

5. Everything we need to grow

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[0 : 0 0] Now let's have a moment's prayer before we look together at 2 Peter. And we would echo these words, our Father, speak, O Lord, in your holy word.

Father, we believe these are words not only which you spoke once, but these are words which are echoing now. These are words which will last until your church is built, and indeed will outlast heaven and earth.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but your words will not pass away. So may your Spirit take these words and lead us to the living Lord Christ himself, in whose name we pray. Amen.

And so we come to our final study in 2 Peter, which we've called Everything We Need Until the Lord Returns. And this evening, Everything We Need to Grow.

And we're looking particularly at verses 11 to 18, on page 1019 and 20. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?

[1 : 1 0] Countless generations of Christians have lived and died since Peter wrote these words. Countless generations of Christians have echoed the words of Revelation, Come, Lord Jesus.

Indeed, my own father and mother, who died a number of years ago, both of them relatively young and dying within a short time of each other, knew very well what they wanted on their gravestone. And on their gravestone is the simple words, Until He Comes. They fell asleep as they had lived in the faith of Christ died, Christ risen, and Christ coming again.

So as Peter begins this final section, look at what he says once again. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, you ought to spend your time speculating on the details of the second coming. Now as you know, he says no such thing. What sort of people ought you to be? In other words, if our lives are dominated by this truth that Christ will come again, it will have an enormously practical effect on our lives.

[2 : 1 9] We will be living for eternity, and because of that, we will be of the maximum effectiveness in time. The great mistake that people often make, assuming that the immediately relevant, the immediately practical, is what we need to be doing.

Peter is saying live for eternity. Live in the light of the coming. Now if we do that, this will prevent two wrong approaches to the coming of Christ.

First of all, excessive interest in the details of the coming. I was brought up in a Christian background where in our meeting places we had charts, detailed charts of the events that would accompany the coming of the Savior.

And all the interest was focused on timetables. Scriptures from Daniel, from Revelation and elsewhere were put together to give us the timetable of the events.

If any of you were brought up in dispensational pre-millennialism, you will know what I mean. If you weren't, then you may thank the Lord. And indeed, it's more common in America than it is in this country.

[3 : 3 1] And sometimes, unfortunately, in America, it's linked with political views and with particular stances on the world. And it's often seen as a test of orthodoxy.

Some American seminaries, you have to have the right view on the details. Now notice what I'm saying. This is not a dispute about whether the Lord will come again or not.

That's what the scoffers, the mockers we looked at last week are saying. Saying he's not going to come at all. This is a dispute on the actual details which will surround that event. So that's one view. Actually becoming so obsessed with those details that we don't realize that these truths are given to make us certain kinds of people here and now.

Living in the future, instead of concentrating on the fact that the future will guide us in the present.

There is a second problem, and I suspect this is more common.

[4 : 31] And that is simply ignoring it. It may have been the people I was brought up with spent too much time talking about pre-, post- and amillennialism. But it has been said that most modern British evangelicals are panmillennialists.

That is, they think everything will pan out all right in the end. They have no clear or intelligent understanding of the doctrine of the coming. It's awfully easy to sneer at those people who spent so much time on it.

But my goodness, they really did believe in the coming of the Lord, and they really did try to live their lives in the light of that. So if we take what Peter says seriously, we will be saved from both errors.

The errors of excessive interest in the details, and the error of ignoring it altogether. However, the New Testament emphasis on the coming of the Lord, the Old Testament emphasis on the day of the Lord are all given in relation to practical teaching.

You read the Old Testament prophets, read the later chapters of Isaiah, and find that Isaiah's prophecies of the new heaven and the new earth are given, so that people in this heaven and this earth can move towards that, living now in the light of then.

[5 : 45] So what is Peter saying? Peter is saying three things, I think. First of all, wait with a purpose. We are waiting for the coming, so let's wait with a purpose.

That's really verses 11 to 13. Secondly, he's saying to us, believe the promises, verses 14 to 16. That's the passage about Paul, and since Paul is mentioned here, I suppose an excuse for me mixing up the names, I try not to, but Trangunos.

