christ and the future judgment that awaits this world and actually living in expectancy of it.**

So let's finish Peter's last theme.

In the 1st 10 verses of II Peter 3, Peter lays out the teaching on "the last days". He talks about "the day of the Lord", verse 10. The day of the Lord is an Old Testament term that speaks about the very thing Peter is addressing—the return of Christ and the end of the world as we now know it.

Now Peter moves to the "so what?" How should the reality of the day of the Lord affect us? What difference should it make in our lives? It's to the application of what lies ahead for the world that we turn today.

Peter is very clear. The true biblical teaching on the end of the world should change our lives. In verse 11, Peter says it flat out, "Since all these things are to be dissolved, what kind of Christians should we be?" Recently I was listening to a CD by a man who's going to die before too long. He said that the reality of death sitting on his shoulder changed his life. He lives every day to a fuller extent than ever before. In fact, he said that we should all live with the reality of death sitting on our shoulders because it's not a matter of "if" but "when".

So, with the knowledge of the end of the world sitting on our shoulders, how should we live each day? Peter answers his own question with 4 powerful lines of coaching. Now remember, these are Peter's final words. He would die a martyr's death within a year or two after writing this letter.

As he finishes his letter, I believe his final verses reveal what was most pressing in his mind. These are the intentional words of a seasoned coach to Christians who need guidance in difficult times. They are words that are as relevant to us as when he 1st wrote them. I've summarized his coaching in 4 words I hope you'll remember.

**Word #1—Transformation (vss. 11, 14b).** The reality of the end of the world should move us away from sin's control in our lives and towards the character of God.

In verse 11, Peter essentially says, "If everything you own and everything in the world is going to burn to nothing some day, shouldn't you concentrate on holy and godly lives?" If all this is true, nothing less makes much sense!

Do you know where the easiest place to be holy and godly is? At church. Most of us look so spiritual here. But here's the reality. We don't see most people at church as they really are and most people don't live life at church like they really live the rest of the week. We tend to live a different private life away from church.

Peter is saying, "When you live your private life, if you call yourself a Christian, live every day in a holy and godly way with the end of the world as your backdrop." But here's the irony in all this. Peter made a big point in chapter 2 about how ungodliness and false teaching mix. The amazing thing to me is how good teaching and ungodliness mix in the church these days.

Does anyone remember "The Truman Show"? The world watched Jim Carey grow up from birth to adulthood on TV and he never knew it. Well, here's the question. How many of us would like the world to see our private lives 24/7 on TV and while they watch, at the bottom of the screen would be the graphic, "So and so is a Christian and says, 'I am Grace'". Maybe the end of the world isn't enough to motivate us to godly living. But how about the concept that someone is watching our every move? That's a fact—God is watching.

Dear friends, salvation isn't just about forgiveness, a free ticket from judgment, a good time at church, and pure doctrine. It's about a transformed life—godly (eusebeiais) and holy conduct (hagiais anastrophais). When God saves us, He means to change us! He intends to perform a "do-over" on us. So true salvation is about forgiveness of sin, deliverance from judgment, and a change in lifestyle.

It only makes sense then for Peter to say in verse 14, "Since you're waiting for the end of the world, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace." Being conscious of the end of the world should make us serious about how we live.

You see, salvation doesn't change us automatically. How nice that would be. We have a part to play in transformation. If we really believe in the end of the world as Peter teaches it, then we're going to be serious about what Peter tells us to do in verse 14—be "diligent (spoudasate—take pains, make every effort)" to get rid of the spots (spiloi—pure) and blemishes (momentoi—without moral blemish) in our character and in our conduct.

The word "diligent" means to work very hard at, to focus energy towards a desired result. It's the same word Peter used in chapter 1:5 when he told us to "make every effort" to add 7 qualities to our faith. Obviously, this isn't something we can accomplish by ourselves. We need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to do everything we can to remove the ugliness of sin from our lives. But the work of doing it resides with us

(In chapter 2, Peter said the false teachers had spots and blemishes—same words {vs. 13}. The Apostle Paul told Christians that Christ uses the Scriptures to wash away the spots and blemishes—same words—so that Christ might present to Himself a beautiful bride {Eph. 5:26-27}.)

