

The True Shape of History

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Date: 21 May 2017

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[0 : 00] Well now we come to our reading from the Bible and perhaps you turn with me to Peter's second letter chapter 3 and you'll find this on page 1019 page 1019 in our hardback Bibles.

So I'll read again as I did last week the whole of the third chapter. The section we'll be looking at later this evening is verses 8 to 13 but we'll get the whole context by reading the whole chapter.

So 2 Peter 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.

[1 : 33] 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 toward you not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

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.

[3 : 00] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation. Just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given 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. Amen. You therefore beloved knowing this beforehand.

Take care that you're 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. This is the word of the Lord. And may it be a blessing to us this evening.

Amen. Well let's turn again in our Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 3. Page 1019.

[4 : 23] Now my title for this evening is The True Shape of History. And as I said earlier the verses I want to take are verses 8 to 13 in this last chapter of this letter.

The whole of the gospel. The whole of the Bible. Is about a historical process. And it is this that distinguishes Christianity so sharply from other faiths.

Other faiths at heart are all about man and man's behavior. And what they all say one way or the other is here are some principles to live by.

This is how to live a good life. Typically by things like prayer and giving. Fasting. Feasting. Self-examination. Meditation. Non-violence.

Caring for those in need. And so on. Other faiths all have man at the center. And their concern is with human behavior. With what we need to do.

[5 : 23] How to live. Christianity by contrast. Is about what God has done. What God is doing. And what God will do in the end. And that is of course a historical process.

It has a beginning. It has a middle. And it has a conclusion. It's all about God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the middle.

At the central point of his activity. He sent the 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. For this very reason. That it is about a historical process. We look back in history. 2,000 years. To the central events of all history.

That is the historical death. Resurrection. And ascension of Jesus. And we now look forward in history. To the fulfillment. Of a great promise from God. About the future.

[6 : 22] And Peter speaks of this promise. Simply and clearly here in verse 13. Look with me. 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. That's the characteristic position of the Christian. We are waiting for the final events of history to unfold. God has promised something radically new.

And we are now waiting for him. 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. Whereas Christianity gives us good news. Now in this third chapter of his letter. Peter is dealing with the end of history.

The great and final goal of history. And he's dealing with this subject. Because the young Christians that he's writing to at these churches. Are in danger of being unsettled in their faith.

[7 : 20] By false teachers. As we've seen over the last week or two. He's told them. Do you remember 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. Jesus' denial is at the heart of the false teaching. But at the beginning of chapter 3. Peter becomes more specific.

And he says in chapter 3 verse 3. Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing. And they will say. Where is this promise of his coming? So they're not just deniers of Jesus.

Specifically. They are deniers of the return of Jesus. They are denying then. The true shape of history. The Bible promises his return. Jesus himself.

Himself spoke of it many times. In his own teaching. And the apostles. Peter and Paul and John. They speak of it many times in their letters. It is one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

[8 : 19] But the scoffers deny it. You know how sometimes we hear of people these days. Even professional historians. Who are known as Holocaust deniers. People who have a special and twisted reason.

For denying what the Nazis did in the second world war. Well the people that 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. Now it's a very different view. From the views of history. Which most people hold today. And 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.

[9 : 18] And the meaningless view. And I'll try and describe each of these. First of all. The cyclical view. Which has its roots. Perhaps more in eastern thinking. Than in western. The idea here.

Is that everything goes round in circles. So a nation or an empire. Grows strong. Reaches its peak of influence and power. And then declines.

Think in terms of the bible. You have the Assyrian empire. Giving way to the Babylonian empire. Which is followed by the Persian empire. Which is followed by the Greek empire.

Alexander the Great and all that. Then the Roman empire. Coming and going. Much more recently. The British empire. Rose in power. Steadily and strongly in the 18th century.

Reached its peak in the 19th century. When nearly half the world was colored pink on the maps. Do you remember? Well no. You don't remember. If we've seen maps published a hundred years ago.

[10 : 14] It was like that. Wasn't it? But then the British empire declined in the 20th century. I guess the Falklands war in 1982. Was about the last gasp of it. More recently.