Believing the promises, and thirdly, growing more like Christ, verses 17 to 18. Peter says as we wait for his coming, first of all, we wait with a purpose.

Since all these things are to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be? I think how startling that is. Peter is saying the emphasis is not on this huge and cosmic event, but it's on God's people. And I think Lucas says in his commentary, the end of the world is not a cosmic bang, but an encounter with the living God. And that's the emphasis here. And if that's the emphasis, the whole way of life is changed.

[6 : 59] Verse 11. What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? Like so many phrases in this letter, it's not altogether easy to get the exact English way to express these.

What Peter actually says is, literally, in all holinesses and godlinesses. In other words, he's talking about a whole way of living. Not just a list of rules and regulations, but an entire lifestyle in all holinesses and godlinesses.

Because God is holy. We are to meet a holy God, and we are preparing to meet him. Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

Now the waiting is clear enough, but what about the hastening? How do we hasten the coming?

Now some argue that we can actually have some influence on the date of the coming.

And take this verse as one of the main arguments for that. But the verse could equally be translated, waiting eagerly for his coming. We cannot influence God's choice of date.

[8 : 08] That's already fixed. God knows when the coming will happen. But what Peter is saying, we wait eagerly. We prepare for that coming.

When we pray, your kingdom come. When do we expect that to be fulfilled? That's what we're doing when we pray, your kingdom come. We are praying for the events of these verses to happen.

Not just a big phrase about things that will pan out all right. We are praying for these events. We know that prayer will be fulfilled when the Lord returns.

But we know also it can be partially fulfilled as more and more people come into the kingdom. As Christ's reign extends over the hearts and lives of people.

That's the whole point surely of all those activities on the sheet. The Christianity explore. The evening meal. All these kinds of things.

[9 : 06] The various things that are done week after week are hastening the coming in the sense of anticipating that coming. Of preparing for it by more and more people becoming disciples.

More and more people being reached. And that's what lay behind all the missionary endeavor of the last centuries. When Isaac Watts wrote, Jesus shall reign where ere the sun does his successive journeys run.

He wasn't just thinking of that coming as he was. But he was thinking of anticipating it. And the great missionary hymns of the 19th century. Some of which seem so old fashioned now.

Had that vision. The whole wide world for Jesus. This shall our anthem be. The whole wide world for Jesus. To him shall all men bow. In city and in prairie.

The world for Jesus now. This was the dynamic that led them. That led them all over the world to preach the gospel. And thus to hasten the coming.

[10:07] So if we wait patiently. If we wait eagerly. Our whole way of life is changed. And not only that. We are commending that gospel to others.

And as their lives are changed. And Peter has already said it. You may remember back at the beginning. One way in which the church remains apostolic. Is by every new convert. It remains apostolic.

As the apostolic gospel is preached. And as that gospel wins hearts and lives. The church remains apostolic. Until the Lord returns. And also Peter now in verse 12.

Repeats what he has already said. In verse 10. We are waiting for the new creation. We are waiting for this great cosmic event. He is echoing Isaiah 65.

Behold I will create a new heaven. And a new earth. If you read that chapter. You will find that Isaiah is echoing himself. The words of Genesis. Genesis. I have said before.

[11:05] That the whole Bible. In a sense. Is a gloss on Genesis 1 verse 1. In the beginning. God created. The heavens and the earth. He is going to finish that job. He is going to complete it.

He is going to be glorious. Beyond our imagining. And Isaiah. As he speaks of these. The future. Talks about the beauty of creation. Redeemed communities.

Uses phrases like. He talks about. Someone dying at 100. Will be really. Will really be seen to have lived a very short life. Not of course.

That people will die. In the new creation. But Isaiah is using the language. Of our creation. Talking about the fulfillment of potential. As I said last week.

There is. There is obviously discontinuity. But there is also continuity. And I'm going to read from the last battle. The end of the Narnia story.

[12:00] Square. I don't know if Lewis is thinking about this passage. In 2 Peter or not. But it's wonderful. And some people have said to me. In the last few weeks. They haven't heard very much.

Of C.S. Lewis. Let me make up for that. Lucy looked this way. And that. And soon found that a new and beautiful thing. Had happened to her.