Friends, we're the bride of Christ. What kinds of spots and blemishes are in our private lives? Are we controlling our passions? Are we living differently from the world's conduct? Spots and blemishes are not the marks of Christ-followers. We're to work hard at living a God-like life.

We were in small group on Thursday night. Each time a different couple shares their wedding story and their wedding album. Every story and album is quite an event! This time it was Gary and Diane Renaud's turn to share. I have their permission to tell you this story.

We all know that weddings are times of good stress. Well, of all things to go wrong, 4 days before the wedding, Diane developed a huge cold sore. She, in Peter's terminology, had a big spot or blemish on her face next to her mouth. It was the size of a dime. It was going to be plain for all to see and it might as well have been the size of a quarter as far as she was concerned.

The blemish bothered her and she did all she could to get rid of it. She didn't want her groom to have a bride with a big spot on her face. That should be our aim as well, to work on making ourselves beautiful for our Groom—to remove the spots and blemishes in our lives. Why? Because we know Jesus is coming and we want Him to be happy with the bride He sees.

People of Grace, I beg you, since you now know how the world will end, be diligent to remove the spots and blemishes of sin from your life so that you'll be found beautiful by Jesus when He comes again. The reality of the end of the world is a powerful incentive to holy living. Let the word "transformation" be your life's goal (cf. I John 3:2).

**Word #2—Anticipation (II Pet. 3:12-14a).** We should eagerly look forward to the end of this age so that the new world can be created.

Three times in verses 12-14, Peter uses the word "wait (prosdokao—wait for, look for, expect)". The idea of the word "wait" here is to eagerly expect something to happen. We're to eagerly look forward to the coming of the day of God, verse 12. We're to eagerly wait for the new heavens and earth, verse 13. And we're to eagerly watch for all these things, verse 14—all the same Greek word.

This kind of waiting has to do with the passage of time to get to a future event or condition, an event or condition that captures your mind in the present. Something is coming and, in the meantime, that's what you think about and that's what you want to have happen. Peter tells us to eagerly look forward to the day of God.

You might be thinking, "Yeah, I want Jesus to come back. I can really look forward to that, but..." If you're single, you might be thinking, "Yeah, I want Jesus to come back, but let me get married 1st." And we all might be thinking, "Who's looking forward to all that we have going up in smoke and the world as we know it being destroyed by fire?"

Well, let me tell you what Peter is doing. He's teaching us 2 things here. 1st, he's teaching us that we shouldn't get wrapped up in the things of this world. Total destruction awaits everything godless and temporal. Nothing earthly has lasting value. We can't take it with us. So we need to hold the things we have loosely. By the way, there's no indication by Peter in any of his teaching that we should take the fiery end of the world in any other way than as actual and literal. We need to take this very seriously.

2nd, Peter is not telling us to think about the destruction of the world with great anticipation. (He does tell us what's going to happen in verse 13. The heavens will be set on fire and dissolve. The heavenly bodies will melt away as they burn. This is the ultimate conflagration. But here's his point.) He's telling us to look for what follows the fire—the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. The unprecedented fire will purge everything evil and establish everything good. I can get into that.

*Can you imagine a new world with no sin of any kind? No immorality. No car crashes. No bad weather. No sickness. No murder. No divorce. No debt. No depression. No injustice. No death. No crying. The tabloids and Entertainment Tonight will be out of business. So will the Storm Team on the weather report.*

I'm tired of what's going on in this world. Aren't you? I'm tired of wars and school shootings and pastors being arrested for sexual offenses and soaring oil prices and political wrangling. I can't wait until King Jesus takes eternal control! That, my friend, is what Peter calls "the day of God" in verse 12. The day of God follows the destruction of the heavens and earth after which the new heavens and new earth will be created. And Jesus will begin his eternal reign. All rebellion will have been squashed forever, and sin and death will be no more (cf. Rev. 21:1-5)!