The Soviet empire rose. And then fell during 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 the rise and fall of political power. You can understand this cyclical view of world history. But it's very different from the Bible's view.

Then secondly. There's the utopian view. The idea that things are getting better and better and better. Until finally. We shall 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 still linger. In many of our hearts today. To some extent. There's a Marxist version of it.

[11 : 14] The Marxist view. Is that world history. Is explained in terms of the struggle. Between the workers and the bosses. Between the employees. And the employers. And the struggle goes back and forth.

Sometimes it goes this way. And sometimes that way. 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. Witterly 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. A kind of perfect society. Another version of this view. Is the idea of the unstoppable.

Progress. Based on the forward rush. Of science and technology. And medicine. Now this began to build up. A great head of steam. During the 19th century. In Britain. The Victorians.

[12 : 14] Were truly remarkable people. And I can only admire. Their energy and their vision. Just think of the advances. That they made. For example. In architecture. And engineering.

The rapid construction. Of the railways. Didn't start till about 1840. But by about 1870. The country was covered with them. Think of the development of industry. Manufacturing. And shipbuilding.

Then think of the advances in medicine. The development of good sewage systems. And town planning. And so on. Many of Glasgow's finest buildings. Were built during 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. And crime. Would be eradicated. And for some at least. Of the movers and shakers. That was a vision. Which had a certain infusion.

[13 : 10] Of Christianity. Let me read you a few lines. From Tennyson. Who was poet laureate. In the 1880s. He was a fine poet. And these lines are taken. From his famous long poem. In memoriam.

And the motif here. Is the ending of the old year. And the beginning of the new year. And he's speaking. To the church bells. I guess it's. December the 31st. It's midnight. And the church bells.

Are ringing in the new year. At midnight. But really. It's not so much. The ending of one year. And the beginning of another. That Tennyson is dreaming about. It's. It's the beginning of a new age.

So he's commanding the bells. To ring out. What is decayed. And damaging. To society. And to ring in. What is good. And life enhancing. Here's what he says.

Ring out. Old shapes. Of foul disease. Ring out. The narrowing. Lust of gold. Ring out. The thousand wars. Of old. Ring in.

[14 : 03] 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.

Ring in. The Christ. That is. To be. How do you see that? 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 dreams. Of that kind.

But did the 20th century. Prove to be. A golden age. Of peace. And delight. By 1945. When the second world war.

Finally ended. All such dreams. Were shot to ribbons. That dream. Of inevitable progress. Of a perfected human race. Living in a kind of global utopia.

[14 : 56] That cannot be sustained. By any person 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. Everything else. That eats out. The heart of mankind. The third view. Is the view. That history. Is meaningless. Because human life.

Itself. Is meaningless. Now this view. Is part and parcel. Of an atheistic view. Of life. If there is no God. It's hard to see. How there can be. Any purpose.

In anything. If our planet. And the life. On the planet. Are simply. The 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. Meaningless. That we die. So as far as history goes.

[15 : 54] By this sort of view. You can study it. Until you're blue in the face. But you're not going to find. Any recognizable patterns. Or sense in it. As a famous American put it. History.

It's one darn thing. After another. This idea. Of meaninglessness. Was popularized. 50 years or so ago. By the plays. Of Harold Pinter. In England. And by writers.

Like Samuel Beckett. In Ireland. And you may know. Some of their works. The scenes. That they portray. Typically. Show people. Having discussions. About things. Which are inconsequential.

And quite devoid. Of any interest. Or significance. For example. This is a. This is a. Pinter style discussion. Where should we go today? I don't know.

What's the weather. Going to be like today? It's going to be rainy. Or sunny. I don't know. Hubert. But it could be related. To whether you had. Jam on your bread. This morning.

[16 : 47] Or butter. 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. But really. 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's no room. For truth. So we have. The cyclical. View of history. The inevitable. Progress. Or utopian. View of history. And the meaningless. View of history.

But over against. All these views. There stands. The Bible's view. And only the Bible. Teaches us. The true shape. Of history. The Bible shows us. That history. Is linear.