Whatever she looked at. However far away it might be. Became quite clear. And close. And far out to sea. She could discover islands. Islands after islands.

To the end of the world. And beyond the end. The huge mountain. Which they had called. Aslan's country. But as she looked harder. She saw it was a real land. And she cried out.

Peter. Edmund. Come and look. Come quickly. And they came and looked. For their eyes had been opened as well. Why exclaimed Peter. It's England. Edmund. I suppose some of you prefer to say it's Scotland.

[12:55] But we'll allow you to do that. And that's the house itself. Professor Kirk's old home in the country. Where all our adventures began. Remember where they entered the wardrobe.

I thought that house had been destroyed. Said Edmund. So it was. Said the fawn. But you are now looking at the England within England. The real England just as in the real Narnia.

And in that inner England. No good thing. Is destroyed. All that is good. And worthwhile. Will be there. In the new creation. Transformed. Beyond our imagination.

Wonderful. And. We will find there. Those good and godly things. We have loved in this world. Not just what we call religious things. After all the prophets make it very clear.

That the new heaven and the new earth. Will be physical. Will not be wearing ethereal negligees. And floating around on clouds. We will be in a deeper country. I think there will be a royal Shakespeare theatre there.

[13:55] But. If not. If not. Sometimes Lewis says elsewhere. Something better will be. Because when we see him. We will be like him. We will see him.

As he is. So all that has been of God. Will be carried over. Into the new creation. All that has not been of God. Will be destroyed. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3.

Everything. Wood, hay and stubble. Will be burnt up. But gold, silver and precious stones. Will survive. And when we reach heaven. It will not be true to say.

With R.L. Stephens. That to travel hopefully. Is a better thing. Than to arrive. We know that in this world. Don't we anticipate something. For so long. Often we have a sense of disappointment.

Don't we? That will not be the case. In heaven. So we wait with a purpose. Not idle waiting. Not aimless hanging around. But waiting for the Lord. And as we do this.

[14:50] Verses 14 to 16. We believe the promises. Now this has been a consistent theme. All through the letter. The word of God. Is both the witness.

To these great events. The events of the past. And the events of the future. But it's also the living word. Which is given to us. To help us to live. In the present.

And Paul says. Paul says. He doesn't. Oh. Yes. Paul does say. I'm coming to that. To what Paul says. Paul says. The same as Peter says. So you see.

It wasn't too. It wasn't too wrong actually. Mixing them up. Look at verse 15. Count the patience of our Lord. As salvation. Just as our beloved brother Paul.

Also wrote to you. According to the wisdom. Given to him. Now. Many scholars say. This proves. That Peter could not. Have written the letter.

[15:48] Because they tell us. That Peter and Paul. Had disagreed. With each other. Now indeed. They had disagreed. With each other. Back in Galatians. At Antioch. You read about that.

But are we to suppose. That a principled. Disagreement. Between two godly men. Should lead to. Endless animosity. For the rest of their lives. We would hardly take them serious.

If that were the case. The point is. These two apostles. Both totally committed. To the gospel. Both totally committed. To the ministry. Of the gospel. Are standing.

Shoulder to shoulder. And side by side. As they proclaim. The power and coming. Of our lord Jesus Christ. When I say they're saying. The same things. I mean. I don't mean. They speak in the same style.

They've got their different styles. They address different people. But nevertheless. What they are saying. Harmonizes. It. Because it comes from the same lord. Who is the spirit.

[16:44] It's not exactly clear. There's a bit of argument. About which letters. Verse 16. Means. As he does in all his letters. There are certain letters of Paul. Notably. One and two Thessalonians.

Which particularly. Refer to the coming. And these are early letters of Paul. But. It's a continual theme. Throughout the whole of Paul. Romans 8. That glorious chapter.

About creation. Waiting on the tiptoe. Of expectation. Waiting for the children of God. To receive their full salvation. That wonderful resurrection passage.

1 Corinthians 15. About the change that will take place. In the whole of creation. And indeed in our mortal bodies. And in Paul's very last letter.

