

The Next Life

Longing for the Return of Christ 2 Peter 3:1-16

Introduction

Over the past few weeks, we have explored our future eternal life in a series called "The Next Life." Jesus will establish God's eternal kingdom when he returns, which is why we should study what impact that will have upon us and how we should prepare ourselves now. What we learned about God's kingdom over the past few weeks should ignite a hunger and longing for the return of Christ.

Eager anticipation of Jesus' return is a dominant theme in the New Testament. In Matthew 24, Jesus describes how he will terminate this evil world order being established now and replace it with God's kingdom. He tells his followers to "watch for" and "be ready" for Christ's return. In Matthew 24:42, Jesus says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:42-44 NKJV)

Peter encourages believers to "fix our hope completely" on Jesus' return. Jude tells us that one of the main ways to stay anchored in God's love is by "eagerly awaiting" his mercy at Jesus' return. Jude says in verse 20, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." (Jude 1:20-21 NKJV)

Jesus taught us to pray for this in the Our Father prayer of Matthew 6 when He said, "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10 NKJV)

The prayer was one of the favorite prayers of the early Christians. Paul echoes this Second Coming theme in 1 Corinthians 16:22 when he says, "Come, O Lord! When John receives the Revelation that Jesus is coming soon, John closes the New Testament with, "Amen, Come Lord Jesus!"

When you accept Jesus as your Savior, he puts his Spirit in your heart, and the Holy Spirit inspires us to anticipate and long for the Second Coming of Christ. But it's a longing that must be cultivated. Even if you belong to Jesus and have his Spirit, this anticipation is not a given. It's a longing that must be nurtured.

In 2 Peter 3, Peter gives us three ways to cultivate an eager expectation and longing for Jesus' return. Peter says longing impacts our hearts, what we desire'; our heads, what we think and understand; and our hands, what we do, and how we live.

I. Jesus – Our Greatest Desire

Is your relationship with God more important to you than anything else in this life? In Deuteronomy 6:4, God tells Israel, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." (Deuteronomy 6:5-6 NKJV)

Relationships are first a matter of the heart! Is Jesus your greatest desire? 2 Peter 3:3-4 says, "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:3-4 NKJV)

Peter is describing people who scornfully dismiss the Bible's teaching on the return of Jesus Christ to this world. In our day, the mockers can be college professors, influential peers, and even some are ministers. They say it is naïve to believe that Jesus will return and put an end to the evil in this world. They point to the years that have come and gone since Christ promised to return and say we should wise up and realize the Second Coming is a myth and Jesus is not coming back.

What motivated these mockers? What prompted their aversion to Jesus' return? Was it their careful research and investigation? Not at all! It was simply based on their *desires* (the NKJV says "lusts.") "Desires" is the word *epithumia*, which means "inordinate desire." It means wanting a good thing to its extreme.

It's related to idolatry in the New Testament. Idolatry is a matter of seeking security, significance, and approval from created things like relationships; career achievement; possessions; and human recognition rather than from your relationship with God. It was these lustful desires that motivated the mockers, and it is these same desires that chill our hearts and dull our passion for Jesus to return.

How does this work? For those of you who are married, let me ask you, "Do you remember the deep desire you had to see your spouse when you first met? Have you allowed that desire to wane? It happens when you let your heart be captured by something or someone else. The same is true of our hunger for Jesus' return. It happens when our hearts wanes and desires something or someone more than we desire Jesus. That's why cultivating this hunger involves being honest with yourself and asking, "What is my greatest desire?"

Have you ever been excited about the promise that Jesus is coming back? Do you remember resonating with Paul and John's prayers, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus," or is this a distant and faded memory? Some believers even secretly hope Jesus doesn't return for a long time. Why would you feel that way? Is it because you desire something else more than you want to see Jesus?

Things in this life get in the way and hinder us from making our relationship with Christ more important than any other relationship. It can be because you want to be married, get that house, advance in that career, enjoy that hobby, or make that trip you dreamed of taking.

It is not attending a banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but rather the endless sampling and tasting at the table of worldliness. In Luke 14, Jesus explains the heart attitudes in a parable about a banquet and describes what keeps people from attending. "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all, with one *accord*, began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.*' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "

(Luke 14:16-24 NKJV)

For all the ill and temptation that Satan can do, when Jesus describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it comes down to a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a spouse. (Lk.14:18-20). The greatest adversary of God's love is not his enemies but his material gifts. The most deadly appetite is not the poison of evil but life's simple pleasures. For when life's pleasures replace your desire for God himself, your idolatry is scarcely recognizable and almost incurable. No wonder Solomon writes, "Two *things* I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny *You*, And say, "Who *is* the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:7-9 NKJV)

So what can you do if you have this heart problem? You can't fix it with your head. Learning more about the signs of Jesus' return won't help. Neither will feeling guilty about it because that may alienate you from Jesus even more. You need to go to Jesus and confess the problem with humble honesty, cast yourself on his mercy, and tell him that you want Him to be your heart's true treasure.

