

"Until He Comes"
2 Peter 3:10-14
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In last week's TIME magazine I read, "There's a great photo of Bill Gates from 1977, the year he would have graduated from Harvard if he hadn't dropped out.

He was 22 at the time and looks all of 16. He's got a flowered collar, tinted glasses and feathered blond hair, and he looks so happy, you'd swear he knew what the rest of his life was going to be like.

He also has a sign around his neck: it's a mug shot.

In an interview Gates said, "I was out driving Paul [Allen]'s car. They pulled me over, and I didn't have my license, and they put me in with all the drunks all night long. And that's why the rest of my life, I've always tried to have a fair amount of cash with me. I like the idea of being able to bail myself out."

TIME then commented: "Mission accomplished." (TIME, June 15, 2007)

Gates had a vision of the future that was so vivid in his mind that he built his life around it.

He said, "We'd agreed the microprocessor was going to change the world. It was weird that people didn't see that. The thing that Paul and I had been talking about happening was happening, and we're sitting there going, Oh, no, it's happening without us!"

Gates had realized that there was a future in writing and selling software for personal computers. It was one of the great technology and business insights of the century. (TIME, June 15, 2007)

What's your picture of the future that wakes you up in the morning and keeps you engaged throughout the day?

- An education is a worthy goal but what then?
- A satisfying career is good but it's over in 40-50 years.
- Marriage and children are certainly good aspirations but then what?
- Recreation and vacations are healthy objectives but what then?
- Adequate retirement income is necessary but what then?

Many, including Bob Buford in his book *Halftime*, have written of slowly coming to the realization that they had accomplished their goals in life but it didn't yield what they expected.

In Buford's case he said he had "more money than meaning. "

For others it is a life full of temporal success or maybe just full of activity but with no purpose.

- My son's major aspiration in life is to acquire a Playstation 2 for video games.
- A 16-year-old lives for his first car.
- The person early in his career aspires to the company's coveted salesman of the year award
- The middle-aged couple works three jobs to get that longed for vacation home.

The older one gets the larger the coveted prize tends to be and the longer gratification is delayed but is there really any eternal difference?

Are we investing in and preparing for what is most important?

- It won't be long before Playstation 2 is passé (there's already a Playstation 3).
- It won't be long before the company awards are history, that no one remembers, and within two generations even the vacation home will belong to someone else who will tear it down to build something new.

What then?

Are we prepared for what comes after the education, career, family, and retirement?

That is, in part, what the Apostle Peter is writing about in the third chapter of his second letter.

Follow along as I read from 2 Peter 3:1-14

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.² I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.³ First of all, you must

understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Pray

I'm particularly drawn to verses 11 and 14:

"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

"So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Is your perspective on the future sufficiently long-range that you are giving yourself to the truly important?

Last Sunday, looking at the first part of this chapter, we saw that Jesus' promise of coming again can be believed because of God's interventions in the past.

And we saw that his reason for not having already returned is because he is merciful - he is giving opportunity for people to turn to him in repentance and faith.

What Peter does next in verses 10-14 is to describe briefly two major events that will happen when Jesus comes again.

Those two events are the destruction of the present heavens and earth (v 10) and the appearance of a new heaven and earth (v 13).

Following the description of each of these events Peter addresses the issue of what wakes you up in the morning – what do you live for and how do you live it.

Conduct follows conviction.

Apparently Peter believed that when the people understood what was going to happen when Jesus comes again it would affect them.

Their excitement for what is coming would lead them to evaluate and maybe change the way they live.

And the motivation for change would grow out of their convictions of what will really happen in the end.

Before looking, more closely, at the two events Peter specifically describes I want to put those two events in context.

For just a minute we will think of the progression of events at the end of the age as I believe the Bible indicates them.

I did this briefly last Sunday but I need you to put this order of events back in mind again.

The writers of the Bible use several phrases to indicate the different periods of time in human history.

The period of history from creation to the first coming of Christ at Bethlehem is called the merely “the past.”

