

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part fourteen

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WHY OUR WORLD REJECTS THE MESSAGE OF THE SECOND COMING

2 Peter 3:1-7 - "This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, [3] knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."

Let's take a minute to look back over the first two chapters of this letter to see where we've been so we can get a better handle on where Peter is going next.

Chapter one is a wonderful, expanded statement rehearsing the solid foundation under the Christian faith. Peter holds up the promises of God's Word. He says they have incredible power to purge the life of corrupt lusts. The admonition is to connect your study of the Scriptures to the habits that dominate your life. Those promises have the certainty and authority of God behind them. The words of Scripture aren't just the musings and contemplations of men. They aren't just the opinion of humanity. They are the words of God. Peter says men were "**carried along by the Holy Spirit**" and "**spoke from God**" (1:21).

Chapter two warns of the encroaching of false teachers and leaders within the church as time goes by. This will be an **escalating problem** as we move toward the last days. There will be a move away from **holiness** in the church. Holiness will be replaced by immediate personal fulfillment. I don't mean leaders will cease calling people to holiness. I mean holiness will be defined more by **self-fulfillment** than **pleasing God**.

Or, perhaps more subtly, people will talk about those things like they're the same - like God's ultimate desire **is** my immediate personal fulfillment. People will actually begin to mock **self-restraint**. **Self-expression** will be praised above **self-denial**. People will pursue **their own instincts** rather than the **Lordship of Jesus**. We will be encouraged not judge anti-scriptural patterns of behavior. **Tolerance** will become **godliness**.

Peter says that in the last days people right in the church will **refuse to hear the truth** just like the prophet Balaam refused to hear God speak (2:15-16). Who could easily forget Peter's edgy picture of people who go back to their old sins the way a dog returns to its own vomit (2:22).

So the glorious truth of the gospel is praised in chapter one, and the dangers of corruption and apostasy are flagged in chapter two. Where does Peter go from here? How does he give the church something to hold on to? **He talks about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**. In fact, if you take the time to look closely, almost every time the New Testament talks about holiness, it talks about the Second Coming:

When the Apostle John wraps up his famous "**do not love the world**" passage he says this - **1 John 2:28** - "**And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.**"

When the Apostle Paul closes that wonderful passage on Christian conduct in **1 Thessalonians chapter 5**, he winds it all up with these words - **1 Thessalonians 5:16-23** - "**Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. [19] Do not quench the Spirit. [20] Do not despise prophecies, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good. [22] Abstain from every form of evil.[23] Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

So in exactly the same way Peter brings this letter home with a reminder about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Christians become gullible, careless, and, culturally compromised when the doctrine of the Second Coming isn't constantly considered. The muscles of holiness are strengthened by the persistent orienting of our ultimate destiny. Our lives come to love the goals at which they are aimed.

1) **PETER REMINDS THESE CHURCHES THAT THE TRUTH OF THE SECOND COMING HAS ITS ROOTS IN THREE SOURCES - THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST, AND THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES**

2 Peter 3:1-2 - “This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles...”

In just a few verses, Peter will warn these churches that there will be all sorts of people in the church who will actually mock - scoff at - this truth. As the spiritual climate of the church drops, the second coming of Jesus will not hold much currency in people’s minds. This has always been the case. And we’re going to look at why this is so. But right now Peter goes back to something he has already dealt with in the first chapter of this very letter:

2 Peter 1:19-21 - “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, [20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

This is the foundational issue for every Christian. The issue is simple and direct. **Every Christian must decide to whom he or she will listen.** That’s the issue. **What is your Christian life based on?** Is it based on what your friends believe? Is it based on what your church happens to teach at that moment? Is it based on stuff you’ve simply had handed down to you by your parents, but have never really thought through for yourself? Do you make decisions based on which inward appetite pulls the strongest (Affluence? Popularity? Acceptance? Ambition? Power? Fun?) Are you **afraid** to hold to convictions that the crowd around you doesn’t admire?

Do your formally fixed life-convictions morph when they don’t fit in with your peers? **Mark Twain** is famously quoted in his reply to his friends when questioned about his beliefs - “**Well, my friends, those are my convictions. If you don’t like them, I have others.**”

Peter says we have to settle in our minds **where we get our inward convictional orientation.** Is our foundation the revelation of God or something else?

What Peter says at this point is significant. He says, “I want to call you back to something you’ve already learned.” He says, “**I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder**” (3:1). He says our minds need **stirring up** on the subject of the Second Coming. Unconsidered truth quickly marginalizes. It moves to the lazy fringes of our lives. Its power to secure our minds and wills cools. **John Calvin** says that without fresh exhortation, “**....the minds of the godly become dim, as it were, and attract rust.**”

When he says that, he doesn’t mean that I cease to **believe** in the Second Coming. He doesn’t mean I don’t **know about** the Second Coming. He means I live life **without thinking about the Second Coming.** I start to make decisions **without thinking about whether or not I will be ashamed of those decisions when I stand before Jesus.** He means I start to lack perseverance and patience as I serve Jesus because I’m too focused on reward or recognition here and now, rather than looking and longing and preparing for the Second Coming.

Peter means I can be **too quickly discouraged** by the situations and trials I face in daily living because I forget that, as Paul says, “**....So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [17] For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal**”(2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

This presents a bigger problem for the church today than ever before. Almost everything in the media focuses on the here and now. Everything in the news focuses on the here and now. Everything on the Internet focuses on the here and now. Everything your boss wants you to do at work focuses on the here and now. Every bill you have to pay focuses on the here and now.

