

Sermon – 2 Peter 3 – Leroy Coote 20/6/2021

The coronavirus vaccine has arrived amongst a climate that combined fanfare and wariness amongst the general population. There has not been as quick an uptake as the government would like. Throughout this discussion, there has been talk that there need to be incentives to encourage people to have their COVID vaccinations. The concept of incentive applies to 2 Peter 3. I believe that this chapter provides an incentive to the believer in Christ. Let me explain with a couple of questions.

- 1, What incentive is needed to follow the great biblical truth found in 2 Peter Chapter 1?
2. What incentive is needed to avoid the false teachers that Peter describes in 2 Peter 2?

The answer: the promise of the return of Christ in the last days which forms the content of 2 Peter 3. I am going to look at this passage under the following headings:

- Why the letter was written from verses 1-2
- Scoffers in the last days and the counter argument from God's perspective from verses 3-7
- The events of Judgment Day from verses 8-10 and...
- How we behave whilst waiting for judgment day from verses 11-18?

By the end of today, what will become clear is how we are to live as believers in Christ with the incentive of Judgement Day coming, but also what we will face as we try to live God's way. So, therefore, let us start by looking at why this letter was written from verses 1 and 2. Not only are we told why this letter was written but we are told in verse 1 that it is Peter's second letter to those he is writing to. The first one being the Book of 1 Peter which precedes 2 Peter in the Bible. Why this letter was written was to stimulate his readers to wholesome thinking. Effectively in this case, what he wanted his fledgling churches to do was to embrace the truth of the Bible which he has clearly spelt out in 1 Peter and in the first chapter of 2 Peter.

But also, he wanted his fledgling church to stay away from false teachers who were trying to break up God's church which is central to 2 Peter 2. This is one of his reasons for stimulating them to wholesome thinking. In the context of this passage, wholesome thinking means thinking that is consistent with what the Bible teaches where the outcome is holy living. The reason for this is that the theme of 1 Peter and the first chapter of 2 Peter is holy living. Peter is encouraging the believers of Christ in the church to partake in holy living in response to what God has done for them by saving them from the wrath of God through Jesus' death on the cross and providing them hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death. Holy living is founded on the words found in verse 2 which read, *"2 I 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."* I believe you could also say that these words are the wholesome thinking that Peter wants his readers to partake in and that the outworking of these words in the lives of the people is holiness. Let us briefly look at the two aspects in the verse that form wholesome thinking from verse 2.

The first aspect is the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets. These are the words of the Old Testament prophets who because of Israel's disobedience spent most of their time

calling them to account for their behaviour. However, towards the end of most of these prophecies, Israel was called back to holy living after God delivered his punishment on Israel at this time. The point of this is that Israel was to follow the Law of God as laid down in the first five books of the Bible. The main command behind these laws was "Be holy because God is holy". Hence the repeated command to holy living through Peter's letters as that is God's call on those who are God's people. Therefore, the first aspect of wholesome thinking is to live holy lives in accordance with the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets.

The second aspect in the verse is the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles. There is an interesting point in this. What is the command? The command is anything that Jesus has commanded in his word – the Bible – that the apostles taught the church that Peter is writing to. So therefore, Peter wrote this letter so that the people he is writing to, could recall the words of both the Old and the New Testament so that they could be stimulated into wholesome thinking. As a result of being stimulated into wholesome thinking, I believe Peter hopes that leads to holy lives. We too as 21st Century believers in Christ are called to be stimulated into wholesome thinking as a result of our engagement into God's word and I pray that our engagement with God's word will lead to continued holy living. And there is a reason for this.

That reason is to resist the scoffers which is my second point. We find this located in verses 3-7. Peter reminds the people he is writing to that scoffers will come. In our context, a scoffer is a person that speaks about an idea in a way that shows that they think that person or idea is stupid or silly. In other words, these people are belittling Christianity. This was written 2,000 years ago and there are still scoffers around. This shows how relevant Scripture is today to the world that we live in and also provides for us more reason for believers in Christ to stick with the Scriptures and not drift away. The scoffers did not only scoff - they also followed their own evil desires. This means that the scoffers not only put down Christians and Christianity but also were led by their own evil deeds. But the depth of what they did went into scoffing the content of scripture which we see at the beginning of verse 4 because they challenged whether Jesus would actually return. But not only that, they suggest that nothing has changed because of the words, "everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation". This is saying that nothing has changed since the world was made and all things go along naturally. However, behind what they are saying through both their actions and words is "where is God in all this?" The implications of their words is that He is nowhere. However, Peter answers the scoffers by saying that creation has changed and that God has had a hand in this. Listen to what he says in verse 5, "*But 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.*" God did change the shape of the world through his word. Prior to God speaking to bring the heavens into being, we are told in Genesis 1 that the earth was formless. The world has changed since the beginning of creation because judgement from God in a negative sense happened with both the water and the word.