Hebrews 1:1-2 “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he

has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”

I don't mean to suggest that nothing ever changed during those thousands of years of history but simply that the Bible refers to those days as significantly different from the days that started with the coming of Jesus to earth as a baby.

The presence of God on earth in the person of His Son introduced a whole new period in human history.

The period of time from Christ's first coming, that includes now, until Jesus comes again is called the "last days."

2 Peter 3:3 “First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

In Acts 2 Peter quotes from the Old Testament book of Joel.

Acts 2:17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”

There we see that the “last days” began with the events surrounding Christ’s resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Yes, that's right, the "last days" have been going on for a long time.

It is important to understand that when the Bible uses that phrase "last days" it is a reference to an era - a whole period of time.

When we hear someone say, "We are in the last days." we are tempted to think they mean the very last few days before the end.

That may be what **they** mean but that is not how the Bible uses the phrase.

In the Bible it is a reference to the whole period of time between the first and second comings of Jesus.

Certainly we are closer to the end of these "last days" than we were yesterday but we don't know how close to the end we are.

No one does but God, says God.

Thus far we have thought about two periods of time:

The period of time from creation to the first coming of Jesus is called “the past.”

The present period of time from Jesus' first coming to his second coming is called the "last days".

The third period of time the Bible discusses is called "the end" as Jesus refers to it in Matthew 24.

Peter and others also call it the “day of the Lord,” or the “day of God” or even the “day of judgment.”

“The end” 1 Corinthians 15:24; Matthew 24:14

“Day of God” Revelation 16:14; 2 Peter 3:12

“Day of the Lord” 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10

“Day of Judgment” 1 John 4:17; Matthew 12:36; 2 Peter 2:9, 3:7

The Second Coming of Jesus ushers this period in.

The "day of the Lord" is both an event on one day when Jesus comes back and a period of time surrounding the second coming of Jesus, a period of time in which a number of events occur.

There you have the three periods of time:

The “past,” the “last days,” and “the end.”

We are in the "last days" and we are looking forward to "the end – “the day of the Lord.”

I want to refresh your memory of what major events take place at the “end.”

1. As we saw last week from Matthew 24 and from much of the book of Revelation the next major event in God's timetable is what Jesus called the time of great distress or tribulation.

Matthew 24:21-22 “For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

We have evidence to believe this period is shorter rather than longer (maybe specifically seven years in length) and depending on your interpretation of the Bible it is either the end of the last days or the beginning of the end days.

In either case it is a period of transition from the period of time in which we now live (called the last days) to the period to come (called the end).

What happens to people who die during this time of tribulation?

During that period of time as during this present period of time if someone who is trusting in Jesus for salvation dies, they will, as the Apostle Paul said, enter into the presence of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:8 "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

Even though the body is buried the person goes to be with the Lord.

We call that place heaven and it is, but we must be careful to distinguish it from the place of everlasting life. (I'll show you what I mean in a minute).

When those who have not trusted Christ die, their bodies are buried and the person goes to hell where they await the final judgment in the "day of judgment."

Though this place called "hell" is a place of torment of some kind, according to Jesus, it is not the place where unbelievers will spend eternity. (I'll show you that later as well.)

2. Following that period of tribulation the Bible says Jesus comes again!

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Revelation 19:11-12 "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns.

In Revelation 20 the 2nd coming of Jesus is also the time of "the first resurrection"

Revelation 20:4-6 "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but

they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”

According to these verses all those who had trusted in God through all the ages (those from times past and us from the last days) and had already died will be joined with our resurrected bodies.

Soul and body will be joined together again, for eternity.

Those who are trusting in Christ **and still alive when He returns** will not die but will be changed so their bodies will be like the resurrected bodies of the others and they will all be with the Lord forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

In verse 10 of our text, Peter calls this “second coming” of Jesus the "day of the Lord" and in verse 12 he calls it the "day of God".

3. Also in Revelation 20 we see that the next major event in the "end days" is a 1000-year period of time when Jesus rules as King on this **present** earth.

Whether this 1000 year period (also called the Millennium) is a literal 1000 years or is symbolic of something else, is debated by biblical scholars.