And yet, as Christians, we are a **called out people - a people whose citizenship isn’t of this world, but is in heaven.** We’re specifically called to **set our affections on things above.** And we will never do that until everything we do has the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus behind it.

2) **CHRISTIANS NEED TO BE ALERTED TO THE FACT THAT THERE WILL ARISE INCREASING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO WILL ACTUALLY MOCK THE REVELATION OF GOD ABOUT THE SECOND COMING**

2 Peter 3:3-4 - “...*knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."*

This follows on the heels of the first point - that we need to keep the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus alive in our hearts. Peter now says this hope will not go **unchallenged**. If you and I are going to keep this hope alive in our hearts, we will have to face cultural opposition.

Here is why keeping faith aimed at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ won't be an easy thing: **People have been waiting for Jesus to come for such a long time!** That's the problem in a nutshell. It just doesn't **look like** Jesus is ever going to come back. “**They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation”(2 Peter 3:4).**

“**Where is the promise of His Coming?** I hear you **talking** about it. I know you **believe** in it. But **where is it?** Nothing changes. Things are just the way they have always been. People have been looking for Jesus to come back for 2000 years. But He hasn't come. Face it - He's not coming!”

And then, in just a couple of words, Peter slips in the **reason** for their mocking - “...**knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires**”(3:3). Their mocking isn't an **honest, unbiased argument**. They have a reason to confront the doctrine of the Second Coming and the Judgement of our Lord. They want, more than anything, **to continue undisturbed in their own lusts**. They **can't afford** to believe in the Second Coming.

There is something very frightening in these words. We should all give them considerable weight in our thoughts. They point out **how beliefs get formed and unformed in our minds. Convictions are not always the result of our best thinking. Sin and wickedness corrupt the ability to apprehend and digest holy truth.**

What these mockers lose is the ability to hear the truth with a **sincere mind** (3:1). The inward love of truth is replaced with what the New Testament calls a “**darkened understanding**” - **Ephesians 4:17-19** - “**Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.**” Nothing enlightening can be sown into their lives anymore.

Now, that process doesn't happen in an instant. It is always over time. This is the **cumulative impact of cherished sin**. That's why the Bible warns so clearly about the danger of the impact mockers can have on the sincere Christian mind: **Psalm 1:1-2** - “**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.**”

Notice the order in these verses. **Before** you can meditate on the Word with fruitfulness you must have **already committed** yourself to distancing your heart from mockers. You can't play both ends against the middle. You must have a **sincere mind** before you can meditate on the Word with fruitfulness.

3) **THERE IS CLEAR OBSERVABLE EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND COMING AND DIVINE JUDGEMENT ON ALL SIN**

2 Peter 3:5-7 - “**For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.**”

Peter says there are three truths that must never be forgotten. And he also says there are people who “**deliberately**” overlook these truths. That means there is a **cost** to pondering these things - an **impact** on our present decision making. So Peter is **stirring up their sincere minds** to forever be tethered to three facts:

a) **God is the Creator of the world and everything in it** - “...that the heavens existed long ago, and the

earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God....” (3:5). He spoke everything into existence *just by the power of His Word*.

Peter is clearly aiming at the mocker’s argument here. They are saying, **“All we have is His Word that Jesus is coming again. We can’t see it happening yet. Many years have gone by. There’s nothing. He hasn’t come. How can you believe for so long when all you have is His Word?”**

Peter says, “You’re forgetting the power of His Word. His Word, **only His Word**, brought this whole world into existence. If His word can bring it all into being, then His Word can finish what He started.”

Now, for the second truth in these verses:

- b) **God has already judged the world of Noah’s day with the flood - “....the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished”(3:6).**

Surely the point Peter wants to make with this case example is this: **nobody thought the flood Noah was nagging about for 120 years would ever come.** Read that story in the Old Testament and you will find a word used to describe what the crowd did as they watched Noah build and heard him preach. The Bible says they **mocked** him.

“Look at the mountains and hills. Look at the massive rocks and trees. Are you saying that all these huge, abiding things are going to be covered with water? Noah, do you know how long this world has gone on from day to day just like it is now? Are you saying God is suddenly going to change all of that?” **They mocked that idea.**

So Peter writes to these churches. As he fills their minds with the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus, he says, “Now, you pay attention. The mockers are wrong. Not only **will** God judge the world at the Second Coming - you have **proof** from the fact that He has already done so! The mockers were wrong then, and they are wrong now.”

- c) **The same word of God that brought this world into being with such incredible power is, even now, actively holding it together, reserving the ungodly for judgement - “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly”(3:7).**

Peter is saying **we don’t see everything God is presently doing.** Just as surely as a place is being prepared for those who love and obey Jesus, a judgement is being prepared for those who are wicked and ungodly. Our Lord is working on **two** future realities. Not just one. God is busy doing both right now. And the mockers will be silenced.

Here’s the important point in closing - **hear the truth with a sincere mind.** Remember the coming Day of the Lord. Don’t let your own desires - your own bias toward living your life your own way - crowd out or cloud over the reality of the Coming of Jesus. He will reward every person according to his deeds.

Those who chafe against His truth, those who live only for the moment, those who return to sins of the past, will be destroyed by the wrath of God.

But for those who love Jesus with a **sincere mind** - who walk instantly in His way when He speaks, who are shaped by the Word rather than the drift of their culture, there is nothing that will spur you on in your road to eternity like the sure hope that Jesus is coming again. And He’s coming for you. That’s a blessed hope indeed.