

The True Shape of History

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[0 : 00] But we're turning to our Bibles, and Edward last week was looking at Peter's second letter! and the final chapter 2 Peter chapter 3, and we're going to read that chapter again today.

! And he's going to be looking at it again, particularly towards the end of the chapter. Here's a letter written by the Apostle Peter to the churches that he was responsible for, knowing that he was towards the end of his life, and preparing the people for life after the passing of their apostles. And so Peter writes at the end of the letter, at the beginning of chapter 3, this is now the second letter that I'm writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I'm stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

They will say, where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God. And that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

But by the same word, the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

[2 : 18] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn. But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace, and 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, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people, and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, may God indeed bless to us his word.

Amen. Well, good morning, friends. Very good to see you all here. Let's turn to 2 Peter chapter 3.

And we're picking up from where we left off last week. My title for this morning is The True Shape of History. The True Shape of History. And the verses I want to take are verses 8 to 13 in this final chapter. I'm planning, God willing, to take the final few verses in early January.

Now, the whole of the gospel, the whole of the Bible, is about a historical process. And it's this that distinguishes Christianity sharply from other faiths. Because other faiths are all, at heart, about man and man's behavior. They all say, here are various principles to live by.

[5 : 13] This is how to live a good life. Typically, prayer, fasting, giving, feasting, self-examination, meditation, non-violence, caring for those in need, and so on.

So other faiths have man at the center. And their concern is with human behavior, with what we need to do, with how we should behave. Christianity, by contrast, is about what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do at the end. And that is, of course, a historical process. It has a beginning, it has a middle, and a conclusion. But it's all about God. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Then in the middle, at the central point of all history, he sent a savior to redeem and rescue his people. And at the end, he promises to bring his rescued people to share his eternal home with him. The gospel is good news because it is all about a historical process. We look back in history 2,000 years to the central events of all history, which are the historical death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. And we look forward in history to the fulfillment of a great promise from God about the future. And Peter speaks of that promise very simply here in our verse 13. But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. So we are waiting. We are waiting for the final events of history to unfold. God has promised something radically new, and we're waiting for him now to fulfill his promise. Other faiths are about man's obligations. Christianity is about God's achievements. Other faiths can only, at best, offer good advice. Christianity alone gives us good news.

And this third chapter in Peter's letter is dealing with the end of history, the great and final goal of history. And Peter is dealing with this subject because the young Christians that he's writing to are in danger of being unsettled in their faith by false teachers. He has told them at the beginning of chapter 2, chapter 2 verse 1, there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them. So Jesus' denial will always be at the heart of false teaching. But at the beginning of chapter 3, Peter becomes more specific. And he says there in verse 3, scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, and they will say, where is the promise of his coming?

So they're not just deniers of Jesus, they are deniers of the return of Jesus. They're denying the true shape of history. The Bible promises his return. Jesus himself spoke of it many times in his own teaching.

[8 : 27] The apostles Peter and Paul and John speak of it many times in their letters. It is one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. But the scoffers deny it.

We sometimes hear of people these days who are called Holocaust deniers. People who have special and twisted reasons for denying what the Nazis did in the Second World War.

Well, the people Peter is writing about here are second coming deniers. Their view of history is warped. They have special and twisted reasons for denying the return of Jesus.

But Peter is saying to his young Christian friends, don't believe these scoffers. So I want us to see how Peter teaches the true shape of history to his Christian readers.

And it's a very different view of history from the views of history which many people hold today.

Broadly speaking, over the last few centuries, worldly thinking has developed three main ways of viewing history, which we might characterize as the cyclical view, the utopian view, and the meaningless view.

[9 : 39] I'll try and describe each of these. First of all, the cyclical view, which has its roots more in Eastern thinking than in Western. Now, the idea here is that everything simply goes round in circles.

A nation or an empire grows strong. It reaches its peak of influence and power, and then it declines. So, for example, the Assyrian Empire gave way to the Babylonian Empire, which was followed by the Persian Empire, and then the Greek Empire, and then the Roman Empire.