4. But regardless, it is after this that the final judgment takes place.

Look at Revelation 20:11-15

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second

death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

All of history builds to this great moment.

- 11 The presence of God is awesome.
- 12 Everyone stands before God and two kinds of books are opened: The book of deeds by which all unbelievers are found guilty and the book of life in which all believers are listed as saved by grace!
- 13 It speaks of the resurrection of the unbelieving dead.
- 14-15 "Death and hades" is a euphemism for all the unbelieving dead, of all the ages, those in hell, awaiting judgment.
- 15 The lake of fire is the final destiny of the unbelieving.
Notice they go **from** "hell" **to** the "judgment" in resurrected bodies and **to** the "lake of fire" in those bodies.

Only such a future judgment makes sense of so much of what happens in our world.

I think unrelenting and unspeakable evil make a thinking person question the very existence of God faster than anything else.

Ron Sweeney of our church has a brother who has written a National Geographic book entitled, *God Grew Tired of Us*.

It is the story of the literally thousands of boys whose families were slaughtered as they fled from their homes in southern Sudan, 10 years ago, only to face unbelievable privation, cruelty and death from rogue military groups, the government and rival tribes.

When you read the personal accounts, they are emotionally wrenching and mind-numbing.

Does such injustice go unanswered?

The answer is no; judgment is coming!

But in great contrast, as already seen, those who are trusting in Jesus have already been united with their resurrected bodies and they will be with the Lord forever.

Please notice that the eternal dwelling place of Christians is not in heaven where the believing dead now wait for the end, but

where we will live with the Lord forever is on the new earth as we will see in a minute.

5. Around the time of the judgment, something else takes place AND it brings us back to the two events that Peter emphasizes:

The destruction of the present heavens and earth AND the creation of a new heavens and earth.

Please be aware that this reference to "heaven or heavens" is not a reference to the place where believers now live with Jesus. That is a different use of the word "heaven."

The word "heaven" or "heavens" here is referring to the skies and universe around this world.

Peter is using the words the same way Genesis 1 does, where it says God created the "heavens and the earth".

Look with me again at 2 Peter 3:10, 12b-13 "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

I have been calling these "two events," but as you will notice they are truly two sides of the same event.

This present universe, including the earth on which we live, will be melted down and reformed into a new heavens and earth.

Much of what we hold so dear and work so hard to accumulate, and stress ourselves over to retain, will be burned up - gone.

According to the Bible, God created the heavens and the earth and it was good.

But because of Adam's sin the entire created universe: people, animals, plants, the earth and the heavens were corrupted.

Decay set in that slowly but surely negatively affected everything.

Please look with me at Romans 8:19-22 “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

According to Paul there is a day coming when this earth and universe will be set free from the bondage under which it labors.

This world for all its beauty will be purged, renovated, remade.

Peter is describing this indescribable event with words like fire, roaring disappearance, melting in the heat.

I am not a scientist but I have read that if you bring intense heat into combination with water, including the water of the earth and skies, there will be an explosion which sound would be indescribable.

And the resulting reaction would reduce the elements to a vapor or a molten shapeless blob.

And then God will recreate it.

Exactly how God will accomplish this we can't be certain but we do know the present earth will be dissolved and out of it God will recreate a new heavens and earth.

The word "new" that Peter uses is not a word that means newly created from nothing like the first creation of the earth.

It is a word that means “new,” as in qualitatively different.

It is the same but different –it is new.

From the Gospels and from I Corinthians we know that when Jesus was resurrected from the dead he had a new body but the same body.

It was the same Jesus. He was recognizable.

But his body was nonetheless different - no longer susceptible to the same limitations as before.

Likewise, Paul teaches, when we are given our resurrected bodies at the Second Coming of Jesus, they will be the same but different.

They will be immortal - never to decay or die.

And yet we, like Jesus will be recognizable.
Our bodies will be "new" and yet the same.

Comparing those descriptions of **our "new"** bodies to the "new" earth it is reasonable to assume that the earth will be different but the same.

Purged of sin and decay and all that hinders, it is "new"!

