

A Growth That Endures...



A VERSE BY
VERSE
EXPOSITION
OF THE
EPISTLE OF
2ND PETER

Weathering Doctrinal Storms 2 Peter 3:1-4 (734)

Our daughter and her husband left early yesterday morning for a vacation near Cancun, Mexico. There's just one problem with this. They are right in the projected path of the eye of Hurricane Emily. So for the first day or two of their vacation they will be weathering this storm. Two things work to their advantage. First, they know the storm's coming and, second, they have a safe place to stay. That pretty much describes what Peter is saying in 3:1-4 of his second letter. He's saying the storm's coming. In fact it's already here. Verse 3 says, *mockers will come with their mocking*. But he's also reminding the believers that they have a safe place to stay – the truth of the Scripture. Indeed, this is my big idea for this sermon – **there is safety in the Scripture**. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. #3) asks, What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. Doctrine and life. Both have come under the fire of the false teachers.

Last Sunday we discovered that even with all the flashy rhetoric and the glowing promises, what these guys teach and preach amounts to nothing. Verse 17 of Chapter 2 says, *These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.* These guys promise water for thirsting souls. What they promise sounds wonderful. But at the end of the day their promises are empty. You go after them seeking to have your spiritual thirst quenched but the spring is all dried up. They are like dark clouds on the horizon during a persistent, lingering Texas drought (see also Prov. 25:14; Jude 12). They give hope of, indeed, promise rain that will revive the parched earth, but the wind drives them past us and no life-giving rain falls. It's all a cruel, heartless deception.

If you are thirsty - yearning for something to quench the need of your soul - I assure you that the gospel as preached by the apostles of Jesus Christ; the gospel as comprehended in the great doctrine of justification by faith alone; the gospel of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ for guilty sinners; the gospel of a righteousness provided by God Himself is the only message on the planet that can quench your thirst. All else is sinking sand, empty bubbles, springs without water, clouds with no rain. These men and their message are hollow, void, destitute of substance. Both the men and their message are deadly; deadly because they are void of the transforming power of the gospel.

There is a pronounced shift at **3:1**. Peter has been blasting away at the heretics in Chapter 2. Now he returns to comforting the faithful. You know, sometimes preachers have to say hard things. We have to speak against evil, against heresy, against sinful living. Even this is for your spiritual welfare. Nevertheless, I

believe the dominant tone of a pastor's ministry should clearly be instruction and encouragement in the gospel. It is to this that Peter returns in **3:1**.

2 Peter 3:1-4 *This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."*

Verse 1. This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder. Being made fun of can discourage; it can wear down a believer. Being beaten up over what one believes and over how one lives; being the object of derision is never easy. We've all heard of folks who trusted Christ and as a result found themselves the objects of ridicule and scorn, some even from members of their own families. Peter knows that's the kind of thing these folks are having to endure. So he is careful to console them and us. First, he addresses them as *beloved*. He reminds them that they are the dear friends of God and of Peter's.

Second, he reminds them of their blessed condition. He mentions their *sincere* or *pure mind*. Does this mean they were uncontaminated by sin? Not at all. Peter uses the term "pure mind" to accomplish three purposes at least. First, it explains that the majority, although troubled (shaken) by the situation, are still true in terms of their adherence to the apostolic faith. They still believed the gospel. Their minds had not been given over to the lusts and heresy swirling

around them. Second, Peter intended the phrase to encourage these believers to remain loyal to the gospel and to those who had taught it to them. Third, this term is also an evidence of God's preserving mercies. Preservation in true faith is always a testimony to the grace, power, and faithfulness of God. Indeed, according to **I Peter 1:5** we are those who are *protected by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*. **Jude 24**, *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy*.

Beloved, Tom Ferrell was converted early Sunday afternoon, May 15, 1973 – 32 years ago. I woke up this morning, July 17, 2005, still trusting in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation. I woke up still believing that Christ satisfied divine justice by His sufferings and death in the place of this sinner. I woke up this morning still in the faith. That this is so is a testimony to the utter reliability, the utter faithfulness, the utter power of God Himself who is forever and unfailingly loyal to His covenant promises.

Peter says, Beloved, I want to encourage you, to exhort you; to stir you up *by way of reminder*. This verse, and especially the word “reminder”, echoes what Peter said in 1:12-15, *Therefore, I shall always be ready to **remind** you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.*¹³ *And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of **reminder**,*¹⁴ *knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.*¹⁵ *And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to **call these things to mind**.*

You recall that in Chapter 1, Peter, by the Holy Spirit, composed a wonderful summary of basic Christian doctrine. Peter rightly views a working knowledge of these things as fundamental, as essential to the stability of individual believers and of the community of believers – the church. These gospel truths are to the Christian what food and water are to the human body. Peter's is the unshakeable conviction that the truth bears repetition. What, specifically, does Peter want us to recall?

Verse 2. That you should remember [here it is] the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. Here in verse 2 Peter mentions messengers – *holy prophets* and *apostles*. He also mentions their messages – *words spoken* and *the commandment*. Let's concentrate first on the messengers. The *prophets*, of course, were the messengers of divine truth in the Old Testament. *Apostles*? Now there are apostles (little "a") mentioned in the New Testament. **Romans 16:7**, for example, says, *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me*. These guys were normally pioneer missionaries; church planters laboring in fields where no Christian had previously worked. There are also Apostles (capital "A") mentioned in the New Testament. These are the Twelve; the men called and commissioned by Jesus Christ Himself. These are the men who had the authority to interpret the Old Testament testimony concerning Jesus.

The prophets and apostles were both God's messengers communicating truth to the people. The prophets and apostles spoke with one voice. And the subject of that singular voice was the Redeemer – the Lord Jesus. **Luke 24:27**, *And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things*

concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. Michael Green says, the reason the prophets and the apostles spoke with one voice is because “the source of their authority was the Spirit who inspired both (**Eph. 3:5; I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:16-21**). [Listen to what Peter said in **I Peter 1:10-11**, *As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.*] Prophets foreshadowed Christian truth. The apostles interpreted Christian truth. Peter has already in **1:16** stated that under the influence of this same Spirit of God both apostles and prophets bear testimony to the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (M. Green, p. 135).

And so when Peter talks about the *words of the prophets* and the *commandment of the apostles* basic Christian doctrine is certainly in view here. But we must remember that it is the strategy of false teachers to cast doubt upon, to disparage those particular points of doctrine which condemn them. Remember their logic. If Christ isn't coming back then there is no judgment then we can live as we please. So here, many think that the *words of the prophets* and the *commandment of the apostles* have to do specifically with the return of Christ and the obligation to live holy lives in light of that return (M. Green, p. 136; N. Hillyer, p. 209). And both of these – the second coming and the moral requirements of the gospel – were denied by the heretics. This is plain in verse 3 and 4.

Now, this is important to remember because the danger is real in the church today. **Verse 3. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts. Knowing this first of all.** Peter is giving us what we sometimes call a “heads up” ... a warning. In his

mind what follows is of overwhelming importance. Remember, an important element in our safety is knowing the storm is coming. Right?

“Peter assumes he is writing in the *last days*” (L/G, p. 129). This phrase is understood most often to encompass the entire Christian era (Galatians 4:4 and Hebrews 1:2). Michael Green says, “With the advent of Jesus the last chapter of human history had opened, though it was not yet completed. In between the two advents stretches the last time, the time of grace, the time, too, of opposition” (p. 137).

Here’s the content of the warning. *Mockers will come with their mocking.* Peter has already sounded this once in **2:1**, *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you.* Similar warnings are repeated elsewhere in the New Testament. In **Acts 20:29-31**, for example, Paul told the Ephesian elders, *“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”* **I Timothy 4:1**, *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.*

Indeed, characteristic of these days is that *scoffers will come.* Now what exactly is a scoffer? A scoffer is someone consumed by disdain for something or someone. A scoffer usually projects a certain intellectual arrogance and social snobbery. Indeed, a scoffer will not listen to or heed wise counsel or anything that resembles a rebuke. **Proverbs 9:7-8**, *He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.* ⁸ *Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, reprove a wise man, and he will love you.* **Proverbs 13:1**, a

wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke (Prov. 15:12, 21:24). Scoffers make fun of stuff. In this context they laugh at the very idea that Jesus Christ is coming again. Furthermore they make fun of the idea of holy living. Indeed, these are men who *walk according to their own lusts*. In their pride and arrogance, they walk or live according to their own sinful rules and sensual passions.

