

2 Peter 3 The Day of the Lord - Sermon 30/06/19

Preamble:

This is now the third sermon in our series from Peter's second letter.

- It is a letter of encouragement to all Christians
- It was written at a time when the church was beginning to become influential
- It had spread from the small state of Isreal across the Roman empire
- And as a consequence, it was facing resistance
- This was coming in two ways

Firstly, there was opposition from general society

- Christian beliefs were perceived as a challenge to the established world view
- To be fair, this was probably true
- If Christianity is not changing people and society it probably isn't really Christianity

There was a feeling Christians were undermining societies values

- They were offensive to the existing Roman Gods
- They were divisive and wouldn't go along with everyone else
- At best they should keep their faith to themselves and not impose it on others
- And at worse they should be outlawed and criminalised.

From the start there had been opposition from the Jewish authorities

- And at the time of writing persecution was still mainly from the Jews
- But it was beginning to emerge from the Roman state as well
- It had not fully materialised, but we know from history it was on its way.

The other consequence of the church's growing influence was internal

- Ambitious and greedy men, and presumably women, saw opportunity
- Church leadership would give influence
- This influence could be exploited to give power, prestige and wealth
- So false teachers, leaders and prophets began to emerge
- Deceiving others they were serving God
- When, in reality they were abusing their position for their own ends

In other words

- Things weren't very different from today.
- Where the church has influence and power in society
- It as been undermined by evil men using that power to fulfil their own desires
- And this has brought the church into disrepute

People, look at this and conclude

- Religion is the cause of all the trouble in the world
- We would be better off without it
- Understandable but wrong
- Religion is a tool – not a cause

It is the misuse of power that causes all the problems in the world

- Religion provides opportunity for power.
- Therefore, it can be exploited and misused for evil
- It is the same with any form of power
- The terrible knife crime epidemic in our cities is not caused by knives
- It is caused by people using them to gain power over others
- Or defend themselves from those that do.

It is true of every kind of power

- Whether it be Military, political, financial or gang
- Any form of power can and will be exploited by evil men and women for their personal gain.
- And those without power suffer from this.

Sadly, it is also true of the church

- Where we have enjoyed power and influence there is a danger of it being abused.
- Peter tackles this in three ways
- In 2 Peter 1 he told us to hold firm to our faith
- Don't lose heart
- True grace and peace come from knowing the truth about Jesus and God
- True purpose, meaning and value come from belonging to Jesus
- And he warns us to be careful to keep to the true faith found in knowing Jesus as Lord and saviour and from the bible

In the second chapter he tackles false teachers

- He reminded us that God is a God of justice
- That righteousness ultimately triumphs
- And those who use their position in the church to exploit and abuse
- Will face judgement and ultimately hell

Now we come to his third point

- Jesus will return and we will join him in heaven
- All the pain, hardship and persecution we may have faced is ultimately a small price to pay for what awaits us

Let's read the passage

Reading: 2 Peter 3: 1-18

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ²I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles. ³Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵But 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. ⁶By these waters also the world of that

time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ 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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

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 ¹² 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. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ 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, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Peter is drawing his letter to a close

- I want to draw three things from what he writes
- There is of course the 'Promise of Heaven'
- The encouragement to have the 'Patience to wait faithfully'
- And finally, the 'Purpose of Writing'

The Promise of Heaven

Peter wants us to be sure Jesus is returning

- He knows we need this hope to keep us going when the world looks wrong
- When people scoff and it all seems so remote to real life
- He wants us to look forward in confidence
- This is a promise from God and God always keeps his promises
"But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." (vs. 13)

But what do we mean by Heaven?

- It is difficult to define because the Bible mainly talks in pictures
- In Matthew 22 Jesus tells the parable of the wedding banquet
- Where the guests refused the invite and the poor and sick got in instead
- Again Matthew 25 the wise virgins are ready to go with the bridegroom into the wedding feast.

On the cross, Jesus tells the thief (Luke 23:43)

- *“Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*
- The word ‘Paradise’ means garden
- It was a place of rest and cool away from the troubles and heat of the day

David famously celebrates a future in the Lords house in the words of the 23rd Psalm

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

*⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:5-6)*

This is echoed by Jesus

- Who, just before he dies, tells his disciples
Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

So, we have this idea of a place of belonging, rest, paradise, and celebration

- But it is, of course, more than that - It is the dwelling place of God
- Both Isaiah and John had visions of Heaven
- And both described God on his throne and fell down in worship (Isaiah 6 & Rev. 4)

It is a place full of worship and the glory of God

- John describes this in Revelation 5:9-16

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands

¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God saying:

“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me,

“These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God

and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;

‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’

‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

Heaven is thus the place where God is

- Just as hell is the place away from God
- So, when Jesus promises we will be with him and we will be in heaven
- They are two ways of saying the same thing.

Paul writes to the Thessalonian church (1 Thes. 4:16-18)

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord, forever ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The focus of heaven will not be meeting loved ones who have died before us

- Even that joy will fade into insignificance compared to being in the presence of Jesus
- This is the inheritance that Jesus has won for us on the cross
- And what we look forward to in order to help us stay faithful to Him.

Sometimes that is hard and seems very remote and distant

- People will dismiss and even scoff at the idea of Jesus return
- But Peter reminds us to wait patiently
- This is our second point

Patience to wait faithfully for the 'Day of the Lord'

Peter writes (2 Peter 3:8-13)

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

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Just as the false prophets are warned Judgement will come

- So, the faithful also need to know this too
- But, in this case it is to strengthen our resolve and encourage our faith.
- We don't know when it will happen
- Nobody knows except God

Jesus told his disciples (Matthew 24:35-46)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and

giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

We don't know when Jesus will come back

- But we should be confident he will
- And should live lives ready for his return
- And this brings us to our final point

Peter's Purpose for writing

He tells us:

- *"I have written both of them (that's his letters) as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking". (2 Peter 3:1)*
- He reiterates this in (vs.11-12 & 14-15)
"You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming".
¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation,

The purpose of writing

- The whole point of the letter is to encourage us to live Godly and expectant lives
- Ready for Christ's return
- Faithful to Him and his word.

We may be facing misunderstanding and misrepresentation from outside the church

- We may be facing ridicule and mockery for our beliefs'
- Even hostility
- Unscrupulous and dishonest men may be leading people astray
- Deceiving God's people with plausible lies
- But Jesus is coming back
- Be ready!

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:17-18)