Much more recently, the British Empire rose in power rather swiftly in the 18th century, reached its peak in the 19th century, when nearly half the world was colored pink on the map, showing British influence and power, and then declined rapidly in the 20th century.

You might say that the Falklands War in 1982 was about the last gasp of the British Empire. Then more recently, the Soviet Empire rose and fell in the 20th century.

And people today are talking about the waning influence of the United States and the rising influence of China spreading its grasp into different parts of the world. Now, in terms of political power, you can see, you can understand this cyclical way of world history.

[11 : 01] But it's very different from the Bible's view. Secondly, there's the utopian view. And that's the idea that things are getting better and better until we shall finally reach a kind of utopia, a state of harmony and peace and perfection.

Now, this has been a very pervasive view, and I'd be surprised if it doesn't linger in many of our hearts today to some extent. There is a Marxist version of it.

The Marxist view is that world history is explained in terms of the struggle between the workers and the bosses, the employees and the employers. And the struggle sometimes goes this way and sometimes that.

But eventually, the idea is we shall reach a state of equilibrium and happiness with the emergence of a classless society where everybody is equal. The problem, of course, as George Orwell wittily pointed out, is that inevitably some will be more equal than others.

In other words, the desire to get ahead of the field is endemic in the human psyche. But the Marxist desire is to create a kind of utopia. Another version of this is the view of unstoppable progress based on the forward rush of science, technology, and medicine.

[12 : 23] Now, this began to build up a great head of steam in the 19th century in Britain and in other parts of the Western world. The Victorians were truly remarkable people and you can only admire their energy and their vision.

Think of the advances that they made in architecture and engineering. The rapid construction of the railways from the middle of the 19th century, the development of industry, manufacturing, shipbuilding, not least on the Clyde, the advances in medicine, in sewerage systems, town planning.

Many of Glasgow's finest buildings were built in Queen Victoria's reign. But there was a genuine feeling amounting to a powerful creed that the dawning of the 20th century would be the dawning of a golden age where disease, war, ignorance, crime, and poverty would be simply eradicated.

And at least for some of the movers and shakers, it was a vision that had a kind of Christian expectation involved in it. Let me read you a few lines from Tennyson.

Tennyson was poet laureate in the 1880s. And these verses are taken from his famous long poem called In Memoriam. And the motif that he's dealing with here is that it's the ending of the old year.

[13 : 45] So it's a December the 31st poem. And it's the beginning of the new year. And the church bells are ringing. They're ringing out the old year and they're ringing in the new year at midnight.

But it's really a new age that Tennyson is dreaming about. He's commanding the bells to ring out what is decayed and damaging in society and to ring in what is good and life-enhancing.

Here we go then, Tennyson. Ring out false pride in place and blood, the civic slander and the spite. Ring in the love of truth and right.

Ring in the common love of good. Ring out old shapes of foul disease. Ring out the narrowing lust of gold. Ring out the thousand wars of old.

Ring in the thousand years of peace. Ring in the valiant man and free, the larger heart, the kindlier hand. Ring out the darkness of the land.

[14 : 46] Ring in the Christ that is to be. Now think of those phrases, the thousand years of peace, the Christ that is to be. It's a kind of millennial vision.

A thousand years of peace with Christ ruling the world. And we can be sure that Tennyson was not alone in Victorian Britain in nursing that kind of dream. But did the 20th century prove to be a golden age of peace?

Well, by 1945, when the Second World War ended, all such dreams were shot to pieces. The dream of inevitable progress, of a perfected human race living in a global utopia that simply cannot be sustained by anybody today unless they're living with the cloud cuckoos.

The human race today is so obviously being ravaged by warfare, aggression, greed for money, pornography, so much else that is destructive.

Now the third view is the view that history is meaningless because human life is meaningless. This view is part and parcel of an atheistic view of life.