Verse 6 talks about the water being used for judgment which is a clear reference to Noah in Genesis 6. Verse 7 talks about the word of God proclaiming the destruction of the ungodly on the day of judgement. What is clear from this is the fact that while scoffers are present, God will deal with them on judgement day. This means that we can take comfort in the fact that God will deal with the scoffers on Judgment Day. What we need to do is to stay away from the scoffers' evil desires because if we do, we will be taken away from the church and sadly, many have drifted away from the church because they have been seduced by the evil desires of the

scoffers. So, therefore, stay away from the scoffers and be comforted by the fact that the scoffers will be dealt with on Judgement Day.

Let me now give you some reasons to stay away from the scoffers through the events of Judgment Day which is spelt out in verses 8-10 which is also my third point. Peter reminds us that the day of the Lord is not going to come in a hurry because verse 8 tells us that with the Lord a day is like a thousand years but a thousand years is like a day. This is quite interesting from a human perspective because there is a vast difference in length between the two spans of time mentioned. However, with God, it is different because in the account of God, who inhabits eternity, in which there is no succession, there is no difference, for all things past, present, and future, are ever before him, and the delay of a thousand years cannot be so much to him as the deferring of anything for a day or an hour is to us. In other words, this phrase introduces the concept of eternity. But there is a reason for this and that is that God is patient with us and therefore, more patient than we are with each other. However, what is the reason behind God's patience with us? Because he wants everyone to come to repentance. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching on the last day because he says the same thing in his discussion on last day events in Matthew 24 and 25. This also shows the mercy and love of God in that he desires to have a relationship with all of the pinnacle of His creation – humanity. However, despite God's mercy in desiring people to repent, there is an urgency in this because verse 10 tells us that the day of the Lord will come like a thief. Judgement day will sneak up so you better have repented by then. Why? Because the heavens and the earth will be destroyed. Judgement Day will happen but it will sneak up on us when we least expect it because no one knows when a thief will strike.

But how are we to behave while we wait for judgement day? This is my final point and it found in verses 11-18. The question I have asked is a similar question to the one the passage has asked at the beginning of verse 11. The answer to that question is to live holy and godly lives. The way to live a holy and godly life is spelt out in the words spoken by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through the apostles. This life of holiness is one that is spelt out in Peter's earlier letter which these people would have heard. But what is the purpose of the believer in living God's life of holiness? Because we are looking forward to the day of God and as people repent, we speed its coming. The key section here is that we keep living holy lives knowing that the day of judgment, which for the believer has a positive result, is coming. And for the believer, we are also looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells or in reality where God dwells. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the great thing about being a repentant believer in Christ is that we have something special to look forward to and this the new heaven and a new earth is where God dwells. This is exciting and should drive how we live as God's people. With this in mind, how then do we live as people who are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth? Look at verse 14 with me, *"make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."* This is the goal of holy living. To live without the world finding a spot wrong with you from the context of the word of God. To live in the world in a way that no one can blame you for doing anything wrong from the word of God and to live at Peace with God. And the beauty of this is that God helps us to make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him. God give us the way to be holy in his world and he gives us the Spirit to help us live by his word. But he also gives us the wisdom of Paul who speaks on similar matters to Peter. But we are to be on our guard so that we don't fall into the error of the lawless and fall from our secure position which is our salvation from God. Being on our guard means growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

We are to get to know Jesus better and better in our relationship with God meaning that our relationship with Him grows until we leave this earth. 2 Peter anchors us in our relationship with God at God's initiative. Peter wants his church anchored in the word of God and also wary of false teachers which is what I hope happens for all in this church. He also wants his church to live holy lives and not fall for the scoffers. But as believers, we have an incentive to live and that incentive is to look forward to judgment day when believers are taken to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells i.e., God. Let us look forward to the return of Christ and show it by living holy lives that grow in the grace of God until we leave this earth.