

Is Peter - How Sure Is Your Hope?

by Mariano Di Gangi

The Apostle Peter's second letter reminds Christians of the importance of wholesome thinking, the reality of the last days, and the hope of a new heaven and new earth.

Duration: 31:36

Scripture: Hebrews 12:29, 2 Peter 3:1-2

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the second letter of the Apostle Peter, which he describes as containing the basics of Christianity. He emphasizes the importance of love as a defining characteristic of the elect, and challenges the listeners to examine the genuineness of their love. The preacher also highlights the firm foundation of the believer's faith, which is based on the witness of the Apostles and the words of the Fitz. He encourages the audience to strengthen their faith by studying and understanding the teachings of the prophets and the commandments of Jesus. The sermon concludes with a warning about the coming of scoffers in the last days and the need for believers to live holy and godly lives in anticipation of the day of God.

Transcript

Reading from Holy Scripture, the second letter of the Apostle Peter, chapter 3, and beginning at verse 1. Hear now the reading of this portion of God's inspired word. Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

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. First of 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 fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of all creation.

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's Word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of the 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 ungodly men. 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. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish

but everyone to come to repentance.

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 in it will be laid bare.

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. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

During these concluding four Sunday evenings, we have been looking into the second letter of the Apostle Peter because it contains what we might very well call basic Christianity. In the opening section of the first chapter, he refers to things like predestination, election, calling. How can we be sure that we are God's elect? By an examination of our own character, for the tree is known by its fruit.

And the bottom line so far as the Apostle is concerned in the character of the elect is that they have a Christlike love in their hearts. And so we began by asking ourselves the question, how real is our love? Then the Apostle went on to speak of the firm foundation of the believer's faith. It rests upon two immovable columns, the witness of the Apostles and the words of the Psalms, each confirming the other and providing a stable basis, a secure firm foundation for our faith.

And we ask ourselves the question, how firm is our faith? Do we rely on the words of the prophets? Are we willing to stake everything, including the destiny of our immortal soul, upon the witness of the Apostles? This evening we ask ourselves another question to which the Apostle offers an answer. How sure is our hope? How sure is our hope that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord? How sure is our hope that this spirit of ours, which is moving in the right direction but not quite at the speed that we would like it to, how sure is our hope that someday this spirit of ours will be conformed to that of the Lord Jesus and we shall be numbered among the men and women whose spirits have been made just? How sure is our hope that Jesus Christ will come again and that at his coming there will be the resurrection of the dead? How sure can we be that there will inevitably be a day of final accounting when wrong shall not forever be on the throne and truth will not permanently be on the scaffold? How sure is our hope that there will be a new heaven and a new earth? The Apostle Peter writes what he does in order that you and I may have a sure and certain hope. Notice first of all his aim.

Scripture is not given pointlessly. Scripture is given purposefully. What's the Apostle's purpose in writing the words of tonight's text? He says, Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you.

I have written both of these letters as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the Holy Prophets. I want you to remember the command given by our Lord and Savior through your Apostles.

He says I want to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. Peter is not among those who believes that all there is to religion is frenzied excitement. He says that we must love the Lord our God with our mind as well as with our heart and soul and strength, and he therefore seeks to stimulate Christians in the first century AD and through what he has written to stir up your mind and mine to think as we should concerning ultimate issues.

He makes an appeal to the mind. Surely there must be an appeal to the affection. Surely there must be an appeal to the will to make the right choices and to stand by the resolves that have been made decisively.

But we must never forget that the gospel is also addressed to the mind, and in many forms of contemporary Christianity there is, in Hildon Nietzsche's phrase, too little for the mind. So he writes with a purpose. He wants to stimulate our minds.

He wants us to understand. He wants us to perceive certain things that are essential for our Christian existence. And though he is an Apostle, and though he wants to remind people of the words of the Apostles and the words of the holy prophets, and though he puts a tremendous amount of importance on the written Word of God, he does it with a pastoral concern.

He writes to those who are his dear friends. He doesn't throw his apostolic weight around. He is not authoritarian, though he does have apostolic authority.

He writes out of loving concern for men and women who face ultimate issues. What happens when we die? Do we go to be with the Lord? Will there be a resurrection? Will there be a return of the Lord? Will there be justice at the last? He writes out of loving pastoral concern to men and women whom he considers as his dear friends. How does he want to stimulate their wholesome thinking? With the written Word, recalling the teaching of the prophets, recalling the commands of the Lord Jesus given through the Apostles.