[17 : 43] It runs in a line. From the creation. To the consummation. It is not meaningless. But purposeful. Because God. Determines its purpose. He decides it.

And he causes. Its events. So how does the Bible. Show God's purposes. Being worked out. In history. Well the key factors. Underlying it all.

Are man's sin. And God's salvation. Sin and salvation. Let's think this through. God created. A perfect universe. And within that perfect universe.

He made a perfect world. Then he set mankind. In the perfect world. So that mankind. Should rule it. And cultivate it. Our first father. And mother.

However. Adam and Eve. They 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 subsequent events. They sin against God.

[18 : 40] And 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. But Adam and Eve's rebellion. Called forth.

God's judgment upon them. Inevitably. And they. And all their descendants. After them. Including us. They were placed under. A severe sentence. It's all there.

In Genesis chapter 3. It would now. God says to Adam. It will now be hard. For you to grow your food. Because from now on. The ground will grow thorns. And thistles. More easily.

Than edible crops. Marriage now. Will become a battleground. A battle of the sexes. And childbearing. Will be a business. Of great pain. And above all.

Death. Will now enter the world. Genesis 3. Is the point. When the last enemy. Death is released. And so men and women. Become subject. To sickness.

[19 : 33] And aging. And dying. The human race. And the whole environment. From now on. Are shot through. With decay. So the entry of sin. Leads to the entry of death.

And the history of the human race. Becomes deeply disfigured. When you read. Any kind of history book. You'll find that you're reading. Largely about wars. Blood lettings.

Intrigues. And lust for power. But. As the history. In the Bible. Develops. So God shows. That he curbs. He restrains. Human fierceness.

And bad behavior. So 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 he reigns in man's ability. To exalt himself.

[20 : 29] And so it goes on. Evil develops. And then God stops it. God stops. The cruel oppression. Of the Israelites. By the Egyptians. And he frees Israel. From slavery. But later on.

Nearly a thousand years later. 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. In 587 BC. 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. It's man's. Repeated rebellion. That shapes the history. Of the world. But. God is the merciful.

[21 : 23] Savior. As well as the severe judge. So each of these great. And terrible judgments. Reveals a saving purpose. As well. So think of Adam and Eve.

Even in the moment. That they're expelled. From Eden. God tells Eve. That finally. One of her own offspring. Will arise. To crush the head. Of the serpent. Who deceived her.

Well then. Think of the flood. The flood. The flood. Is an act of salvation. As well as of judgment. Many 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 think of Genesis 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. Then think of the exile. When Jerusalem. Is smashed to pieces.

[22 : 19] Before the exile. Even takes place. In fact. More than a century. Before. God announces. Through the prophet Isaiah. That he is going to bring. The people of Israel. Back. To Jerusalem. He's going to restore them.

Then finally. Comes God's son. Who comes again. Both. To judge. And to save. His appearing. And his message. When he comes.

They split the human race. Into two. Now the fault line. Between those two groups. Was always there. But when Jesus comes. He opens it right up. Some people.

Come to him. With joy. And submit to him. Others reject him. We shall. All of us. At the end. Be either. Amongst the sheep. Or the goats. And now.

We're living. In the last days. As Peter describes them. In verse three. Of our chapter. The days. Between the first. And second. Comings. Of Jesus. And this is a period. Of grace.

[23 : 14] A period. In which the gospel. Is to be preached. To the whole world. But it won't. Run on forever. Because the final act. Of world history. The greatest. And most awesome.

Day of all. Will be the day. Of Jesus's return. When according. To our verse 10. 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. Or burned up. 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 the new earth. Will appear. Characterized. By righteousness. Therefore sin. And death. Will have no place there.

So with all that in mind. Let's look at the points. Of detail. That Peter teaches us here. And I want us to notice. Three things. The first thing. He tells us. In verses 8 and 9.

[24 : 10] Is that we can. Trust. The Lord's timing. 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 most interesting feature here. Just look back to verse 4. And the aggressive question. Which the scoffers put.