Probably. Unknown to Timothy. It's unknown to Peter. Since he's written much the same time as 2 Peter. In 2 Timothy. Paul speaks about finishing the race.

[17:42] About fighting. About keeping the faith. And he says. This reward is not just for me. But to all those who love his appearing. So consistently.

From beginning to end. Paul speaks of the power and coming. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. And consistently Peter. From beginning to end. Speaks of that same subject.

The power and coming. As we cooperate today. With other gospel ministries. And other gospel churches. That's what we're presenting to the world. Isn't it? A gospel. A gospel. A gospel. Which not only transforms us in this world.

A gospel. Which not only saves us from our sins. But a gospel. Which will fit us to live in the new heaven. And the new earth. Where there is righteousness. But the other interesting thing is this.

If you look again at verse 16. There are some things in them that are hard to understand. So take courage when you find Paul hard to understand.

[18:38] And so did Peter. Which the ignorant and unstable. Twist to their own destruction. As they do the other scriptures. See what Peter is saying. Peter is saying.

Our beloved brother Paul. Is writing scripture. It's not something to be discussed. Or debated. This is scripture. Peter as an apostle. Once again.

Is coming back to his. The point he's made right from the beginning. Believe the words of the prophets. And believe the words of the apostles. There's an interesting place in 1 Thessalonians 5. Where right at the beginning of Paul's apostolic ministry. Paul says. Paul says. Test prophecies. So if someone comes with a prophecy.

Don't instantly disbelieve them. But don't instantly believe them either. Test the prophecies. And then he says. Read this letter. He doesn't say test this letter. He says read this letter.

[19 : 34] In other words. The letter to Thessalonians. Is authoritative scripture. The words of an apostle. To be read. And to be obeyed. Unlike prophecies. Which may be of God.

And may not be. And that's so important. The scripture. Is the only authority. The scripture is what judges. Everything else. So Paul's writings.

Are scripture. And Peter is saying here. Believe in these promises. And use scripture responsibly. And that's the point of verse 16.

The second part. An ignorant and unstable twist. To their own destruction. Now the ignorant are not the illiterate. The ignorant may be highly intelligent.

And very learned people. Because Peter is using the word ignorant. In the same way that the wisdom writers. Of the Old Testament. Use the word fool. A fool may be a highly educated person.

[20 : 30] He's talking about people. Who use scripture. As if they were simply human writings. As if they were standing in judgment. Above them. A very common way. In which that's done nowadays.

Is by people setting up. One part of scripture. Against another. Saying that some parts of scripture. Are more authoritative. And when someone does that. Do you see what they're really doing?

They're setting themselves above. All scripture. They're deciding which parts are authoritative. And which parts are not. In other words. It's no longer the word of God.

That's the guide. It's human reason. And the unstable. The unstable are those who listen. To the false teachers. Those who are carried away. By what they say. Now this is not an attack.

On creative. New insights. This is not an attack. On hard work. On the scriptures. Because all responsible Bible teachers. Continue to work at the scriptures.

[21 : 27] And one of the fascinating things. Is it's continual freshness. You return to a scripture. You thought you knew. And then suddenly. It strikes you. In an utterly new way.

Peter is saying. When we read scripture. Take it authoritatively. Then we will be safe. Then we will have the standard. With which to judge false teaching.

And it's the words of the apostles. And the prophets. It's not just Paul's words. It's the whole of the scriptures. Calvin says. It needs a whole Bible. To present a whole Christ.

And make whole Christians. We believe in a moment. But the work of making us like Christ. Is a lifetime's work. And it comes through. Obedience to the scriptures.

Wait with a purpose. Believe the promises. Verses 17 and 18. Grow like Christ. 17. You therefore beloved. Knowing this beforehand.

[22 : 23] Take care. That you are not carried away. You notice how Peter. Will not move away. From this warning. And there are two things he does here.

First of all. There is a warning. And the warning is. Take care. You are not carried away. With the error of lawless people. And lose your own stability. Now error.

Error is wrong teaching. Error is false teaching. Whereas lawlessness. Is the kind of behavior. That comes from such teaching.