James writes, "Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "GOD RESISTS THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-

mind. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:5-10 NKJV)

Don't let your heart betray you. Put Christ first in your life! Not as a duty or responsibility but because your heart longs for Him more than anything in this world.

II. Jesus – His Soon Return

Why does He delay His return if Jesus said He's coming soon? Sometimes we lose our hunger for Jesus' return because He is no longer the desire of our hearts. But that's not always the problem. Sometimes the problem is in our heads—our heart gets discouraged because our head is confused. Hunger for Christ's return can be displaced by ignorance or misinformation. But our desire for Christ's return can also wane because we can't understand why He is waiting so long, especially when so many people are suffering.

That's what Peter addresses in 3:8-10. Verse 8 says, "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Peter 3:8 NKJV)

First of all, it only seems slow to us because our perspective on time is different from God's, who is eternal. But God's plan also takes longer to complete because his scope of concern is broader than just me. Could it be that Jesus delays his return because he cares about the ones he wants to join us?

In verse 9, we read, "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9 NKJV)

Jesus is waiting because he wants as many people as possible to repent, believe in him, and escape eternal judgment. Peter knew people would read and listen to his letter who hadn't yet decided to receive Christ. Peter may be speaking to you this morning as we read this passage and listen to this teaching. God patiently tells us about our need for His forgiveness and how he sent his Son to die in our place. God waits for those who need His forgiveness and choose to give their life to Jesus. God literally delays his plans for a new world just to give you a chance to be included in it!

But He doesn't plan to wait forever! In verse 10, Peter writes, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10 NKJV)

When Jesus returns to this earth, it will be the end of the world as we know it. Those who have not received Jesus as Savior will experience His coming like a

thief in the night. You'll wake up in the morning to the worst day of your life. All your things will be gone, and it will be too late to do anything about it. But losing your car or computer is just stuff; we're talking about losing your life and eternity with no opportunity to get it back. It will be too late to get ready. Your works will be laid bare, and you will have to explain to God why you refused to receive his forgiveness. No excuse will be sufficient to rescue you from God's eternal judgment.,

So get ready *now* by receiving Christ.

III. Jesus – Proclaim His Name

If you have already accepted Jesus as your Savior, are you actively helping people come to faith in Jesus?" Of course, Jesus needs to be our heart's greatest desire, and our heads need to understand that Jesus is coming again and why he is delaying.

But we also need to put our "hands" to work actively pursuing his interests and proclaiming his name. Your heart will follow what you invest your lives in. If you don't believe me, just do a simple check: What do you think about? How do you spend your money? And what do you spend your time doing?

Your hunger for Jesus' return will grow as we invest our lives in proclaiming His name and doing what he wants. And the sooner we finish the Great Commission, the sooner Jesus will come! Jesus said in Matthew 24, "**And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.**" (Matthew 24:14 NKJV)

Dedicate your life to proclaiming the name of Jesus and that He is coming again to judge this world. Invest your life in proclaiming the name of Jesus and his mission of salvation because what Jesus wants most is for more people to come to faith in Him and escape the coming judgment.

Look at verse 11, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you," (2 Peter 3:11-15 NKJV)

Peter connects "looking forward to" Jesus' coming (longing for His return) and "hurrying up" Christ's coming. How do we hurry it along? By using this time to help other people come to faith in Jesus.

We can do this by verbally sharing our faith in Jesus here in Bloomington and all over the world. When you tell your family, friends, neighbors, and work associates about Jesus, your hearts will hunger even more for His return. Do you share your faith with others? Are you involved in ministries that reach out to people who don't know Jesus? Do you provide prayer and financial support to our missionaries?

When you invest your life and resources this way, your heart will follow! Peter is describing a life that loves lost people and seeks to penetrate the darkness around them with the light of Jesus' love so that they can see and be redeemed by Jesus.

Peter is describing a life that goes into our broken community and cares for broken people (like Jesus did) with God's redeeming love. When you do this, it changes you. Your compassion is stirred, your heart is broken, and your zeal for God and his kingdom grows.

You begin to mean it when you pray: "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And you become more eager for Jesus' return!

Conclusion

We must love Jesus with our hearts, our head, and our hands! Begin to focus your heart's affections on him as your greatest treasure. Focus your mind and thoughts on the kingdom he will establish and the reason he is waiting. Focus your hands on helping other people to come to him before it's too late.

If you live as a consumer and relate to Jesus as just one more "product" to add to your list, your life will become more and more complicated and anxious, and disappointing. But when you love Jesus with your heart, head, and hands, your life will become much simpler and fuller—, and your longing for Jesus to return will grow.