"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (Verse 4). "Where is the promise of His coming?" Now they're not wanting to know where in the Bible Christ's second coming is promised. Mockingly they are asking, "Where is the fulfillment of the promise? It had been thirty years since the crucifixion. That's a long time for some folks. It's just not going to happen folks!"

And here's the support for their argument. *Since the fathers fell asleep all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.* *Fell asleep* obviously refers to their deaths. Who are the fathers? It seems most natural to understand the fathers as the Old Testament patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Since those men died everything **continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.** These guys didn't just deny certain features of the doctrines of Christ, and of salvation, and of last things. These guys had a fundamental problem with the very idea of God. What they are suggesting is that the universe is a closed, mechanical phenomenon. In their view there is no room for a God who breaks into human history. "They convinced themselves that God has not intervened in the world's affairs since time began and therefore they assumed that he would

not do so in the present or at any time in the future” (Bentley, p. 234). And Peter will respond to this argument beginning in verse 5.

There are three lessons that I think are important to learn. The first has to do with preaching. I hope you can see the importance of doctrinal, soundly Biblical, expository preaching to your own personal growth and stability in faith, and, by extension, to the stability of the community of faith. For the church to remain stable this kind of preaching must be wed with genuine, sincere, and warm affections for God and for the gospel of His grace. So this passage ought to move us to a deeper and more confident commitment to such preaching.

In a similar vein, this passage should highlight in your minds the value of historic creeds and confessions of faith; those statements that express and affirm the apostolic faith. We modeled that to some extent in this service. Although each has phraseology unique to it there is a remarkable harmony between the three confessions on the doctrine of the return of Christ.

The second lesson has to do with the providence of God. The Shorter Catechism defines our position. God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. Unlike the heretics in Peter’s day, we believe that God is intimately involved in His creation; that He does intervene; that He governs and controls.

The third lesson has to do with the preserving mercies of God. Opposition to the truth is nothing new or unique. Indeed, it is characteristic of the environment in which we live out our faith. Opposition varies only in degree from time to time and from place to place. And yet God preserves our souls in the truth. With all

that had been swirling around these folks God had seen to it that their minds had stayed pure in the sense that they had not been infected by error and unholy living. We will pick this theme of God's faithfulness up at the Lord's Table.

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What's the big idea?

There is _____ in the _____.

II Peter 2:17-22

Both the men and their message are deadly; deadly because they are void of the _____ power of the _____.

I believe the dominant tone of a pastor's ministry should clearly be _____ and _____ in the gospel. It is to this that Peter returns in 3:1.

2 Peter 3:1-4 *This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."*

Verse 1. This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder.

Peter uses the term "pure mind" to accomplish three purposes:

First, it _____ that the majority, although troubled (shaken) by the situation, are still _____ in terms of their adherence to the apostolic faith.

Second, Peter intended the phrase to _____ these believers to remain loyal to the gospel and to those who had taught it to them.

Third, this term is also an _____ of God's preserving mercies.

Verse 2. That you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles.

The prophets and apostles spoke with _____ voice.
And the subject of that singular voice was the _____ – the Lord Jesus.

The reason the prophets and the apostles spoke with one voice is because “the source of their authority was the _____ who inspired both (Eph. 3:5; I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:16-21).

Prophets _____ Christian truth. The apostles _____ Christian truth.

So here, many think that the *words of the prophets* and the *commandment of the apostles* have to do specifically with the return of Christ and the obligation to live holy lives in light of that return.

Verse 3. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts.

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A scoffer usually projects a certain intellectual _____ and social snobbery.

A scoffer will not listen to or heed wise _____ or anything that resembles a rebuke (Prov. 9:7-8, 13:1).

Scoffers _____ stuff.

In this context they laugh at the very idea that Jesus Christ is coming again.

Verse 4. "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

In their view there is no room for a God who breaks into human history.

Three lessons:

The first has to do with _____.

The second lesson has to do with the _____ of God.

The third lesson has to do with the _____ mercies of God.