How can we be sure about this? Look at verse 13. Peter says that this is a promise God Himself made. It's as certain as God is. He doesn't break His promises!

I ask you, what are you eagerly waiting for? Your next paycheck? Getting out of the house? Getting married? Another job? Your next car? Graduation? The next blockbuster movie? Getting out of trouble? Christmas? Retirement? The sale of our old church campus which just happened at closing on Friday? Waiting for these things is okay. But there's something that needs to rise above these things. It's the daily anticipation of the coming of Christ and our eternal home (cf. Col. 3:1-2).

The godly anticipate the day and it leads to life-change. The ungodly ignore the day and it leads to further sin. Do you love the thought of His appearing (cf. Titus 2:13; II Tim. 4:8) and all that follows it? Word #2 is "anticipation" and Peter tells us to live with expectant excitement about these things. Are you anticipating them or are you rushing headlong after this life with nary a thought about the incredible events that are coming?

**Word #3—Salvation (II Pet. 3:15-16).** We should see our current era as God's loving patience towards the lost.

In verse 15, Peter returns to a truth in verse 9. The reason Christ has not returned yet is simple—God is patiently waiting for more people to come to repentance and escape judgment day. So here in verse 15, we're told to regard the patience (makrothumian—patient, enduring, forbearing) of the Lord as salvation (cf. Rom. 2:4).

Now let me test this out. How many of you have come to know the Lord during the past 5 years? (Raise hands). How many of you are glad Jesus didn't come back in 2002? Had He returned in 2002, you would have been lost for-ever, separated from God, and under His judgment. God's patience was salvation for you.

Do you see all the names on the boards up front? They're the 1st names of people many of you put there last week. People who up to this moment have not confessed Jesus as their Savior. How many of you would want Jesus to come today which would mean that you'd be forever separated from them? How many of you are grateful for the patience of God, that He's waiting for them?

Peter says something very interesting in verse 12. He says that we can hasten (speudontas—hurry, speed) the coming of the day of God. This is hard to understand. Can we actually have something to do with the timing of the coming of Christ? Can we shorten the period of the patience of God? Isn't the future plan already established? Interesting questions.

I'm not sure there's a totally satisfactory answer to this question. But I tend to come down on the side that the church does have a bearing on when Christ returns. If the church is committed to getting the gospel out, more will be saved and the faster the gospel will reach every people group of the earth. And the faster people come to Christ through the witness of the church, the sooner Christ will come. But if the mission of reaching people is not important to the church, the slower will be the return of Christ. I don't know about you but I'm for speeding things up.

(Peter now references the Apostle Paul in verses 15-16. He says that his beloved colleague also wrote about the coming of Christ and judgment in similar fashion. Peter says that what Paul wrote was the wisdom that God gave him when he wrote his letters. Even the apostles needed the enlightenment of God as to matters of the end times. We don't know what specific writings by Paul that Peter had in mind. But we're certainly not at a loss to locate the kinds of passages by Paul about these matters.

Peter says some very interesting things about Paul's writings in verse 16. He says some of the things Paul writes about concerning the end times are very hard to understand {dusnoeta}. The word for "hard to understand" means "ambiguous" and perhaps "obscure". Anyone ever feel that way when you read Paul's letters? Aren't you glad that you're not the only one, that even Peter had a little trouble understanding what Paul meant? The issue here is that some passages are capable of more than one interpretation and sometimes it's hard to determine what is exactly meant.

But please notice a few things. 1st, Peter didn't say that Paul's writings were impossible to understand. Sometimes it takes a little digging and hard work to understand the Bible. Let's not be afraid of some hard work in the text.