[15 : 58] If there is no God, it's hard to see how there could possibly be purpose in anything. If our planet and life on the planet are simply a random consequence of various atoms and molecules coming together, then random consequences must be the product of random causes.

As somebody has said, it is meaningless that we live and meaningless that we die. Therefore, as far as history goes, you can study it till you're blue in the face, but you can't find any recognizable patterns in it.

As a famous American put it, history is one darn thing after another. The idea of meaninglessness, it was popularized 50 or 60 years ago by the plays of Harold Pinter in England and by writers like Samuel Beckett in Ireland.

The scenes they portray typically show people having discussions about things that are completely inconsequential and quite devoid of any real interest. So, for example, I'm not quoting from a play, but this is the sort of thing that you find in Harold Pinter, a conversation between two old men who are on the stage together talking.

One says, where should we go today then? The other one says, I don't know. First one says, what's the weather going to be like today? Rainy or sunny?

[17:20] The other one says, I don't know, Hubert, but it could be related to whether you had jam on your bread this morning or butter. The other one says, now that, Edwin, though I don't mean to flatter you, is a remark of peculiarly penetrating insight.

That sort of thing, it's nonsense, isn't it? It's quite funny in a way, but it's an expression of despair. Nothing means anything any longer. And the even more modern idea that there's really no such thing as truth is directly spawned by that mid-20th century view that human life and history are without shape and meaning.

If there's no room for meaning, there can be no room for truth. Or you might say, the only truth that you can have is that there is no meaning. So we have the cyclical view of history, the inevitable progress view of history, and the meaningless view of history.

But over against all these false views stands the Bible's view. Only the Bible teaches us the true shape of history. The Bible shows us that history is linear.

It runs in a line from the creation to the consummation. It's not meaningless but purposeful because God determines its purpose.

[18:42] He decides it. He causes its events. How then does the Bible show God's purpose is being worked out in history? There are two key factors as you read the Bible.

First, man's sin and second, God's salvation. Man's sin and God's salvation. Let's think this through. God created a perfect universe and within it a perfect world. Then he set mankind in the perfect world so that mankind should rule it and cultivate it.

God's salvation. Our first father and mother, however, Adam and Eve, wanted to be in charge of the world without reference to God and it's their bid for power, their rebellion that sets the scene for everything that follows.

They sin against God. We mustn't imagine, of course, that God was taken by surprise when Adam and Eve rebelled. God is God and he knows the end from the beginning.

[19:45] But Adam and Eve's rebellion called forth God's judgment upon them, inevitably. And they and all their descendants after them were placed under a severe sentence.

It's all there in Genesis chapter 3 where God says to them, it is now going to be hard to grow food because from Genesis 3 onwards, the ground will grow thorns and thistles more readily than edible crops.

Marriage will become a battleground. Wedlock will become deadlock. Childbearing will become painful and above all, death would now enter the world.

Genesis 3 releases the last enemy so men and women became subject to sickness and aging and death. The human race and the whole environment are shot through with decay.

So the entry of sin into the world leads to the entry of death and the history of the human race becomes deeply disfigured from Genesis 3 onward. If you read any history book you'll find that you are largely reading about wars, bloodlettings, intrigues and lust for power.

[21:00] But, as the history in the Bible develops, so God shows that he curbs human fierceness and bad behavior. He doesn't allow it to grow as big and as awful as it could do.

So, for example, he puts a stop to Adam and Eve's tenancy of the Garden of Eden and he expels them. Later, he puts a stop to the universal wickedness and violence by sending the flood in Noah's day.

Later on again, he stops the building of the Tower of Babel and rains in mankind's ability to exalt himself. And so it goes on. He stops the cruel oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians and he frees Israel from slavery.

Later on, of course, he has to turn the tables on Israel because of her wickedness and idolatry and he drives her out of the promised land and smashes the city of Jerusalem as he had smashed the Tower of Babel.

The pushing out of Israel from the promised land mirrors the pushing out of Adam and Eve from Eden. God drives people from his presence because of their sin and these events are only a

foretaste of the final expulsion from God's presence of all who refuse to bow to his son Jesus.

[22 : 23] It's man's repeated rebellion that shapes the history of the world. But, God is the merciful savior as well as the judge. So each of these terrible judgments in the Bible reveals a saving purpose as well.

So think of Adam and Eve. They're expelled from Eden. But in Genesis 3, God tells Eve that finally he is going to send one of her offspring to crush the head of the serpent who has deceived her.

Think of the flood. The great flood was an act of salvation as well as of judgment. Many people are destroyed. Everybody is destroyed except Noah and his family.

The ark contains the nucleus for rebuilding the human and animal populations of the world. Then in Genesis chapter 11, the tower of Babel is smashed.

But before the end of chapter 11 is reached, we're introduced to Abraham from whose line the chosen people of God is to be built up. Think of the exile from Jerusalem in the 6th century BC.

[23 : 30] Before it even takes place, God announces through the prophet Isaiah that he is going to bring the people of Israel back to Jerusalem. He is going to restore them.

Then finally, there comes God's son who comes both to judge and to save. His appearing and his message split the human race into two.

Now the fault line was always there, but Jesus' coming opens that fault line right up. Some come to him with joy and repentance. Others reject him.

We shall all of us at the end be either amongst the sheep or the goats. And now we live in the last days as Peter describes them in verse 3 of our chapter.

The days between his first and second comings. It's a period of grace that we live in now. A period in which the gospel is to be preached to the whole world. But it won't run on forever for the final act of world history, the greatest and most awesome day of all, will be the day of Jesus' return.

[24 : 39] When according to our verse 10 here, the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved. So the true shape of world history is that it will all end with the return of Jesus after which, verse 13, the new heavens and new earth will appear characterized by righteousness and sin and death will have no place there.

Well now with all that in mind, rather long introduction, let's look at the points of detail that Peter teaches us here in this chapter. I want us to notice three things. The first thing he teaches in verses 8 and 9 is that we can trust the Lord's timing.

Look at verse 8. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

Now there's a very interesting feature here. Just look back to verse 4 and the aggressive question raised by the scoffers. The scoffers say, where is this promise coming?

In other words, we don't believe in it, we don't accept it. Now look at verse 8. What question is Peter addressing here? He's addressing the same question even though it's not articulated.

[26 : 05] He's addressing the question, where is the Lord's coming? As it appears in the minds of believers. You see, the believers listen to the scoffing talk of the scoffers and they are unsettled by it.

The scoffers say contemptuously, where is his coming? And the believers think, well, where is his coming? Perhaps the scoffers might be right. And Peter, knowing that the Christians are unsettled, answers their question.

It's the same question. But while the scoffers fire that question out belligerently, the Christians are asking it thoughtfully, just as we ask it today. And Peter helps them by showing them that they can trust the Lord's timing even if it seems slow.

And just notice how very warm and affectionate he is towards them. Notice the word beloved there in verse 8. Do not overlook this one fact, beloved.

Look back to verse 1. This is now the second letter that I'm writing to you, beloved. Look on to verse 14, therefore, beloved. Verse 17, you therefore, beloved.

[27 : 17] And he even speaks of our beloved brother Paul in verse 15. And you can see this is not just an exercise in doctrine. It is an exercise in doctrine, but it's so much more besides.

Here we see the pastor loving the people deeply and caring that they should understand the truth and be comforted by it. And Peter's message is a great comfort to us as well.

And the message is, verse 9, that the Lord is not slow in fulfilling his promise to return. Yes, nearly 2,000 years have passed since Christ's ascension.

But verse 8 tells us what to make of that. Peter says 2,000 years. It's like a couple of days in the Lord's calendar. It's nothing. What is two days to you or me?

It's a short weekend. It's a Monday and Tuesday. It's nothing. The Lord doesn't look at time as we do. So Peter is saying, don't think that because he hasn't come yet, he's not coming.

[28 : 24] Of course he's coming. He's going to fulfill his promise. It is a promise, as verse 9 puts it. And again, verse 13, according to his promise.

God doesn't promise what he has no intention of performing. And Peter tells us more about it in verse 9. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

So the apparent delay is owing to a wonderful motive. The Lord is extending this era of gospel preaching so as to bring more people into his eternal kingdom.

Paul the apostle says something very similar in Romans chapter 2, where he says, do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

You see, both Peter and Paul use this word patience. God is patient, so we too can be content to be patient. Jesus sheds further light on it in Matthew 24.

[29 : 36] He says, this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So we are still in this era of gospel proclamation.

So friends, let's keep on proclaiming the gospel. We have good news to share, and people are coming to Christ every day in repentance and faith. But, verse 10, when the Lord Jesus does return, that day will arrive as unexpectedly, as a thief breaking in.

So this period of gospel grace, extended already for nearly 2,000 years, may go on for a while yet. Jesus said to the 11 apostles in Acts chapter 1, just before he ascended, he said, it is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has set by his own authority.

God's sake. Some things are revealed, many things are revealed to us in the Bible, but some things are kept shut up from prying eyes, and this is one of them, the time of the Lord's return.

There have been times, quite often in the last 2,000 years, when groups of Christians have said, the Lord is about to return, it'll be next week or next month or next year. But they've always ended up with egg on their face.

[30 : 58] It's not for us to know the timing of these things, but what we do know is that the Lord is patient and kind and is giving us further windows of opportunity to preach the gospel.

So there's the first thing, let's trust the Lord's timing. Now secondly, Peter teaches us to live lives of holiness and godliness as we wait for the Lord to return.

Look with me at verse 11. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? Now why should Peter write like that? Why should the sudden return of Jesus, which we cannot know the timing of, why should that be an incentive to us to live lives of holiness and godliness?

Well it's because we want him to be able to take pleasure in us when we meet him. We want him to be able to say to each of us, well done, good and faithful servant.

[32 : 05] Imagine the king inviting you to tea with him at Balmoral Castle. Would you enjoy such an invitation? Well just imagine that happened. How would you present yourself to him? How would I go?

Would I go wearing the trousers which I'd had on while I was mucking out the hen pens? No, I'd be all washed and scrubbed up. I'd be wearing my best suit. I'd want to please my earthly sovereign.

How much more should we attend to living godly lives when we're preparing to meet the king of kings? And think of the new home in which we shall be living after his return.

It's the new heavens and the new earth, verse 13, in which righteousness dwells. Well how could we live in the home of righteousness if we knew nothing of righteousness and godliness in our own lives?

We'd be simply unprepared. The New Testament never exhorts us to live godly lives just so that we can tick a box and say haven't I done well? No, godly living is all about our relationship to Jesus.

[33 : 10] He says in John chapter 14, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. In other words, you'll live a godly life. Living a godly life means keeping his commandments and we learn to do that because we love him and we want to express our love for him.

Peter is teaching us to live our lives in such a way that when he comes back with the suddenness of a thief, he will find us living enthusiastically for him.

Jesus puts it like this again in Matthew 24. Know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore, you also must be ready for the son of man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him. Peter is making just this point.

We're waiting for the day of God and our preparation for the greatest of all days is to learn to live lives that are holy and godly. Then thirdly and finally, Peter teaches us to be eager waiters, to wait eagerly.

[34 : 22] Do you see how he uses the word waiting three times in three verses? Verse 12, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. Verse 13, waiting for new heavens and a new earth.

And verse 14, since therefore, beloved, you are waiting for these. So Peter is teaching us to develop in our hearts a sense of joyful expectation.

Just as the school boy longs for the start of the school holidays, just as the engaged couple long for their wedding day, the Christian longs for the return of Jesus.

We're eager waiters. The person who is not a Christian has a very different sense of waiting. All he can do is to wait with fear and apprehension for the arrival of old age and death.