Because there is always a connection. We have seen this often before. People preach wrong doctrine. And they say they can preach wrong doctrine. And still hold on to the gospel ethic. Still hold on to the gospel behavior.

That may work in the beginning. But as the generations pass. Then false teaching leads to false behavior. The shameless behavior. And lose your stability.

[23 : 21] Paul found people in Athens. Who always wanted to hear something new. And Peter is saying. Don't always be listening to something new.

You need to be reminded. It needs to come to you in newness and freshness. So he gives them a warning. But secondly he gives them an appeal. Grow in grace.

Verse 18. The knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ. Now there are two things we have to grow in. One we have to grow in the grace.

Now grace is the character of Christ. Which he develops within us. Knowing Christ and knowing scripture. Is never simply intellectual knowledge.

Is never simply filling our minds with information. So that we can pass a quiz on the Bible. That's not the kind of thing we are talking about at all. Obviously as we read scripture.

[24 : 14] As we study scripture. As we listen to preaching and teaching. Our knowledge about scripture will grow. But the point is growing in grace. Is growing more mature. Growing more like Christ.

And knowledge as I say is not theoretical. But it's knowledge of how to live. Knowledge of how to walk the Christian walk. And you see how the letter hangs together.

He began way back in chapter 1 verse 2. May grace and peace be multiplied to you. And now it's grace and peace. With which he are. Grace and knowledge with which he ends.

Because grace is the essence of the gospel. That's where J.H. Newman in that otherwise fine hymn. Praise to the holiest. And the hype gets it wrong.

He says that a higher gift than grace. Should flesh and blood refine. God's presence and his very self. There is no higher gift than grace.

[25 : 11] Grace is God's presence. And his very self. Grace is the life of Christ in us. Grace is the product of that life. Being born in us.

And growing in us. And the letter here ends with praise. To our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory. The glory which is anticipated on the mountain of transfiguration.

And glory. Sometimes we use these words very vaguely. But glory is the solid reality of God. As opposed to Hevel. Which is vanity.

Often used in the Old Testament of idols. Futility. Emptiness. God is utterly real. And because God is utterly real. We can build our lives on Him. But it is also the shining light.

The light shining in a dark place. Until the day dawns. When you put these two ideas together. You see what Peter is saying. Peter is saying God is utterly real. The gospel of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 11] Is utterly true. And in that light. We will see to live safely. And then this very interesting phrase. The day of eternity. An unusual phrase. Now I think first of all.

He is probably echoing. His quotation from Psalm 90. Earlier in the chapter. Verse 8. Do not overlook this one fact. Beloved. That with the day.

The Lord one day. Is as a thousand years. And a thousand years. As one day. But I think there is more to that than this. I think as he has done so often the letter. He is going back to the very beginning of the Bible.

And to the creation story. The day of eternity. Is the seventh day. On which God rested. There is no eighth day. When you read the creation account.

You don't read. There is the seventh day. The evening and the morning. The seventh day points to eternity. When that creation will be fulfilled. It anticipates heaven. It anticipates the rest of the people of God.

[27 : 10] And that is how the letter to the Hebrews takes it up. In chapters 3 and 4. So Peter is saying. This gospel. Which is given to light you.

In the darkness. And the murkiness. And the confusion. And the perplexity. And the sheer trackle. If you like. Of living as a Christian in this world. That light will shine even more brightly.

In the day of eternity. The day of the rest of God. The day when God rested. From what he had done. Not the day in which he did nothing ever after. But the day in which he contemplated that work.

And continued it. Until the new creation. So Peter says. Since your path to glory. Cannot be thwarted. Since the power and coming.

Cannot be set aside. Live now. In the light of then. And that is I believe. What 2 Peter is saying to us. Let's pray.

[28 : 12] Father may we grow in grace. And the knowledge. Of our Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ. We want to give him glory. In our lives now. We want to share him with others.

So that the light may dawn. In many hearts and lives. Indeed we pray. As Willie said earlier. In the service. That we. May indeed share Christ. With more people this year.

Than we have ever done. In any previous year. And that many of them. Will indeed. Come to know him. And to love him. We ask this. In his name. Amen. Amen.