Let us never forget that the Church does not come into existence because of the free enterprise impulse of preachers and organizers. The Church comes into existence by the will of God, and the Church consists of men and women who, like living stones, are built on the foundation of what? Of the prophets and the Apostles, Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. And so in reminding these Christians and in reminding us of the prophets and the Apostles of the Old and New Testament, he tells us that our faith must rest on this solid foundation.

He never tires of stressing that. Now why is it necessary for us to be stimulated in our thinking? Why is it necessary for us to recall the words of the holy prophets? Why is it necessary for us to remember the command of Christ given through the Apostles? The answer to that question is that scoffers have appeared upon the scene. People who are not merely agnostics but downright skeptics.

People who deny, who mock, and who ridicule. Their emergence itself is a sign of the last days, that we are now in the final period of human history. It is not for me to set dates, it is not for me to speculate wildly as some televangelists are wont to do, and yet I must insist on the fact that we are now living in the final phase of human history.

How can we be sure of that? Because the Bible says so. Think for example of the opening verses of the letter to the Hebrews. God, who at different times in a variety of ways spoke to our forefathers by means of prophets, has in these last days, in the final phase, in the climactic epoch of human history, spoken to us in his Son Jesus Christ.

And so it is that the last days began to run their course with the first coming of Christ, and will fully have run their course by his return at the end of time. And we are now therefore living between the two advents in the final period of human existence. In the last days, and one of the signs of the last days is the emergence of scoffers who ridiculed the idea of the return of Christ and retributive judgment because it

conflicts with their lifestyle.

They are not only scoffers raising intellectual denial and doubt, they also live in a way that ingratiates itself with the world and fulfills their lusts. Their self-indulgent way of living does not want to hear of the return to judgment, and so they are skeptical about it and they deny it as well. It would simply be too upsetting for their lifestyle.

Now these skeptics raised two objections. First, where is the promise of his coming? Where is the coming of Christ that has been promised? God has not kept his word. God is faithless to his promise.

God has spoken but he has not performed. You have a faithless God. He has not lived up to his promise.

And more than that, he can't fulfill his promise. He's not only faithless, he is plagued with powerlessness and weakness. And so they doubt the faithfulness of God to keep his word and they doubt the power of God to bring to pass what he has promised.

He didn't do it because he couldn't do it. And the skeptics feel that having said that, they've won their case. It is to answer their skepticism that the Apostle has written what he has written, so much for his aim.

Now what about his affirmation? The Apostle Peter may have vacillated earlier in his career. He might have shown a life that was utterly inconsistent, but now he has come to certainty. Now he is no longer a vacillating man.

Now he's no longer a reed shaken by the wind. He is a man who can say, I know, I am sure, this is the way it will be because I have it on the authority of my predecessors, the prophets of the Old Testament and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And repeatedly in this passage of Scripture, the Apostle says that the day of God, the day of the Lord, the day of judgment will come.

Why? Because we happen to live in a moral universe, because we happen to live in a universe where God is sovereign, because the wages of sin must be death. If God were unjust, then there would be no expectation that wrong would be put down and righteousness would triumph. But because we believe in a God who is holy and righteous and just, because we believe in a God who will maintain his cause with sovereignty, we believe that the day of God will dawn, that the judgment of God will fall, that the day of the Lord will be at hand.

And Peter makes that affirmation. Now he says they delude themselves by imagining that everything has continued with regularity ever since the day of creation, that God having wound up the clock of human providence has left it to run down on its own and does not intervene or interfere. And Peter says how easily they forget that God not only caused the earth to emerge out of the watery chaos at his creative word in the book of Genesis, but that also in the book of Genesis, when the evil of mankind had reached the point where ripeness gave way to rottenness, opened the heavens and caused the deluge to descend and wiped off the face of the earth those who were practitioners of iniquity.

They forget that God intervened to break the bondage of the people of Israel and Egypt and made a way through the Red Sea waters for them to pass by into the wilderness and onward to the promised land. They forget that when the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah became a stench in the nostrils of the Almighty, he sent down fire and brimstone to consume them all. They forget that God dramatically intervened when Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.

They forget that God dramatically made bare his powerful arm and on the third day brought back his son from the corruption of the grave and restored him full of life to his followers. They forget that God who ordinarily works by the laws that he has made can cause those laws to combine in such extraordinary ways to bring about unusual effects that we call miraculous. God who set the whole thing in motion will someday call it to a halt and separate wheat from tares and sheep from goats.

God has intervened and will intervene when it pleases him for the fulfillment of his sovereign plan and purpose. But the next time, says Peter in his affirmation, it will not be by water but by flame, not by flood but by fire. Remember the words of Malachi, who shall abide the day of his coming? Or who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire.