2nd, Peter says that the difficult passages by Paul are a breeding ground for false teachers. He says that these are the kinds of passages that the ignorant {amatheis—state of false teachers} and the unstable {asteriktoi—unsteady, apt to sway or fall} like to twist {streblousin—to distort so that a false meaning results} to their own ends. The ignorant and the unstable think the exact opposite—that they're the enlightened and the steady. But they're badly mistaken. And once again, Peter reminds us that tampering with the Bible is a high crime against God and punishable by destruction {apoleian—utter ruin as a result of judgment; cf. II Pet. 2:1, 3}.

3rd, Peter says that false teachers distort passages of the Old Testament as well. So it's not just Paul's writings they twist. But the point I want to make here is that Peter puts Paul's writings on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures. He's giving Paul's writings the full authority of Scripture even before the New Testament was completed.)

Friends, what God is about in this age is the salvation of multiplied millions of people. While He waits, we're to reap the harvest of souls. The current patience of God is about word #3—salvation.

**Word #4—Maturation (II Pet. 3:17-18).** While we wait for the coming of Christ, we're to protect ourselves from doctrinal error and grow in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ.

Peter spent a whole chapter on false teachers (II Pet. 2). Some of you might have wondered how relevant all of that was. Peter thinks it's extremely important. False teachers are destructive and a constant threat. So he comes back to this issue as he closes his letter. In verse 17 Peter says, "Now that you know this beforehand". Yes, there's the danger of tainted and destructive doctrine out there. But you've been warned. You now know beforehand (proginoskontes—to know in advance).

So Peter says, "Be very careful; keep your guard up (phulassesthe)." Steer clear of it. Don't allow yourself to be in a position where you can be carried away (sunapachthentes, also lead off) by those who twist Scripture. Now that you've been taught to understand how false teachers think and operate, you can protect yourself.

(Most likely Peter has in mind here what false teachers were doing to Paul's writings about grace because of the word Peter used in verse 17—"lawless people (athesmon—also, unprincipled)". Paul taught that Christians are under grace and not under law. But the false teachers taught that no rules apply to the Christian life. We're free to do whatever we like and God's grace will cover it. They failed to remember that Paul also said in Romans 6:15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!")

Friends, if you get your doctrine screwed up, here's what will happen to you. You'll lose (ekpesete—fall or drift) your own stability (sterigmou—to fix firmly, establish, support, {NIV, secure position}), verse 17. You'll wobble and fall in your Christian walk. The sure foundation of your faith will begin to crumble and you may be the last to know it.

So here's Peter's advice. Grow in the grace and know-ledge of Christ. Get to know Jesus in a wonderful, personal, dynamic, and transforming way. Don't stagnate in your faith!

I want you to see this. Peter ends his letter where he began his letter. In verse 17, he says, "Grow in the know-ledge of Jesus Christ, actually, "be continually growing (auxanete--increase)" in that knowledge. In chapter 1, Peter made it a point to tell us to grow in the knowledge of Christ.

Do you remember how Peter told us to grow in that know-ledge in chapter 1 (vss. 3, 8)? By the math of a spiritual equation—1+7. He told us to add 7 qualities to our faith—moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. For if these qualities are in us, and increasing, we'll be useful and fruitful in the full knowledge (epignosis) of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:8. You'll be growing like a weed and you won't be sucked in by false teaching. And you won't be nearly so susceptible to sin.

So final word from Peter—word #4—is maturation. Keep growing up in Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Let's review Peter's last coaching words to the church in chapter 3:

- 1. TRANSFORMATION—Work diligently on transforming your life by the removal of as many spots and blemishes as possible.**
- 2. ANTICIPATION—Eagerly anticipate the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the eternal day of God.**
- 3. SALVATION—See the delay of Christ's return as the patience of God; as a gracious opportunity for more people to find salvation.**
- 4. MATURATION—Now that you're forewarned about doctrinal error, concentrate on growing to maturity through the true knowledge of Christ.**

Today we close the book of II Peter. But please, let Peter's teachings live on in your lives. Because the main point of Peter's entire letter is this—people who truly know Christ are changed people.

At the end of Peter's letter is a great little benediction. So as we close our study of his book, let' repeat it together—To Christ be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen!