

GSM Sermon 6th May 2012

2 Peter 3

Living in holiness and Godliness, with the certain hope of Jesus' return

Pray

Intro

Morning all, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Ben and I'm married to Alyce, who runs Bouncers here. I'm currently studying for a PhD, researching a new cancer therapy; I'm now just over halfway through the 3yrs of funding, although whether I'm halfway through the time it'll take me to finish is another matter!

So, this is the final sermon in the current series before we move onto Romans chapters 12-15. We've seen Jesus appear to all of the disciples in a locked room, His meeting with Thomas, the successful fishing trip Jesus had with his disciples before a beach breakfast, followed by an intimate talk with Peter. We've looked at the eyewitness accounts, so what do we do now with this knowledge? We're going to look today at 2 Peter 3. Chapter 3 comes after Peter encouraging believers to live up to their calling in chapter 1 and a warning about false teachers in chapter 2. Chapter 3 encourages believers to live lives like Jesus, repeats his warnings against false teachers and ultimately helps us answer what sort of people we should be, knowing that Jesus is coming again. When preparing this sermon, it was tempting just to leave it there, but I think we really should unpack the passage and see it in black and white.

Now I remember the Comets came and told us a memory verse last week, so I thought that we would continue our memory games and learn a sentence that will help us to remember the central themes of the passage that we'll be looking at today. Peter's aim in this chapter is to encourage us, not to rebuke us. **"Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus' return is certain, not delayed, and it's the motivation for our lives today."**

Read passage

1. "Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus' return is certain, not delayed, and it's the motivation for our lives today."

A Reminder (v1-2) – Peter starts this section, in verses 1 and 2, with a reminder to his readers. The reminder is that we should remember the prophecies of the prophets, that is, from the Old Testament scriptures, and to remember the commandment given to us by Jesus, by Himself, and through His apostles – the OT and the teaching of the apostles are taken together. This means that our approach to the Bible is to take it as a whole, not as two separate entities. When we study the NT, we have to look at it with the background of the OT scriptures. The OT looked forward to JC and the NT looks towards JC's return. The OT prophecies were fulfilled through JC and so will the prophecies about JC's return. Jesus promised to send the HS after Him to help His apostles and us in John 14. So in this way, the HS is enabling the apostles to teach the command of Jesus through their ministry. We have to pay attention to the teachings of the apostles as it is wisdom from God, and this is why we should be paying close attention to what Peter has to say to us here. With that in

mind, the specific reminder here is to stimulate the believers to wholesome thinking, or so that believers might be of a sincere mind – to live holy and Godly lives – look at verse 11. This should be done particularly in the knowledge of JC’s return, which Peter talks about in v10. Now, the first thing many of us think when we hear of JC’s return is fire and brimstone, hell and God’s judgement and wrath. Now that reaction comes from our sinful nature. Because we are fallen beings, the natural response to judgement is that of a guilty conscience. If a head-teacher summons you to their office, or your boss calls you in, the first thought is “What have I done?” As a child, I remember my initial response to questions being “It wasn’t me!” I started my defence before I’d even been accused of anything, although I probably was guilty! The difference for us as believers is that we are seen as righteous, we aren’t guilty in God’s sight. The message from the Bible this morning is that we have a hope to look forward to, that we have eternity lying in store for us when JC returns. Our sinful response of guilt isn’t there anymore. When we hear about JC’s return, we know that our judgement has been dealt with by JC on the cross and through His resurrection we can now look forward to eternity with Him.

2. “Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus’ return is certain, not delayed, and it’s the motivation for our lives today.”

Warning (v3-4) – Next, Peter brings a stark warning that there will be scoffers in the last days. It is key to understand the victim of the scoffing here. Although some of you may be thinking it, it’s not food that’s being scoffed, but then again, neither are the believers being scoffed at. In fact, it is the teaching of the apostles, God’s word that is being scoffed at. In this case, it is the scriptural promise of JC’s return that is being scoffed at. We need to be aware that there have been, are, and will be, people in this world who deride and undermine the sovereign word of God. There are the obvious scoffers, such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Stephen Hawking who have spent their lives trying their best to undermine the truth of God’s word by saying that science can disprove God. But we also need to be wary of the subtle scoffers; people who come with a soft and fluffy message luring people away with messages such as the prosperity gospel or denying JC’s return and God’s judgement on unbelievers. Everyone gets saved and it’s eternity for everyone in the end. That’s why you need to carefully listen to all talks you hear about the Bible and study them to see whether the people giving the talks are actually teaching the truth of God’s word, or whether they are twisting it to their own uses. This is what Peter warns about in chapter 2:20-21: *“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.”* False teachers from within the church were a huge problem for the early churches and one of the main reasons why the apostles had to keep writing these letters to remind churches of what they had heard from the apostles’ themselves so that the gospel didn’t get diluted or polluted. Peter acknowledges in v16 that Paul’s letters are hard to understand and that as a result, there are those who twist and manipulate them to their own destruction, just as they have previously done with other Scriptures. A couple of years ago, I remember a talk at a youth camp in Haslemere, where, the speaker read a Bible passage and added a verse of his own on the end. Now, nobody noticed, not even the leaders until he pointed it out. We need to have our Bibles open, our ears tuned, our eyes focused and our brains switched on whenever we hear a talk or go to a Bible study. The lies and jeers from non-believers are very easy to distinguish, but those that come from within the church are much harder to detect.

3. “Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus’ return is certain, *not* delayed, and it’s the motivation for our lives today.”

Rebuttal of the scoffers (v5-7) – So the scoffers in verses 3 and 4 are questioning when Jesus’ return will be; their argument is that they can only see creation continuing as it has done for the past centuries, the cycle of life goes on and on, nothing’s changing, so therefore they don’t believe in the second coming. To them everything they believe has to be empirical, that is that they have to see it to believe it; they need proof. The disciple Thomas, who we looked at a couple of weeks ago, needed to see Jesus physically to believe in the resurrection.

Now, there are some people who think the idea of Jesus’ return is ridiculous, and our response to that is, firstly, to be aware of these views, and secondly, to remember that God has destroyed the world before. In 1 Peter 3, we are taught that we are to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have. The world was formed by God’s word out of water and it was by water that God purged the world back in the days of Noah. The people back in Noah’s day scoffed at God’s promise to flood the earth and look what happened. God did exactly what He said He would do. God then promised that never again would the world be destroyed by water. But just as God commanded the world to be formed out of water, He will command that it will be destroyed by fire. This means that the prophecies in the OT and the teachings of Jesus, through the apostles, are certain and not to be scoffed at. People overlooked the promise of JC’s return nearly 2000yrs ago, and similar people still make the same mistake today. The world goes round, the sun rises and sets each day, but we know that this won’t last forever because JC will return. And remember, as believers, we don’t need to fear this earthly destruction because our judgement has been poured out on Jesus and we can look forward to our hope of eternal life.

4. “Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus’ return is certain, *not* delayed, and it’s the motivation for our lives today.”

The return (v8-10) – So the mockers have overlooked God’s judgement in the past; now, we must not overlook God’s patience in storing up His judgement rather than undertaking His judgement now. God would be perfectly just in judging the world now. But, as we see in this passage, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day. God is out of time and He is eternal. We can see that God keeps to His promises and timing; if you remember the Israelites in slavery in Egypt, God does not delay His rescue for them. He sticks to His promise that they will be slaves for 400years – in Genesis 15:13 God tells Abram the following: *“Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.”* Even though it seemed to the Israelites that God had abandoned them in Egypt, God had already told them that there would be 400yrs of slavery before they would come out of it. Therefore we know that God is not delaying, nor that He has abandoned us, but that He is being patient and keeping to His time plan for the world and its judgement. Here we see the impatience of man compared to the eternity of God. God wishes that everyone would come to repentance, and He is being patient in allowing His chosen people to repent and believe. God is storing up judgement for those who have rejected Him, and this should make us all the more earnest in our evangelism right here, right now. Some take a path where they spend their lives studying Jesus’ return, the timings and the miniature details. Some people spend their lives trying to predict

the date of the end of the world, there was one who predicted that the world would end last year – twice! Once on the 21st May, then when that didn't happen, he revised his prediction to 21st October. Others before have made predictions for other dates. Obviously, they were all wrong because we are still here today! So instead of doing this, we need to take the path to be even more fervent in evangelism because we don't know when the day of judgement will come. Peter describes it like a thief – you don't wait for a thief to come, lying in wait with the police to catch them, a thief comes in stealth, quietly and quickly before you can react. Once Jesus returns, the time we have in spreading the good news, and teaching repentance to those who don't know it, will be up. We have to admit that we cannot predict the time of Jesus' return as Jesus says in Matthew 24 and we need look to the tasks that Jesus has set us – to love one another as Jesus loved us (John 15) and to spread the news of Jesus to all nations (Matthew 28).

5. "Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus' return is certain, not delayed, and it's the motivation for our lives today."

Our action (v11-18) – As a result of the destruction, everything becomes exposed. The earth and everything done on it is laid bare. That means that all our lives will be laid bare for Jesus to see. So surely we ought to be living our lives in the light of that? We have the knowledge of Jesus' death and resurrection and our lives ought to reflect that by living lives of holiness and Godliness (v11). So we wait, not knowing when the day of the Lord will be, but we also hasten that day by spreading the gospel to those who don't know it, through which God will bring about the salvation of His people. We can do this by actively looking for opportunities where God might use us for this purpose. Are you involved in a church outreach activity? How much do you know about the lives of the people you spend your working week with? Would they feel able to come to you if they needed support? Are you striving to increase the qualities listed by Peter in chapter 1? – Goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, affection and love? We are God's people destined for a different world; we don't belong on this corrupt and sinful world, but we reside here whilst God's purposes are being worked out, often through His work through us, in order that one day God will bring us back to Himself into that perfect relationship in the new heaven and the new earth which will replace the one that we currently live in; the one that will be destroyed and exposed by fire. As believers, this is our certain hope for eternity and our motivation for the present.

To add to this, Peter tells us that we are to be found without spot or blemish and to be at peace. One spot on a white canvas ruins the whole canvas, regardless of its size or location. The peace Peter talks of is being at peace with Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour. Being spotless as humans is impossible; we can only become spotless and blameless by accepting and rejoicing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. No longer is there rejection of Him by our sinful former selves, but now Jesus' righteousness is conferred onto us because of His death and resurrection. He took our place on the cross as a substitute; we have been atoned for and are now considered blameless in God's sight. So we should live lives without spot or blemish. We are destined for a place of righteousness and to live holy and Godly lives. We need to pay attention to Scripture for instruction in wisdom, and to count the patience of God as salvation, that is, to put Scripture into practice. God is graciously and mercifully granting us time to repent and work out our salvation as Peter has described in chapter 1. We also need to be careful in our own Bible studies, wary that we will never be able to fully understand the meaning of everything and the mysteries that God has chosen not to reveal to us. This makes me even more excited to get to heaven, where one day we will have a full and complete

understanding of God's work in the whole of eternity. There will be no more mysteries and God will be fully revealed to us in all His glory and splendour. Here's part of what Matthew Henry wrote in his commentary on 2 Peter 3, and I think he puts this in better words than I can!

"What true Christians look for: new heavens and a new earth, in which a great deal more of the wisdom, power and goodness of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will be clearly discerned than we are able to discover in what we now see; for in these new heavens and earth, freed from the vanity the former were subject to, and the sin they were polluted with, only righteousness shall dwell; this is to be the habitation of such righteous persons as do righteousness, and are free from the power and pollution of sin; all the wicked shall be turned into hell; those only who are clothed with a righteousness of Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, shall be admitted to dwell in this holy place."

Concluding

To end, since Easter, we have been reminded of the results of Jesus' resurrection. Thomas, the doubter, in the light of the knowledge of the resurrection, went onto spread the gospel to India and beyond. The disciples, previously in hiding, spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Today, Peter has reminded us of Jesus' return. What is your response to this? Is it to become inward looking? Or will we become outward looking, using the time, that God has given us, to become sure of our salvation and to make the offer of salvation known to the world? When our beliefs are ridiculed, do we still trust in God's promises? God has been, is and will be keeping His promises to His believers throughout time, and Peter is encouraging us to respond with a faith that is ever-present and ever-growing. So let us:

"Live in hope, not fear, but beware of scoffers, remembering that Jesus' return is certain, not delayed, and it's the motivation for our lives today."

As Peter ends his letter, I'll end this sermon. Let us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Homegroup Qs

Some of the following are fairly big questions, so depending on discussions, it might be better to pick one or two to go into deeply. Some of them cover things mentioned in the sermon that I didn't have time to go into fully. Qs 1, 4 and 6 are more focused on application.

1. What do people today hope and fear in? What can we, as believers, put our hope in? What fear(s) do we have? Should we have those fears? – Why/Why not?
2. What are the world's arguments against Scripture? (Creation vs Evolution; Science can disprove God etc). What response can we give to these arguments? What encouragements from Scripture can we take to stand firm in our beliefs? Matt 24/Acts 20:17-35 – we have warnings for false teachers and the NT epistles teach us how we can live in a world where false teachers exist.
3. What does it mean when Peter says that God doesn't wish anyone to perish but for everyone to come to repentance? Ezekiel 18 and 1 Timothy 2 show that God is merciful and wants all to be saved. Yet 2 Peter 2, 2 Peter 2:3-7 and John 3:16-18 show that God will punish the wicked who don't believe in Jesus. How do we balance these passages and how does this impact on living out Christian lives?
4. What do we use as motivation to live lives as Christians today? Are there areas/situations in which we struggle in this? How can we encourage and support each other?
5. Can we 'hasten' or 'speed' the day of God's return? Yes and No! – God has fixed the time when it will happen – only He knows the day and the hour (Matt 24), yet we can humanly-speaking speed the day by spreading the gospel and God working through us to bring people to believe in Him.
6. Is God integral in our daily lives? Do we find it easier to rely on God when things are going well than when everything goes pear-shaped? Or in some cases, is it the reverse where we get by on our own steam on a day to day basis and only go to God when we really need Him? How do we break this cycle? – How do we know that we can trust in His promises to us?