The scoffers say. Where is this promise coming? What they're really saying is. We don't believe it. And we won't accept it. But now look at verse 8. What question is Peter addressing here?

He's surely addressing the same question. Even though it's not actually articulated. He's addressing the same question. About the timing. Or the fact of Jesus is coming.

As the believers think of the question. The believers listen to the scoffing of the scoffers. And they're unsettled by it. The scoffers say. Where is his coming? Ah. And the believers think.

[25 : 08] Well. Where is his coming? Maybe the scoffers are right after all. And Peter knowing that the Christians are unsettled. Answers their question. But it's the same question.

But while the scoffers fire out that question belligerently. The Christians ask it thoughtfully. And Peter helps them by showing them. That they can trust the Lord's timing.

Even if it seems slow. And he's very warm and affectionate towards them. Have you noticed 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. Verse 14. Therefore.

Beloved. Verse 17. You therefore. Beloved. And even verse 15. Our beloved brother Paul. This is not just an exercise in doctrine.

[26 : 05] Now it is an exercise in doctrine. But it's much more besides. This is 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 today 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. 2,000 years is like a couple of days in the Lord's calendar. It's nothing at all. What is two days to you and me? It's like a short weekend.

It's like a Monday. A Monday and Tuesday. It's nothing. Is it? The Lord doesn't look at time as we do. Peter is saying. Don't think that because he hasn't come yet.

He's not coming. Of course he's coming. He's going to fulfill his promise. It's a promise as verse 9 puts it. And look again at verse 13. According to his promise.

[27 : 05] 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 this apparent delay is owing to a wonderful motive.

The Lord is extending the era of gospel preaching. So as to bring more and more people into his eternal kingdom. Paul says something very similar in Romans chapter 2.

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. So both Peter and Paul use this word patience.

God is patient. Therefore we too can be content to be patient. Jesus himself sheds further light on it in Matthew chapter 24.

[28 : 04] 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 friends we're still in this era of gospel proclamation.

So 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. As God continues to exercise patience.

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 almost 2,000 years. May go on for a while yet. Jesus said to the 11 apostles in Acts chapter 1. Just before his ascension.

He said it is not for you to know times or seasons. That the father has fixed by his own authority. God knows that timing. He's fixed it.

[29 : 05] Some things are revealed to us. Much is revealed to us. But some things are kept shut up from prying eyes. And this is one of them. There have been times during the last 2,000 years.

When groups of Christians have said. We believe the Lord is about to return. Maybe next year. Or in 10 years time. But they've always ended up looking foolish. 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 let's trust the Lord's timing.

Then secondly. Peter teaches us to live lives of holiness and godliness. As we wait for the Lord to return. Look at verse 11. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved.

Since it is all going to be brought to an end. 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.

[30 : 07] So why should Peter write like that? Why should the sudden return of Jesus. Be an incentive to us. To live lives of holiness and godliness. Well it's because we want him to take pleasure in us.

When he returns and when we meet him. We want him to be able to say to us. Well done good and faithful servant. Just imagine if the queen were on holiday in Scotland.

And she were to invite you to tea at Balmoral Castle. How would you present yourself to her? How would I present myself? Would I go wearing the trousers that I'd had on.

While I'd been mucking out the chicken pens? I would not. I can tell you I would be all washed and scrubbed up. I'd be wearing my very best suit. Because I would want to please my earthly sovereign.

How much more then should we attend to living godly lives. When we're preparing to meet the king of kings. And think of this new home. In which we should be living after his return.

[31 : 07] And it's the new heavens and the new earth. In which righteousness dwells. How could we live in the home of righteousness. If we knew nothing about righteousness in our own lives.

We would be simply unprepared. The New Testament never exhorts us to live godly lives. Just so that we can tick boxes. And say haven't I done well. Haven't I kept this commandment of that one.

No. Godly living is all about our relationship to Jesus. If you love me he says. You will keep my commandments. Living a godly life. Means keeping his commandments.

And we learn to do so. 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 in Matthew 24. Know this. That if the master of the house had known.

[32 : 04] 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's teaching is making exactly this point. We're waiting for the day of the day of the Lord. And our preparation.