According to Revelation 21 it is on this "new" earth that we with "new" resurrected bodies will live with the Lord forever.

Revelation 21:1-3 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Do you realize what is going to happen?!!

Jesus is coming again.

When he comes he will resurrect, judge, sentence, and **condemn to everlasting punishment** all those who are not trusting in Him.

When he comes he will **totally renovate this earth** and the heavens creating of it a new, perfect, good and everlasting earth.

When he comes he will also **resurrect the bodies of all of us** who are trusting in him, and with him we will live forever.

What will that eternal heaven on the new earth be like?

Peter has already given us one hint when he calls it the "new" earth meaning, as we already saw, "the same but different".

This earth is beautiful, too beautiful to take in sometimes, but yet according to Peter the new earth will make this present earth pale in comparison.

What will heaven on the new earth be like?

Peter gives us another hint when he says in verse 13 that it will be "the home of righteousness".

In Revelation 21 the Apostle John wrote, "Nothing impure will ever enter it. Nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful."

The sins of person against person, to which we are so prone now, will be gone.

No slander, gossip, defaming, lying, cheating, abusing, or hurting.

It will all be gone.

What will that heaven on the new earth be like?

Most of all it will be the place where Jesus is!

Many of you know the story of John Newton the author of "Amazing Grace", the slave trader who was saved by Jesus.

In a letter one day he wrote of what he looked forward to most in heaven:

"I hope one day to be all ear, all heart, all tongue; when I shall see the Redeemer as he is, I shall be like him. This will be heaven indeed, to behold his glory without a veil over my eyes, to rejoice in his love without a cloud, and to sing his praises without a jarring or wandering note, forever." (Gilmore, 188)

One night in Philadelphia, Joni Erickson Tada told her story of the diving accident that left her a quadriplegic.

Near the end of her testimony she said something about heaven. "She said that when she got to heaven, the first thing she wanted to do was to ask Jesus for a dance. Then from her wheelchair she sang about this hope" this great future that is hers on the new earth. (Gilmore *Probing Heaven* p176)

Now we come back to Peter's point:

If this is the way things will be in the future, what kind of people should we be now?

If much of what I give myself to now is going to be dissolved in the fiery renovation of this earth,

AND there is going to be a whole new earth, on which I will live forever with Jesus,
 WHAT do I do now to prepare myself?

Some might say, "Preacher you have your head in the clouds. Get real. We live in the here and now." "Your otherworldliness is only escapism from the real world."

Someone wrote: "Otherworldliness is only escapism if there is no other world. But if there is another world than worldliness is escapism." (Peter Kreeft, *Heaven*, 106)

Jesus is coming again and he is ushering in a whole new world.

The only reasonable thing is to live for that day; to live with such an expectation of that day that it affects all I do and even think NOW.

In verses 11 and 14 Peter gives several words of direction as to what that means: "live holy and godly lives" and "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

These words speak of a devotion to God,

- of consciously doing what advances God's kingdom and brings him glory,
- of caring about God's standards of right and wrong,
- of holding fast to ones faith in Jesus
- and of living with sins confessed and in open relationship with God.

Is it worth it to obey, to trust God?

Your heartache is not the last chapter of your life.

And your successes are nothing compared to what is yet to come.

While I **do** think Peter is warning his readers, I think the stronger motivation is an eager anticipation of the future.

2 Peter 3:14 "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this..."

The feeling of the words is this:

Imagine it!

Look at what God is about to do.

You want to be ready for that day.

As you live your life, as you make your plans, **is it that true future** that you plan your life around?

If Jesus is actually coming again, how can I live any other way than investing in that day?

How about you?

Other notes:

“speed its coming” Consider the following verses:

Acts 3:19-20 “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and **that he may send the Christ**, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

2 Peter 3:8-9 “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. **He is patient with you**, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come.**”

Matthew 6:10 We are to pray, “Your kingdom come...”

Do these suggest that while God is absolutely sovereign in the timing of Christ’s return, he somehow factors into his timing our responses of repentance, world evangelization, and prayer? (Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 198)