But the Christian's waiting is transformed because of what is promised to us. And what is promised for us in verse 13 is a new home, a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

[35 : 30] The contrast between that and our broken old world, this world, is so clear. In this present world, righteousness is not at home. It's a shy stranger.

It does put in an appearance from time to time, briefly, and we welcome it when we see it. For example, we're glad that life in Northern Ireland is better now than it was 30 years or so ago.

We're glad that mental illness is much better understood today than it was in the days when, if you were showing odd signs in youth, you might get locked into an institution for half your life.

But the dominant powers in the old world are the powers of greed, dishonesty, and corruption, dark forces which hate what is good and true and righteous.

As the Apostle John puts it so starkly, the whole world is in the power of the evil one. Even Jesus describes Satan as the ruler of this world.

[36 : 30] Satan's power, of course, is temporary, but he exercises it fiercely in these last days of human history. And this gives us all the more reason to long for the new heavens and earth where righteousness is at home, where righteousness, godliness, is the character of every relationship, every thought, every conversation, every impulse, every action.

The new world where we who belong to Christ will have lost the power, lost the power to think evil or ill of other people. Righteousness is the native air of the new creation, just as unrighteousness is the dominant force in the old world.

In the new world, it will be simply impossible for us to hate or to envy or to covet, to despise people, to demean other people. As verses 10 to 12 put it, the old world is destined for fire, the fire that destroys sin and purges everything away.

And the new world, purged of everything hostile to God, will appear, and we who trust Christ will inherit it. So with such a new home in prospect, let's not get too attached to our homes in this old world, to our houses and our gardens, ours, because we will soon be leaving them.

We have staked everything on the world to come, and the Lord has promised it to us. What is promised to us is something radically, fundamentally new.

[38 : 09] The old creation will be burned up and ended. As verse 10 puts it, not only will the earth be brought to an end, the very heavenly bodies and the heavens will be dissolved. This kind of teaching is more than some liberal theologians can come to terms with.

If you hear a liberal theologian talking on the radio about the future, they like the idea of improving the old world, reducing its corruptions, enhancing its virtues, a bit like the poet Tennyson with his 19th century view of progress.

But Peter and the whole New Testament with him is teaching the end of the cosmos as we now know it, and the ushering in of a completely new world.

So friends, let's wait for it eagerly. Well, I want to end now by quoting a few other verses from other parts of the Bible, where we hear, again, other voices encouraging us by getting us to think with longing about this great future.

Here's Isaiah, Isaiah 65. For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind, but be glad and rejoice forever in that which I am creating.

[39 : 28] The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Here's the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him, these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

It's by revelation that we come to grasp these things. We can't work them out by scientific experiment or by logic or philosophy. But God opens out the prospect of all this for us because he loves us and he wants to assure us of what lies ahead.

Then here is Jesus speaking to his apostles in Matthew chapter 19. Truly I say to you, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me, will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

The regeneration. That is a wonderful word. The word that Jesus actually uses literally means the again Genesis. The again Genesis.

[40 : 56] So the true shape of history determined by God is linear. It will come to an end gloriously, terrifyingly, when Jesus returns. The curtain will be dropped on this age and the great division will be finalized between those who have rejected Christ, who will be sent away.

But for his beloved people, the new age, the new creation will begin. And so Peter, our apostle, assures his beloved, his Christian friends.

According to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Amen.

Well, let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Lord Jesus, come again soon.

We know that the timing of your return is in the Father's hands, but we long for it. We long to see the old world purged by fire, purged of everything that defaces and disfigures human life.

[42 : 12] We long to have our own sinfulness removed, to have the corruptions of our hearts obliterated forever. We long to dwell with you and your people and the holy angels in the realm where pain and mourning and tears and death are forever banished.

So help us, Lord Jesus, to wait with patience and with joy and to keep on proclaiming the good news of forgiveness and repentance. And we ask it all for your namesake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.