

September 24, 2023  
Faith in Exile – Faithful Until He Comes  
2 Peter 3:14-18  
Vernon Advent Christian Church

### Intro – Faith in Exile

We come to the end of Peter's second letter to the exiles of the early church. The letter began with the affirmation found in ch. 1:3, that we, as followers of Jesus, have everything we will ever need in order to be all that God calls us to be in life, and to do all that God calls us to do in our service to Him. We've seen in this letter how the apostle Peter urges his readers to stand with complete confidence on the Word of God and to build on the foundation of our faith. At the end of Chapter 1, Peter says that we can build on that faith in Christ with assurance and that's because the promises of Jesus are not myths. Namely, that Jesus really is the risen Son of God and He really will be coming to this earth again.

Now, we know that not everyone was faithful to the truth that the apostles taught about Jesus. And so, in Chapter 2, Peter warned about the dangers of the false teachers who had risen within the church and misled God's people, and who would seek to sway them from a sincere faith. Peter went into great detail in warning us about the character of these false teachers and the harm they would cause. And then, in Chapter 3, he spoke about the promise of the Lord's return and warned that many unbelievers would arise in the last days to mock the whole idea of Jesus' coming. Peter affirmed to us that, in spite of the mocking and unbelief, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night . . ." (3:10).

And so we come to this morning's passage as Peter writes his conclusion to these early believers. If you are able, would you please stand with me as I read the Word of God this morning. In the light of the Lord's promised return, and of the promise of new heavens and a new earth; and in light of the fact that many deceivers and scoffers would arise in the last days; Peter tells us what we should do with it all. He writes, [Read Passage]

This is a very practical close to this letter. As stated earlier, the letter began by affirming to us that we have all that we need in Christ for life and godliness and it ends by urging us to use that provision to live lives worthy of being found faithful by Him at His return. The question is brothers and sisters, if the Lord Jesus returns in our lifetime, in what spiritual condition will we be when He comes? How will He find us? Will He find us faithful? Faithfully living for Him and doing what He has commanded us to do?

Did you know that this was also a concern for Jesus? During his life on this earth, Jesus said in Luke 12:35-40, [Read]

Jesus assured us that we cannot know the time of His return. It will happen at a time when the people of this world are not anticipating it. But we, as His followers, must be in a constant state of expectation, and always live in such a way as to be found faithful by him. And Peter was there and heard the Lord Jesus say these very words and he asked the Lord in vs. 41, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" Peter didn't understand what Jesus was saying and perhaps he wondered if he was talking about something that would only happen in his lifetime. But Jesus made it clear that He meant those words for all His followers up until the time of His return, however far away that return may be when He went on to say in vs. 42-48, [Read].

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus is coming again! He will come at a time when the world is not expecting Him to come. But you and I know it with certainty and, therefore, a lot is required of us. We need to live in a constant state of expectation of His return because nothing could be more important than to be found faithful by Him at His coming.

These final few verses in 2 Peter tell us what we need to do in the light of the promise of our Lord's return so that we will be found 'faithful.' Peter certainly wanted his readers to be ready. He wanted them to be able to enjoy the full blessing of being found faithful by our Lord. And so, he told them certain things that they needed to do in order to ensure that the Lord would find them faithful.

In our passage this morning, there are five of things that Peter says we need to do and if we make them the regular pattern of our lives, we will be found faithful when Jesus comes again. If He comes in our lifetime, He will find us in a way that will please Him. Or, if He comes after we have been placed in the grave, He will raise us up to the reward of being faithful to Him to the very end.

The first thing is this: we need to be diligent in how we live (v. 14). Peter writes, "Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace." (v. 14)

Look at these words carefully. Do you notice that Peter urges us to be found by our Lord "at peace"? This isn't talking about having a subjective experience of inward peace. Throughout this passage, the commands are distinctively "us" related. They have to do with all of us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. And so, the "peace" that we are to be in before Him isn't so much a matter of inner peace within ourselves as it is of outward peace in our relationships with one another. We are to be careful to maintain good, loving relationships with one another in the body of Christ; not walking all over the feelings and rights of one another. We are to be careful to see that we look out not only for our own concerns, but also for the concerns of one another. That we hold one another's needs above our own and serve one another in genuine love. The Lord Jesus cares very deeply about our relationships with one another and when He comes, He wants to find us in a unity of love before Him.

And not to be overlooked, but I believe this "peace" also refers to our new position, as believers, who were once enemies of God are now "at peace" with him through the work of Christ on our behalf. So we are to work hard to maintain our relationships with each other as well as our relationship with God.

And do you notice that Peter also says that we need to be found by Him "without spot and blemish"? It's interesting that in 2 Peter 2:13, when Peter wrote about the immoral false teachers within the church, he described them as "spots and blemishes". But in 1 Peter 1:19, he wrote that our Lord Jesus is a lamb "without blemish and without spot". We are not to be like those false teachers who are slaves to the lusts of the flesh. We are to, instead, be like our Lord who walked before the Father in purity and holiness. The Lord Jesus wants to find us holy in His sight when He comes.

Now we are, of course, far from where we should be in all this. But we're to work hard at it. To be "diligent," as Peter is using the word means to be "earnest; to be very intentional and committed to a task." The NIV translates it that we are to "make every effort" to be characterized by a spirit of loving peace with one another, and personal holiness in our daily walk. We are to give ourselves to it with seriousness because we want to be found pleasing to our Lord at His return. We're to be like the apostle Paul; who, in 1 Corinthians 9, wrote [Read 1 Cor. 9:24-27].