But you say that's Old Testament stuff. Well how about this that the book of Hebrews chapter 12 is found in the New Testament. He says our God is a consuming fire.

The badness of man was such that God wiped it with water in the past but iniquity will abound so much in the future that the only thing for it is to burn it up completely and so it will be. In a final cataclysm, the journalists, the novelists can speculate about this cosmic conflagration. They can speak about an atomic chain reaction, nuclear fission, and all the rest of it.

In whatever way the sovereign God will bring it about, he will judge the world in righteousness. And Peter makes this concluding affirmation that what God will do not only will deal decisively with sin but will realize his grand design of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will not be a wandering exile, in which righteousness will not be an endangered species, but in which righteousness will be an honored guest. A new heaven and a new earth.

Isn't this the hope that is given to those who are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ? Remember those words embedded in the middle of Romans chapter 8? That the creation right now groans and travails and is subjected to futility and vanity because of man, a cursed man who pollutes and contaminates God's creation? And that someday God will deliver the world from its bondage and it will share in the revelation of the glorious liberty of the children of God at the end. And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth. Isn't this the message of the book of the Revelation in chapter 21? That God himself will take up his dwelling place at close quarters with his people and be their God and they shall be his people.

And he will wipe away all tears from their eyes and there will be no more death and no more mourning and no more crying and no more pain for the old order shall have passed away and everything has been made new. That's the Christian hope and Peter affirms it and is willing to stake everything on it. We've noticed his aim to get us thinking about the problems that appear on the horizon and then he makes an affirmation to answer the skeptics.

But he doesn't stop there. He goes on to refer to application. Biblical prophecy is nothing if it is not intensely practical.

The Apostle in verse 11 states it clearly. 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. And there's an urgency to the ethical thrust of his statement because we expect a new heaven and a new earth to be the home of righteousness and we must therefore live in expectation of that and begin now to practice the kind of lifestyle that will be equally at home with righteousness in that new

universe of God's grace and glory.

Since this is going to happen, says Peter, what difference, what radical difference should it make in the way you live? Notice that he doesn't give any encouragement at all to eschatological speculation. He doesn't encourage anyone to start making predictions about when and how. He says since this is going to happen, what kind of life ought you to lead in anticipation of what is to come? We are to live holy and godly lives so that we will feel at home in a place and in an order where righteousness reigns and we may speed the day of God.

You might say we believe in a sovereign God. We believe that God works with a plan. We do not believe that there's anything that you and I can do to alter his timetable, to pressure him one way or the other, to delay this or to do that.

As a matter of fact, what the skeptics thought was God's delay was God's patience, giving men and women the opportunity to repent. It was not because he was faithless. It was not because he was powerless.

It was because he was merciful, that he held back the dawning of the day of God, that he held back the day of the judge's return to give the likes of you and me an opportunity to see what we are really like and say, Lord be merciful to me and help me to know the peace and joy of sins forgiven and a soul in readiness for the return of my Redeemer. God in his sovereignty has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by means of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, and yet there is a sense in which you and I can speed the dawning of that day. Let me give you two ways in which we can speed the coming of the day of the Lord's return, and they both come from the sayings of Jesus.

Do we long for a kingdom of righteousness at dawn? Then we must pray as Jesus taught us, thy kingdom come. God has appointed the time and place in his eternal counsels and in his matchless sovereignty, but the end is not independent of the means, and one of the means of speeding the coming of the kingdom is persevering prayer on the part of people who believe. And so we pray, thy kingdom come, to speed the day of its redawning.

Another statement of Jesus, and with this we conclude. He said this gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed to all nations for a witness, and then shall the end come. If we want to see the return of our blessed Lord and Savior, if we wish to see an end to injustice, if we wish to see a finish written to the inhumanity of man to man, and we want to see the triumph of a kingdom in which righteousness reigns, then we had better get on with the task of world evangelization with redouble zeal, and as the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed to all the nations of the earth for a witness, then shall the end come.

And so we have a hope, but it's not ephemeral. We have a hope, but it's not evanescent. We have a hope, but it's not something that evaporates.

We have a hope that is sure and certain because of the words of the prophets, the teachings of the Apostles, the command of the Lord, and the sovereignty of God who said, as you have seen him go into heaven, even so this same Jesus you shall see return from heaven in power and with great glory. Let us pray. Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight.

Lord haste the day when Jesus shall come again and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. In his name we pray, Amen.

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