For this greatest of all days. Is in learning how to live lives. Of holiness. And godliness. It is a lovely thing to do. Then third and finally.

Peter teaches us. To be eager. Waiters. Do you see how he uses this word. Waiting. Three times in these 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 then verse 14. Since you are waiting for these.

[33 : 03] So Peter is teaching us. To develop in our hearts. A sense of joyful longing. And expectation. Just as the school boy longs.

For the start. Of the summer 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's 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.

So the contrast between that. And this old broken world that we're living in. Is so clear. In this present world. Righteousness is a shy stranger.

[34 : 01] It puts in little appearances from time to time. And we welcome it when we see it. We're glad for example. That William Wilberforce. Back in the 19th century. Worked so hard.

For the abolition of the slave trade. That was a pushing forward of righteousness. In a different way. We're glad that life in Northern Ireland. Is better now than it was 20 or 30 years ago.

There's been an improvement there. We're glad that mental illness. Is so much better understood today. Than it was in the days. When you got shut away into an institution. For half of your life.

If you behaved strangely. But the dominant powers. In this old world. Are the powers of greed. Dishonesty. And corruption. They're dark forces.

Which hate what is true and good. 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.

[34 : 56] As the ruler of this world. Now Satan's power in this world. Is temporary of course. But he is exercising 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 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. 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 realm. It will be impossible.

For us to hate. Or to envy. Or to covet. To despise people. Or to demean other people. As verses 10 to 12 put it. The old world.

[35 : 53] 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. And live in it. So with a new home. Such as that in prospect. Let's not get too attached. To our homes in this world.

Let's not get too attached. To our houses and our gardens. Because we shall soon be leaving them. We've staked everything. On the world to come. And the Lord God has promised us.

This great inheritance. What is promised to us. Is something radically. And fundamentally new. The old creation will be ended. Burned up.

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.

[36 : 50] Can come to terms with. If you ever hear them. Talking on the radio. About the future. They quite like the idea. Of improving the old world. Reducing its corruptions. And enhancing its virtues.

A little 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 us wait for this. With eager. Anticipation. Let's end now.

By listening to a few other voices. From other parts of the Bible. Who are all encouraging us. By getting us to think. With longing. About this great future. Isaiah 65.

I think it's in Isaiah. That we first have this. This phrase. The new heavens and the earth. Isaiah writes. Well it's God speaking through Isaiah. For behold. I create new heavens.

[37 : 45] And a new earth. And the former things. Shall not be remembered. Or come into mind. But be glad. And rejoice forever. In that which I create. 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. The apostle Paul. 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.

From God. That we come to grasp these things. We couldn't possibly work them out. By scientific experiment. Or by logic. Or philosophy. But God opens out to us.

[38 : 39] The prospect of all this. Because he loves us. And because he wants to assure us. Of what lies ahead. And then here is Jesus. Speaking to his apostles.

In Matthew chapter 19. This is not a very well known quotation. But it's tremendous. Truly I say to you. He says. 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. Just think about that word. The regeneration.

Isn't that a great word? The word that Jesus uses there. Literally means. The again. Genesis. So the true shape of history.

Determined by God. Is linear. It will come to an end. Gloriously. And yet terrifyingly. When Jesus returns. The curtain will be dropped. On this age.

[39 : 34] And the new age. The new creation. Will begin. So Peter assures. His beloved. His Christian friends. Verse 13. According to his promise.

We are waiting for new heavens. And a new earth. In which righteousness. Dwells. Well let's bow our heads. And we'll thank God. Dear God.

Our father. We haven't seen this. And we don't have eyes to see it. At the moment. But we regard your promise. As something upon which. We can rely absolutely. And our prayer.

Is that you will fill our hearts. With an ever growing. Joyful. Expectation. For what lies ahead. We do pray. Thy kingdom come. We pray that the Lord Jesus.

Will return. That his return. May indeed be hastened. And our prayer. Is that you will give us. The unspeakable joy. Of seeing him face to face. Our savior.

[40 : 39] And of bowing. Before your throne. And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.