People give themselves diligently to all sorts of earthly things. But nothing could be more important than to be found by the Lord Jesus in a way that pleases Him. That is, to be at peace with him and with one another, and to be holy in our personal lives. If you have a strained relationship with another brother or sister in Christ, then do what you can to make it right. If you are harboring secret sin in your life, or are allowing yourself to be dragged down by a sinful habit, then do what you must do and repent and be free of it. Don't wait! Give yourself to it with all diligence. Make it your regular practice of life. Keep short accounts before God and with each other. And do it out of a desire to be found pleasing to the Lord at His return. This is one aspect of how we are to live as we anticipate Jesus coming again.

Another regular practice of life, according to our passage, is that we should consider the patience of Jesus (v.15). Peter goes on to say, "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation..." And I think a good clue to what Peter means by this is found in what he said just a few verses earlier in vs. 8-9. Peter wrote [Read]

The patience of Jesus is our salvation. The seeming-delay of the Lord's coming is really an act of mercy on His part. He is allowing unbelieving people time to hear the gospel message, believe on the Lord Jesus, and respond to the Gospel by giving their lives to him. I certainly think that's a big part of what Peter has in mind.

You know, the day of the Lord's return is life for us. We are saved by faith now, but on the day of the Lord's return, we will experience the full completion of that salvation! As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:3-4, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." And in that sense, the Lord's patience is our salvation! Every day that He delays His coming is a difficult time of waiting for us. But every day of His patience is a day for us to live more faithfully for Him. And on the day of His coming, then we'll really live.

So, if we would be found faithful by Him at His coming, then let's make sure that we consider His patience. Let's not allow ourselves to be troubled by those who mock at the Lord's return and say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Let's keep our eyes on that day and consider His patience and mercy as our salvation and the possible salvation for others.

Now, Peter mentions Paul's writings in vs. 15-16. Many of the letters of the apostle Paul would have been circulated among the Christians by this time. Peter goes on to speak of them when he writes, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures." Peter here refers to the letters of Paul as "Scripture." They have the same divine authority as the Old Testament Scriptures that the Jewish people read and honored. And we can certainly admit the truth of what Peter said about them; that in the things that Paul wrote, though given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there are some things very hard to understand. They present revealed truth from God of a deep theological nature; things that require careful thought and study and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to grasp.

Here, Peter is talking once again of the false teachers who were taking these hard things that Paul wrote and "twist" them. They, in the end, don't harm the word of God though. They twist Scripture, not to the destruction of God's revealed truth, but to the destruction of their own souls. The word of God is steadfast and firm and it cannot be broken by wicked people. They can only break themselves against it as we read about in Matt. 21:44.

But this, I believe, implies yet another thing that you and I must do if the Lord would find us faithful at His return. Even though the people of this world will twist and distort the word of God, you and I must know the scriptures (v. 16). We must make it our daily habit, our whole

lives long, to read the Scriptures and to know them. And we must be dedicated students of it. We must work at it diligently; and study; and ask questions; and interpret it correctly; and journal; and memorize; and think carefully about what we read; and apply it faithfully and accurately to our lives. The apostle Paul told Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” If we would be found pleasing to the Lord at His return, then we must know the scriptures and be people of the Bible.

Related to that, we must also be on guard against falling into error (v. 17). Studying the word of God carefully is the positive habit that informs our minds and our hearts with saving truth from God. But we must be careful to protect the ways Scripture informs our minds and hearts and not allow ourselves to lose what we have gained. There are people all around us who have abandoned the truth of God from out of a love for sin. Peter has warned us of those who twist the Scriptures to the destruction of their own souls; and so he then adds, “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”

The word that Peter uses, here translated “take care,” suggest the idea of being on guard against something. One of the ways that I believe some folks start out strong and end up suffering loss is because of a failure to be on guard. They don’t “take care” of what they are doing or who, or what, they are listening to. They get a little over-confident; and start listening a little too closely to unbiblical philosophies and world-views. We sometimes forget that, as Peter said in his first letter, our adversary the devil “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). If we would want the Lord Jesus to find us faithful at His return, then we must constantly keep ourselves on guard against being deceived by the error of lawless people.

One final thing. If we would be found faithful at the time Christ returns, then we must continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus himself (v. 18). Peter, at the end of it all, says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Here, Peter stresses to us the importance of maintaining an ongoing, personal relationship with our Savior. We’re not to simply be content with the fact that we prayed a prayer once in our lives to receive Jesus as our Savior. We must maintain an ongoing fellowship with Him and we’re told we must grow in our relationship with Jesus.

Peter says that we are to grow in the “grace” of our Lord. This means that we make sure that we have received the complete forgiveness of our sins as a gift of God’s grace and that we now rest in God’s full love and acceptance through what Jesus has done for us alone. It means that we keep ourselves from deceiving ourselves into thinking that we are earning God’s favor by our good works and that we make sure that we rest confidently in what Jesus has done for us.

And Peter also says that we are to grow in the “knowledge” of our Lord. We should spend time with Him and get to know him more. Bring our troubles to Him in prayer. We should make sure we know what he expects of us and are obeying Him because we cannot love Him and grow relationally with Him unless we obey Him. For Jesus himself said, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:9-10).

Nothing could be more important than to be found ‘faithful’ to the Lord Jesus when He returns, to hear from the Lord, “Well done good and faithful servant.” And if we would do these things diligently, if we would be diligent in how we live, consider the patience of our Lord, know

the Scriptures, be on our guard against falling into error, and grow in our relationship with Jesus Himself, then we can be sure that He will find us faithful when he comes again. And we'll be able to say, with Peter, "To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." But this requires faith. Faith in exile.